

BEYOND RELIGIOUS: KŪKAI THE LITERARY SAGE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines non-doctrinal writings by Kūkai (774-835), the systemizer of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. Most prior scholarship on Kūkai attends to either theological or biographical issues. Despite his reputation as a talented poet and calligrapher, no English-language work to date focuses solely on his accomplishments in these fields. This study aims to fill this lacuna, if even just partially, by providing scholarly translation and analysis of selected poems, letters, monuments and epitaphs, that appear in the *Shōryōshū*, an anthology compiled by Kūkai's disciple Shinzei (800-860).

Modern Japanese cultural history views Kūkai as a canonical hero, who braved stormy seas to travel to China and learn the secrets of the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*. The seemingly secure position he occupies in modern memory elides his unconventional life, education, and cultural activity. While Emperor Saga and his *kanshi* coterie admired Kūkai's unique talents, the idiosyncrasies of his background and style removed him from the mainstream of Heiankyō poetic life.

This study complicates conventional views on Kūkai, reinterpreting him as a Chinese, not *kanshi* poet, by demonstrating his facility in poetic genres ignored by the Heiankyō intelligentsia. Although several of Kūkai's poems were included in one of the ninth-century *kanshi* anthologies, his views on the superiority of Sanskrit suggest he did not share the prevailing sinocentric stance on *monjō keikoku* (statecraft through writing). Finally, the efforts by Shinzei to anthologize his works for the benefit of a wider readership indicate that Kūkai's status as a cultural figure was not uncontested during his lifetime.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KDKZS	<i>Kōbō daishi Kūkai zenshū</i>
KKS	<i>Keikokushū</i>
MYS	<i>Man'yōshū</i>
NKBT	<i>Nihon koten bungaku taikai</i>
SRS	<i>Shōryōshū (Henjō hakki shōryōshū)</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i>

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Introduction Beyond Religious: Kūkai the Literary Sage

Introduction

Innovative theologian, mystic mendicant, linguistic genius, philologist, daring adventurer, shrewd politician, diplomat, civil engineer, progressive educator, man of nature, artist, university dropout, bohemian, and accomplished writer – all of these labels would accurately describe Kūkai 空海 (774-835), yet no single one is adequate. A veritable polymath, Kūkai matured during the political chaos surrounding the transfer of the capital from Heijōkyō to Nagaokakyō, and finally to Heiankyō. Although he was born into a provincial aristocratic family, his paternal relatives' involvement in a politically-motivated assassination would derail any career aspirations as a court bureaucrat. He attended the elite State College,¹ but ultimately withdrew and spent his time wandering around his native Shikoku. Eventually, he would hear his calling: he became a Buddhist monk, and was granted the opportunity to join the 804 mission to Tang China. Kūkai boarded the ship at a port in Hizen unaware that he had just embarked on a fateful voyage that would result in his becoming one of the most important figures in premodern Japanese cultural, religious, and literary history.

Kūkai remains a popular figure in his native Japan, where a steady stream of books aimed at a general readership is released yearly. A recent example is *Kūkai nyūmon* 空海入門

¹ The State College (*daigakuryō* 大学寮) stood at the pinnacle of the educational system in late-eighth and early-ninth century Japan. Admission was limited to the sons of aristocrats, who undertook a curriculum based on the continental classics. Although the State College was modelled after its Tang counterpart, there were some differences. First, there were six schools in Chang-an, compared to just one in Heiankyō, and the Japanese version was much smaller. Second, the Tang educational system was universal (at least in theory), while the Japanese State College was open only to aristocrats. Initially, admission was guaranteed to the sons and grandsons of court officials Fifth Rank and above, and those from the lower ranks could be admitted with a special petition (Marian Ury, “Chinese Learning and Intellectual Life,” in Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 369-371).

(*Introduction to Kūkai*, 1997),² written by Takeuchi Nobuo 竹内信夫, a professor of French Literature specializing in modern poetry at the University of Tokyo. Takeuchi’s work situates Kūkai and his activities within a framework he labels “Kōnin Modernism” 弘仁モダニズム.³ Another example is *Kūkai to Nihon shisō* 空海と日本思想 (*Kūkai and Japanese Thought*, 2013),⁴ by Shinohara Sukeaki 篠原資明, a professor of philosophy at Kyoto University. He positions Kūkai within a system of Japanese thought (*Nihon shisō* 日本思想) by comparing him to Plato and Henri-Louis Bergson.

Other works appropriate Kūkai’s legacy to instruct their readers on how to lead a better life. *Hotto suru Kūkai no kotoba* ほっとする空海の言葉 (*Words of Reassurance from Kūkai*, 2011),⁵ written by Yasumoto Takashi 安元剛 and illustrated by Taniuchi Kōshō 谷内弘照, presents maxims from a number of Kūkai’s works, with explanations about how his wisdom can be applied to the hustle and bustle of modern Japanese life. Another title in a similar vein is *Kūkai no zaiunjutsu* 空海の財運術 (*Kūkai’s Techniques for Good Fortune*, 2013)⁶ by Matsunaga Shūgaku 松永修岳, a self-proclaimed *feng shui* expert, esoteric mystic, business advice writer, and president of Enlightenment Heart Corporation. These are just a few examples of the books that line the shelves of bookstores in Japan. A conspicuous majority of these titles deal with matters regarding the anxieties of modern life, perhaps reflecting insecurities of twenty-first century Japanese society: the breakdown of the lifetime employment system, a public pension system of questionable solvency due to a graying population and declining birth rate, and

² Takeuchi Nobuo, *Kūkai nyūmon* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1997).

³ Kōnin 弘仁 (lit. “spreading benevolence”) was the era name for most of Emperor Saga’s 嵯峨天皇 reign (746-842, r. 809-824), and Takeuchi considers these years “modern” based on Japan’s interest in the outside world (China and India) (Takeuchi, 175-183).

⁴ Shinohara Sukeaki, *Kūkai to Nihon shisō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2013).

⁵ Yasumoto Takashi, *Hotto suru Kūkai no kotoba* (Tokyo: Nigensha, 2011).

⁶ Matsunaga Shūgaku, *Kūkai no zaiunjutsu* (Tokyo: Sunmark Publishing, 2013).

seemingly inept politicians.

Public intellectuals have also made their contributions to modern Kūkai discourse. Philosopher Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛 was interviewed in the introduction to the July 2011 issue of *Bessatsu Taiyō* 別冊太陽 (*The Sun*) dedicated to Kūkai. The issue was released just four months after the disastrous Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11. Umehara pondered what Kūkai would do if he were alive today and had to confront the environmental disaster that resulted from the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. His conclusion was that since Kūkai took refuge in Mahāvairocana Buddha – the Great Sun Buddha – he would undoubtedly advocate that modern Japan turn to the sun and embrace solar energy.⁷

While these types of publications attest to Kūkai’s enduring popularity as a cultural figure, they largely extricate him from the milieu of his day and appropriate him for a modern agenda, be it self-help or environmentalism. Of course, this is not a particularly new phenomenon, as images, representations and narratives of Kūkai have been appropriated and re-appropriated in countless hagiographies since his death in 835. However, focusing solely on the “imagined” narratives of Kūkai forego a close reading of his immense textual corpus.

The opening to this introduction listed a number of roles which are attributed to Kūkai. The last – accomplished writer – is the focus of this project. Despite Kūkai’s prolific literary production, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to his secular writings. Such English-language works as Yoshito Hakeda’s *Kūkai: Major Works* (1972),⁸ David Shaner’s *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kūkai and Dōgen* (1985),⁹ and Ryūichi Abe’s *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric*

⁷ Bessatsu Taiyō Henshūbu, ed., *Kūkai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2011).

⁸ Hakeda Yoshito, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

⁹ David Shaner, *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kūkai and Dōgen* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985).

Buddhist Discourse (1999)¹⁰ focus primarily on religious matters. In 1978, Richard Bodman, a Cornell-trained sinologist, wrote a dissertation entitled *Poetics and Prosody in Early Mediaeval China: A Study and Translation of Kūkai's Bunkyō hifuron*,¹¹ which examines how the *Bunkyō hifuron*, perhaps Kūkai's best known literary treatise, recorded and preserved native Chinese poetics, prosody, and rhyme. Although Bodman's study, which includes an almost-complete translation of this monumental text, is of immense value, it examines the *Bunkyō hifuron* only from sinological and quasi-linguistic standpoints. It does not consider Kūkai as a literary figure, or explain how this text was received and appropriated in his native Japan. Similarly, Konishi Jin'ichi's three-volume *Bunkyō hifuron-kō (Notes on the Bunkyō hifuron, 1948-1953)*¹² is an impressive piece of scholarship, but it focuses primarily on technical aspects of classical Chinese poetry composition. This pioneering study does discuss the connections between the *Bunkyō hifuron* and Japanese poetry (particularly classical/medieval *waka* and *renga*) in several places, but its primary concerns are Six Dynasties and Tang rhyme, prosody, and poetic form. To date, there is no comprehensive study of Kūkai's own literary output.

Creating Kūkai as a Literary Figure

Any attempt to define “literary” or “literature” becomes problematic when discussing texts from ninth and tenth century Japan, where there were no clear-cut divisions between “literary” and other forms of writing, such as philosophical, historical, political or legal. In the East Asia of Kūkai's day, all forms of writing were represented by the sinograph 文, read *wen* in Chinese and *bun* in Japanese, which originally meant “pattern.” The question confronting modern scholarship is both ontological and epistemic: does “literature” actually exist as a

¹⁰ Ryuichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Richard Bodman, *Poetics and Prosody in Early Mediaeval China: A Study and Translation of Kūkai's Bunkyō hifuron*, Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1978.

¹² Konishi Jin'ichi, *Bunkyō hifuron-kō*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1948-1953).

discrete form of textual production, and how can its properties be elucidated?

Terry Eagleton has addressed the problems associated with attempts to arrive at an all-inclusive, universally-applicable definition of literature. In his view, simply defining literary texts as “imaginative,” “creative” or “fictional” denies literary status to texts generally associated with the social and natural sciences. Even within “imaginative” writing itself, conservative views of literature tend to withhold “literary” status from forms of production such as comic books, tawdry romances, and pulp-fiction mysteries.¹³

However, studies on Kūkai’s literary output are spared the arduous task of providing an uncontroversial definition of “literature” and “literary.” Shinzei 真濟 (800-860), one of Kūkai’s senior disciples, undertook the task of collecting his master’s non-doctrinal writings and anthologizing them as the *Henjō hakki shōryōshū* 遍照發揮性靈集 (henceforth, *Shōryōshū*).¹⁴ In addition to creating the collection, Shinzei composed the preface, where he presents an outline of Kūkai’s literary talents. A complete translation of this preface, and a discussion of its significance, is provided in Chapter Three.

As Shinzei played a significant role in constructing Kūkai as a literary figure, a brief biography is in order. Also known as Ki no sōjō 紀僧正 or Kakinomoto no sōjō 柿本僧正, he was born into the Ki clan in the Sakyō district of Heiankyō. He was the son of Ki no Misono 紀御園 (dates unknown) who held the title of Vice-Commissioner (*daihitsu* 大弼) of the Board of Censors (*danjōdai* 彈正台).¹⁵ Shinzei was related to the seminal *waka* poet Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (872-945) through his great-grandfather Ki no Funamori 紀船守(731-792), who was Tsurayuki’s great-great-great grandfather (making Shinzei and Tsurayuki fourth cousins).

¹³ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁴ There are several translations for this title. Refer to discussion in Chapter Three.

¹⁵ Mochizuki Shinkō, ed., *Mochizuki Bukkyō daijiten* (Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Kankō Kyōkai, 1954-1963), 2068.

Shinzei took Buddhist orders at the age of twenty and learned the Mahayana and Hinayana traditions, and also became versed in non-Buddhist texts. He later became one of Kūkai's disciples and studied esoteric Buddhism. In 836, a year after Kūkai's death, Shinzei attempted to travel to China under imperial order, but after departing Dazaifu, Shinzei's ship was destroyed in a severe storm near Tsushima.¹⁶ Forced to return to Japan, he resumed his duties at the Jingoji temple.¹⁷

Problematics of Translating Kūkai

A majority of the texts presented in the chapters to follow have not previously been translated into English. One example is the memorial epitaph Kūkai wrote in Chang-an in 806 for his master Hui-guo 惠果 (746-805). English-language scholarship often mentions Kūkai's authorship, but does not provide a translation or commentary. It is understandable that prior scholarship has omitted translations from their studies, since the actual text, rhetoric or literary qualities of the documents in question were not central to the questions that they were trying to address. Despite the fact that printed editions of Kūkai's works have been available for almost a century, a majority of the those that might be classified as miscellany – his letters, epitaphs, steles, votive documents, petitions and poems – have remained untranslated, and largely undiscussed in English. Therefore, detailed, scholarly translations of Kūkai's writings are a significant contribution to the field.

While this study assumes an affirmative stance toward the act of translation and its ability to generate new knowledge, it recognizes many of the issues presented by critical theorists. The act of rendering the classical Chinese that Kūkai and his colleagues wrote in early ninth century Japan into twenty-first century North American English for a Western readership presents

¹⁶ Abe, 461.

¹⁷ Mochizuki, 2068.

ideological, historical and linguistic challenges. Thomas Hare, in his article on Kūkai’s writing and discursive strategies, takes a rather critical view of the extant English translations of Kūkai’s works (at least circa 1990), claiming that they “might be more precisely called paraphrases because the densely allusive and ornate Chinese of his writing is extremely resistant to literal translation.”¹⁸ Also, many extant translations of Kūkai’s works lack references to commentaries in secondary sources, an issue raised by Stanley Weinstein in his review of Hakeda’s volume.¹⁹ Translators of Kūkai’s poetry and prose find themselves somewhere along a continuum anchored by two equally untenable positions: highly literal translations that are virtually unreadable without extensive commentary, or translations of high literary quality that elide the multiple layers of intertextuality, metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and historically/textually informed toponyms. The translations presented in this study attempt to find a middle ground between these positions: retaining the rhetoric and tone of the original when possible, and providing commentary via footnotes when it is not.

Prior Scholarship and Theoretical Assumptions

The primary objective of this study is to examine Kūkai’s written output from a literary standpoint. However, since Kūkai was influential in many areas, a multidisciplinary approach is required to properly elucidate the significance of his writings. In addition to the mainstays of literary analysis – discussions of rhetoric, imagery, source materials and style – his works will be situated in the larger milieu of his day, drawing on the methodologies of biography, history, and religious studies.

Kūkai was first and foremost a Buddhist monk and scholar, so discussions of any aspect

¹⁸ Thomas Blenman Hare, “Reading, Writing and Cooking: Kūkai’s Interpretive Strategies,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2 (May, 1990), 253.

¹⁹ Stanley Weinstein, “The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: The Neglected Tendai Tradition,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Nov. 1974), 178.

of Kūkai’s life and work must inevitably attend to religious matters. The landmark work in this regard remains *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Creation of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* by Ryūichi Abe. Abe’s work aims to situate the significance of Kūkai’s religious thought within a theory of language based on mantra. Another issue explored in this work is Kūkai’s use of esoteric Buddhist doctrine to recast the Japanese emperor as a *cakravartin* (*tenrin shō’ō* 轉輪聖王), the ideal sage-monarch depicted in Buddhist scripture.²⁰ Although released over a decade ago, this work remains impressive in its simultaneous engagement with Japanese scholarship and modern critical methods. For example, in the “Semiology of the Dharma” chapter, Abe traces the development of Kūkai’s theories of language. He demonstrates how Kūkai created novel esoteric Buddhist theories – which to a degree resemble Western notions of *summa mundi*²¹ and Derrida’s concept of *différance* – to challenge Confucianism’s monopoly on intellectual production. In addition, his application of literary analysis to doctrinal texts provides new perspectives.

Among numerous works in Japanese that were published for a general readership, *Shamon Kūkai* 沙門空海 (1967)²² by Watanabe Shōkō 渡辺照宏 and Miyasaka Yūshō 宮坂宥勝, co-authored by two of the leading Japanese scholars on Kūkai in the twentieth century is noteworthy. In this work, Watanabe and Miyasaka adopt a biographical approach toward Kūkai and his religious thought, while incorporating selections from a number of primary sources. Watanabe and Miyasaka were also the co-editors and annotators of the NKBT edition of the *Shōryōshū* and *Sangō shiiki* 三教指帰 (*Demonstrating the Goals of the Three Teachings*), which

²⁰ Abe, 1.

²¹ *Summa mundi* literally means “the sum of the world,” but in the context of literary studies it refers to a “text of the world,” that “...in its classical sense is an imposing, complete tome – an encyclopedia of the Age of Enlightenment, for example – that claims the comprehensiveness of its contents as the mark of universality” (Abe, 276). However, Abe observes “Kūkai blurs the boundary between the inside and outside of the text(s), for the text’s inside and outside are the writings of different editions of the same scriptural text. In order to be applied to Kūkai’s model of the text, the term *summa mundi* cannot merely be a genitive compound – the “text of the world” – but must serve more prominently as an appositional compound: “text(s) as the world” and the “world as the text(s)” (Abe, 276).

²² Watanabe Shōkō and Miyasaka Yūshō, *Shamon Kūkai* (Tokyo: Chikuma Gakugei Shobō, 1993).

was used as one of the primary source texts for this study. They brought a unique set of skills to bear on the task of Kūkai textual exegesis – both were ordained Shingon monks, (and Miyasaka served as the chief abbot 管長 of the Chizan 智山 branch of the Shingon sect for a number of years). Additionally, Watanabe was trained in Indian Buddhism at Tokyo Imperial University. Their strong backgrounds in Shingon doctrine and philology have produced a series of works which remain required reading for anyone wishing to do academic research on Kūkai.

The majority of the Japanese scholarship on Kūkai is oriented toward biographical in approach. Examples include *Kūkai shōgai to sono shūhen* 空海生涯とその周辺 (1997)²³ by Takagi Shingen 高木諄元 and *Kūkai* 空海(1982), a volume co-edited by Takagi and another Shingon scholar, Wada Shūjō 和田秀乗.²⁴ The latter volume is included in the *Nihon meisō ronshū* 日本名僧論集 (*Collected Essays on Eminent Japanese Monks*), a testament to Kūkai’s canonical status within Japanese Buddhist scholarship. Even works that explore some other aspect of Kūkai, such as his calligraphy, often situate it within a biographical framework. An example is *Kōbō daishi Kūkai: hito to sho* 弘法大師空海 人と書 (*Kōbō Daishi Kūkai: The Man and His Calligraphy*) by Kimoto Nanson 木本南邨.²⁵

Japanese engagement with the larger discourse of sinographic culture is another concern of this study. Perceptions of China have long been a preoccupation in Japanese literature, among writers and scholars alike. In particular, representations of “Japan” and “China” have been understood largely in dialectical terms, the “*wa-kan* 和漢 dialectic:” *wa* represents Japan, *kan* represents China, and within Japanese literary discourse the two polar opposites attain synthesis to produce a domesticated “Chinese” aesthetic that is acceptable to “Japanese” cultural,

²³ Takagi Shingen, *Kūkai shōgai to sono shūhen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997).

²⁴ Wada Shūjō and Takagi Shingen, eds., *Kūkai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1982).

²⁵ Kimoto Nanson, *Kōbō daishi Kūkai: hito to sho* (Wakayama, Japan: Kōyasan University, 2002).

intellectual and aesthetic expectations. David Pollack's *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China from the Eighth through Eighteenth Centuries*²⁶ was pioneering in its attempt to transcend the "fracture" between the Japanese and Chinese cultural spheres, – previously understood in purely material terms – by exploring how the Japanese literati conceived China as an "imaginary." However, Atsuko Sasaki's *Obsessions with the Sino-Japanese Polarity in Japanese Literature*²⁷ takes issue with Pollack's overly neat dialectic whereby Chinese culture represents "forms" that the Japanese transform into "content." Her work attempts to correct this by "complicating" Pollack's dialectic to problematize the contingent nature of the *wa-kan* dialectic as it was originally proposed. Jason Webb also presented three significant shortcomings to Pollack's work: the absence of any discussion on the three hundred and fifty years between the *Kojiki* and *Genji monogatari*, his assumption that the reception of continental materials would be uniform over the centuries, and the philologically problematic nature of the term *wa-kan* itself.²⁸ Nonetheless, Pollack's work continues to stimulate discussion on the precise nature of Chinese cultural reception throughout Japanese history.

The "China in the Medieval Imaginary" chapter in David Bialock's *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories* examines how medieval texts such as *Heike monogatari* recast the imperial court and its periphery within the framework of a sinocentric world view.²⁹ Although the focus of Bialock's study is the medieval period, his discussion of issues such as center/periphery and geographical imaginaries are applicable to this study, particularly in relation to the letters and memorials Kūkai wrote for literati who were relegated to life in the hinterlands, discussed in

²⁶ David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China from the Eighth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

²⁷ Atsuko Sasaki, *Obsessions with the Sino-Japanese Polarity in Japanese Literature* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2006).

²⁸ Jason P. Webb, *In Good Order: Poetry, Reception and Authority in the Nara and Early Heian Courts*, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2004, 40-45.

²⁹ David T. Bialock, *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 177-216.

Chapter Two.

Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription by Thomas LaMarre is an important intervention in several respects. First, by linking poetic practice to cosmology, LaMarre provides a fresh epistemic lens for viewing the relationships between the court, poetic practice, history and language. Second, on an orthographic level, he attempts to deconstruct the binary between “Japanese” and “Chinese” writing in early- to mid-Heian Japan, proposing instead a transnational speech community based on sinographic culture. Finally, he reconfigures the contemporary understanding of early Heian period poetics by insisting that the visual character of Heian literary production cannot be dismissed. LaMarre recognizes that Kūkai’s writings and thought played a pivotal role in forming the literary and linguistic discourse of the Heian period:

Kūkai himself, renowned as a poet and calligrapher at the early Heian court, played an important role in establishing the contours of Heian writing. In fact, although some postwar scholars go to great lengths to downplay the role of Buddhism and Kūkai in the history of writing and chanting, legends attribute the very invention of kana to Kūkai, associating his fluid movements across the land (irrigation projects and temple circuits for pilgrims) with his fluid hand. In any event, the kinds of statements that he makes about the efficacy of forms, designs, or patterns constitute the general framework within which Heian poetics assumed its political and cosmological effectiveness.³⁰

This study (particularly Chapter Four, which discusses calligraphy and Kūkai’s theories of language and literature), uses LaMarre’s position as a point of departure. While LaMarre linked the historical fact that Kūkai authored treatises on calligraphic practice to his larger arguments about textual and visual culture in early Heian Japan, this study takes the opposite approach: through translating these writings, the issues LaMarre presents are elucidated in detail and expanded upon. Sasaki and LaMarre’s works draw on Benedict Anderson’s concept of the

³⁰ Thomas LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 28.

“imagined community,”³¹ and Bialock and LaMarre’s works incorporate the deconstructionist views of Amino Yoshihiko 網野善彦 in their descriptions of the court’s dealings with the “frontier.”³²

Objectives of this Study

The modern received image of Kūkai (via the Kōbō Daishi legend) presents a deceptively seamless narrative that first took shape during his lifetime. This includes his status as a literary figure of uncontroversial canonicity, which is strengthened by the inclusion of two of his major non-doctrinal works into the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*. Yet a close examination of his writings and his interactions with the court literati, particularly his patron Emperor Saga, suggests that he was a peripheral figure in his own time. Certainly the emperor and his circle recognized Kūkai as a man of unique talents, yet the circumstances surrounding his education and voyage to China placed him far outside the mainstream.

A key difference is that for Saga and his coterie, the continental tradition was an imagined one mediated by text. While the presence of faculty at the State College who specialized in “Chinese phonetics” indicates an interest in learning the spoken language, the literary Chinese poetry and prose composed by Japanese scholar-bureaucrats was likely read aloud in *on-yomi*, similar to a Buddhist sutra. Also, most of the members of Saga’s poetic circle had never set foot on Chinese soil.

Kūkai’s abilities in spoken Chinese, his actual experience in Chang-an, his interest in Sanskrit, and his (partially) independently acquired erudition served to distinguish him from his contemporaries. An extreme interpretation would be that the court literati composed *kanshi* while Kūkai wrote actual Chinese poetry. Kūkai’s idiosyncratic use of continental sources, poetic

³¹ Sasaki, 4; LaMarre, 1-2.

³² Bialock, 181; LaMarre, 30. For a general discussion on these issues, refer to Amino Yoshihiko, *Nihon to wa nani ka* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2000), 132-174.

genres, and imagery all underscore his independence from the literary establishment. These issues will be engaged by 1) providing original, scholarly translations of Kūkai's literary and other non-doctrinal writings, 2) elucidating his characteristics as a writer based on an analysis of these translations, and 3) generating new knowledge regarding literary practices in early ninth century Japan.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter One presents an overview of Kūkai's life and early literary activities. This chapter draws on methods of biographical research and literary history to examine the literary and cultural milieu during Kūkai's early years. Special attention is paid to the events related to his journey to Tang China. While the biographical and historical approach adopted here mirrors that of prior studies, this chapter contributes to English-language scholarship on Kūkai by providing, for the first time, complete, annotated translations of many of the documents he composed during his two years in China. One of the selections featured in this chapter is a complete, annotated translation of the memorial epitaph Kūkai composed for Hui-guo.

The starting point for Chapter Two is Kūkai's return from China in 806. This chapter examines the Sinitic poetic culture in vogue at the court, particularly during the reign of Emperor Saga. Kūkai's engagement with the imperially-commissioned *kanshi* poetic anthologies is examined from a historical viewpoint, while Kūkai's creation of an eremitic aesthetic is situated within the broader discourse of comparative literature. An example is his adaptation of the *you xian shi* 遊仙詩 (wandering sage) poetic genre, which further underscores the unconventional aspects of his literary activities.

The connection between Kūkai's poetic practice and practical benefits to the state is explored through translating and discussing his writings pertaining to water and rainmaking

rituals. Finally, Kūkai’s involvement in circumscribing the textual periphery of the Heian *ritsuryō*³³ state is examined through close readings of two epistle-poems he addressed to court literati-bureaucrats headed for postings on the frontier.

Chapter Three discusses the aforementioned *Henjō hakki shōryōshū*, a collection of poems, epistles, votive documents and a variety of other prose miscellany composed by Kūkai during his lifetime. Shinzei’s preface, translated in its entirety, declares his agenda to canonize Kūkai not just as a theologian, but also as a writer. This chapter surveys the history of the collection and presents translations of several documents that would generally be considered “non-literary” that nonetheless shed light on important aspects of Kūkai’s literary and political activities nonetheless.

Kūkai’s calligraphic practice and its relationship to his larger theories of language, literature and political governance are addressed in Chapter Four. His theories on calligraphic practice are situated within larger narratives of Buddhist metaphysics and Confucian statecraft. This chapter expands the current understanding of Kūkai’s calligraphic theory by presenting a translation, and analysis of, his letter to Emperor Saga advocating the benefits of Sanskrit writing. In this document, Kūkai presents a creative and politically daring approach to history whereby the Japanese emperor is positioned within Chinese and Buddhist historical discourse.

Finally, a note on the editorial conventions used in the following chapters. The prose Chinese texts presented herein include punctuation marks. Writers in late Nara and early Heian Japan did not punctuate their writing (in literary Chinese or Japanese); these marks were added centuries later. It is also important to bear in mind that a “period” (or more specifically, a *maru*)

³³ *Ritsuryō* 律令 is the name Japanese historians have given to the “statutory” system of government prevalent in Nara and Heian Japan. Modelled after the Tang system, *ritsu* 律 refers to the penal code, and *ryō* 令 the administrative code. The Taihō Code of 701 and the Yōrō Code of 718 are examples of *ritsuryō*-inspired legal codes (Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, “Introduction,” in Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3).

in a literary Chinese text does not necessarily represent the end of a sentence as it would in modern English. In many cases, a *maru* marked the end of a clause, or indicated where the reader should pause. However, since the modern edited volumes of the primary sources used in this study punctuate the prose texts, the relevant marks have been reproduced here as well.

Chapter One Kūkai's Early Literary Education and Activities

Introduction: The Japanese Literary Scene in Kūkai's Early Years

At the time of Kūkai's birth in 774, the capital was still Heijōkyō (Nara), which was modeled on the Tang capital. Mastery of the Chinese classics was considered the mark of a scholar, a prerequisite for entry into governmental service, and an indispensable tool for absorbing the best and latest in Chinese literature, thought, and technology. In the early part of the eighth century, the Japanese attempted to create their own history along Chinese historiographical and ideological lines, producing the *Kojiki* 古事記 (*Record of Ancient Matters*) in 712 and the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (*Chronicles of Japan*) in 720.

Naturally, literary Chinese was also the medium for writing down poetry. The oldest extant anthology of *kanshi* is the *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻 (*Fond Recollections of Poetry*), a collection compiled in 751 that included 116 poems written by Buddhist priests, court nobles, imperial princes, and emperors.³⁴ As Robert Borgen points out, the *Kaifūsō* offers a valuable glimpse into the sinocentric literary milieu of the mid-Nara period, since all of the poets included in the collection (including the monks) were associated with the court.³⁵ All of the poems are written in the *shi* 詩 form, so the even-numbered lines were supposed to rhyme, with one rhyming scheme running throughout the entire poem.³⁶ The poems were arranged in chronological order, and their subject matter ranged from official functions such as palace banquets, to private ones that praised

³⁴ Although the preface to the *Kaifūsō* mentions 120 poems, the collection actually only contains 116 (Robert Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 40; also cf. Helen Craig McCullough, *Brocade by Night: 'Kokin Wakashū' and the Japanese Court Style in Japanese Classical Poetry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 87.

³⁵ Robert Borgen, "The Politics of Literary Chinese in the Early Japanese Court" in David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance, eds., *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power in Court Culture: China, Europe and Japan* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005), 207.

³⁶ Edwin A. Cranston, "Asuka and Nara Culture: Literacy, Literature and Music" in Delmer M. Brown, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 473.

the countryside around the capital.³⁷ The anthology exhibits nostalgia toward older poetic forms, since its compositions were written in the *gu shi* 古詩 (“old *shi*”) style of the earlier Six Dynasties period, largely inspired by such collections as the *Wenxuan* 文選 (*Literary Selections*) and the *Yutai xinyong* 玉台新詠 (*New Poems from a Jade Terrace*). The style of the poems in these anthologies was very popular in Japan even though they were out of fashion in China.³⁸ Also, the *Kaifūsō* did not adopt the tonal parallelism and antithesis which became mandatory features in the *lu shi* 律詩 (regulated verse) style in vogue in Tang China.³⁹ As the preface to the collection, written by its anonymous compiler, states:

逖聽前修。遐觀載籍。襲山降蹕之世。樞原建邦之時。天造草創。人文未作。至於神后征坎。品帝乘乾。百濟入朝。啓龍編於馬廐。高麗上表。囟烏冊於烏文。王仁始導蒙於輕島。辰爾終敷教於訊田。

When I hear about the learned sages of ancient times and gaze upon the ancient texts, I learn that when the Son of Heaven descended to Mt. So, and when the Emperor constructed the nation in Kashihara,⁴⁰ the heavens just started forming the realm, and the writings of men had not yet been created in Japan. Empress Jingū⁴¹ led her expedition over the water⁴² and when Emperor Ōjin ascended to the throne, the Korean kingdom of Paekche paid tribute to us; the Dragon Texts⁴³ were opened in the stables,⁴⁴ and the kingdom of

³⁷ Borgen, “The Politics of Literary Chinese,” 207.

³⁸ Cranston, “Asuka and Nara Culture,” 473.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kashihara 樞原 in Yamato Province was said to have been established by the legendary Emperor Jimmu 神武.

⁴¹ Empress Jingū directed the expeditions into the Korean kingdoms of Silla, Paekche, and Koguryo and brought them into the Japanese sphere of influence.

⁴² The character 坎 can be translated a number of ways. Since it is one of the *bagua* 八卦 (eight trigrams of the *Yijing*), it can represent the direction of west in the “Earlier Heaven” scheme attributed to Fu Xi 伏羲, or north in the “Later Heaven” scheme attributed to King Wen 文王. In both schemes, it represents the element of water.

⁴³ “Dragon Texts” 龍編 refer to learned writings. According to legend, when Fu Xi 伏羲 looked up at the sky, a “dragon horse” (*longma* 龍馬) had markings on its back. These markings served as the inspiration for the *Yijing*. Fu Xi is also credited with the creation of writing in general.

⁴⁴ The Paekche emissary Achiki 阿直岐 presented Prince Ujinowakiiratsuko 菟道稚郎子 with fine horses, along with continental texts. The “stables” 馬廐 refer to where the prince kept these horses and viewed the texts (Kojima Nobuyuki, ed., *Kaifūsō, Bunka shūreishū, Honchō monzui*, In *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 69 (Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 58).

Koguryo wrote its greetings on the wings of birds.⁴⁵ Wani⁴⁶ led the capital at Karushima⁴⁷ out of the darkness, and Shinni⁴⁸ spread the teachings into the field of translation.

遂使俗漸洙泗之風。人趨齊魯之學。逮乎聖德太子。設爵分官。肇制禮義。然而專崇積教。未遑篇章。及至淡海先帝之受命也。恢開帝業。弘闡皇猷。道格乾坤。功光宇宙。既而以為。調風化俗。莫尚於文。潤德光身。孰先於學。

As a result, the commoners were turned to the teachings of Confucius.⁴⁹ Prince Shōtoku instituted a system of court ranks and assigned governmental offices, and established propriety and courtesy for the first time.

However, he primarily revered the teachings of Shakyamuni, leaving little time for literary composition.

When Emperor Tenji⁵⁰ received the Mandate of Heaven, he performed his duties as the Son of Heaven, and his imperial benevolence spread throughout the land. The Way of the Son of Heaven reached both Heaven and Earth, and his merit illuminated the universe. He believed that nothing surpassed the written word in taming the customs and indoctrinating the common people, and nothing stood before learning in rejuvenating virtue and illuminating the path toward advancement. .

爰則建庠序。徵茂才。定五禮。興百度。憲章法則。規模弘遠。夙古以來。未之有也。於是三階平煥。四海殷昌。旒紘無為。巖廊多暇。旋招文學之士。時開置醴之遊。當此之際。宸翰垂文。賢臣獻頌。雕章麗筆。非唯百篇。

Therefore, schools were built, talented scholars were summoned, the Five Courtesies were established, and a hundred laws were enacted. The constitutions and laws were wide in their scale and far in their reach. The

⁴⁵ The letter Emperor Bidatsu 敏達天皇(538?-585?, r. 572?-585?) received from Koguryo was said to have been written on this wings of birds. This is a reference to Cang Jie 蒼頡, the semi-mythical creator of sinographs. According to legend, he modeled a particular style of Chinese characters after the tracks left by birds (Kojima, 58).

⁴⁶ Wani 王仁 (dates unknown) was the Korean (Paekche) scholar who brought eleven volumes of Chinese texts to Japan, including the *Analects* and the *Thousand Character Classic*, to Japan during the fifth century (Cranston, “Asuka and Nara Culture,” 454).

⁴⁷ Located southeast of Kashihara, Karushima 輕島 was the capital established by Emperor Ōjin.

⁴⁸ Shinni 辰爾 (dates unknown) was also a scholar from Paekche who helped spread Chinese learning in sixth century Japan. According to an episode in the *Nihon shoki*, a manifest from a Koguryo emissary was presented to the Japanese court. However, no one could decipher it. Shinni, who was supposedly descended from continental immigrants, was able to read the document, much to the delight of the Emperor and the Great Minister (David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literary: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 106).

⁴⁹ Literally 洙泗之風 (the styles of Zhu and Si) and 齊魯之學 (the teachings of Qi and Lu). Zhu 洙 is a river in Shandong Province, and it converges with the Si 泗 River. Since the area where Confucius taught his disciples was in the basin of these two rivers, “the style of Zhu and Si” is used as a metonym for Confucius’ teachings. Lu 魯 was the birthplace of Confucius, and Qi 齊 that of Mencius, so this is another metonym for Confucianism. (Tōdō Akiyasu, *Kanjigen* (Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1992), 682, 1445).

⁵⁰ Literally referred to as 淡海先帝 (the previous emperor in Ōmi), since Emperor Tenji moved the capital to Ōmi in 667 (also written 近江) (Kumagai Kimio, *Ōkimi kara tennō e* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 316).

opulence of the Imperial Palace and the prosperity throughout the Four Seas—the realm governed itself without much effort from the Son of Heaven and there was much leisure time at the court. Frequently, gentlemen of letters were invited and banquets were held. On these occasions the Son of Heaven would compose a poem and the wise ministers would present verses in praise of him. There are over one hundred examples of splendid poetry and beautiful brushwork.

但時經乱離。悉從煨燼。言念湮滅。軫悼傷懷。自茲以降。詞人間出。龍潛王子。翔雲鶴於風筆。鳳翥天皇。泛月舟於霧渚。神納言之悲白鬢。藤太政之詠玄造。騰茂實於前朝。飛英聲於後代。

However, on occasion insurrections would reduce these poems to ash. Thinking of the destruction of these poems brings sadness to my heart. From this point on, many poets were produced. The Dragon Prince⁵¹ “painted a crane flying through the clouds using the wind as a brush,” the soaring Phoenix Emperor⁵² floated his “moonlit boat along the misty shore,” the Middle Councilor⁵³ lamented his “graying hair,” and the Fujiwara Chancellor⁵⁴ recited his poem on the “creation of Heaven and Earth.” Previous reigns held up these excellent poems, passing their majestic voice on to later generations.

余以薄官余間。遊心文囿。閱古人之遺跡。想風月之旧遊。雖音塵眇焉。而余翰斯在。撫芳題而遥憶。不覺淚之泫然。攀縵藻而遐尋。惜風聲之空墜。遂乃収魯壁之余蠹。綜秦灰之逸文。遠自淡海。云暨平都。凡一百二十篇。勒成一卷。作者六十四人。具題姓名。并顯爵里。冠于篇首。余撰此文意者。為將不忘先哲遺風。故以懷風名之云爾。于時天平勝宝三年歲在辛卯冬十一月也。

I, a lowly official, turned my heart to the pursuit of literature in my spare time. Looking upon the traces of the ancients, I think of the old elegant pleasures of the wind and the moon. Although the sounds of the ancients may be in the distant past, their writings remain with us. Touching the texts and thinking of how old they are, I cannot help but be brought to tears. Searching long and far for these treasured texts, it pains me that the sounds on the winds⁵⁵ fall in vain. Thus, I compile the poems and prose that remain. I collected a total of 120 poems that date from the days of Emperor Tenji, now since past, to the present here in Nara, and compiled them into a single volume. There are sixty-four poets, whose names I provide, and they

⁵¹ The “Dragon Prince” 龍潛王子 is Prince Ōtsu 大津皇子 (Kojima, 60).

⁵² The “Phoenix Emperor” 鳳翥天皇 is Emperor Mommu 文武天皇 (Kojima, 60).

⁵³ The Middle Councilor 納言 here is Ōmiwa no Takechimaro 大神高市麻呂 (Kojima, 60).

⁵⁴ This is Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (Kojima, 60).

⁵⁵ “Sounds on the winds” 風聲 is a metaphor for the reputations of famous poets (Kojima, 60).

represent both the capital and the provinces. Their names are provided at the beginning of each poem. My intent in compiling this volume is so that the literary traditions of the ancient sages is not forgotten. Therefore, on this occasion, the eleventh month (winter) of the third year of Tempō Shōhō, I entitle this collection *Fond Recollections of Poetry*.⁵⁶

This preface exudes Chinese literary aesthetics and political ideals. Ontologically, the Japanese emperor is understood in purely Chinese terms, and referred to using various Chinese synonyms for “son of heaven.” The text diverges from the native view that the emperor is descended from the Shintō pantheon of gods (although an allusion is made to his mythical descent in Kyūshū, it is framed in Chinese rhetoric), here he is depicted as receiving the “mandate of heaven.” Finally, the compiler portrays Japan as a truly imperial power on a par with its mighty continental neighbor, complete with satellite tributary states on the Korean Peninsula.

The preface recognizes a great cultural and philosophical debt to the Chinese. Confucianism is praised as a means of governing (and pacifying) the realm and Chinese scholars such as Wani and Shinni are recognized for their role in introducing these teachings to the Japanese. Also, references are made to the implementation of a Chinese-style court bureaucratic system, the introduction of the Confucian Five Courtesies, and the enactment of laws. Of particular importance is the Chinese notion that the written word was an invaluable technology in “taming the customs and indoctrinating the common people” 調風化俗. Indeed, as Borgen pointed out, the *Kaifūsō* may have greater significance as an articulator of Chinese culture than as a literary monument.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Kojima, 58-62. Another complete translation of this preface can be found in Ryusaku Tsunoda et al., eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 88-90. A partial translation is included in McCullough, 87. A new translation, accompanied by scholarly analysis, can be found in Webb, 150-153.

⁵⁷ Borgen, “The Politics of Literary Chinese,” 207.

Scholarship in English on the *Kaifūsō* generally does not extol its literary merits, instead focusing on how it served as vehicle which allowed the Japanese literati to practice composing Chinese poetry, emulate Chinese cultural models, and to use textual production as a means to impose order on their world.⁵⁸ However, Webb has recently taken these prior negative views of the *Kaifūsō* to task. In particular, he questions the position taken by Donald Keene and Helen McCullough that the anthology was a “forced” and “unripe” attempt at mimicking continental styles.⁵⁹ Through a sophisticated literary and political analysis, Webb demonstrates how the poems in the *Kaifūsō* appropriated and transformed continental source materials to celebrate the ideals of Japanese kingship and to reinforce political loyalties among the various clans. He also examines how the *Kaifūsō* came into being in the decade after Emperor Shōmu became a diehard proponent of Buddhism and ordered the construction of the Rushana Buddha statue at the Tōdaiji 東大寺 temple in Nara. In Webb’s analysis, the “literary remnants” 風 that are the object of “nostalgia” 懷 is the court culture that existed prior to Shōmu’s ambitious Buddhist cultural program – in other words, the *Kaifūsō* would stand as a literary monument that would rival the statue of Rushana.⁶⁰ In addition to its articulate defense of the *Kaifūsō* as a work of literature, Webb’s study offers new possibilities for further deconstructing the *wa-kan* dialectic and a new understanding of the *kanshi* culture in late Nara and early Heian Japan.

There is a strong possibility that Kūkai was familiar with the *Kaifūsō*. In one of his later writings, he makes reference to “frolicking in the forest of learning” 槐市,⁶¹ and he is quoted in

⁵⁸ Emanuel Pasteriech, “The Reception of Chinese Literature in Japan” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1080-1081.

⁵⁹ Webb, 69-70.

⁶⁰ Webb, 148-149.

⁶¹ This is found in the preface to the *Sangō shiiki* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 85). The “forest of learning” 槐市 refers to the university. During the Later Han (25-220 C.E.), a market was established next to the university, and a grove of

one of his biographies as having converted to Buddhism because secular writings were just “worthless dregs” 糟粕.⁶² Takagi Shingen points out that the style of Kūkai’s declaration closely resembles the biographical account of the monk Dōyū (道融、dates unknown) presented in the *Kaifūsō*:

积道融者。俗姓波多氏。少遊槐市。博学多才。特善属文。性殊端直。昔丁母憂。寄住山寺。偶見法華經。慨然歎曰。我久貧苦。未見宝珠之在衣中。周孔糟粕。安足以留意。遂脱俗累。落髡出家。

The venerable Dōyū was of the Hata clan. In his young days he frolicked in the forest of learning. He was erudite and talented, and his writings were particularly excellent. His character was upright. Due to his mother’s death, he was given to a mountain temple. When he happened to read the *Lotus Sutra*, he lamented, “For an eternity I have suffered in poverty, as I have yet to see the treasured jewel in my sleeve. The teachings of Zhou Gong-dan⁶³ and Confucius are dregs; how can they be worth taking to heart? I then severed my ties with the vulgar world, cut my hair, and took the tonsure...”⁶⁴

Since the text with this allusion was written after Kūkai returned from China, it is difficult to say whether he read the *Kaifūsō* before or after his studies in China. However, considering that the *Kaifūsō* was compiled in 751, and the access Kūkai had to Chinese texts from a young age, it is not unreasonable to assume that he read it during his student days.

Continental influences are evident even in texts which record Japanese poetry. The *Man’yōshū* 万葉集 (*Anthology of Myriad Leaves*), which was most likely completed in 759, was upheld by Japanese nativist scholars during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries as the embodiment of the pure essence of the Japanese language, tradition, and “spirit,” completely

pagoda trees 槐 was planted nearby. Students gathered at this market to sell goods from their home provinces, purchase books and musical instruments, and engage in debates (Tōdō, 169).

⁶² This quotation is found in the *Kūkai sōzuden* 空海僧都伝 (*Biography of the Bishop Kūkai*), which was written by Shinzei, one of this top disciples. More information on Shinzei is presented in the Introduction and Chapter Three of this study.

⁶³ Zhou Gong-dan 周公旦, better known as Duke Zhou, was a famous politician during the Zhou dynasty and viewed as a Confucian sage (Kojima, 173; Tōdō, 224).

⁶⁴ Takagi Shingen, *Kūkai shōgai to sono shūhen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1974), 21; and Kojima, 173.

unadulterated by foreign (particularly Chinese) influences.⁶⁵ However, as the Japanese of the eighth century did not have a native orthography, they resorted to using *man'yōgana* 万葉仮名, a system that used Chinese characters for both their phonographic and semantic values to transcribe the 4,500 poems in the collection. Actually, the inspiration for Japanese *man'yōgana* most likely came from the Koreans, who also used a similar system of mixed sinographic writing.⁶⁶ David Lurie emphasizes the importance of understanding the role of Korean writing when discussing the history of writing in Japan, citing the use of a mixed sinographic writing system in Korean *hyangga* 郷歌 poetry, and the development of the *kundoku* system of reading literary Chinese.⁶⁷ The chronological proximity of the *Kaifūsō* and the *Man'yōshū* has led to comparisons between the two, namely that the former is an example of “Chinese” literary production and the latter an example of “native Japanese” literary production, but such a comparison is perilous. Webb’s study demonstrated that while the *Kaifūsō* may have drawn on continental source materials and genres, it was not an attempt at slavish imitation of Chinese court culture, nor was it the Nara court’s attempt at positioning itself as a “little China” *vis-à-vis* its more powerful continental counterpart. Conversely, the *Man'yōshū*, replete with its lengthy headnotes written in literary Chinese, copious allusions to continental source materials,

⁶⁵ Shinada Yoshikazu, “*Man'yōshū: The Invention of a National Poetry Anthology*,” Kevin Collins, trans., in Haruo Shirane and Tomi Suzuki, eds., *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity, and Japanese Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) 31-32.

⁶⁶ John R. Bentley, “The Origin of *Man'yōgana*” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 64, no. 1 (2001), 62-63. However, the early Heian Buddhist establishment is often credited with the invention of *kana*, or Japanese phonetic writing. Legends surrounding Kūkai often claim that he is the inventor of *kana*. This is because a number of priests, including Kūkai, worked with Sanskrit materials and were thus familiar with the principles of a phonetic writing system (Abe, 114). However, the existence of *man'yōgana* in the eighth century already shows that Japanese literati were already familiar with the notion of phonetic writing. Furthermore, while some volumes of the *Man'yōshū* are written in a hybrid semantic-phonetic script, others are almost entirely phonetic. Historical linguist Alexander Vovin believes that *kana* was not “invented,” by any one person or entity, rather it was a gradual reduction of the number of *man'yōgana* signs used (Vovin, personal communication). Xylographic copies of early Heian texts, such as the *Kokinshū* and *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 are written in what is considered *hentaigana* 変体仮名 (irregular *kana*), and multiple signs, albeit fewer than during the era of the *Man'yōshū*, are still used to represent the same sound.

⁶⁷Lurie, 201-202, 204.

contributors with experience in China such as Yamanoe no Okura, and its Korean-inspired orthography can hardly be considered purely “Japanese.” Although a satisfactory answer to the *wa-kan* issue will likely require collaborative research by philologists, literary scholars, historical linguists, historians and sociolinguists, one possibility is that the orthographic styles represented in the *Kaifūsō* and the *Man’yōshū* actually reflect different orthographic registers that can be linked to specific lineages or production contexts, rather than to specific “nations” or “languages.”⁶⁸

One of Japan’s first works of literary criticism also appeared during this period. In 772, two years before Kūkai was born, Fujiwara no Hamanari 藤原浜成 (724-790) wrote the *Kakyō hyōshiki* 歌經標式 (*Standards of Poetic Practice*) as a manual for *waka* practice, but Chinese influence is clearly present. Judith Rabinovitch states the *Kakyō hyōshiki* “makes frequent allusions to Chinese poetics, especially that of the Six Dynasties period, and to major prose classics in the Chinese canon.”⁶⁹ She adds that Chinese poetic theory is most evident in Hamanari’s attempt to create a system of “poetic faults” (*uta no yamai* or *kabyō* 歌病) for *waka*.⁷⁰

This was the Japanese literary scene in the decades immediately preceding Kūkai’s birth. Although there were attempts made at composing and anthologizing Japanese poetry, most historical and literary writings were composed in literary Chinese. Also, negotiation and engagement with continental orthographic and literary conventions is evident even when the

⁶⁸ In this regard, Lurie states, “I am not denying that there were real differences among Chinese, Japanese and Korean spoken languages. Rather, I am insisting that *texts* were potentially unaffected by such linguistic differences. It is counterintuitive to the alphabet-centrism of most thinking about writing, but we must consider textual variety on its own terms rather than assuming it inevitably reflects or is determined by linguistic variety.” (Lurie, 204).

⁶⁹ Judith Rabinovitch, “Wasp Waists and Monkey Tails: A Study and Translation of Hamanari’s *Uta no Shiki* (The Code of Poetry, 772), Also Known as *Kakyō Hyōshiki* (A Formulary for Verse Based on The Canons of Poetry)” in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Dec., 1991), 472.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Japanese literati of the time composed Japanese poetry. Finally, the Chinese imprint is clearly present in what little literary criticism was produced in Japan during this period.

Kūkai's Early Studies in the Classics

Kūkai was born in 774 in Byōbugaura, Tado County, Sanuki Province, on the island of Shikoku, which is modern-day Zentsūji City, Kagawa Prefecture. Many previous studies, such as those by Yoshito Hakeda and Ryuichi Abe, point out that Kūkai came from an aristocratic background with links to both the Saeki and Ōtomo clans, but political machinations surrounding the Prince Sawara affair may have dampened his family's fortunes.⁷¹ According to various autobiographical and hagiographical accounts, Kūkai is said to have been a Buddhist prodigy from birth, engaging in practices such as building Buddhist statues from mud and conversing with Buddhas and bodhisattvas in his dreams. His last will and testament, the *Goyuigō* 御遺告 (*Final Instructions*) records:

A long time ago, when I was five or six years old and in my parents' home, I had a dream where I was seated on an eight-petal lotus and conversing with the various Buddhas. However, I did not tell my parents or anyone else about this dream. My parents had a great deal of affection for me and named me Tōtomono [Precious Thing]. When I turned twelve, my mother said, "Our child surely was a disciple of the Buddha a long time ago. I know this because in a dream I became pregnant, and gave birth to this child. That is why this child surely must be a disciple of the Buddha." When my young heart heard this, I was overjoyed and always built images of the Buddha out of mud. I built a small shrine near my home to house the images and worshipped them.⁷²

⁷¹ The Prince Sawara 早良親王 (?-785) affair was an incident surrounding the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu 藤原種継 (737-785). Tanetsugu, a close confidant of Emperor Kanmu, advocated moving the capital from Heijōkyō (Nara) to Nagaoka-kyō, contrary to the wishes of Sawara. Sawara, along with members of the Ōtomo 大伴 and Saeki 佐伯 clans, was implicated in the assassination, and was banished to Awaji Island. However, on the way to Awaji, Sawara refused to eat and died in 785. As there were fears that Sawara became a "vengeful spirit" (*onryō* 怨霊), the court attempted to placate his spirit by awarding him the posthumous title of Emperor Sudō 崇道天皇 (Asao Naohiro, et al., eds., *Kadokawa Nihonshi jiten* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1996), 448). Incidentally, the head of the Ōtomo clan at the time of this incident was none other than Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (718?-785), the compiler of the *Man'yōshū*.

⁷² William Matsuda, *The Founder Reinterpreted: Kūkai and Vraisemblable Narrative*, MA thesis, University of Hawaii, 2003, 31. The translation is from the *Goyuigō* (KDKZS, v. 8, 38-39). Due to a series of irregularities between the events presented in the *Goyuigō* and other sources on Kūkai's life, there is the strong possibility that it

However, Kūkai's maternal uncle, Ato no Ōtari 阿刀大足 (dates unknown) advised him to receive a standard aristocratic, Confucian education at the State College in preparation for a career as a bureaucrat. Kūkai writes:

My maternal uncle, Ato no Ōtari, said “Even if you are to become a Buddha, nonetheless you should attend the State College, read academic texts, and rise up in the world.” Following my uncle's learned advice, I read worldly texts and learned how to write in Chinese...⁷³

Although Ato no Ōtari frequently appears in primary and secondary sources pertaining to Kūkai, very little is known about him. Kūkai's preface to the *Sangō shiiki* and the *Goyuigō* indicate that he was his maternal uncle collected a stipend of 2,000 *koku*, had the position of *tayū* 大夫 (steward) and held the Junior Fifth Rank, Lower (*jūgoige* 従五位下) at the imperial court.⁷⁴ He was supposedly a top scholar who was well-versed in the Chinese classics and served as an official tutor to Prince Iyo, one of Emperor Kanmu's sons. Watanabe and Miyasaka write that the origins of the Ato clan are unknown, but speculate that they were the descendants of naturalized immigrants.⁷⁵ If they are correct, the origins of the Ato would most likely have been on the Korean Peninsula, since the Nara court employed skilled Koreans as scribes and artisans.

As indicated in his final testament, Kūkai followed his uncle's advice and in 788, at the age of fifteen, he went to the capital to study under him. Since there is no extant documentary evidence on where Ato no Ōtari lived, scholars debate whether Kūkai moved to Heijōkyō (Nara) or to Nagaokakyō to pursue his studies. By 784, the capital had officially moved from Heijōkyō to Nagaokakyō, but because the new capital was largely under construction, many facilities in the old capital were still being used. Takagi Shingen and Kishida Tomoko, along with Watanabe

was not written by Kūkai himself (Shimpo Ryūshō, ed., *Goyuigō*, in *Kōbō daishi kūkai zenshū*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1983), 93).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁴ Watanabe Shōkō and Miyasaka Yūshō, eds., *Sangō shiiki, Shōryōshū*, in *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, vol. 71 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965), 84.

⁷⁵ Watanabe Shōkō and Miyasaka Yūshō, *Shamon Kūkai*, 39.

and Miyasaka, are of the opinion that Kūkai most likely studied in Heijōkyō.⁷⁶ For the next three years, Kūkai would study the Chinese classics (including poetry) and learn the art of literary Chinese composition under his uncle's tutelage until his matriculation at the State College at the age of eighteen.

Kūkai at the State College

The next phase in Kūkai's early education took place at the State College, where aspiring elite government officials studied a state-prescribed Confucian curriculum. As Abe points out, the *Gakuryō* 学令 (*Rules of Education*) dictated that all incoming students should be no older than sixteen years of age, but it was likely that Okada Ushikai 岡田牛養 (dates unknown), a fellow Sanuki native who had just been promoted to full professor (*hakase* 博士), arranged for an exception to be made on Kūkai's behalf. Once admitted, students had the choice of entering five curricula: history (*kidendō* 紀伝道), classics (*myōgyōdō* 明経道), law (*myōbōdō* 明法道), mathematics (*sandō* 算道), and calligraphy (*shodō* 書道). Although Kūkai would later be lauded as one of Japan's Three Great Calligraphers (*sanpitsu* 三筆), he apparently did not study calligraphy while at the State College. Rather, he majored in classics, which meant that he had to complete an intense curriculum that included reading The Five Classics of the Confucian Canon: the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), *Liji* 礼記 (*Book of Rites*), *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Songs*), *Chunqiu zuoshizhuan* 春秋左氏伝 (*The Commentary of Zuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals*) and *Shujing* 書經 (*The Book of Documents*).⁷⁷ Even though Kūkai eventually lost interest in his studies and withdrew, his time at the State College had two major benefits: first, the rigors of

⁷⁶ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 43; and Kishida Tomoko, *Kūkai to chūgoku bunka* (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 2003), 2. Kishida, citing Takagi, states that even if Kūkai did reside in Nagaokakyō, he would have most certainly made frequent trips to Nara to visit temples (Kishida, 2).

⁷⁷ Takagi, 16.

textual studies at the college, combined with what he already learned from his uncle, gave him a solid foundation in literary Chinese texts, and second, as Watanabe and Miyasaka suggest, it is highly probable that he obtained instruction in Tang Chinese pronunciation from the phonetics professor.⁷⁸

Kūkai clearly had access to the *Wenxuan* 文選 (*Literary Selections*). Although Kūkai does not mention the *Wenxuan* by name in his introduction to the *Sangō shiiki*, where he described his secular studies, the *Wenxuan* was widely known to the literati and intelligentsia of the period. The *Wenxuan* is a catalog of thirty-eight different styles of Chinese poetry and prose compiled in 531 by Prince Xiaoming 昭明太子, who was also known as Xiao Tong 蕭統. Kūkai's compositions in the “four-six rhymed style” (*si lu pian li ti* 四六駢儷體) would have required familiarity with the *Wenxuan*. Also, the *Rōko shiiki* 聾瞽指歸 (*Demonstrating the Goals for Those who are Deaf and Blind to the Truth*), which is considered to be the “draft” version of the *Sangō shiiki*, contains many quotations from the anthology. Finally, the first selection in the *Shōryōshū* is a *you xian shi* 遊仙詩 (roaming into transcendency poem), an adaptation of a genre catalogued in the *Wenxuan*. Complete translations of Kūkai's *you xian shi*, and the source material from the *Wenxuan*, are presented in Chapter Three of this study.

Kūkai withdrew from the State College because he was unsatisfied with his studies and considered what he learned there to be worthless.⁷⁹ Yet, his intense textual and linguistic studies would be of immense benefit when he finally arrived in Chang-an. However, before joining the Japanese embassy to China in 804, Kūkai would spend about a decade as an unlicensed itinerant monk.

⁷⁸ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 45.

⁷⁹ Abe, 73.

Kūkai's Literary Debut: The *Rōko shiiki*

Kūkai wrote his first major work after withdrawing from the State College. He wandered around Shikoku as a hermit for a while, engaging in various ascetic practices. Kūkai went from a privileged life in the political and cultural center of the early Heian *ritsuryō* state to one on its periphery (both politically and geographically) as an unordained and unlicensed itinerant monk. However, this was an extremely important period for his literary and intellectual development, as he composed the *Rōko shiiki* in 797 at the age of 24. Upon returning from China in 806, Kūkai would add a new introduction to this work and rename it the *Sangō shiiki*. In both versions, Kūkai uses fictional characters to debate which of the “three teachings,” Confucianism, Daoism, or Buddhism, is superior. Naturally, after extensive debate and eloquent dialogue, Buddhism emerges the victor.

As Abe and Hakeda indicate, the original introduction to the *Rōko shiiki* is an invaluable work because it provides detailed information about texts that were in current circulation:

Some people are adroit, others are clumsy. In the same way, some writings are lauded for their beauty, and others are dismissed as lacking charm. Even in the poems of the legendary Ts'ao Chien⁸⁰ and Ch'en Hsiu,⁸¹ I often find flaws as well as deviations from the rules of poetics. Chang Wen-Ch'eng⁸² of T'ang wrote a great book for entertainment. His prose flows brilliantly from one sentence to another, just like a string of gems. The poems that adorn his chapters are as dynamic as phoenixes ascending to heaven. I only regret that because Wen-ch'eng devotes much of his book to scenes of sexual love, his work is devoid of loftier feeling. Yet even opening this book is enough to thrill the judge Liu-hsia Hui,⁸³ and reading it transforms the tranquility of a Buddhist monastery into tumult. In our nation, Hi no Obito composed Stories to Keep from Falling Asleep (*Suikakuki*).⁸⁴ Unexcelled in his eloquence, he fills his book with fancy, taradiddle, and sophism, as thoroughly as a thundercloud covers the sky. Just hearing Obito's name causes even a fool to clap his hands and burst into laughter. Just reading a few phrases from his writing prompts even a mute to exclaim in delight. Despite its sophistication, I

⁸⁰ Cao Jian 曹建 in pinyin.

⁸¹ Chen Xiu 沈休 in pinyin.

⁸² Zhang Wen-cheng 張文成 in pinyin.

⁸³ Liu Xia-hui 柳下惠 in pinyin.

⁸⁴ This work is not extant, but could be the first piece of fiction composed in Japan (Hakeda, 25).

must admit that Obito's work lacks spiritual depth. These are the beauty of the epitome of the beautiful writings of the past, yet they hardly serve as the standard for later generations.⁸⁵

In addition to providing modern scholars a glimpse of the kinds of texts (particularly those not officially sanctioned) available in Kūkai's early days, this passage can rightly be labeled Kūkai's first foray into literary theory. First, his statements, "some writings are lauded for their beauty, and others are dismissed as lacking charm" and "[u]nexceeded in his eloquence, he fills his book with fancy, taradiddle, and sophism..." indicates that Kūkai appreciated writing for its intrinsic aesthetic value, independent of pragmatic content. Although he does not take issue with the entertainment value of literary writing, he does object to its spiritual shallowness. Nevertheless, Kūkai's suggestion that fiction could have any redeeming value bordered on heresy, as it was a challenge to Confucianism's hostility toward⁸⁶ There had been a perceptible reevaluation of the didactic potential for non-Buddhist texts during Kūkai's lifetime; for example, the introduction to the *Nihon koku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* 日本国現報善惡靈異記 (*Miraculous Stories of Karmic Retribution of Good and Evil in Japan*, c. 820), by Keikai 景戒 (or Kyōkai, dates unknown) recognizes the value of both "inside texts" (*naikyō* 内經, i.e. Buddhist texts) and "outside texts" (*gesho* 外書, i.e. Confucian and Daoist texts).⁸⁷ Although Kūkai's use of fiction in the *Rōko shiiki* may have been unorthodox, written debates over which of the "three teachings" was superior was not; Takagi comments that students of the period were often required to write on this topic in their examinations. In fact, the same year that Kūkai wrote the *Rōko shiiki*, Sugawara no Kiyokimi 菅原清公 (770-842) wrote on the "three teachings" in his examination, but Takagi states that it is unclear whether Kiyokimi had advance access to Kūkai's manuscript.

⁸⁵ Abe, 97-98. A *kakikudashi* version can be found in the KDKZS, vol. 2, 126-127 (translation and commentary by Muraoka Kū).

⁸⁶ Abe, 103.

⁸⁷ Izumoji Osamu, ed., *Nihon ryōiki* in *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, vol. 30 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996), 3.

In any event, Kūkai and Kiyokimi would meet several years later, since Kiyokimi was also appointed to serve on the 804 embassy to Tang China.⁸⁸

The work by Wen-cheng 文成 (660-732) mentioned in Kūkai's preface is the *You xian ku* 遊仙窟 (*The Dwelling of Playful Goddesses*), a fictional tale written during the early Tang dynasty. This text probably found its way to Japan between 701 and 704, when Yamanoe no Okura traveled to Tang China as an attaché to the Japanese ambassador. Since Okura makes a direct reference to the *You xian ku* in volume five of the *Man'yōshū*, possibly someone in the ambassador's entourage brought it back to Japan.⁸⁹ Kūkai's relative Ōtomo no Yakamochi sent several *You xian ku*-inspired poems to the daughter of Ōtomo no Sakanoue, suggesting the Ōtomo clan had ready access to a copy. Perhaps the *You xian ku* was one of the Chinese texts that Kūkai read when he was being tutored by Ato no Ōtari.

Kūkai's vast erudition and profound learning is apparent even in this debut work. Along with his sophisticated command of literary Chinese, the *Rōko shiki* displays his deep familiarity with scriptural and secular texts of the period. In order to further his arguments regarding Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, Kūkai drew upon a wide array of texts from these three schools of thought. However, he did not limit himself to scriptural or philosophical material; he also directly quoted or alluded to numerous Chinese literary and historical texts. Also, Kūkai

⁸⁸ Takagi, 30-31. Kiyokimi (also read Kiyotomo) was the grandfather of Michizane and was an erudite scholar in his own right. From an early age, he immersed himself in Confucian and historical texts, and at the age of fifteen, was bestowed the honor of attending to Prince Ate (who later became Emperor Heizei). He was admitted to the State College as a student of literature and stayed there for the maximum nine years. He sat for the civil service exam after he completed his university studies, but despite his scholarly bent, he failed the first time (he was later given a passing grade after his answers were reevaluated). He was granted the title of *monjō hakase* 文章博士 (professor of letters) in 815, and he was involved in the compilation of the *Ryōunshō* and the *Bunka shūreishū* (Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, 30-43).

⁸⁹ Uchida Michio, "Yūsenkutsu" in *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten*, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 117-118.

wove in texts from one tradition when making arguments about another: for instance, he drew upon Buddhist texts when discussing Confucianism and vice-versa.

Kūkai opens his three-part work with an exposition on Confucianism. His many years of Confucian education are evident from the opening lines, where Kimō 龜毛 (Tortoise Hair), the representative of Confucianism, is described as knowing the Nine Classics,⁹⁰ Three Histories,⁹¹ the Three Great Ways,⁹² and the Eight Trigrams by heart. Naturally, throughout this section Kūkai also makes frequent allusions to Confucian texts such as the *Lun 'yu* 論語 (*Analects of Confucius*) and the *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), and the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 (*School Sayings of Confucius*).

After Kimō finishes his eloquent presentation of the superiority of Confucianism, Kyomū 虛亡 (Nothingness) attempts to show the superiority of Daoism. The section on Daoism is the shortest, possibly reflecting the comparatively small number of Daoist texts in circulation in early Heian Japan. Abe points out that this was probably due to the rather tight control that the state exerted over Daoism:

The government was particularly sensitive about the magico-religious aspect of Taoism [Daoism]. The practice of diverse rituals for healing, divination, and shamanism, strongly associated with the Taoism was banned by the *ritsuryō* code. Mastery of such skills might give its practitioners charismatic power that could be used to upset the Nara political process, modeled on Confucian rationalist ideology. As the tragic death of Prince Nagaya

⁹⁰ The Nine Classics (*jiu jing* 九經) are the *Yijing* 易經 (*The Book of Changes*), *Shujing* 書經 (*The Book of Documents*), *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Songs*), *Liji* 禮記 (*The Book of Rites*), *Zhouli* 周禮 (*The Rites of Chou*), *tYili* 儀禮 (*The Book of Ritual*), *Chunqiu zuoshi zhuan* 春秋左氏傳 (*The Commentary of Zuo on the Spring and Autumn Annals*), *Chunqiu gongyang chuan* 春秋公羊傳 (*The Commentary of Qiu Gong on the Spring and Summer Annals*) and *Chunqiu guliang chuan* 春秋穀梁傳 (*The Commentary of Qiu Gu on the Spring and Summer Annals*) (Matsuda, 16).

⁹¹ The Three Histories (*san shi* 三史) consist of the *Shiji* 史記 (*Historical Records*), *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han Dynasty*), and *Hou han shu* 後漢書 (*History of the Later Han*) (Matsuda, *ibid.*).

⁹² The Three Great Ways 三墳 refer to the writings of the legendary Emperors Fuxi 伏羲 Huang Di 黃帝 and Shen Nong 神農.

(684-729) had demonstrated, for the courtiers to be implicated in Taoist magic often proved sufficiently scandalous to remove them from posts in government.⁹³ However, this section of the *Rōko shiiki* contains numerous references to the classics of Daoism, such as the *The Way and Its Power* 道德經 (*Dao de jing*) by Laozi 老子 (dates unknown), the writings of Zhuang zi 莊子 (dates unknown), and the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (date completed unknown), compiled by Liu An 劉安 (179-122 BCE). According to Kishida, Kyomu's understanding of Daoist theory is largely based on the *Bao po zi* 抱朴子 (*The Master who Embraces Simplicity*) by the Daoist alchemist Ge Hong 葛洪 (284-364).⁹⁴ The *Bao po zi* is a seminal text in Daoism because Ge Hong makes a clear distinction between the techniques used for attaining longevity (gymnastics, the consumption of herbs, and plant medicine) and those for attaining immortality (the consumption of alchemical elixirs).⁹⁵ Abe observes that the Daoism section of the *Sangō shiiki* has the fewest number of textual attestations, which he attributes to censorship by the Nara and early Heian states.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it does appear that a small number of canonical texts were circulated among the early Heian intelligentsia and nobility, perhaps out of a thirst for continental thought, or perhaps out of a desire to attain personal immortality.

Although the other participants in the debate are impressed and convinced by Kyomu's presentation, Kamei Kotsuji 仮名乞児 (Mendicant X), the spokesman for Buddhism, is about to show why Kyomu and Kimo are wrong, and that Buddhism is the proper path. Throughout his sermon, Kamei Kotsuji quotes or makes allusions to an eclectic array of Buddhist sutras such as the *Sutra of the Golden Light of the Most Victorious Kings* 金光明最勝王經

⁹³ Abe, 88.

⁹⁴ Kishida, 31. Indeed, Watanabe and Miyasaka's commentary the Daoism chapter of the *Sangō shiiki* indicates numerous references to the *Bao po zi* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 104-114).

⁹⁵ Herman Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan: The Tenmu Dynasty, 650-800* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 150.

⁹⁶ Abe, 88.

(*Suvarṇaprabhāsottama sūtra*), the *Lotus Sutra* 妙法蓮華經 (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka sūtra*), the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* 維摩詰經 (*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa sūtra*), the *Nirvana Sutra* 涅槃經 (*Mahāparinirvāna sūtra*), the *Garland Wreath Sutra* 華嚴經 (*Avatamsaka sūtra*) the *Sutra of Brahma's Net* 梵網經 (likely apocryphal, no known extant Sanskrit original) the *Diamond Wisdom Sutra* 金剛般若經 (*Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*), and the *Sutra of the Benevolent King* 仁王般若經 (likely apocryphal, no known extant Sanskrit original). In addition to Buddhist sutras, Kūkai also draws upon Buddhist treatises such as *The Great Cessation and Insight* (*Mohezhiguan* 摩訶止觀) by de facto Tien-tai founder Zhi-yi 智顛 (538-597) and *The Realization of Consciousness Only* 成唯識論 by Vasubandhu (fl. 4th century CE).

Although the *Rōko shiiki* was Kūkai's literary debut, the innumerable quotes, references, and allusions from scriptural, literary, and doctrinal sources found in the text demonstrate that Kūkai possessed scholarly erudition and literary acumen from an early age. Beyond the *Rōko shiiki*, there are no reliable textual accounts of Kūkai's activities between his withdrawal from the State College and his voyage to China. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the only textual record of a man who lived outside of the establishment is a piece of fiction, a form of writing condemned by the very establishment he was trying to escape. Due to the dearth of written records, scholars have had to speculate where Kūkai spent these ten years. There is the possibility that he traveled around the Kii Peninsula, since he mentioned that he had been there before when he wrote to Emperor Saga in 816 for permission to construct a temple atop Mt. Koya. Naturally, the hagiographic tradition has filled in this gap in Kūkai's biography with tales of his wandering throughout Japan performing various miracles.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Hakeda, 26.

Kūkai at Daianji

Located on the outskirts of Nara, the Daianji 大安寺 temple was an important link between Buddhist studies in Japan and China in the eighth and ninth centuries. The atmosphere at the temple was rather cosmopolitan, as it hosted prominent monks from many regions, including Daoxuan 道璿 (702-760) from China and Simsang⁹⁸ from 審祥 from Silla (credited with transmitting Hua-yen to Japan), Bodhisena from India (who came for the dedication of the Tōdaiji temple), and Fozhe 仏哲 (dates unknown) from Thailand (who introduced *rin'yūgaku*⁹⁹ to Japan).¹⁰⁰ The connection between the temple and continental culture is apparent from its very design, inspired by the Ximingsi 西明寺 temple in Chang-an, which in turn was a replica of Jetavana, a monastic complex donated to Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples.¹⁰¹ Also known as Nandaiji 南大寺, Daianji was an integral component of the Nara state Buddhist structure, along with the other “seven great temples:” Tōdaiji 東大寺, Saidaiji 西大寺, Yakushiji 薬師寺, Kōfukuji 興福寺, Gangōji 元興寺 and Hōryūji 法隆寺.¹⁰² Over the years, Daianji was home to both prominent Chinese monks, and Japanese monks who had considerable experience living in China.¹⁰³ Originally, the temple was located near the old capital of Fujiwara-kyō and known by different names, including Kudaranodera 百濟寺, Takechinoōdera 高市大寺, and Daikandaiji 大官大寺, but Emperor Shōmu issued an imperial edict ordering Dōji 道慈 (?-744), a Japanese

⁹⁸ Simsang is briefly mentioned in Jinhua Chen, *Philosopher, Practitioner, Politician: The Many Lives of Fazang* (643-712) (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 1, 85.

⁹⁹ *Rin'yūgaku* 林邑樂 is a type of *gagaku* 雅樂 court music that is Southeast Asian in origin. Rin'yū (C: Lin-yi) probably refers to a short-lived, unidentified country in Southeast Asia. (Helen Craig McCullough, “Aristocratic Culture” in Donald H. Shively and William McCullough, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 425.

¹⁰⁰ Kōno Seikō, “Daianji to Kōbō daishi” in Bukkyō geijitsu gakkai, ed., *Bukkyō geijitsu*, no. 92 (June, 1973), 26.

¹⁰¹ Sawa, 454.

¹⁰² Abe, 34.

¹⁰³ Kōno, 26.

vinaya master who had returned from studies in China, to move the temple to Nara and rename it Daianji.¹⁰⁴

According to the hagiographic tradition, Daianji played a significant role in Kūkai's education. Here, Kūkai was taught the *Kokūzō gumonjihō* 虚空蔵求聞持法, a meditative practice said to generate the ability to immediately memorize anything they learned or read. Abe explains that in addition to reciting the mantra of Ākāśagarbha one million times, the ritual included “drawing an image of the bodhisattva, constructing a ritual altar in a meditative hall, preparing offerings – such as powdered perfume, flowers, incense, food and lights – memorizing numerous mudras that accompany the recitation of *dhāranī*, and visualizing the physical characteristics of the bodhisattva.”¹⁰⁵ There is some debate as to who actually taught Kūkai this esoteric practice. In the introduction to the *Sangō shiiki*, the polished version of the *Rōko shiiki*, Kūkai simply writes that he learned it from “a monk.” However, other sources declare Gonzō 勤操 (754-827), who was also Kūkai's first ordination master, to be the one who transmitted it to him.¹⁰⁶ The ritual was most likely introduced to Japan in the mid- eighth century, when Daoxuan took up residence at Daianji and lectured on the precepts. However, Daoxuan was well-versed in mediation practices, in addition to Hua-yen and Tien-tai doctrine.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Daianji's strong Chinese character would have made it the ideal doctrinal and linguistic environment for a monk about to embark on an extended course of study in China.

Kūkai would not be the only China-bound monk to pass through Daianji. Kūkai's eventual rival Saichō 最澄 (767-822) also studied at Daianji for a period. Later, almost half a

¹⁰⁴ Nakamura, 528.

¹⁰⁵ Abe, 74.

¹⁰⁶ Kōno, 27. A passage from the *Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略記 is cited as evidence that Kūkai learned the incantation from Gonzō. However, other sources, such as the *Kūkai sōzuden* do not mention Gonzō (Kōno, 27).

¹⁰⁷ Nakamura, 610.

century after Kūkai and Saichō returned from China, Saichō’s disciples Enchin 円珍(814-891) and Ennin 円仁 (794-864), the next generation of Japanese “exchange monks,” would also spend time at Daianji before departing for China to receive their own transmission in esoteric Buddhism.

Voyage to China

There is some debate as to how Kūkai was allowed to join Ambassador Fujiwara no Kadonomaro’s embassy to China. In light of his withdrawal from the State College and his family’s declining political fortunes, it is highly unlikely that he alone had sufficient influence with the court to secure a spot on the journey. One view is that his uncle Ato no Ōtari persuaded Emperor Kanmu to permit Kūkai to travel to China.¹⁰⁸ The opposing view is that it was Gonzō who made the necessary arrangements for Kūkai to accompany the ambassador and his entourage,¹⁰⁹ which included Saichō. Another recent theory is that Kūkai was not initially selected for Kadonomaro’s mission, which originally departed in the fourth month of 803. Inclement weather forced them to return to port, however, and Kūkai was able to join the mission as an alternate when Kadonomaro attempted another departure a year later.¹¹⁰ Regardless of who managed to obtain permission for Kūkai to join the voyage, or whether he was even the court’s first choice, he was on one of the four Japanese government boats that set sail for Tang China in the fifth month of 804.

Although Chang-an was in many ways the center of the East Asian world, an appointment to the Japanese embassy was considered less than an honor. As Hakeda points out:

¹⁰⁸ Hakeda, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Fujii Jun, *Kūkai no shisōteki tenkai no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Transview, 2008), 28.

A voyage to China in those days was extremely dangerous. Whenever the government announced plans to send an envoy to the Chinese court, officials of the middle or lower ranks were thrown into a state of frenzy for fear that they might be sent. Some had to be punished for evading government orders, and others became exhausted from mental strain even before embarking. Japanese shipbuilding at the time was much inferior to that of Korea or China, and navigators were not able to take full advantage of the seasonal winds.¹¹¹

Indeed, the voyage to China was fraught with peril, and this one was no exception. On the second day of the mission's journey, they encountered stormy weather and high seas. The vessel carrying Saichō and Vice Ambassador (*kentōfukushi* 遣唐副使) Ishikawa no Michimasu 石川道益 (?-804) made it through the storm and arrived in Minzhou, but two of the other vessels were lost in the storm.¹¹² The boat carrying Kūkai and the ambassador drifted considerably off course, eventually arriving in Fuzhou (present-day Fujian Province) a few weeks later. As Fuzhou was politically, culturally, and linguistically distant from the capital in Chang-an, the local magistrate was unprepared to handle the alien Japanese who had drifted into his jurisdiction, so he simply impounded their vessel, denied them permission to travel further inland, and quarantined them in a hut in the wetlands near the beach for two months.¹¹³ Undoubtedly, members of the ambassador's entourage (including Kūkai) would have had some spoken proficiency in the

¹¹¹ Hakeda, 29. There are conflicting accounts of what happened to the two vessels which did not make it to the continent. Hakeda writes that one ship turned back to Japan, set out again the following year, but encountered rough seas and wound up shipwrecked somewhere in the South Seas, while the other sank with only one survivor (*ibid.*). Unfortunately, he does not cite the source for this claim. Abe states that both ships were lost at sea, citing a passage in the *Nihon kōki* 日本後記 (*Later Chronicles of Japan*) (Abe, 114, 484). Borgen, on the other hand, states that “the two ships were blown back to Kyushu” and that the court sent an emissary to Silla to inquire as to whether the ships had been shipwrecked there. (Robert Borgen, “The Japanese Mission to China, 801-806” in *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 37, no. 1 (Spring 1982), 10). Borgen also cites the relevant passages in the *Nihon kōki*. The title of Borgen's article indicates the amount of preparation required for a mission to China: Kadonomaro was initially appointed ambassador in 801, but did not successfully make it to China until 805. During those four years, the four ships were constructed, gifts of tribute were prepared, and elaborate ceremonies and banquets were held for the 600-member embassy (Borgen, “The Japanese Mission to China, 801-806,” 7).

¹¹² However, Michimasu died from illness only a few days after arriving in Min-zhou, most likely from the exhaustion of the journey (Abe, 114).

¹¹³ According to Hakeda, the Japanese mission was treated rather coldly because the local government was undergoing a change of administration, and no Japanese had ever sailed into their jurisdiction before (Hakeda, 29).

dialect used in Chang-an,¹¹⁴ but this would have posed difficulties in Fuzhou, which is in the Min dialect region.¹¹⁵ Kadonomaro made several attempts to write to the local governor to plead their case, but his repeated efforts were rebuffed without a reply. Nevertheless, what started off as misfortune ultimately provided Kūkai an opportunity to demonstrate his proficiency in Chinese composition to a Chinese audience. Asked by the ambassador to write a letter to the magistrate explaining the Japanese delegation’s situation and reasons for sailing to China, Kūkai responded:¹¹⁶

雅能啓。高山澹默。禽獸不告勞而投歸。深水不言。魚龜不憚倦而遂赴。故能。西羌梯陰貢垂衣君。南裔航深。獻刑厝帝。誠是。明知艱難之亡身。然猶忘命德化之遠及者也。伏惟。大唐聖朝。霜露攸均。皇王宜宅。明王繼武。聖帝重興。掩頓九野。牢籠八紘。是以。我日本国。常見風雨和順。定知中国有聖。

He Neng¹¹⁷ bids you respect. Though the towering peaks are silent, the birds and beasts make their way there without speaking of difficulty; though the deep seas do not speak, the fish and dragons reach them without worrying about fatigue. That is why the Xiqiang¹¹⁸ can build bridges in steep areas and offer tribute to the Virtuous Sons of Heaven in Draped Robes¹¹⁹ and the Descendants of the South¹²⁰ navigated the deep seas to offer tribute to the virtuous ruler who dispensed with punishments. It is undoubtedly clear that

¹¹⁴ Watanabe and Miyasaka speculate that Kadonomaro may have obtained his spoken Chinese proficiency at home, since his maternal relatives were émigrés from the continent.

¹¹⁵ The dialect spoken in Chang-an would have been the spoken version of Middle Chinese, a direct descendant of Old Chinese. Middle Chinese served as the parent language to modern Chinese dialects such as Mandarin, Cantonese and Shanghaiese. However, the language spoken in Fuzhou is a separate offshoot of Old Chinese. (Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 185-186). Therefore, while the languages are linguistically related, they are not mutually intelligible. Since extant records do not specifically mention who Kadonomaro and his party dealt with upon coming ashore, it is difficult to say definitively whether dialectal differences posed a problem. However, since it was ultimately Kūkai’s letters that won over the magistrate, it is reasonable to assume that written Chinese was the more effective mode of communication.

¹¹⁶ *Shōryōshū*, vol. 5, poem 38. Henceforth, *Shōryōshū* citations shall be abbreviated as (volume number):(poem number) based on the NKBT edition. There is also a translation of this poem in Borgen, “The Japanese Mission to China, 801-806,” 26-28.

¹¹⁷ He Neng 賀能 (Ganō) was Fujiwara no Kadonomaro’s Chinese penname (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 266).

¹¹⁸ The Xiqiang 西羌 are a non-Han Chinese minority people that reside in northwestern China (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 266).

¹¹⁹ This is a reference to Huang-di 黃帝, Yao 堯, and Shun 舜, the mythical Chinese emperors who effortlessly ruled the realm in their flowing robes (Imataka et al., 354).

¹²⁰ This is a reference to modern-day Vietnam (specifically, Tonkin and Hanoi) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 266).

crossing the seas and traversing the mountains brings danger, yet there are those who think nothing of losing their lives and come from afar in pursuit of the emperor's virtue. In retrospect, the sagacious reigns of Chinese emperors kept the frost and the dew in proper balance, providing a suitable residence for the Son of Heaven. A wise king succeeded him, and there was one sagacious emperor after another. The Emperor's virtue covers the Nine Heavens¹²¹ and extends to realms in the Eight Directions. For this reason, when we see the winds blow and the rains fall harmoniously in our land of Japan we know that there is a sage emperor in China.

剝巨輪於蒼嶺。摘皇花於丹墀。執蓬萊琛。獸岷岳玉。起昔迄今相續不絕。故今。我國王。顧先祖之胎謀。慕今帝之德化。謹差太政官右大弁正三品兼行。越前国大守。藤原朝臣賀能等。弁使奉獻国信別貢等物。賀能等。忘身衛命冒死入海。

The Emperor commissioned the carving of a boat¹²² out of a giant tree from atop a verdant peak, and plucked his finest blossoms¹²³ to dispatch to your Crimson Lacquer Garden.¹²⁴ I present you with jewels from Mt. Kunlun and treasures taken from the island of Peng Lai.¹²⁵ This tradition started in the days of old and continues to this very day. As such, the ruler of my realm, in accordance with the deep-seated desires

¹²¹ The Nine Heavens (*jiu ye* 九野), also known as the Nine Fields, refer to the heavens in general, but also specifically to the following nine heavenly realms: the Balanced Heaven 鈞天, the Azure Heaven 蒼天, the Transforming Heaven 變天, the Mysterious Heaven 玄天, the Obscure Heaven 幽天, the Luminous Heaven 昊天, the Crimson Heaven 朱天, the Fiery Heaven 炎天, and the Yang Heaven 陽天 (Imataka, et al., 354).

¹²² “Carving a boat” 剝 is found in the *Yijing*: “They hollowed out trees to form canoes; they cut others long and thin to make oars. Thus arose the benefit of canoes and oars for the help of those who had no means of intercourse with others. They could now reach the most distant parts, and all under heaven were benefited” 剝木為舟剝木為楫舟楫之利以濟不通致遠以利天下蓋取諸渙. Originally, the verb 剝 meant to “hollow out,” as in to make a dugout canoe (Imataka et al., 354; Legge, *The I Ching*, in Max F. Muller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 16 (New York: Dover Publications, 1963) 384; Yi, Chōng-ho, *Chuyōk chōngūi* (Seoul: Asea Munhwasa, 1987), 60).

¹²³ The “blossoms” are the Emperor's emissaries, and alludes to a poem in “Minor Odes of the Kingdom” 小雅 section of *The Classic of Poetry*:

皇皇者華	Brilliant are the flowers
于彼原隰	On those level heights and the low grounds
駉駉征夫	Complete and alert is the messenger, with his suite
每懷靡及	Ever anxious lest he should not succeed

(Imataka et al., 355; James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: IV The She King* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 249).

¹²⁴ The “Crimson Lacquer Garden” is a reference to the Tang court (Imataka et al., 355).

¹²⁵ Peng Lai 蓬萊 is one of the three sacred islands located to the east of China. Here, the “jewels from Mt. Kunlun” and the “treasures taken from the island of Peng Lai” refer to the items of tribute presented by the Japanese mission (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 267).

of his ancestors, seeks out the present Emperor's virtue. I, Lord Fujiwara no Kadonomaro [He Neng], Greater Right Controller of the Third Rank and Governor of Echizen, in the employ of the Grand Councilor of State, was humbly dispatched as ambassador and wish to present my credentials and gifts of tribute. We selflessly accepted our mission and plied the seas, challenging death.

既辞本涯比及中途。暴雨穿帆。戕風折柁。高波泼漢。短舟齧々。凱風朝扇。摧肝耽羅之狼心。北氣夕發。失膽留求之虎性。顰蹙猛風待葬鼈口。攢眉驚汰占宅鯨腹。隨浪昇沈。任風南北。但見天水之碧色豈視山谷之白露。掣々波上二月有餘。水盡人疲。海長陸遠。飛虛脱翼。泳水斃鱗。何足為喻哉。

With the shores of our homeland behind us, midway through our voyage heavy rains tore apart our sails and fierce winds split our rudder. The waves were so tall as to spill over into the Milky Way, and our small boat was sandwiched between the billows. In the morning, had the winds blown from the south, our livers would have frozen at the thought of the wolf-hearted inhabitants of Cheju Island.¹²⁶ In the evening, had the winds blown from the north, we would have lost our courage at the thought of the tiger-like nature of the inhabitants of the Ryukyus. Scowling at the fierce winds, we await our internment in the mouth of a sea turtle; cringing at the sight of the raging billows we know our final home will be in the belly of a whale. Undulating in the waves, we entrust our fate to the wind and make our way southeast. Around us is nothing but the emerald color of the sea and the sky. How can we see the white mists of the mountains and valleys? After over two months of being jostled by the waves, we have run out of water and are fatigued, the sea goes on for an eternity and land is far off. We were trying to fly through the skies with our wings clipped, or trying to swim the waters with our gills slit – would these metaphors suffice?

僅八月初日。乍見雲峯欣悅罔極。過赤子之得母。越旱苗之遇霖。賀能等。萬冒死波。再見生日。是則。聖德之所致也。非我力之所能也。又大唐之遇日本也。雖云。八狄雲會膝步高台。七戎霧合稽頸魏闕。而於我國使也。殊私曲成待以上客。面對龍顏自承鸞綸。佳問榮寵已過望外。與夫璫々諸蕃豈同日而可論乎。

Finally, on the first day of the Eighth Month, we suddenly saw a peak enshrouded in clouds and our elation knew no limit. Our joy exceeded that of an infant meeting his mother or a parched field encountering the

¹²⁶ The Japanese fear of the inhabitants of Cheju Island (written in this text as 耽羅) appears to be based on an episode in the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本記 (*Continued Chronicles of Japan*), where a Japanese embassy bound for Tang China in 778 was stranded on Cheju and attacked by the inhabitants (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 507).

rain. We braved our way through the myriad waves of death to see the sun of life once again. This was not due to our own abilities, but to the sage virtue of the Tang Emperor. Although the Eight Northern Barbarian Tribes¹²⁷ kneel before the throne, and the Seven Western Barbarian Tribes¹²⁸ gather like the mist and made their prostrations before the palace's pillars, the Emperor treats the Japanese envoy with special consideration and the utmost hospitality. We have direct audiences with the dragon-like countenance of the Emperor and partake of his sage words. It is beyond our expectations to receive the Emperor's majestic inquiries and affection. Should we be discussed in the same breath as those numerous insignificant barbarian tribes?

又竹符銅契本備奸詐。世淳人質文契何用。是故。我国淳樸已降常事好隣。所獻信物不用印書。所遣使人無有奸偽。相襲其風于今無盡。加以。使乎之人必挾腹心。任以腹心何更用契。載籍所傳東方有国。其人懇直礼義之鄉。君子之國蓋為此歟。然今。州使責以文書。疑彼腹心。檢括船上。計數公私。斯乃。理合法令。事得道理。官吏之道實是可然。

Also, the bamboo cards and copper tablets¹²⁹ that we bring as identification are meant as countermeasures against fraudulent impersonation. If the world were pure and the people upright, would identification documents be needed? For this reason, our government has been pure and upright from the onset and has dealt with neighboring nations in a friendly manner. The items we present as tribute do not bear the imperial seal, and those whom we dispatch as envoys are devoid of malicious intent. This practice has continued uninterrupted from the days of old to the present. Not only that, did not Confucius say that the person selected to be a “fine messenger”¹³⁰ will always have a true heart? If one appoints an ambassador with a true heart, then why would one use identification documents? According to records, there is a

¹²⁷ These are the non-Han tribes that inhabited the areas north of China. Although expressed as “Eight Northern Barbarian Tribes” (*ba di* 八狄), this term does not refer to eight specific ethnicities, but to the northern “barbarians” in general (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 268).

¹²⁸ The Seven Western Barbarian Tribes (*qi rong* 七戎) refer to the non-Han tribes to the west of China. Like the “Eight Northern Barbarians” described above, the number “seven” appears to merely refer to the tribes in general, not seven specific groups (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 268).

¹²⁹ The “bamboo cards and copper tablets” (*zhu fu tong qi* 竹符銅契) were the credentials issued by the Japanese Emperor for presentation by the embassy to the Tang Emperor (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 268).

¹³⁰ This is a reference to the *Analects*: “Ch’u Po-yu [Qu Bo-yu in Pinyin] sent a messenger to Confucius. Confucius sat with him and asked, ‘What does your master do?’ He answered, ‘My master seeks to reduce his errors but has not yet been able to do so.’ When the messenger had left, the Master commented, ‘What a messenger! What a messenger!’” 蘧伯玉使人於孔子孔子与之坐而問焉曰夫子何為對曰夫子欲寡其過而未能也使者出子曰使乎使乎 (Lau, 128; Kanaya, 199).

country to the east, its people are honest and upright, and it is a realm of courtesy – perhaps this is why it is called the “country of gentlemen.”¹³¹ Nonetheless, you, the magistrate of this province, fault us for not having the appropriate documents and you doubt the sincerity of our hearts. You boarded our ship and inventoried our personal effects and official gifts of tribute. In principle, you are within the letter of the law and your actions are within reason. Your actions as an official are indeed appropriate.

雖然。遠人乍到。觸途多憂。海中之愁。猶委胸臆。德酒之味飽心腹。卒然禁制手足無厝。又建中以往。入朝使船。直着揚蘇。無漂蕩之苦。州縣諸司。慰勞慇懃。左右任使。不檢船物。今則事与昔異。遇將望疎。底下愚人。窃懷驚恨。

However, we, who have come from afar, have offended your laws upon our arrival and this distresses us greatly. Our sorrows on the high seas remain in our hearts. Our hearts and bellies have yet to be sated by the taste of the Emperor’s wine of virtue. Your sudden restrictions leave us nowhere to place our hands and feet. Also, from the reign of Emperor Jian Zhong¹³² on, Japanese missions to the Tang court arrived directly at Yangzhou or Suzhou and did not suffer the ordeal of being adrift. The officials in these provinces treated the mission with the utmost courtesy and did not subject their effects to inspection, entrusting matters to the mission. However, now things are different from in the past, and what we have encountered here is far removed from our expectations. As we are lowly fools, we harbor both surprise and outrage.

伏願。垂柔遠之惠。顧好隣之義。從其習俗。不怪常風。然則。涓々百蠻。与流水而朝宗舜海。喁々萬服。將葵蕾以引領堯日。順風之人甘心輻湊。遂腥之蟻悅意駢羅。今不任常習之小願。奉啓不宜謹啓。

I humbly beseech you extend some compassion toward us who have traveled so far, consider the righteousness of good relations with your neighbors, and leave our relations as they are and not hold them in suspicion. If you do so, the One Hundred Barbarian Tribes,¹³³ which are like infinite threads, will flow into the sea of Shun¹³⁴ and pay tribute to the Tang Emperor, and the Ten Thousand Commoners who revere

¹³¹ The “country of gentlemen to the east” is found in the *Huai nan zi*, so in effect, Kūkai is trying to use the Chinese textual tradition to justify their presence (Imataka et al., 356).

¹³² Jian Zhong 建中 is the name given to the first twenty-four years of the reign of Emperor Dezhong 德中 (r. 779-804) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 269).

¹³³ 百蠻 (*bai man*) in the original. Like the examples above, this refers to non-Han peoples in general.

¹³⁴ Shun was one of China’s mythical virtuous emperors, but here it is used to refer to the Tang court (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 270).

the emperor will worship Yao just as a dandelion faces the sun. Those who follow the ways of old will find satisfaction in their hearts, and will gather; the ants follow the frowsy and will find joy in their hearts and form a line.¹³⁵ Now, I cannot implore you enough to honor the customary relations [that have existed between us]. Respectfully.

Kūkai's letter is very dense and contains allusions to numerous Chinese historical and literary texts. Although the primary thrust of the letter is to plead the ambassador's case and curry the local magistrate's good favor, Kūkai mildly chastises him for being unaccommodating in his treatment of the ambassador and his party, pointing out the special relationship the Japanese have with the Tang court and the warmer reception previous missions received from officials in other provinces. Also, Kūkai's characterization of the inhabitants of Cheju Island and the Ryukyus reveals on how the ninth century Japanese perceived the areas in its geographical periphery.

Apparently impressed by Kūkai's writing style, the magistrate gave the ambassador and a few members of his party permission to proceed to Chang-an. However, in an ironic twist, Kūkai, the very author of the epistle, was not granted permission to travel to the capital. Fearing that he would be forced to remain in Fuzhou until the ambassador and his party were ready to return to Japan, Kūkai dashed off a second letter:¹³⁶

日本国留学沙門空海啓。空海。才能不聞。言行無取。但知。雪中枕肱。雲峯喫菜。逢時乏人簞留学未。限以廿年。尋以一乘。任重人弱夙夜惜陰。

Kūkai, a student-monk from the country of Japan, bids you respect. Kūkai's talents are unrecognized; there is nothing noteworthy about his speech or actions. However, he knows this: sleeping in the snow he uses his

¹³⁵ This line is based on a line found in the *Zhuangzi*: "Of enthusiasts, Shun is an example. Mutton does not care for ants; it is the ants which care for the mutton. Mutton has a frowsy smell; and there is a frowsiness about Shun which attracts the people" (Herbert A. Giles, trans. *Chuang Tsu: Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1923), 245.

¹³⁶ SRS 5:39.

elbow as a pillow;¹³⁷ he partakes of wild vegetables atop the peaks enshrouded by clouds. Due to a lack of qualified people at the time, he was finally able to join a group of students bound for China. Limited to twenty years in China, he seeks the One Vehicle. His duty is daunting, humans are weak, and he loathes the passage of time.

今承不許隨入京。理須左右。更無所求。雖然。居諸不駐。歲不我與。何得。厚荷國家之馮。空擲如矢之序。是故歎斯留滯。貪早達京。伏惟。中丞閣下。德簡天心。仁普近遠。

Now, Kūkai would like to inquire why he has been denied permission to enter the capital as part of the Ambassador's entourage. Kūkai would like to make clear his reasons; this is all he asks. However, time does not stand still, and he is not one with time. How heavy is the burden that the state has placed upon him; it is possible to vainly throw away time like it was an arrow. This is why he bemoans his confinement here and yearns to proceed to the Capital at once. Your Excellency's virtue has been recognized by the Son of Heaven, your benevolence reaches near and far.

老弱連袂頌德溢路。男女携手詠功盈耳。外示俗風。內淳真道。伏願。顧彼弘道。令得入京。然則。早尋名德。速遂所志。今不任陋願之至敢塵視聽伏深戰越。謹奉啓以聞謹啓。

The streets are filled with the old and frail lining up to praise your virtue; men and women praising your merits fill Kūkai's ears. On the outside, you show your worldly virtue, on the inside, your heart is drawn to the true teachings. He humbly beseeches you to allow him to enter the capital so that he may propagate this path. This is why he wants to call upon a revered monk soon and accomplish his goals. Thus far, he has not accomplished his humble task. His boldly writing to you is an offense to your senses that will deepen your ill will toward him. I humbly present these words to your honorable ears.

Unlike the letter Kūkai wrote for the ambassador, this second letter is short and to the point.

Nevertheless, the magistrate was apparently once again impressed by the quality of Kūkai's

¹³⁷ This is a reference to the *Analects*: "In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds" 子曰飯疏食飲水曲肱而枕之樂亦在其中矣不義而富且貴於我如浮雲 (Lau, 88; Kanaya, 96).

prose and granted him permission to proceed to Chang-an. After a perilous sea voyage and uncomfortable quarantine, Kūkai was finally allowed to journey to the capital and embark on his twenty-year mission: to seek out a revered esoteric Buddhist sage who would teach him the inner mysteries of the *Mahāvairocana sūtra* and the true workings of esoteric Buddhism.

Kūkai in the Center of the East Asian Universe

In 805, Chang-an was perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in the world. Strategically located at the far eastern terminus of the Silk Road, the city was a lively bustle of Chinese and foreign people, goods, technologies, religions, and ideas. During his time in Chang-an, Kūkai might have encountered Central Asians, Indians, Zoroastrians, Nestorian Christians, Jews, Muslims (Persian missionaries and traders as well as Chinese converts), in addition to the local Chinese. Tang legal scholars also produced one of the world's first bodies of codified law, the *Tang lu* 唐律 (*Tang Code*) which greatly influenced the creation of law in other East Asian nations, including Japan. The *Tang lu* was an extremely sophisticated work of jurisprudence that meted out penalties in accordance to the intrinsic nature of the crime and the relationship between the accused and the victim.¹³⁸

The Tang government was not particularly nationalistic or exclusionist in its employment practices, as it retained foreigners to serve as government advisors and high officials. Although the process was not entirely unproblematic, non-Han peoples could attain *baixing* 百姓, a type of naturalized status within the Tang state by fully satisfying taxation and corvee labor obligations.¹³⁹ Also, this was one of the periods in Chinese history when Buddhism, ostensibly a

¹³⁸ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 423-424.

¹³⁹ Marc Abramson, *Encounters with Asia: Ethnic Identity in Tang China* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 129.

foreign religion, was largely spared official harassment and enjoyed a fairly high level of patronage and support, particularly among the masses.¹⁴⁰

Chang-an was prominent in the Japanese cultural and aesthetic imagination, serving as the inspiration for the Japanese capitals of Heijōkyō and Heiankyō. In addition, it was not uncommon for Japanese scholars and diplomats to reside in Chang-an for extended periods; for example, court nobles Abe no Nakamaro 阿倍仲麻呂 (698-770) and Kibi no Makibi 吉備真備 (695-775) traveled to the Tang capital in 717 as foreign students. While Makibi returned to Japan in 735,¹⁴¹ Nakamaro would remain in China for fifty-four years, eventually dying there.¹⁴² During his stay, Nakamaro even adopted the Chinese name Zhao Heng 朝衡 and served Emperor Xuan Zong 玄宗.¹⁴³ Also, Nakamaro befriended and exchanged poetry with Li Bai 李白 (701-762, commonly known as Li Po) and Wang Wei 王維 (701?-761), among the most prominent poets of the day.¹⁴⁴ His successes in China were viewed quite favorably in his native Japan, where he was posthumously promoted to Senior Second Rank.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Kūkai's visit to Chang-an coincided with one of the rare periods when Buddhism was more than just tolerated. However, Buddhism's fortunes took a turn for the worse during the Huichang suppression of 841-846, when Buddhism met with both official and popular opposition (Abramson, 54).

¹⁴¹ Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, 74.

¹⁴² However, Nakamaro's extended residence in China was not by his own design. He actually intended to return to Japan with Ambassador Fujiwara no Kiyokawa 藤原清河 (dates unknown), but their ship encountered a storm and ended up drifting to Annam (northern part of modern-day Vietnam) where they were persecuted by local bandits. After barely making it back to Tang territory, Nakamaro decided to spend the rest of his days there. He died at the age of 73 (Saeki Umetomo, ed., *Kokinwakashū in Nihon koten bungaku taikei*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1958), 356).

¹⁴³ Kishida, 19-20. Kishida cites a passage from the *Dong yi chuan* 東夷伝 ("Biographies of Eastern Barbarians") chapter in the *Tang shu* 唐書 (*Records of the Tang*), which mentions Nakamaro's love for China, assumption of a Chinese name, and refusal to return to Japan despite being granted permission.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Edwin A. Cranston, trans. and ed., *A Waka Anthology Volume One: The Gem-Glistening Cup* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 397.

Poetry was in full flourish during the Tang Dynasty, generally considered the golden age of the art.¹⁴⁶ Two major trends can be detected in Tang literature: the development of regulated verse and “broken line” (*jue ju* 絕句) quatrains.¹⁴⁷ Although Tang poetry assumed numerous forms, pentasyllabic lines were considered standard and heptasyllabic lines gained in popularity from the eighth century on.¹⁴⁸ Bodman points out that these forms encouraged “concision of expression,” which led to the refinement of poetic techniques such as parallelism, tonal prosody, and antithesis to generate the desired effect.¹⁴⁹ Also, the early eighth century saw the emergence of the “rhapsody” (*fu* 賦), particularly the “regulated rhapsody” (*lu fu* 律賦) which were common on the imperial civil service examinations. “Rhapsodies” are a type of rhymed-prose, and were used to test the writing skill and literary erudition of potential bureaucrats. Examination questions would present a philosophical or historical topic, and examinees would have to compose a “regulated rhapsody” using the prescribed rhyming scheme.¹⁵⁰

Kūkai arrived in Chang-an thirty-five years after Nakamaro’s death, and Li Bai and Wang Wei had been dead for almost half a century. Although the “high period” 盛唐 of Tang poetry (712-756) was over, there was still an active literary scene in Chang-an. Kūkai’s two years in China were at the tail end of what is considered the “middle” period 中唐 (766-806). Representative poets include Li Yi 李益 (748-829), Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751-814), Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824), and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819).¹⁵¹ Li Yi is known for having spent the last quarter of the eighth century on the northern frontier, and writing on topics pertaining to frontier

¹⁴⁶ Paul W. Kroll, “Poetry of the Tang Dynasty” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 274.

¹⁴⁷ Bodman, 22-23.

¹⁴⁸ Kroll, 275.

¹⁴⁹ Bodman, 22-23.

¹⁵⁰ Kroll, 278.

¹⁵¹ Kroll, 303-304.

life.¹⁵² Meng Jiao's poems are considered to be rather dark and intense in mood, and "rough" in style.¹⁵³ Failing the *jin shi* 進士 (imperial civil service) examination twice, and not passing until he was in his mid-forties, likely informed his dark views.¹⁵⁴ Han Yu had a similar background – he failed the *jin shi* examination three times before passing. Nevertheless, he was considered a person of great intelligence, and became one of the leading literary and intellectual figures of his time.¹⁵⁵ Liu Zongyuan, much like Li Yi, spent many years on the frontier, but in his case, he spent many of them in exile. His poetry was known for its descriptive quality, and many of his poems focus on plants and birds.¹⁵⁶

While these four poets are well-known representatives of late eighth century Tang poetry, Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846, also known as Po Chu-i) is considered the foremost poet of the early ninth century.¹⁵⁷ His most active years would have overlapped with the two years Kūkai was in Chang-an. Bai Juyi is renowned not just as a versatile poet capable of compositions in multiple poetic genres, but also as a pioneer in using poetry as a vehicle for social criticism.¹⁵⁸

This general literary climate would exert a considerable influence on Kūkai's literary style. First, poets like Wang Wei and Meng Hao-jan were using poetry as a medium to celebrate Buddhist ideals. Second, the Tang disdain for decadent writing and preference for literary works with didactic value reinforced values Kūkai was already exposed to in Japan. Finally, although Kūkai was by no means a political or theological subversive, he certainly understood the power of writing to make provocative statements.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 303, 307.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 304.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 307.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

When Kūkai first arrived in Chang-an, he resided at the ambassador’s official residence in the Xuanyangfang 宣陽坊 quarter, near the Eastern Market. Kūkai would spend several months there before his fateful first encounter with Hui-guo 惠果 (746-805), the Buddhist master who had a profound impact on Kūkai’s studies. The months prior to meeting Hui-guo were spent collecting poetic and calligraphic texts. Here is how he described his early days in Chang-an:

As a youth, I went to my maternal uncle, from whom I learned a great deal of literary refinement. When grown, I entered China in order to learn, however imperfectly, what remained to be discussed. Although I was resolved on the silence of meditation and unwilling to pay attention to this matter (i.e. poetry), nevertheless there were many young scholars who impinged upon my quiet solitude from the garden of literature and sounded their flowery words in the park of poetry. Their sounds and echoes were hard to silence as they read their books with a teacher. Therefore, I examined the theses of the various authorities, comparing their similarities and differences...¹⁵⁹

Kūkai managed to obtain authentic calligraphic works by Emperor Dezong 德宗 (742-805), Ouyang-xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), and Zhang Yi 張誼 (dates unknown). Many of these collected texts would find their way into the *Bunkyō hifuron*. Also, it is at this time that he began his studies of Chinese calligraphy.

After many months at the ambassador’s residence, Kūkai took up residence at the Ximingsi temple. There, he had the opportunity to study Sanskrit intensively under the Indian master Prajna. Through contacts that Kūkai made at the temple, he was finally introduced to Hui-guo, of the Qinglongsi temple. The hagiographic tradition records that upon setting his eyes on Kūkai, Hui-guo exclaimed, “I knew you would come, I knew you would come! I have waited so long.” Then, Kūkai was led into the Womb Mandala ordination chamber, where he was instructed to throw a flower onto the mandala. Kūkai’s flower fell upon the image of Mahāvairocana, whereupon Hui-guo exclaimed, “How wonderful, how wonderful!” After giving

¹⁵⁹ Bodman, 167. There are several edited editions of the *Bunkyō hifuron* in both Japanese and Chinese. The selection cited above may be found in: Lu Shengjiang, ed., *Wen jing mi fu lun*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 23-24.

Kūkai a transmission in the teachings of the Womb Mandala, Hui-guo then led him into the Diamond Mandala ordination chamber, and instructed him to throw a flower on the mandala. As before, the flower landed on the image of Mahāvairocana, much to Hui-guo’s delight. He then gave Kūkai a full transmission in the teachings of the Diamond Mandala. Hui-guo died shortly after passing on all of his teachings to Kūkai; his last words supposedly were, “If I am reborn in the Eastern Country [Japan] this time I will be your disciple.”¹⁶⁰

After Hui-guo died, Kūkai was chosen to compose his memorial epitaph. This was rather unusual, since Kūkai was a relatively recent arrival in Chang-an and Hui-guo’s other disciples had considerable seniority. However, Kūkai seems to have been Hui-guo’s favorite, having received a full transmission in esoteric Buddhism, while the other disciples received a transmission only in selected teachings. The epitaph was reportedly engraved on a stone tablet and displayed on the grounds of the Qinglongsi temple, it has not survived; no trace was found in an archeological excavation conducted on the temple grounds in the 1970s. Fortunately, Kūkai brought a copy of the epitaph back to Japan, which Shinzei included in the *Shōryōshū*.¹⁶¹

俗之所貴者也五常。道之所重者也三明。惟忠惟孝彫声金版。其德如天蓋藏石室乎。嘗試論之。不滅者也法。不墮者也人。其法誰覺。其人何在乎。爰有神都青龍寺東塔院大阿闍梨法諱惠果和尚者也。大師。拍掌法城之行崩。誕迹昭応之馬氏。天縱精粹。地治神靈。種惟鳳卵。苗而龍駒。高翔扞木。囂塵之網不能羅之。師步占居。禪林之葩實是卜食。

What the worldly value are the Five Cardinal Virtues;¹⁶² what Buddhists value are the Three Insights.¹⁶³ Be loyal, be filial¹⁶⁴ – these are inscribed on golden tablets. Buddhist virtues are like the heavens, yet why are

¹⁶⁰ This general narrative (albeit with varying degrees of detail) can be found in numerous hagiographic writings on Kūkai. However, the most accessible version for the English reader would be the excerpt of the *Goshōrai mokuroku* (under the title of *Kūkai and His Master*), which can be found in Donald Keene’s *Anthology of Japanese Literature From the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Grove Press, 1955) 63-66.

¹⁶¹ SRS 2:13.

¹⁶² The Five Cardinal Virtues 五常 are benevolence 仁, justice 義, courtesy 礼, wisdom 智, and integrity 信 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 197).

they not preserved in stone chambers?¹⁶⁵ When I pondered this matter, I realized that which does not collapse is the Dharma, and that it does not degenerate is due to man. Who has awakened to this Dharma, and where is such a man? Here, in the Eastern Stupa Hall¹⁶⁶ of the Qinglongsi temple in the sacred capital is the great *ācārya* Hui-guo. The great master was born into the Ma family of Zhao Ying;¹⁶⁷ he could bring forth and destroy a Dharma citadel with a clap of his hands. The heavens entrusted Hui-guo with its supreme purity, the earth polished his divine spirit. From the seed of a phoenix; he sprouted into a fledgling dragon. Soaring high, he chose his tree. The net of the vulgar world was unable to ensnare him, and he occupied his domain, feasting on the flowers and fruit of the mediation grove.

遂乃。就故諱大照禪師之事之。其大德也則大興善寺大広智不空三蔵之入室也。昔髻亂之日隨師見三蔵。々々一目驚異不已。窃告之曰。我之法教汝其興之也。既而。視之如父。撫之如母。指其妙蹟。教其密蔵。大仏頂大隨求。経耳持心。普賢行文殊讚。聞声止口。年登救蟻靈驗処多。

Hui-guo studied under the Meditation Master Da-zhao¹⁶⁸ of the Da sheng shan¹⁶⁹ temple, a disciple of Amoghavajra, the Great Tripitaka Master of Vast Knowledge.¹⁷⁰ A long time ago, when locks of hair draped

¹⁶³ The Three Insights 三明 refer to the three transcendental powers possessed by the Buddha and arhats: knowledge of past lives 宿住智証明, knowledge of future lives 死生智証明, and the knowledge which eradicates desire 漏尽智証明 (Nakamura, 331).

¹⁶⁴ This is a reference to the “Charge to Zhong of Cai” 蔡仲之命 section of the *Book of Documents*: “In order that you may cover the faults of your father, be loyal, be filial” 爾尚蓋前人之愆惟忠惟孝 (James Legge, *The Chinese Classics III: The Shoo King* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 489).

¹⁶⁵ The “stone chamber” 石室 is a reference to the imperial Han library, where books were stored for posterity. In his preface to the *Records of the Great Historian*, Sima Qian makes mention to “books stored in stone chambers and metal coffers” 石室金匱之書 (Imataka et al., 229).

¹⁶⁶ The Eastern Stupa Hall 東塔院 was Hui-guo’s residence on the Qinglongsi temple grounds (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 198).

¹⁶⁷ Zhao ying 昭応 is located in modern-day Lintong District, Shanxi Province (Imataka et al., 229).

¹⁶⁸ Da Zhao 大照 was the posthumous name awarded to Tan-zhen 曇貞 (dates unknown). He resided in the Sacred Buddha Hall 聖佛院 at the Qinglongsi temple (Sawa, 529).

¹⁶⁹ The Da sheng shan 大興善寺 temple is located in Xi’an and was a major center for esoteric Buddhist studies during the Tang dynasty (Sawa, 458).

¹⁷⁰ The Great Tripitaka Master of Vast Knowledge 大広智不空三蔵 was Amoghavajra’s posthumous Chinese name. Amoghavajra (705-774, also known by his abbreviated Chinese name of Bu-kong (Pinyin) or Pu-k’ung (Wade-Giles)) was born in Central Asia, but due to his father’s death, was brought to Chang-an at the age of 13. He became a novice monk under the tutelage of Vajrabodhi 金剛智 (671-741), who is now regarded as the Fifth Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism. Amoghavajra studied the *Vajraskhara Sutra* (*Kongōchōkyō* 金剛頂経) under Vajrabodhi, then later travelled to India, where he collected over five hundred sutras and treatises. Upon returning to China, he earned a reputation as a translator of Buddhist sutras and a popularizer of Esoteric Buddhism. He is considered the Sixth Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism (Nakamura, 686).

from Hui-guo's head and his new teeth were coming in,¹⁷¹ he accompanied his teacher and met the Tripitaka Master. When the Tripitaka Master took one look at Hui-guo, he could not help but be surprised. He said, "You will be the one to uphold my esoteric teachings." He watched over him like a father, and adored him like a mother. Hui-guo taught the secret treasury and indicates its profundity. Reciting the *dhārani* of the Supreme Buddha¹⁷² and the *dhārani* of Mahāpratisārā,¹⁷³ he held these teachings in his heart. He recited the *Praises for the Prayers of Samantabhadra*¹⁷⁴ and *Praises for the Dharma-body of Manjusri*.¹⁷⁵ When he reached the age of saving ants,¹⁷⁶ he had many mystical experiences with the gods and Buddhas.

于時。代宗皇帝聞之有勅迎入。命之曰。朕有疑滯請為決之。大師則依法呼召解紛如流。皇帝嘆之曰。龍子雖少。能解下雨。斯言不虛。左右書紳。入瓶小師。于今見矣。從爾已還。驢驘迎送。四事不缺。

Emperor Daizong¹⁷⁷ heard about this, issued an imperial edict, and welcomed Hui-guo at court. He decreed, "I, the Emperor, have doubts. Please, make it so I can decide!" Hui-guo, in accordance with the Dharma of

¹⁷¹ *Tiao chen* 髻鬣 in the original. *Tiao* 髻 refers to long bangs of hair, and *chen* 鬣 refers to the permanent teeth that replace the juvenile ones, so someone in this situation is around eight years of age (Imataka et al., 230). The same phrase appears in the *Goshōrai mokuroku* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 497).

¹⁷² This is the *Dhārani of the Supreme Buddha in Sanskrit* 梵字大佛頂陀羅尼 in one fascicle (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 198).

¹⁷³ This is the *Dhārani of Mahāpratisārā in Sanskrit* 梵字大隨求陀羅尼 (ibid.). This was a particularly popular *dhārani* in India, Central Asia, China and Japan, since the bodhisattva Mahāpratisārā 大隨求 was known for the wide range of practical benefits he offered: abundant harvests, financial wealth, pleasant weather, and protection from illnesses and disasters, etc. (Sawa, 467).

¹⁷⁴ *Praises for the Prayers of Samantabhadra* 普賢行願讚 in one fascicle (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 198), and appears in the *Goshōrai mokuroku* as one of the texts Kūkai brought back to Japan (in both Sanskrit and Chinese) (*T.* 2161:1061a14 and 1063b15). The bodhisattva Samantabhadra 普賢, along with Manjusri (see note below) are the attendants to Shakyamuni Buddha (Nakamura, 688).

¹⁷⁵ *Praises for the Dharma-body of Manjusri* 文殊讚法心礼 in one fascicle (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 198), and appears in the *Goshōrai mokuroku* as one of the texts Kūkai brought back to Japan (*T.* 2161: 1061c05). Manjusri 文殊 is known as the bodhisattva of wisdom and along with Samantabhadra (see above), one of the attendants to Shakyamuni Buddha (Nakamura, 802).

¹⁷⁶ *Jiu yi* 救蟻 in the original, and is approximately thirteen to fourteen years of age. This anecdote appears in numerous sutras, but the version that appears in the "Karmic Reward of Prolonged Life for the Buddhist Novice who Rescued Ants from Drowning" 沙弥救蟻子水災得長命報緣 chapter of the *Sutra of the Miscellaneous Treasure Storehouse* 雜寶藏經 (*T.* 203) can be summarized as follows: an *arhat* who is training a young Buddhist novice learns that the novice is to die within seven days, so he gives the novice permission to visit his family. On the seventh day, he orders the novice to return to the temple. On his way back to the temple, the novice notices a group of ants being washed away and on the verge of drowning. Taking pity on the ants, he piles a mound of earth to stop the water, and then moves the ants to a higher location. The *arhat* is surprised to see that the novice has not died, and attributes this to the karmic reward he received for saving the ants (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 198, 495).

¹⁷⁷ Daizong 代宗 (r. 762-779) was the eighth Tang emperor (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 198).

Mahesvara,¹⁷⁸ summoned Mahesvara to clear the Emperor's doubts, which were untangled and made into a flowing river. The Emperor exclaimed, "The dragon-child, although young, knows how to make it rain. This is not an empty saying; and it will be recorded on the belts of my retainers. A marvelous little Buddha is in our presence." From that time on, a stallion of good steed brought Hui-guo to the court whenever needed, and he lacked none of the Four Offerings.¹⁷⁹

年滿進具。孜孜照雪。三藏教海波濤唇吻。五部觀鏡照曜靈台。洪鐘之響隨機卷舒。空谷之應逐器行藏。始則四分乘法。後則三密灌頂。弥天弁鋒不能交刃。炙輶智象誰敢極底。是故。三朝尊之以為國師。四衆禮之以受灌頂。若乃。旱魃焦葉。召那伽以滂沱。商羊決堤。馱迦羅以杲々矣。其感不移晷。其驗同在掌。

At the age of twenty, he studied diligently, using the reflection from snow for light. The waves from the great sea of the Tripitaka lapped against his lips. The mirror reflecting the Five Divisions of the Diamond Realm¹⁸⁰ had the clarity of a mystical dais. The reverberations of the Great Bell are either silence or sermon in accordance with the character and faculties [of the practitioner]; the reverberations of an empty valley are the same. In the beginning, he learned the Dharma of the Precepts in Four Parts, later, he received *abhiseka* in the Three Mysteries. Even the sharp wit of Mi Tian¹⁸¹ was no match for Hui-guo. Who could fathom his vast wisdom, which was on par with Chun Yu-kun?¹⁸² For this reason, three emperors respected him and made him a National Teacher. The four classes of believers revered him and received *abhiseka*. When a drought scorched the leaves, Hui-guo summoned a *naga* dragon and it rained. When the *shang yang* bird¹⁸³ brought

¹⁷⁸ This section is 即依法呼召 which literally means "Then [he] summoned [him/it] in accordance with the Dharma," but Imataka et al. note that Kūkai uses the same language in reference to Mahesvara in his *Shingon fuhō den* 真言付法伝 (*Record of Shingon Transmission*) (Imataka et al., 230). In Chinese, Mahesvara is rendered either in transliteration as 摩醯首羅 or translated as 大自在天. Mahesvara was originally a Shiva deity and was considered a god of creation, but was later incorporated into Buddhism as one of the protector deities of Shakyamuni Buddha and a manifestation of the bodhisattvas (Sawa, 462).

¹⁷⁹ The Four Offerings 四事 are: food, clothing, bedding, and steeped medicines (Imataka et al., 231).

¹⁸⁰ The Five Divisions of the Diamond Realm 五部 are: the Buddha division, the adamantine division, the treasures division, the lotus division, and the emptiness division (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 199).

¹⁸¹ Mi Tian 弥天 is another name for Dao-an 道安 (dates unknown), a monk who appears in the *Jin shu* 晋書 (*Book of Jin*) and was famous for his ready wit and sharp tongue (Imataka et al., 231).

¹⁸² This is based on an anecdote found in *The Records of the Grand Historian*, where the vast erudition of Chun-yu kun 淳于髡, a government minister, is likened to a grease-pot 輶 which never stops burning 炙 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 497).

¹⁸³ The *shang yang* 商羊 is a mythical one-legged bird which appears in the *Kongzi jiayu*, a collection of sayings and anecdotes attributed to Confucius. According to one such anecdote, Confucius explains that when this bird appears and begins to dance, heavy rains will follow (Imataka et al., 232).

forth floods and the dams burst, he summoned a *garuda* bird, and it dried up. No shadow could be cast upon his intuition, and it was as though he held his powers in the palm of his hand.

皇帝皇后崇其增益。瓊枝玉葉伏其降魔。斯乃。大師慈力之所致也。縱使。財帛接軫田園比頃。有受无貯不屑資生。或建大曼荼羅。或修僧伽藍處。濟貧以財。導愚以法。以不積財為心。以不慳法為性。故得若尊若卑虛往實歸。

Emperors and empresses revered the benefits of his powers. Emperors and princes submitted themselves to his demon-quelling powers. This was the extent of the master's merciful powers. Although treasures and silks came pouring in, and even though he was awarded rice fields, he would receive but not accumulate. He did not waste worldly goods. He would assemble great *mandala* and construct temples. He would use his treasures to save the poor and the Dharma to lead the feeble-minded. It was not in his heart to accumulate worldly goods, and it was not his nature to withhold the Dharma. For this reason, whether august or lowly, all came to him empty and returned full.

自近自遠尋光集会矣。訶陵弁弘。經五天接足。新羅惠日。涉三韓而頂戴。劔南則惟上。河北則義円。欽風振錫。渴法負笈。若復。印可紹構者義明供奉人也。不幸求車。滿公当之也。沐一子之顧。蒙三密之教。則智璨政壹之徒。操敏堅通之輩。並皆入三昧耶学瑜伽。持三秘密達毗。或作一人師。或為四衆依。

From near and far, people sought out his light and were able to gather in his presence. Bian-hong from Heling traversed through the Five Indian States to touch the master's feet,¹⁸⁴ and Hui-ri from Silla crossed the Three Korean States¹⁸⁵ to receive a transmission in esoteric Buddhism. Seeking the master's teachings, Wei-shang of Jiannan¹⁸⁶ and Yi-yuan¹⁸⁷ of Hebei brandished their walking staffs in search of the master's teachings and they carried their brush-boxes thirsting for the Dharma. In addition, the one who has received

¹⁸⁴ Bian-hong 弁弘 (dates unknown) was from Heling 訶陵, which was the Tang dynasty rendering of what is now central Java (ibid., 498). The Javanese sent their first emissaries to the Tang court in 640 (Imataka et al. 232). The Five Indian States 五天 refer to India as a whole, not discrete political entities (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 200).

¹⁸⁵ Hui-ri 惠日 (dates unknown) arrived in Chang-an in 781. "Three Korean States" 三韓 is a very old term for the Korean Peninsula, and specifically refers to the former Mahan 馬韓 Confederacy, the Byeonhan 弁韓 Confederacy, and the Jinhan 辰韓 Confederacy (Woo-keun Han, *The History of Korea*, trans. Kyung-shik Lee (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1970), 33). The original McCune-Reischauer romanizations were rendered into the current Revised Romanization scheme.

¹⁸⁶ Wei-shang 惟上 (or 惟尚) (dates unknown) was one of Hui-guo's disciples (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 200). Jinnan 劔南 is in modern-day Sichuan Province (Imataka et al., 232).

¹⁸⁷ Yi-yuan 義円 (dates unknown) was one of Hui-guo's lead disciples (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 200).

permission to carry on the master’s teachings is Imperial Chaplain Yi-ming.¹⁸⁸ It was Yi-man who sought out the vehicle due to misfortune.¹⁸⁹ Basking in the master’s rear glance and receiving the teachings of the Three Mysteries, Yi-zhi, Wen-can, Yi-zheng, and Yi-yi, along with Yi-cao, Yi-min, Xing-jian and Yuan-tong¹⁹⁰ received *samaya*,¹⁹¹ learned *yoga* and through the Three Mysteries attained *vipasyanā*.¹⁹² Some became teachers to the Son of Heaven and some became anchors to the Four Classes of Believers.¹⁹³

法灯滿界。依派遍域。斯蓋大師之法施也。從辭親就師落飾入道。浮囊不惜他。油鉢常自持。松竹堅其心。冰霜瑩其志。四儀不肅而成。三業不護而善。大師之尸羅於此盡美矣。經寒經暑不告其苦。遇飢遇疾其業不退。四上持念四魔請降。十方結護十軍面縛。能忍能勤。我師之所不讓也。

The Dharma Torch filled the realm and its waves spread throughout the land. Is this not the Master’s contribution to the Dharma? From the time he left behind his parents, studied under his master, shed all ornamentation and entered the Way, he diligently obeyed the precepts and always held his oil bowl.¹⁹⁴ The pine and bamboo made his heart steadfast and the ice and frost polished his resolve. Although he did not

¹⁸⁸ Yi-ming 義明 (dates unknown) was one of Hui-guo’s lead disciples and was appointed Imperial Chaplain 供奉. Although the date of his death is not certain, it is assumed to be sometime before 839, since his name was not listed on a letter dispatched to Jitsue 実惠 (786-847), the second intendant of the Tōji temple after Kūkai’s death (Sawa, 121, 306). Yi-ming appears in prior English-language works under the Wade-Giles transcription of I-ming. The term “Imperial Chaplain” is used here to maintain consistency with prior works.

¹⁸⁹ Yi-man 義滿 (dates unknown) was one of Hui-guo’s disciples. The phrase “seek out the vehicle due to misfortune” 不幸求車 is an allusion to the *Analects*: “When Yen Yuan died, Yen Lu asked the master to give him his carriage to pay for an outer coffin for his son” 顏淵死顏路請子之車以為之椁 (Imataka et al., 233; Lau, 107; Kanaya, 144). Therefore, the “misfortune” suffered by Yi-man was likely the loss of a child (Imataka et al., 233). Kūkai tropes “seeking the vehicle” and re-reads in Buddhist terms; i.e. seeking out the “vehicle” of the Buddhist teachings.

¹⁹⁰ Yi-zhi 義智, Wen-can 文璨, Yi-zheng 義政, Yi-yi 義壹, Yi-cao 義操, Yi-min 義敏, Xing-jian 行堅, and Yuan-tong 円通 were all disciples of Hui-guo (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 200). Dates of birth and death are unknown.

¹⁹¹ *Samaya* 三昧耶 refers to the basic precepts of an esoteric Buddhist practitioner, namely to hold steadfast to the Dharma and not abandon it under any circumstances (Sawa, 276).

¹⁹² *Vipasyana* 毘鉢舍那 is meditative contemplation of phenomena (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 201).

¹⁹³ The Four Classes of Believers 四衆 are the *bhikṣu* (Buddhist monks), *bhikṣuni* (Buddhist nuns), *upasaka* (lay male followers) and *upasika* (lay female followers) (Nakamura, 60, 674).

¹⁹⁴ “Always held his oil bowl” 油鉢常自持 means to perceive the Buddha and to be generous toward sentient life. This is based on an anecdote in the *Nirvana Sutra* where steadfastness is likened to someone carrying an oil-filled bowl through a village. The relevant passage is: “The king commands a minister: ‘Carry a bowl of oil, go through the village, but if even a drop of oil falls, you will forfeit your life.’ Also, the king placed a man behind the minister with his sword drawn” (Imataka et al., 233).

follow the Four Rites¹⁹⁵ he was dignified, and although he did not obey the regulations concerning the Three Acts¹⁹⁶ he was good. In this regard, the master's *sīla*¹⁹⁷ were perfect. Even if he was suffering from heat or cold, he did not complain, and even on the occasions he was hungry or sick he did not stray from the Buddhist path. He was diligent in his practice throughout the day and prayed for the submission of the Four Demons.¹⁹⁸ He guarded the Ten Directions and restrained the Ten Hindrances.¹⁹⁹ He was able to endure and persevere; these were qualities in which he was second to none.

遊法界宮。觀胎藏之海會。入金剛界。禮遍智之麻集。百千陀羅尼貫之一心。萬億曼荼羅布之一身。若行若坐道場既變。在眠在覺觀智不離。是以。與朝日而驚長眠。將春雷以拔久蟄。我師之禪智妙用在此乎。示榮貴導榮貴。現有疾待有疾。病投藥。悲迷指南。常告門徒曰。人之貴者不過國王。法之最者不如密藏。

Visiting Mahāvairocana's palace, he contemplated the profundity of the Womb Mandala; entering the Diamond Realm, he worshipped its infinite, all-encompassing wisdom. There were infinite *dhāraṇī* stored in his heart and myriad *mandala* clothed his body. Whether he was moving or sitting still, this is where he trained. Whether asleep or awake, he was not removed from perceptive wisdom. As the morning sun rises, he awakens us from our long slumber, and with the spring thunder he rousts the bugs burrowed in the earth. Is not the marvelous effect of our master's yoga-meditative wisdom present here? He displayed wealth and status in order to lead people to wealth and status, and experienced illness in order to tend to the sick. He prescribed medicines in accordance to the illness, and taught out of pity for those who lost their way. He always told his disciples, "No one surpasses in people's esteem the king of the realm. The most superior form of the Dharma does not equal the Secret Treasury.

¹⁹⁵ The Four Rites 四儀 refer to proper deportment in: walking 行, sitting 坐, abiding 住 and lying down 臥 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 201).

¹⁹⁶ The Three Acts are: acts of the body 身業, acts of the mouth 口業, and acts of the mind 意業 (Nakamura, 314).

¹⁹⁷ *Sīla* refers to the precepts and is normally translated into Chinese as *jīe* 戒, but in this text Kūkai opts to transliterate it as *shi luo* 尸羅.

¹⁹⁸ The Four Demons 四魔 refer to four types of hindrances to Buddhist practice, which are: the Demon of the Five Skandhas 五蘊魔, the Demon of Attachments 煩惱魔, the Demon of Death 死魔, and the Demon of the Heavens 天魔 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 201).

¹⁹⁹ The Ten Hindrances 十軍 are: desire 欲, melancholy 憂愁, hunger and thirst 飢渴, cravings 渴愛, sleep 睡眠, fear 畏怖, suspicion 疑, poisoning 含毒, material gain 利養, and self-aggrandizement 自高 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 201).

策牛羊而趣道。久而始至。駕神通以跋涉。不勞而至。諸乘与密藏豈同日而論乎。仏法心髓要妙斯在乎。無畏三藏脱躡王位。金剛親教浮盃來伝。豈徒然哉。從金剛薩埵稽首扣寂。師々相伝于今七葉矣。非冒地之難得。遇此法之不易也。

Those who whip oxen or sheep to follow the Way will eventually reach their destination. But those who hitch up to mystical powers can leap mountains and rivers and to arrive without any effort. How can one discuss the exoteric and esoteric on the same day? Right here is the wondrous essence of the Buddhist Dharma. Subhakarasiṃha²⁰⁰ cast off his royal rank, and Vajrabodhi²⁰¹ set sail to transmit the teachings. Are these idle acts? From the moment Vajrasattva²⁰² lowered his head in humility and became enlightened, the teachings were transmitted from master to master, and now there are seven leaves.²⁰³ Enlightenment is not hard to attain; rather encountering this Dharma is difficult.

是故。建胎藏之大壇。開灌頂之甘露。所期。若天若鬼。觀尊儀而洗垢。或男或女。嘗法味而蘊珠。一尊一契証道之徑路。一字一句入仏之父母者也。汝等勉之々々。我師之勤誘。妙趣在茲也。夫。一明一暗天之常也。乍現乍沒聖之權也。常理寡尤。權道多益。

This is why he constructed a grand altar for the Womb Mandala and brought forth the sweet nectar of *abhiseka*. He wished that whether heavenly dragon or demon, when one gazes upon the sacred image in the *mandala*, impurity is washed away; whether man or woman, one tastes the flavor of the Dharma and accumulates jewels of enlightenment. Meditating upon one sacred image and mastering one *mudra* is the path to enlightenment, and one seed character and one mantra are the parents that allow entry to Buddhahood. All of you—persevere! All of you—persevere!” Herein lay our master’s admonitions and extraordinary inclinations. The alternation of light and darkness is a constant of the heavens. Appearing and disappearing

²⁰⁰ Subhakarasiṃha 善無畏 was originally born into a royal family in Magata, India, but renounced his status to become a Buddhist monk. He came to Tang China in 714 and translated numerous sutras into Chinese, including the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*. He died in 741 at the age of 71 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 498; Nakamura, 507).

²⁰¹ Vajrabodhi 金剛智 (671-741) is considered the Fifth Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism. He began his studies of Buddhism at the age of 10 at the Nalanda Monastery, but later went to the south where he learned Esoteric Buddhism. Finally, he set sail for China, arriving in Lo-yang in 720. Under the patronage of Emperor Xuan-zong, he translated Esoteric Buddhist scripture and systemized Esoteric Buddhist thought (Sawa, 241).

²⁰² Vajrasattva 金剛薩埵 is considered the Second Patriarch of Esoteric Buddhism. He is an important figure in the Esoteric Buddhist tradition because he is the one who received a direct transmission in the teachings from Mahāvairocana. In the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*, Vajrasattva serves as Mahāvairocana’s interlocutor, inquiring as to the precise nature of the “all-embracing wisdom of the Tathagatas” 一切智智 (Abe, 131).

²⁰³ The “seven leaves” 七葉 likely refer to the seven generations of Esoteric Buddhist teachers, Mahāvairocana, Vajrasattva, Nāgārjuna, Nāgabodhi, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra, and finally, Hui-guo.

are expedients of the holy ones. The eternal principles have few flaws and the way of expedients have many benefits.

以永貞元年歲在乙酉極寒月滿。往世六十。僧夏四十。結法印而攝念。示人間以薪盡矣。嗚呼哀哉。天返歲星人失惠日。筏歸彼岸溺子一何。悲哉。医王匿迹。狂兒馮誰解毒。嗟呼痛哉。簡日於建寅之十七。卜塋于城邨之九泉。斷腸埋玉。爛肝燒芝。泉扉永閉翹天不及。荼蓼嗚咽吞火不滅。天雲黯々現悲色。松風颯々含哀声。

On the night of the full moon in the twelfth month during the first year of Yong Zheng (805, at sixty years of age, forty summers after taking the tonsure, he formed the *mudra* of Vairocana, and entered a state of deep meditation, showing the world his flame was about to be extinguished.. Ah, how sad! The heavens recalled his spirit and humanity lost the brilliance of his wisdom. His raft has already reached the other shore, but what of those who have drowned? How sad! The Medicine King conceals his traces, and whom shall the insane children rely upon to be rid of their poisons?²⁰⁴ Ah, how painful! We decided to inter him in a cemetery outside the city on the seventeenth day of the first month. With gut-wrenching sorrow we buried him, and with a burning sensation in our hearts we cremated him. The door to the land of the dead was closed for eternity and our appeals to the heavens fell on deaf ears. We wailed out in bitterness, and our sorrows were an inextinguishable flame. The clouds in the heavens expressed their sadness by turning light gray. The wind whistling through the pines like a zither had a melancholy tone.

庭際菉竹葉如故。隴頭松檟根新移。鳥光激迴恨情切。蟾影斡轉攀擗新。嗟呼痛哉奈苦何。弟子空海。顧桑梓則東海之東。想行李則難之中難。波濤萬々。雲山幾千也。來非我力。歸非我志。招我以鉤。引我以策。泛舶之朝數示異相。歸帆之夕縷說宿緣。

The leaves of the bamboo at the edge of the garden are verdant as always. The roots of the pines and catalpa around the hill are newly transplanted. The sun quickly makes its rounds and we feel resentment and despair; the moon revolves and our heartbreaking sadness is renewed. Oh, how painful! What is to be done with our suffering? The disciple Kūkai looks back upon his homeland of mulberries and catalpa²⁰⁵ to the east of the

²⁰⁴ Medicine King 医王 is a reference to Hui-guo, and the “insane children” 狂兒 are his disciples (Imataka et al., 235). The “poisons” 毒 likely refer to the “three poisons” 三毒: greed, anger, and ignorance of the Buddha’s teachings (Nakamura, 326).

²⁰⁵ The phrase “mulberries and catalpa” 桑梓 to refer to one’s ancestral home comes from a line in the *Xiao bian* 小弁 poem in the *Xiao ya* 小雅 (Lesser Court Hymns) chapter of the *Book of Songs* (Imataka et al., 235). The relevant section reads: 惟桑与梓 必恭敬止 靡瞻匪父 靡依匪母 (Even the mulberry trees and the *tsze* [catalpa] /Must be regarded with reverence:/But no one is to be looked up to like a father/No one is to be depended on like a mother)

eastern sea and thinks the journey home will be a peril among perils, with an endless onslaught of raging waves and a multitude of towering clouds. Coming here was not due to my own power and returning home is not my intention. It was the hook of Hui-guo's teachings that brought me here and it is the rope of his teachings that will lead me home.²⁰⁶ When I depart in the morning he will frequently show me his mysterious signs and when we unfurl our sails in the evening he will lecture me in detail on karmic destiny.

和尚掩色之夜。於境界中。告弟子曰。汝未知吾與汝宿契之深乎。多生之中。相共誓願。弘演密藏。彼此代為師資。非只一兩度也。是故。勤汝遠涉。授我深法。受法云畢。吾願足矣。汝西土也接我足。吾也東生入汝之室。莫久遲留。吾在前去也。竊顧此言。進退非我能。去留隨我師。

On the evening when the Master was overcome by hues²⁰⁷ of death, he appeared before me in a vision and said, "You may not know this yet, but our karmic ties run deep. Through our many reincarnations, our vow has been to propagate the esoteric teachings. Whether here or there, whether master or student – it is an endless cycle. That is why you made the long journey to receive my profound Dharma. You have completely received the Dharma and my prayers have been fulfilled. If I am reborn in the east I will be your disciple. I cannot remain for much longer; I will go ahead of you." When I quietly reflect upon these words, my advancement is not due to my ability and I will follow my master's instructions as to whether to remain or to leave.

孔宣雖泥怪異之說。而妙幢說金鼓之夢。所以。舉一隅示同門者也。詞徹骨髓。誨切心肝。一喜一悲。胸裂腸斷。欲罷不能。豈敢韞默。雖馮我師之德廣。還恐斯言之墜地。歎彼山海之易變。懸之日月之不朽。乃作銘曰。

(Legge, *The She King* 43). In his notes to the translation, Legge observes: "The mulberry tree and this [the catalpa] were both planted about the farmsteadings [sic], and therefore they are introduced here. They carried the thoughts back to the father or grandfather, or the remote ancestor who first planted them, and so a feeling of reverence attached to themselves (Legge, *The She King*, 43).

²⁰⁶ In this line, Kūkai portrays Hui-guo as a bodhisattva through his reference to two of the four "tools" the bodhisattva uses to lead people on the right path: the hook 鉤 and the rope 策. The two that were not mentioned are the chain 鎖 and the bell 鈴 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 204).

²⁰⁷ This is a literal translation of 掩色. Based on context, this phrase is assumed to refer to the death of Hui-guo, but the specific textual reference is unclear (Imataka et al., 236).

Although Confucius had a disdain for stories about the fantastic,²⁰⁸ the bodhisattva Ruciraketu²⁰⁹ dreamed of golden drums. For this reason, he lifted up one corner and showed it to his disciples.²¹⁰ The master's words penetrated the marrow of our bones and his teachings are etched in our hearts. Between our joy for this teachings and sorrow at his death our hearts are torn apart and our insides are wrenched. We wish for this feeling to end, but can do nothing. How can we be silent? Although we may implore the master for his broad virtue, we know nonetheless that his words have fallen into the earth. We lament the fickle nature of the mountains and the oceans, yet realize that the sun and moon are constant. With this, I compose the following verse:

生也無邊	Living beings are infinite
行願莫極	Prayers for their salvation are without limit,
麗天臨水	Shining in the heavens, the sun and moon look upon the water
分影萬億	Spreading their light in a trillion directions,

爰有挺生	Here is an exceptional being
人形仏識	With a human's form and a Buddha's knowledge
毗尼密藏	With the precepts and Secret Treasury
吞並餘力	Taking in both, he had strength to spare,

修多与論	With the sutras and the treatises
牢籠胸臆	Stored away in his heart,
四分乘法	He took the Four-Part Precepts
三密加持	And practiced the Three Mysteries,

国師三代	He served as National Teacher to three sovereigns
萬類依之	People from all walks of life relied on him,
下雨止雨	He could make it rain, and then make it stop
不日即時	All without a moment's delay

²⁰⁸ This is a reference to the *Analepts*: “The topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, force, disorder and gods” 子不語怪力乱神 (Lau, 88; Kanaya, 98).

²⁰⁹ The story of bodhisattva Ruciraketu 妙幢 dreaming of a brahman beating golden drums appears in the *Golden Light Sutra* 金光明經 (*Suvarnaprabhasottamarja-sūtra*). Kūkai uses this story to counter the previous argument against fictional tales purported by Confucius and demonstrate the mystical powers of the Buddhist teachings (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 205, 499).

²¹⁰ The phrase “For this reason, he lifted up one corner and showed it to his disciples” 所以举一隅示同門 is another reference to the *Analepts*: “The Master said, ‘I never enlighten anyone who has not been driven to distraction by trying to understand a difficulty or who has not got into a frenzy trying to put his ideas into words. When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the other three, I will not point it out to him a second time.’” 子曰不憤不啓不悱不發举一隅而示之不以三隅反則吾不復也 (Lau, 86; Kanaya 92).

所化緣盡 Exhausting his destiny to spread the Dharma
怕乎歸真 In silence, he has returned to the True
惠炬已滅 The torch of wisdom has been extinguished
法雷何春 In what spring shall the Dharma Thunder boom again?

梁木摧矣 The supporting pillar has cracked
痛哉悲哉 How painful, how sad!
松檟封閉 Closed in by pine and catalpa,
何劫更開 How many *kalpa* shall pass before his tomb is opened again?

While this inscription was ostensibly a memorial epitaph for Hui-guo, Kūkai's attempts at self-promotion are evident. Despite his lack of seniority among Hui-guo's disciples, he devotes considerable space in this monument to describe his special relationship with his master. The other disciples are mentioned by name and place of origin only, while Kūkai's initial encounter with Hui-guo is depicted as one of destiny. Furthermore, according to Kūkai, Hui-guo declares with his dying breath he will serve as Kūkai's disciple should he be reborn in Japan.

This monument has two audiences: the members of the Qinglongsi temple community in Chang-an, and Kūkai's potential benefactors in Japan. In China, he uses the narrative of his encounter with Hui-guo to justify receiving a full transmission while Chinese disciples with greater seniority did not. In Japan, Kūkai uses the detailed account of Hui-guo's life as a testimonial to the benefits esoteric Buddhism can offer the state, with particular emphasis on rainmaking and flood mitigation rituals. Furthermore, the narrative of Kūkai's preferential relationship with Hui-guo, and the complete transmission he received, also legitimizes Kūkai as the true bearer of esoteric Buddhism in Japan.

Also evident in this text is Kūkai's idiosyncrasy as a truly transnational writer. The epitaph was written in literary Chinese to be read by a native Chinese readership. Kūkai deftly demonstrates his abilities in literary composition to a Chinese audience through his dense, ornate style and eclectic engagement with a variety of secular and sacred texts. At the same time,

Shinzei's inclusion of this text in the *Shōryōshū* proves a copy of the epitaph's text was brought back to Japan and considered an exemplar of Kūkai's writing. Unlike the *kanshi* poets of Saga's court who produced Chinese poetry solely for domestic consumption, here Kūkai authored a work intended for both Chinese and Japanese readership.

Kūkai originally intended to remain in China and study on a Japanese government stipend for twenty years, but he managed to spend his entire stipend in a mere two years. This lack of funds, along with Hui-guo's sudden death, prodded Kūkai to return to Japan. In early 806, he submitted a petition to Vice Ambassador Takashina no Tōnari 高階遠成 (dates unknown) and requested permission to return:²¹¹

留住學問僧空海啓。其器乏素材聰謝五行。謬濫求撥涉海而來也。著草履歷城中。幸遇中天竺國般若三藏。及內供奉惠果大阿闍梨。膝步接足仰彼甘露。遂乃。入大悲胎藏金剛界大部之曼荼羅。沐五部瑜伽之灌頂法。忘飡耽讀。假寢書寫。大悲胎藏金剛頂等。已蒙指南記之文義。

Kūkai, a student-monk, bids you respect. Lacking basic talent and intelligence,²¹² I cannot surpass Ying Feng,²¹³ who could read five lines at once. Ignorant and unqualified, I crossed the seas seeking the raft of the Dharma. Donning straw sandals and ambling about the capital, I had the good fortune of encountering the Indian Tripitaka Master Prajna²¹⁴ and Achrya Master Hui-guo, the Imperial Chaplain. At their feet, I indulged in the sweet dew of their teachings. Then, I was initiated in the complete teachings of both the Womb and Diamond mandalas and received *abisekha*. Forgetting to eat, I was engrossed in reading; even when I lay down I would copy the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*, as well as other texts. I would receive instruction even while doing this, so I would write down its import.

²¹¹ SRS 5:41.

²¹² Literally 其器乏楚材 means “[Kūkai's] vessel lacks the materials of Chu.” Chu 楚 was known for producing high-quality materials. This allusion is found in the *Chunqiu zuoshichuan* (Imataka et al., 361).

²¹³ The story of Ying Feng 應奉, a genius who could read five lines at once, is found in the *Hou han shu* 後漢書 (*Records of the Later Han*).

²¹⁴ Prajna 般若 (734-810) was a monk from northern India who resided in Chang-an who translated sutras. At the age of 23, he began his studies in Buddhism at the Nalanda Monastery, and after eighteen years of wandering, arrived in Guangzhou, China by sea in 786 coming to Chang-an the following year (Imataka et al., 361; Sawa, 574).

兼因胎藏大曼荼羅一鋪。金剛界九會大曼荼羅一鋪。並七幅。丈五尺 並写新訳經二百餘卷。繕裝欲畢。此法也仏之心国之鎮也。攘氛招祉之摩尼。脱凡入聖之嶮徑也。是故。十年之功兼之四運。三密之印貫之一志。兼此明珠答之天命。嚮使久客他鄉引領皇華。白駒易過。黃髮何為。今不任陋願。奉啓不宣。謹啓。

I would also make drawings of the Womb Mandala and the Nine Assemblies²¹⁵ of the Diamond Realm Mandala. In addition, I copied and bound over two hundred newly translated sutras. These sutras are the true essence of the Buddha's teachings and the Dharma that will pacify the nation. These sutras are a wish-fulfilling gem that will repel calamity and beckon good fortune as well as a shortcut to shedding banality and entering sainthood. Therefore, I was able to condense ten years' worth²¹⁶ of effort into one and the seal of the Three Mysteries penetrated my unwavering heart. I reply to the emperor's edict with this bright gem. If I were to spend an eternity in a foreign land waiting for a ship home, time would just pass by like a swift white stallion,²¹⁷ and what would I do with yellow hair? With sincere regards, I earnestly make my plea to you.

Although Hui-guo commissioned the court artists and scribes to produce copies of sutras, ritual manuals, mandalas, etc. for Kūkai to take back, apparently Kūkai wanted additional materials. Before boarding the ship that would take him back to Japan, he made the following plea to the magistrate in Yue:²¹⁸

日本国求法沙門空海啓。某聞。法之為物也妙。教之為趣也遠。遇之者拔泥翔漢。失之者自天入獄。濟度之船筏。巨夜之日月者也。是以。儒童迦葉教風東扇。能仁無垢法雨西灑。五常因之得正。三際以之朗然。不然者。与盲瞽而沈抗。将禽獸而無別。

²¹⁵ The Nine Assemblies 九會 are the divisions of the Diamond Realm Mandala devoted to the teachings of various parts of the *Vajrasekhara Sutra* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 510). The mandala is divided into nine squares (assemblies), representing groupings of deities. For a more detailed explanation, and a diagram, refer to Sawa, 33 (appendix).

²¹⁶ Since Kūkai was originally supposed to study in China for twenty years (something that he also acknowledges in his other writings), this is considered to be a copyist's error (Watanabe, and Miyasaka, 278).

²¹⁷ The comparison of the passage of time to a swift white stallion is found in the "Knowledge Rambling in the North" 知北遊 chapter of the *Zhuang zi*: "Man passes through this sublunary life as a white horse passes a crack. Here one moment, gone the next" 人生天地之間若白駒之過郤忽然而已 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 279; Giles, 214).

²¹⁸ SRS 5:40.

Kūkai, a Dharma-seeking monk from Japan, bids you respect. Kūkai hears that objects of the Dharma are mysterious and the inclinations of the teachings are distant. Those who encounter these teachings shed the mire and soar mightily, but those who lose these teachings plummet from the heavens into hell. The Dharma is truly the raft of salvation, the sun and moon that illuminate the dark night. With it Confucius and Lao-zi²¹⁹ fanned the breezes of their teachings to the east, and Shakyamuni and Vimalakirti showered the west with the Dharma Rain. Through the Five Cardinal Virtues one can gain the True, and through the Three Realms²²⁰ one can become bright. Without these teachings, we would fall into a pit with the blind and the deaf, and would be ignorant like the birds and the beasts.

孔宣不遑燻席。悉達脫躡輪寶。蓋為此乎。斯乃。大雅大人。亭毒萬生之用心。大覺大雄。子育三界之行業也。雖然。或行或藏時之變也。乍興乍廢實由人也。時至人叶道被無窮。人時矛盾教則墜地。至若。駕羽乘雲之前。人火時水道則藏焉。白馬白象之後。乳水暗合教則行焉。興廢流塞待時矣。

Was it not for these reasons that the sage Confucius never had a moment to warm a seat,²²¹ and Prince Siddhartha renounced his kingly rank? This is why people of great talent and virtue have the mind to cultivate the masses, and why Shakyamuni made it his mission to educate the children of the Three Realms. However, whether the Dharma is visible or hidden depends on the times. Truly, it is up to humankind whether the Dharma suddenly flourishes or suddenly wilts away. When the time is right and the people are responsive, the Dharma can spread without obstruction. However, when time and humankind are at odds with each other, the Dharma falls into the earth. In ancient times, before the Emperor sported six wings and rode on a cloud,²²² humans were like fire and time was like water, so the Way was hidden. After the White Horse arrived and the White Elephant appeared,²²³ milk and water naturally came together, so the teachings could be propagated. In this way the rise and fall of the Dharma truly awaits people and time.

²¹⁹ In the text above, Confucius is written as 儒童 and Lao-zi as 迦葉, which is based on a tradition where Confucius is considered the reincarnation of a bodhisattva, and Lao-zi that of Kasyapa (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 272).

²²⁰ The Three Realms 三際 refers to karmic relationships across the past, present, and future (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 272).

²²¹ “The sage Confucius never had a moment to warm a seat” 孔宣不遑燻席 refers to Confucius’ travels around China to spread his teachings, and is based on a line in the *Wenxuan* (Imataka et al., 358).

²²² This is a reference to an anecdote found in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 272).

²²³ The “White Horse” 白馬 refers to Buddhism’s entry into China. According to legend, two Indian monks with a white horse loaded with Buddhist texts arrived in Lo-yang in the year 65, which marked the arrival of Buddhism in

伏願。我日本国也。羲和初御之天。夸父不步之地也。途径乎仲尼将浮。所不能之海也。山谷則秦王欲往。所不至之嶽也。南嶽大士後身始至。揚江応真鼓棹船破。橫海鯨鼈飲舟非鷁首之能压。泼漢驚波。岳崩決底禽高何曾得往。風緊也百尺摧矣。吹緩也赤馬不動。日居月諸朝浴夕浴。望東望西碧落接波。入海則誰觀魚鼈之遊樂。日月云除。登山則空聽猿猴之悲響。寒暑推移。

In retrospect, the skies of my home nation of Japan are where the first light of dawn makes its appearance, yet it is a place that Kua-fu,²²⁴ the boy who raced against the sun, has not yet walked. The path from China to Japan is an ocean Confucius cannot traverse, and the mountains and valleys of Japan are a place where King Qin²²⁵ would want to go, but he cannot reach. The reincarnation of the Master of the Southern Mountain²²⁶ was the first to reach Japan. The *arhat* of Yang-jiang²²⁷ paddled his way to Japan and wrecked his boat. The whales and turtles inhabiting the seas tower like mountains and swallow ships whole, and the herons carved on the ship's prow²²⁸ could do nothing to keep the wind and waves at bay. The rough waves spilled over into the heavens, crumbled like a mountain, then chiseled away at the hull. How could Qin Gao²²⁹ live here? When the winds are fierce, they crack the mast, but when the winds let up, the ship will not move. In the morning and evening we bask in the light of the sun and the moon. Looking to the east and the west, the emerald skies plummet into the waves. When we enter the ocean all we see are turtles and fish at play, and much time was spent here. We climb the mountains and pointlessly listen to the forlorn cries of the monkeys, as the cold gives way to the heat.

China. “White elephants” 白象 have a long history in Buddhist lore: Shakyamuni’s mother was supposedly impregnated in a dream by a white elephant, and bodhisattvas have appeared in dreams on white elephants (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 508).

²²⁴ Kua-fu 夸父 was a boy in the *Lie zi* 列子 (*Lieh Tzu*) who did not properly assess his abilities and died trying to race the sun (Imataka et al., 356).

²²⁵ According to the *Sanjin eji* 三秦略記 (*Abridged Chronicles of the Three Qin*), Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, attempted to build a bridge across the sea to reach the sun (Watanabe, and Miyasaka, 508).

²²⁶ The Master of the Southern Mountain 南嶽大士 is a sobriquet for Hui-si 慧思 (517-577), who is considered to be the Second Patriarch of the Chinese Tien-tai school (Nakamura, 72). The “reincarnation” is considered to be none other than Shōtoku Taishi, according to his eponymous biography, the *Shōtoku taishiden* 聖德太子伝 (*Biography of Shōtoku Taishi*) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 508).

²²⁷ “The *arhat* of Yang-jiang paddled his way to Japan and wrecked his boat” 楊江応真鼓棹航破 is a reference to the perilous journey made by the Chinese monk Jianzhen 鑑真 (688-763), better known by his Japanese name of Ganjin, to Japan in 754. For the term *arhat*, Kūkai chooses to use the Chinese translation of 応真 (lit. “resonates with the true”) rather than the more common transliteration of *a Luo Han* 阿羅漢 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 273; Imataka et al, 359; Sawa, 697). “Yang jiang” 楊江 is shorthand for his birthplace of Jiangyang County, Yangzhou 揚州江陽縣 (Nakamura, 145).

²²⁸ Images of herons 鷁 were carved into the prows of ships to ward away calamities at sea (Imataka et al., 359).

²²⁹ Qin Gao 琴高 was from Zhao 趙 and a master of the zither. After serving as an official to King Kang 康王 of Song, he decided to live underwater (Imataka et al., 359).

所謂萬死之難斯行當之也。是故。好勇憚而陋之矣。乘牛西而不東也。石室難見。貝葉罕聞者。路險之所致也。昔者。天后皇帝。因國信歸寄送經論律等。然猶。三藏之中零落尤多。好事道俗西望斷腸而已。空海。生葦苕長躡水。器則斗筲。學則戴盆。雖然。哭市之悲日新。歷城之歎彌篤。思欲決大方之教海。灌東垂之亢旱。遂乃。充命廣海。訪採真筌。

The phrase “A peril of myriad deaths” truly applies to the journey between Japan and China. This is why even Tsu-lu, Confucius’ brave disciple, despised the idea of traveling to Japan and why Lao-tsu headed west rather than going east. It is difficult to see inside the stone chamber,²³⁰ and it is rare indeed to travel to India and hear the scriptures. Long ago, Empress Tian-hou²³¹ sent the Japanese envoy home with copies of Buddhist sutras, treatises, and precepts. However, there are many items in the Tripitaka that have yet to be transmitted to Japan. Members of the clergy and laity in Japan who are fond of Buddhism can only look to the west and lament their lack of these teachings. Kūkai was born on a reed plain²³² and grew up in a muddy puddle. His talents can fit in a small bamboo basket of rice and his learning is limited, like someone with a bowl over his head. Nonetheless, his sadness is like the bodhisattva Sadaparudita²³³ who cried in the streets in search of the Dharma. Intense were the laments of Sudhana Sresthidaraka²³⁴ as he passed through many cities in search of the Dharma. My desire is to search the ocean of teachings on the great continent and use them to irrigate the parched earth to the east. This is the reason I risked my life crossing the great sea and came here to seek out the true texts.²³⁵

今見於長安城中。所写得經論疏等。凡三百餘軸。及大悲胎藏金剛界等曼荼羅尊容。竭力潤財。趁遂凶画矣。然而。人劣教廣未拔一毫。衣鉢竭盡不能雇人。忘食寢勞書寫。日車難返忽迫癸期。心之憂矣向誰解紛。空海偶登崑嶽未得滿懷。仰天屠裂

²³⁰ A stone chamber 石室 is a repository for books and other valuable documents. Here it represents writings found in China. Kūkai also uses the term in his epitaph for Hui-guo.

²³¹ This is a reference to Emperor Zetian Wuhou 則天武后 (623-705 r. 684-704) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 274).

²³² This is a reference to Japan (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 274).

²³³ Sadaparudita 常啼 (lit: “always crying”) is a bodhisattva known for constantly wailing. He cried at the sight of sentient beings suffering, and because he was born in a world without the Buddha. He supposedly cried for seven days and nights in search of the Dharma (Nakamura, 434).

²³⁴ Sudhana Sresthidaraka (*Zenzai dōji* 善財童子) is a bodhisattva who appears in the final chapter of the *Flower Garland Sutra*. He travelled around and met various bodhisattvas, who endowed him with their wisdom. He is considered an exemplar of the travelling monk and is frequently depicted in illustrated scrolls (Nakamura, 499).

²³⁵ In the original passage, Kūkai analogizes these texts to a bamboo fish-trap 筌. Just as a bamboo fish-trap is required to catch fish, a variety of texts, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, are required to attain the true way (Imataka et al., 360).

無人知我。途遠來難。何劫更來。嗟乎何計也。大王之助也。臨日月而得水火。附鳳鵬而屆天涯。感応相助之功妙矣哉。

At present, in Chang-an, I have used up all of my ability and drained all of my financial resources to commission copies of over three hundred scrolls' worth of sutras, treatises and commentaries as well as the Womb and Diamond Mandalas. However, people are inferior, and the teachings are so vast that what I have acquired thus far is merely a hair. A priest with a robe and begging-bowl, I have run out of resources and do not have the means to hire people. I labor away copying texts, forgetting to eat or sleep. It is difficult to turn back the chariot of the sun and the day of my departure draws near. Who will dispel the sadness in my heart? Although I have climbed Mt. Kunlun, I have yet to fill his pockets.²³⁶ Though I implore the heavens with a heart-wrenching sadness, there is no one who knows my plight. The journey was long and getting here was difficult. How many *kalpa* will pass before I come here again? Alas! What shall I do? With a strong wind, a great ship can travel a thousand *li* in a day. With the aid of a great king, Bian-jue²³⁷ was able to go empty and return full.²³⁸ Gazing upon the sun and moon and obtaining fire and water, I mounted a phoenix and soared into the heavens. It is rare indeed that a person making a prayer and the object of that prayer operate in unison.

伏惟。中丞大都督節下。天縱粹氣。岳瀆挺生。且儒且吏。綜道綜積。彈壓班馬金聲玉振。並吞回賜珪璋瑚璉。上帝簡德。為人父母。松筠子視。鸞雉降馴。冰霜留犢。五袴洋々。動則躡景逐風。龍躍星散。住則扛鼎策鉄。雲繞霧合。見今也作北辰之阿衡。准古也南甌之垂拱。可謂。觀音之一身。付屬之四依。法之流塞。只繫吐納。

²³⁶ Kūkai compares his journey to China seeking the Buddhist teachings to climbing the mythical Mt. Kunlun in search of jade – just as Mt. Kunlun is filled with jade, China is filled with Buddhist texts (Imataka et al, 360).

²³⁷ The “great king” 大王 here is Qu Wentai 麴文泰 (r. 623-640), the ruler of the oasis city known in Chinese as Gaochang 高昌 which is located in the present-day Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. He was the patron of Bian-jue 遍覺, better known as Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), one of the great translators of Buddhist texts into Chinese and the First Patriarch of Yogacara Buddhism (Nakamura, 238).

²³⁸ Xuanzang studied at the Nalanda Monastery in India and then returned to China to engage in translation and propagation work. The phrase used to describe Xuanzang's studies in China, “to go empty and return full” 虛往實歸 is often used to describe Kūkai's own experiences in China (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 62).

I believe that His Excellency the Regional Magistrate possesses the sensibilities of the heavens and draws his vitality from the mountains and rivers.²³⁹ You are well-versed in Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. The writings of Ban Gu outclassed those of Sima Qian;²⁴⁰ they emitted a marvelous golden sound and reverberated like jade. Your deeds are superior to those of Yan Hui and Zi Gong²⁴¹ combined, and your character is noble like a jade offertory vessel. The Emperor chooses people of virtue to serve as parents to the people. Steadfast like the pine and bamboo, you watch over the people as though they are your own children, and your virtue descends to the phoenixes and pheasants. Your integrity is as pure as ice and frost, like that of the official who left behind a calf;²⁴² your people are so wealthy that they have five formal pleated skirts. When you move, your people step in your shadow and follow you like the wind. They dance like dragons and disperse like the stars. When you stop, they raise ceremonial vessels on poles in offering, with the strength of a steel cord they form a circle and gather around you like the mist. Now I see you as a minister to the North Star, but if I were to liken you to someone from the past it would be Nan Ou,²⁴³ who governed the realm with his hands folded across his chest. It can be said that you are a manifestation of Avalokitesvara, and the Four Classes of Dependents²⁴⁴ are your attendants. The ebb and flow of the Dharma is tied only to your words.

伏願。顧彼遺命。愍此遠涉。三教之中。經律論疏傳記。乃至詩賦碑銘。卜醫五明。所撰之教。可以發蒙濟物者。多少流傳遠方。斯則。大士之所經營。小人之所不意。儻遂渴仰。茂績英聲。刻鏤肌骨。山海霑沢。萬劫粉身。一則節下之修。何事過之。

²³⁹ The “mountains and rivers” 岳瀆 refer to the Five Sacred Mountains (Taishan 泰山, Hengshan 衡山, Huashan 華山, Hengshan 恒山 and Songshan 崇山) and the Four Great Rivers the Yangtze 長江, Yellow 黃河, Huai 淮河, and Ji 濟水 rivers (Tōdō, 728).

²⁴⁰ Ban Gu 班固 (32-92, also known as Pan Ku in Wade-Giles) was a historian, poet and author of the *Book of Han*. Sima Qian 司馬遷 (?-86 BC, also transcribed as Ssu-ma Ch'ien) was the author of the *Records of the Grand Historian*. Here, Kūkai appears to be arguing that later generations are superior to prior ones, and he extends this argument in the next line where he claims that the magistrate's virtues exceed that of Confucius' disciples (see following note).

²⁴¹ Yan Hui 顏回 and Zi Gong 子貢 were considered Confucius' two most outstanding disciples (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 276).

²⁴² This is a reference to Shi Miao 時苗, an official who was dispatched to Shouchun 壽春. He arrived on a rickety cart pulled by an old ox. During his posting, the female ox gave birth to a calf. When Shi Miao's posting ended, he left the calf behind, stating that since it was born there, and consumed the grass and water there, it belonged to the people there (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 510).

²⁴³ Nan Ou 南甌 was an official who was of such virtue that he could govern with his hands folded across his chest 垂拱, i.e., with no effort (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 510).

²⁴⁴ The Four Classes of Dependents 四依 are: those with attachments, those who follow the words of the Buddha, those who have renounced desire, and those who have reached the level of *arhat*. This is discussed in greater detail in the Four Dependents fascicle of the *Nirvana Sutra* (Imataka et al., 361).

二則迷方之狂兒。忽覺乎南。今不勝渴法之至願。敢竭丹款。輕贖威嚴。流汗戰越。謹奉啓以聞。不宣謹啓。

I humbly implore you to look upon my testament and take pity upon the distance I crossed. I ask you to transmit as many texts as you can spare from the Three Teachings, such as sutras, precepts, treatises, commentaries, hagiographies as well as poetry, rhymed-prose, epitaphs, inscriptions, divination and medical texts and teachings of the Five Learnings²⁴⁵ so that they will open the way to enlightenment and bring about salvation in my faraway land. This is a task for a bodhisattva, not a petty man. Should I sate my thirst, your great deed shall be etched into my flesh and chiseled into my bone. In return for your great charity, which is as tall as the mountains and as deep as the seas, I shall work my body into dust for ten thousand *kalpa*. First, what can surpass your altruism? Second, children who are lost immediately gain your instruction. Now, nothing exceeds my thirst for the Dharma. My boldly writing to you exhausts your goodwill and is an offense to your authority. I drip sweat as I stand in awe of you. Humbly, I make my petition.

Many of the rhetorical strategies Kūkai deployed in his earlier epistles to the magistrate in Fuzhou are present here. Once again, the regional magistrate is depicted as a paragon of both Confucian and Buddhist virtue. However, Kūkai's rhetorical and intertextual strategies in this epistle are far more complex than his earlier attempts in Fuzhou. First, by presenting Confucius and Lao-zi as Buddhist reincarnates, Kūkai can argue that upholding Confucian and Daoist ideals, and promoting Buddhism, are one and the same. Next, he positions Japan on the periphery of Chinese textual space, claiming it inaccessible to Confucius, Kua fu, and Emperor Qin, allowing him to portray his homeland as an uncivilized frontier in desperate need of Chinese learning.

This lengthy plea is significant for any study of Kūkai's literary attitudes because here he explicitly requests literary texts (poetry and rhymed prose) in addition to doctrinal ones. The order in which these texts are requested suggests textual categories, and perhaps even a

²⁴⁵ The Five Learnings 五明 are the five categories of scholarship and arts in the Indian scheme: linguistics 声明, logic 因明, metaphysics 内明, medicine 医方明, and architecture 工巧明 (Nakamura, 281-282).

hierarchy: first, he lists scriptural, philosophical, and hagiographic texts 經律論疏伝記 from the Three Teachings 三教 (Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism), followed by various types of *belles-lettres*: poetry, rhymed-prose, epitaphs and inscriptions 詩賦碑銘. Finally, he requests texts which could be categorized as “secular” learning: divination and medical texts, and texts from the Five Learnings (see footnote 245) 卜医五明. Thus, although Kūkai’s stated purpose in travelling to Chang-an was to gain instruction in esoteric Buddhism, this epistle demonstrates he also considered non-Buddhist learning essential for the Japanese state. Also, the phrasing of his request, “...so that they will open the way to enlightenment and bring about salvation in my faraway land” 可以發蒙濟物者多少流伝遠方 appears to be a continuation of the pedagogical theory of literature that he expounded in the *Rōko shiiki*.

Since the *Goshōrai mokuroku* 御請来目錄 (*Catalog of Items Presented to the Court*), Kūkai’s report on his studies in China, only lists the sutras, ritual manuals and other sacred objects he brought back to Japan, there is no authoritative listing of the literary texts he acquired in China. However, it is possible to gain some insight as to what he obtained in China through his poetic catalog, the *Bunkyō hifuron*. In this massive collection, he provides theoretical treatises such as the *Shi ge* 詩格 (*The Framework of Poetry*) by Wang Chang-ling 王昌齡 (698-757), the *Shi shi* 詩式 (*Designs of Poetry*) and the *Shi yi* 詩議 (*Deliberations on Poetry*) by Jiao Ran 皎然 (dates unknown), as well as the *Si sheng pu* 四声譜 (*Record of the Four Tones*), a treatise on tonal prosody attributed to Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513).

Kūkai returned to Japan without incident in 806. Upon his arrival in Kyushu, he submitted his catalog of acquired texts to the court. Nevertheless, despite the minor celebrity status he acquired during his two years in China, the Japanese court was initially indifferent to Kūkai’s

imported Buddhism. The court did not even reply to Kūkai's report for three years, and he was not granted permission to proceed to the capital.²⁴⁶ It was Saichō, who had returned to Japan about a year before Kūkai, who enjoyed the ailing Emperor Kanmu's patronage and was summoned to perform rituals to restore the sovereign's health.²⁴⁷ Kūkai, on the other hand, was confined to Kyushu. Very little is known of his activities during this three-year period, but there is a record of his performing a memorial service for the late mother of the vice-governor of Dazaifu.²⁴⁸

Kūkai's fortunes would improve with the ascension of Emperor Saga 嵯峨天皇 (786-842, r. 809-823). Saga, the crown prince of Emperor Heizei 平城天皇 (774-824, r. 806-809) and grandson of Kanmu, had a keen interest in Chinese poetry and calligraphy. Forged by mutual literary and artistic interests, their friendship brought Kūkai back to Kyoto and into the public eye. Under Saga's patronage, Kūkai would produce calligraphic works for the court, contribute Chinese poetry to an imperial anthology, and exchange poems with distinguished literati of the period. Japanese history remembers Kūkai as a Heian period religious pioneer, but it was his literary and artistic talents that provided the access to the Heian court necessary to expound his religious ideals.

²⁴⁶ Hakeda, 34-35.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ For more information on this ceremony and a complete English translation of the *ganmon* 願文 (votive document) that Kūkai wrote for this occasion, refer to David L. Gardiner, "Japan's First Shingon Ceremony," in George J. Tanabe, Jr., ed., *Religions of Japan in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 153-158.

Chapter Two Kūkai and Early Heian Chinese Poetics

Introduction

After a long sojourn in Kyushu, Kūkai finally returned to Heiankyō in 809 under the auspices of Emperor Saga, his poetic, artistic and political patron. Saga often commissioned Kūkai to compose poetry, produce works of calligraphy, or perform esoteric rituals for the benefit of the state. While in the capital, Kūkai also became acquainted with leading literati such as Ono no Minemori 小野岑守 (778-830) and Yoshimine no Yasuyo 良峯安世 (785-830). Although Minemori and Yasuyo were among the top poets of the era, they were interested in far more than just the aesthetic aspects of Chinese poetry; as graduates of the State College, they understood the value of writing as a way of establishing and maintaining political power and general order.²⁴⁹

Traditional scholarship, with its preference for vernacular literatures informed by Romantic-era European sensibilities, has long held this period to be a “dark age” in the history of Japanese literature (*kokufū ankoku jidai* 国風暗黒時代). However, the phrase *kokufū ankoku jidai*, “the dark age of the national style,” i.e., literature written in Japanese, is problematic, as it makes assumptions about the concept of the “national style,” the qualities of “darkness,” and the practices of “periodization.” The period between 757 and 905 is viewed as a dark age because it is the intermediary stage between the “brilliance” of the *Man'yōshū* and the *Kokinwakashū*. However, summarily labelling this period as a “dark age” of the “national style” dismisses the highly creative literary activity which took place, and makes untenable assumptions about literature written in Japanese.

²⁴⁹ Abe, 305.

Recent scholarship has rigorously interrogated the notion of *kokufū ankoku jidai*. First, Thomas LaMarre shows how even Japanese poetry served as a vehicle for expressing certain Chinese literary aesthetics in a native voice:

Although the synthetic moment of *Kokinwakashū* evokes *Man'yōshū* and borrows songs from it, its formal methods and concepts derive largely from these imperial anthologies of Han songs, as well as from Chinese poetic prefaces. Thus, even when the *Kokinwakashū* summons *Man'yōshū*, it speaks in the Chinese poetics of a particular period.²⁵⁰

Indeed, although the *Kokinwakashū* is the second major Japanese poetic anthology compiled under official auspices,²⁵¹ it should not be seen as the direct descendant of the *Man'yōshū*.

Everything in the *Kokinwakashū*, from its preface that evokes the Great Preface to the *Book of Songs* to its organizational principles, reflects Chinese models. Kawamura Hisao stated that “...the pursuit of Chinese writings in the early Heian period is indispensable to the pursuit of the essence of Heian literature. Although there are those who survey Heian literature looking only at works written in Japanese, this is a lopsided approach.”²⁵² Similarly, the recent works of scholarship by Jason Webb and Gustav Heldt demonstrate the limitations of applying Romantic-era categories of literature to the literary activities of the late eighth- and early ninth- century Japan. As discussed in the prior chapter, Webb examines the ritualistic functions of Chinese poetry, focusing on the banquet poetry in the *Kaifūsō* and how Saga deployed the continental concept of *monjō keikoku* 文章経国 (writing as a means of statecraft) to manage state affairs. Heldt’s work is primarily interested in how the notion of “poetic harmony” developed in the

²⁵⁰ Lamarre, 14.

²⁵¹ In Japanese scholarship, the *Man'yōshū* is sometimes called a *junchokusenshū* 準勅撰集 (quasi-imperial anthology) because although it was not commissioned under a direct imperial order, court officials were involved in its compilation.

²⁵² Kawamura Hisao, “*Heianchō kanbungaku no sekai*” in *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* (Tokyo: Shibundō), Oct. 1990, 6.

poetics of the so-called “dark age” informed those of the *Kokinwakashū*.²⁵³ Indeed, the scholarship by Lamarre, Webb and Heldt shows that the literary culture of the early Heian period was anything but dark.

Kūkai’s engagement with classical Chinese poetry was complex and multifaceted, much like the man himself, making it difficult to distill his poetry into a few discrete literary principles. Therefore, this chapter looks at Kūkai’s poetic *oeuvre* from several vantage points: his engagement with the imperial anthologies, his use of poetry to celebrate the virtues of water, his aesthetic views of mountains and eremitic life, and finally, how he used his poetry and prose to aid in the textual mapping of the early Heian Japanese state and the colonization of its frontier. It will be evident there is no one unifying principle, theme or theory behind Kūkai’s literary production: any attempt to interpret his work solely through the lenses of Esoteric Buddhist thought, early ninth century Japanese literary aesthetics, or state-sanctioned Confucianism will result in a skewed understanding of his work and its significance. Yet, despite Kūkai’s politically shrewd engagement with various elements of Heiankyō society, the content, styles and genres he used demonstrates his non-conformist literary stance.

Kūkai and the Imperial Anthologies

In the study of Japanese literature, the term “imperial anthology” (*chokusenshū* 勅撰集) is conventionally associated with imperially-commissioned *waka* collections such as the *Kokinwakashū*. However, the *Kokinwakashū* was actually the fourth imperially commissioned poetic anthology. During Kūkai’s lifetime, the imperial court commissioned the three major anthologies of Chinese poetry (*kanshi*): the *Ryōunshū* 凌雲集 (*Collection Soaring Above the Clouds*) in 814, the *Bunka shūreishū* 文華秀麗集 (*Collection of Masterpieces of Literary*

²⁵³ Gustav Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony: Poetry and Power in Early Heian Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 2008), in general.

Flowers) in 818, and the *Keikokushū* 経国集 (*Collection for Governing the Country*), in 827.

The *Ryōunshū* and *Bunka shūreishū* were commissioned by Saga, while the *Keikokushū* was compiled under the auspices of Emperor Junna 淳和天皇 (786-840, r.823-833). In keeping with the prevailing ideology of the time, the prefaces to all three anthologies make reference to the power of the written word to govern state affairs.²⁵⁴

Despite his attendance at the State College, vast knowledge of Chinese poetry and poetics, and acquaintanceship with Yasuyo and Minemori, Kūkai was not involved in the compilation of any of the aforementioned anthologies. This is rather ironic, as someone of Kūkai's learning, erudition, and experience in China would have been well-suited to the task. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Kūkai actually had experience writing and exchanging Chinese poetry in China. However, Kūkai seems to have taken a rather aloof stance toward public literary activity, preferring to devote his time to developing and systemizing Shingon teachings. Also, by the time the compilation of the *Keikokushū* was ordered, four years had passed since his patron Saga had relinquished the throne, and Kūkai was busy building his monastic complex atop Mt. Kōya.

Nevertheless, Yasuyo did include seven poems by Kūkai in the *Keikokushū*. Abe observes that the only poets who had more poems included were Saga and Shigeno no Sadanushi 滋野貞主 (785-852), a court tutor and the anthology's chief compiler. According to Abe:

To Yasuyo and other court literati who took pride in this pragmatic approach to writing, Kūkai – who was also a former student at the State College – seems to have been something of a mystery. On the one hand, they respected Kūkai's talent as a writer and calligrapher. His skill at Chinese writing was public knowledge at court. Emperors, ministers, ambassadors, and eminent priests frequently requested that Kūkai draft their edicts, public speeches, official missives, or liturgical prayers...²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ The prefaces to all three anthologies are translated in Heldt, 301-308.

²⁵⁵ Abe, 307.

Kūkai’s poems in the *Keikokushū* were written at various points throughout his life. Three were composed during Kūkai’s stay in China, two of which also appear in the *Shōryōshū*. The first was most likely composed in the spring of 805, when Kūkai first arrived in Chang-an, and is addressed to Chang-fa 昶法 (dates unknown), a monk who resided in the city. In this poem, Kūkai expresses his wonder at being in the Tang capital, yet longs for spring in his native Japan:²⁵⁶

看竹看花本国春 人声鳥弄漢家新	Looking at the bamboo, looking at the blossoms – it is spring in my homeland The voices of the people, and the songs of the birds – everything is Chinese ²⁵⁷ and new
見君庭際小山色 還識君情不染塵	Looking at the verdant hue of the miniature mountain on the edge of your garden I realize once again that your heart is not sullied by the dust of the world

Kūkai sees the bamboo and the blossoms and reminisces of Japan, yet the cacophony of voices – due to the cosmopolitan nature of Chang-an, it can be reasonably assumed that Kūkai was exposed to numerous Chinese dialects, as well as various Central Asian languages – serves to remind him that he is now a stranger in a foreign land. The immense population of Chang-an

²⁵⁶ KKS 61 (Book 10).

²⁵⁷ The term that Kūkai uses here for “China” 漢家 is of particular interest because this is its first appearance in his writings. Although the *Sangō shiiki* is replete with references to canonical Chinese literary, philosophical and historical texts, a line-by-line, character-by-character inspection revealed that at no point does he actually use a word that directly refers to China. The lack of annotation or specific descriptions suggests that these Chinese narratives were thoroughly “naturalized” into late-Nara/early-Heian Japanese intellectual discourse. However, while the Japanese scholar-bureaucrats of the time were quite familiar with a variety of Chinese texts, undoubtedly the country of China itself was an intellectual abstraction to the great majority. Even when the ship carrying Kūkai and Ambassador Fujiwara no Kadonomaro arrived in Fuzhou, Kūkai’s letters to the local magistrate used words such as “The Great Tang” 大唐 and the “Middle Kingdom” 中国. One possible reason Kūkai used 漢家 is that it better reflected his direct experience of actually being in China, as opposed to the others, which represent China more as a political/historical 大唐 or geographical 中国 construct. *Kanjigen*, a Japanese dictionary of classical Chinese, provides three definitions for 漢家: 1) the imperial family during the Han Dynasty; 2) a physician who specializes in Chinese medicine; and 3) China in general. According to *Kanjigen*, the third definition was developed in Japan, i.e., it is not used with this meaning in texts actually produced in China (Tōdō, 712). Another possibility is that 漢家 was a colloquial term circulating in China which Kūkai happened to acquire while he was there. Borgen suggested the same possibility for Kiyotomo, who used the word *pu fen* (Alas!), which was a Tang colloquial expression. He interpreted the usage of this lexical item as evidence of Kiyotomo utilizing newly-acquired learning, and perhaps the same can be said for Kūkai (Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian Court*, 34-35).

(estimated at two million, including the communities immediately outside the city's walls) would also have been in sharp contrast to the Japanese capitals of Heijōkyō and Heiankyō. Even the songs of exotic birds serve to intensify the sense of “foreignness” of China. His juxtaposition of human “voices” and bird “songs” with “China” calls to mind *koto saheku* ことさへく/言宣く, a *Man'yōshū makura kotoba* attached to *kara* 韓/唐(China/Korea) and *kudara* 百濟(Paekche) that alludes to unintelligible foreign languages.²⁵⁸ As a student in Japan, “China” – with all of its historical adages and homilies on sufficiently (or insufficiently) virtuous emperors, kings, dukes, generals, scholar-bureaucrats, students and sons and daughters – was an imaginary construct that Kūkai had merely engaged textually. In Chang-an, however, he confronted China with his own eyes, without the benefit of textual mediation, tutors, or a corpus of State College-approved commentary. Yet, amidst this flurry of nature is Chang-fa's garden, where Kūkai finds solace in an artificial “miniature mountain” 小山 on its periphery. Despite all the change he sees around him – his new life in China and unfamiliar voices – he views the garden with its artificial mountain and its vibrant hues as an emblem of mental discipline. Even amidst the throngs of metropolitan life Chang-fa's heart remains unsullied and committed to the Buddhist path.

The next poem included in the *Keikokushū* was composed in 806 when Kūkai was about to leave the Qinglongsi temple, where he had studied under Master Hui-guo until his death, in order to return to Japan. The poem was addressed to a monk named Yi-cao 義操 (dates

²⁵⁸ An example of *koto saeku* may be seen in the following selection from MYS 2:135:

つのはさわふ	Tuno sahahu	In the Sea of Iwami
石見の海の	Ihami no umi no	Where swarming vines crawl on rocks,
言さへく	Koto saheku	Under the Cape of Kara,
辛の先なる	Kara no saki naru	A name for far lands strange of speech
いくりにそ	Ikuri ni so	Grows the sea pine in deep waters
深海松老	Fukamiru ohuru	On the snowy strand

(Cranston, *A Waka Anthology*, 206)

unknown), one of Hui-guo's top disciples and revered as a National Teacher.²⁵⁹ Yi-cao is also the "Meditation Master Cao" featured in Wang Wei's poem "Passing by the Qing long si temple on a Summer Day and Visiting Meditation Master Cao" 日過青龍寺謁操禪師.²⁶⁰ Although the exact dates of his birth and death are unknown, it is assumed that he was already dead when Ennin arrived in China in 838.²⁶¹ The poem Kūkai presented this poem to Yi-cao at the moment of their parting:²⁶²

同法同門喜遇深	Of the same Dharma, of the same Gate: how deep my happiness at meeting you!
遊空白霧忽歸岑	The white mists floating in the skies suddenly return to their peak
一生一別難再見	One life, one parting: it will be difficult to meet again
非夢思中數數尋	Let us call on each other often in our thoughts, not in our dreams.

²⁵⁹ As one of Hui-guo's highest ranking disciples, Yi-cao had also received a transmission in both the Womb and Diamond mandalas, mastered the Three Mysteries 三密 of esoteric Buddhism (body, mind and speech), and all five areas of general knowledge 五明(Sawa, 119). Kūkai mentions him in the memorial stele he composed after Hui-guo died.

²⁶⁰ This poem was composed in 761, over forty years before Kūkai arrived in China. The An Lushan Rebellion had taken place five years before, and An Lushan's 安祿山 (703-757) independent Yan Dynasty was a source of frustration for the Tang state. However, the Tang saw an opportunity to launch a counterattack when Shi Siming 史思明(703-761), one of An Lu-shan's deputies and third emperor of the Yan Dynasty, was assassinated by his eldest son, Shi Chaoyi 史朝義(unknown-763). Tang plans for a counterattack were foiled by heavy rains which led to widespread famine. Wang Wei would often give his food rations to the poor. It was during this period of instability that he visited the Qinglongsi temple with his companion and fellow poet Pei Di 裴迪(dates unknown) and composed the following poem:

龍鐘一老翁	Trudging along, one aged old man
除步謁禪宮	Shuffles to visit a palace of meditation.
欲問義心義	Wishing to ask about the principled mind's meaning
遙知空病空	From afar I know the disease of voidness is empty.
山河天眼裏	Mountains and rivers within the Buddha's eye
世界法身中	The universe amid the Dharma body:
莫恠銷炎熱	Do not be surprised when it dissipates burning heat—
能生大地風	It can arouse a wind across this great earth.

(Pauline Yu, *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 137).

²⁶¹ Sawa, 119.

²⁶² KKS 60 (Book 10).

The final poem composed in China, entitled “Passing through the Jinxinsi temple” 過金心寺, records Kūkai’s visit to the Jinxinsi 金心寺, a temple located in Changzhou (present day Jiangsu Province).²⁶³

古貌滿堂塵暗色	Old monks fill the temple, and dark dust drifts about
新華落地鳥繁聲	A new blossom falls to the ground, and a flock of birds can be heard
經行觀禮自心感	My heart is moved by the sight of the monks performing their rituals
一兩僧人不審名	I do not know the names of one or two monks

The imagery in this poem is rather straightforward: Kūkai contrasts the dusty temple and its old monks to the fresh blossoms and singing birds outside. In her commentary, Kishida notes that Kūkai is impressed by the monks’ discipline and focus on their training, despite the spring scenery unfolding outdoors.

Three poems that Kūkai composed upon returning to Japan also appear in the *Keikokushū*. Unlike the poems composed in China, they are difficult to date accurately. One uses the spring blossoms as a metaphor for explaining Buddhist laws of causation:²⁶⁴

七言過因詩一首	釈空海
Seven-Syllable <i>Shi</i> on Past Causes – By the Monk Kūkai	
莫道此花今年發	Do not say that these flowers bloom this year
應知往歲下種因	You must know that their causal seeds were planted in years past
因緣相感枝幹聳	Causes and conditions are in mutual sympathy, tree branches and trunks soar
何況近日遇早春	Certainly we will encounter early spring soon!

While this poem discusses past causes as the roots of present effects, the following poem focuses solely on present effects:²⁶⁵

七言現果詩一首	釈空海
Seven Syllable <i>Shi</i> on Present Effects – By the Monk Kūkai	
青陽一照御苑中	A shaft of pale sunlight shines upon the palace garden

²⁶³ KKS 59 (Book 10).

²⁶⁴ KKS 110 (Book 11).

²⁶⁵ KKS 109 (Book 11).

梅蕊先衆發春風	The plum buds are the first to bloom in the spring breeze
春風一起馨香遠	A spring breeze arises and carries the fragrance far
花萼相暉照天宮	The blossoms shine upon each other and brighten the Palace of Heaven

Although the date and context of these poems are unclear, Abe Ryūju suggests that they were both written when Kūkai was invited by Saga to view the plum blossoms in the palace garden.²⁶⁶ Certainly, the expression “palace garden” 御苑 in the second verse provides some evidence to support this idea.

Neither the date nor the context of the third post-return poem are known. Rather than expound on Buddhist notions of causality, Kūkai here contrasts ephemeral, changing patterns of weather and eternal emptiness:²⁶⁷

七言秋山望雲雨以憶此心一首 積空海
 Seven-Syllable Poem on Gazing at Rainclouds from an Autumn Mountain with Feelings of Recollection –
 By the Monk Kūkai

白雲輕重起山谷	Light and heavy white clouds form in the mountain valley
蒼嶺高低本入空	Verdant peaks, high and low, from the onset, the clouds rise up into the sky
或灑或飛南北雨	The northerly and southerly rains – sometimes they fall, sometimes they fly away
乍瓢乍扇東西風	The easterly and westerly winds – suddenly breezy, suddenly blustery
唯有一虛湛不變	There is only one empty abyss that does not change
千年萬歲顏色同	One thousand years, ten thousand years – its color is the same
欲言□□傍煙色	As if to say...next to the color of smoke ²⁶⁸
天水含暉秋月通	The waters of the heavens have the glimmer of the autumn moon passing through

The lack of contextual information for this poem, and the two missing characters in the second to last line, makes it difficult to provide a definitive analysis. Nevertheless, it appears thematically similar to the seventh, and final, poem by Kūkai to appear in the *Keikokushū*, a lengthy reflection on Kūkai’s preferences for mountain life. This poem will be discussed later in this chapter.

²⁶⁶ Abe Ryūju, *Kūkai no shi* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2002), 33-34.

²⁶⁷ KKS 147 (Book 13).

²⁶⁸ Two characters in this line are missing.

In addition to the poems written by Kūkai, the *Keikokushū* includes poems written in response to Kūkai’s poems, even ones that were not included in the anthology. For example, sometime between 810 and 823, Kūkai composed a poem entitled “Gazing at Shinsen’en on an Autumn Day” 秋日觀神泉苑 which was later included in the *Shōryōshū*. Shinsen’en 神泉苑, located south of the former palace, was an imperial garden used to host special banquets. The garden also includes a pond and spring, so during a major drought in 824, Kūkai used it as a site for rainmaking rituals at the behest of Emperor Junna. As “Gazing at Shinsen’en on an Autumn Day” was written sometime before the drought, Kūkai focused on the natural beauty of the garden, and how the emperor’s virtue runs throughout:²⁶⁹

夕于神泉觀物候	Walking around Shinsen’en, I gaze at the scenery
心神恍惚不能歸	My heart is enraptured and I cannot leave
高台神構非人力	The high dais is the work of the gods, not of man
池鏡泓澄含日暉	The mirror-like surface of the pond is crystal clear and absorbs the sunlight
鶴響聞天馴御苑	Cranes can be heard in the heavens, they are accustomed to the garden
鵠翅且戢幾將飛	Swans start to fly off after resting their wings for a while
游魚戲藻數吞鉤	Swimming fish frolic among the aquatic grasses, occasion swallowing a hook
鹿鳴深草露霑衣	Deer cry in the thick grass and dew wets my sleeve
一翔一住感君德	One bird flies away and another remains; I feel the emperor’s virtue
秋月秋風空入扉	The autumn moon and autumn wind desolately come through the gates,
銜草啄梁何不在	Birds and beasts munching on grasses and pecking at millet – where are they not found?
躑々率舞在玄機	Frolicking about, ²⁷⁰ they dwell in His Majesty’s profound principle

²⁶⁹ SRS 1:2.

²⁷⁰ This is a reference to the Yi and Ji 益稷 chapter of the *Book of Documents*: 夔曰戛擊鳴球搏拊琴瑟以詠祖考來格虞賓在位群后德讓下管龔鼓合止祝敵笙鏞以間鳥獸踴躍九成鳳皇來儀夔曰於予擊石拊石百獸率舞庶尹允諧 (K’wei said, ‘When the sounding-stone is tapped or strongly struck; when the lutes are swept or gently touched; to accompany the singing: – the imperial progenitors come to the service, the guest of Yu is in his place, and all the nobles show their virtue in giving place to one another. Below there are the flutes and hand-drums, which join in at the sound of the rattle, and cease at that of the stopper; when the calabash organ and bells all filling up the intervals; when birds and beasts fall moving. When the nine parts of the service according to the emperor’s arrangements have all been performed, the male and female phoenix come with their measured gamboling into the court.’ K’wei said, ‘Oh! when I strike the stone, or tap the stone, all kinds of animals lead on one another to gambol, and all the chiefs of the officers become truly harmonious’) (Legge, *The Shoo King*, 87-89). In summary, when there is harmony and virtuous governance in the realm, they are felt even by the animals, who dance in response.

In the Shinsen'en garden, nature is in perfect harmony and everyone is content. Kūkai loses himself in the idyllic scenery and has no desire to leave. The references to the emperor reveal the underlying belief that he is responsible for maintaining the natural order of things. His governance of the realm is described as profound 玄機 and the characters attributing an almost otherworldly aspect to his authority.

Sadanushi wrote a poem in response to Kūkai's poem, which he entitled "An Autumn Day at Shinsen'en – A Seven Syllable Poem Composed for the Monk Kūkai" 七言和海和尚秋日觀神泉苑之作一首.²⁷¹

闍梨下自南山幽	The Master descends from the mystical southern mountain
勅許令看上苑秋	And views Shinsen'en with His Majesty's permission
御路蕭疎楊柳影	In the shade of the willows, the forlorn path is a patchwork of fallen leaves
遵行直到白沙洲	Following the path leads straight to the isle of white sand ²⁷²
廻瞻肅殺無紛濁	Looking around, everything has withered in the autumn cold, nothing is soiled
眼沸清泉一細流	Before my eyes, a clear spring gushes forth and forms a narrow stream
小嶺登攀頻見鷺	It ascends the small mound in the garden, and I am frequently in awe
暗林沸入欲驚鳩	The stream gurgles into the dark woods, and the doves are frightened
三明濕照龍池閣	The Three Wisdoms replenish the Dragon Lake and shine on its pavilion
二道薰迎秋蕙樓	The two paths are fragrant and greet the house of aromatic autumn grasses.
法侶相隨嘉樹下	Monks follow each other and are happy under the tree
不殊昔與大比丘	The great <i>bhikṣu</i> has not changed – he is the same as before.

Sadanushi's poem also presents the Shinsen'en garden as an oasis of tranquility, but opens with a subtle reminder to Kūkai that although he may be the "Master" 闍梨 and visiting the capital from the "southern mountain" 南山 (i.e., Mt. Kōya), his station in life is due to the good offices of the emperor, and it is only with the emperor's permission that he may view the Shinsen'en garden.

Hidden behind the words of this seemingly benign poem is a rather pointed rebuke. By stating that the Master (Kūkai) views Shinsen'en with His Majesty's (Saga's) permission 勅許令

²⁷¹ KKS 207 (Book 14).

²⁷² This is most likely a reference to the island in the middle of the Shinsen'en pond.

看上苑秋, Sadanushi informs Kūkai in no uncertain terms that Shinsen'en is royal space.

Furthermore, Saga's control over Shinsen'en was not limited to the physical space of the garden; it extended to associated discourse. As Webb has observed, indoctrination in accepted modes of reception and composition began at the State College:

In short, the enterprise of learning to read and write—an education in writing carried out at the court university—inevitably was influenced by the norms of the current orthodoxy of reception and composition. With regard especially to students of composition, a mastery of exemplary works to a large degree meant in fact a mastery of the sovereign's preferences.²⁷³

The poems composed on Shinsen'en by Saga and his circle of poets had to conform to his parameters: namely, they had to be melancholy in tone and depict the “austere beauty” of the season.²⁷⁴ A portion of the poem Saga presented during a gathering at the Shinsen'en in observance of the Chrysanthemum Festival (*chōyō* 重陽) reads:²⁷⁵

秋可哀兮	Autumn, so sorrowful
哀年序之早寒	I grieve that a chill comes so early in the course of the year
天高爽兮雲渺渺	the sky lofty and clear, clouds far off
氣蕭颯兮露團團	the air lonely and the dew in thick beads
庭潦收而水既淨	the summer rains have subsided and the water is now clear
林蟬踈以引欲殫	the cicada in the forest have grown faint, their music about to end
燕先社日蟄巖嶺	the swallows depart for the equinox to burrow in the rocky peaks
雁雜涼風叫江洲	the geese arrive with the chilly wind and cry out in the river islet
荷潭帶冷無全葉	in the pond the lotuses, enveloped by the cold, no leaf unwithered
柳岸銜霜枝不柔	on the banks the willows are frost-laden, limbs no longer soft
寒服時授	time to provide cold-weather clothing
熟稼新收	and gather the freshly-ripened grains

The selection presented here comprises one-third of the poem, but is sufficient to illustrate the rhetorical thrust of his autumn poetics. Autumn is depicted in melancholy terms: it is “sorrowful” 哀 and the “chill comes so early” 早寒. An austere beauty is present in the descriptions of the

²⁷³ Ibid., 246.

²⁷⁴ Webb, 223.

²⁷⁵ KKS (Book 9). Translation by Webb, 218. For a complete translation of the poem, refer to Webb, 218-220.

autumn sky, and the geese who arrive with the chilly winds, yet imagery of desolation prevails – the cicada are about to end their songs, the lotus leaves are withered, and the limbs of the willows are “frost laden” 銜霜 and have stiffened in the face of the coming cold. The diction and imagery in this selection present autumn as a season of death and decay where the desolation and solitude of the coming winter intensifies with each passing moment.

Kūkai presents autumn at the Shinsen'en as the exact opposite: his heart is “enraptured” 恍惚 and he “cannot leave” 不能歸, as the garden is teeming with vibrant life, fish frolicking in the pond and birds coming and going as they peck for millet. Unlike Saga's poem, which immediately laments the cold that has come too soon, the presence of the “sun” 日暉 lends the garden a sense of warmth. Although stock autumn imagery such as “autumn wind and autumn moon vainly coming through gates” 秋月秋風空入扉 does provide the poem a tinge of melancholy, by no means is the poem sad; Kūkai depicts Shinsen'en as a place of imperial virtue, where life continues on despite the encroachment of autumn. While his poem is certainly not subversive – it praises the beauty of the garden and acknowledges the virtue of the emperor – it is incongruous with the imagery Saga attempted to establish with his own work. This may explain why, despite the cordial relations among Kūkai, Saga, and the members of his poetic clique, this poem was not included in the *Keikokushū*.

Water and Kūkai's Poetics of Virtue

When Kūkai visited the Shinsen'en garden in the above poem, all was well in the realm. In the years that followed, Japan was beset by numerous droughts, and Kūkai was often called upon to perform rainmaking rituals for the court. Perhaps for this reason Kūkai (or Kōbō Daishi) is often associated with “water” in the hagiographic tradition. In numerous legends, Kūkai travels to a remote hamlet in some far-flung corner of Japan, strikes his staff against the ground,

and brings forth water. Richard M. Dorson records five folk legends about Kūkai, and three of them pertain to his relationship with water. In these selections, Kūkai is an anonymous itinerant monk travelling through the countryside, and the villagers he encounters are either given water as a reward (usually by striking his staff to create a well) for showing him hospitality, or denied water (by inflicting a drought) as a punishment for denying him assistance.²⁷⁶

Water, particularly in the form of rainfall, is a common symbol in Mahayana Buddhism. The “Medicinal Herbs” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* speaks of “Dharma rain” 法雨 where the Buddhist teachings are equated with rain falling from the sky. Like actual rain, the Dharma rain falls equally and indiscriminately on everyone below, but how the rain is actually absorbed depends upon individual nature and capacity. In esoteric Buddhism, water takes on additional significance, as it is used in the *abhisekha* ceremony. In Sanskrit, *abhisekha* originally means “to sprinkle water on the head” (which is accurately reflected in the Chinese translation of 灌頂). In pre-Buddhist Indian society, kings would have water from the “four seas” sprinkled on their heads to symbolize their rule over the realm, and esoteric Buddhism incorporated this ritual into its initiation ceremonies.

Several texts written by Kūkai demonstrate his relationship with water. In 821, during Saga’s reign, Japan was afflicted by a severe drought. Saga ordered all Buddhist temples to hold special services to pray for rain, and supposedly it actually did start to rain. Kūkai composed the following poem to express his joy.²⁷⁷

哀々末世諸元々	How sad it is for those living in the Latter Age of the Law!
聾瞽不屑聖者言	Deaf and blind, they do not take the words of the sages to heart

²⁷⁶ Richard M. Dorson, *Folk Legends of Japan* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1962), 33-36.

²⁷⁷ SRS 1:4. For alternate translations, refer to Alan Grapard, “Religious Practices” in Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 537-538 and Paul Rouzer, “Early Buddhist Kanshi: Court, Country and Kūkai” in *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 59, no. 4 (Winter, 2004), 455-457.

久醉无明酒 不知本覺源	Eternally drunk on the wine of ignorance They know not the source of Original Enlightenment
長眠三界夢 永愛四蛇原 身与口心行十惡 不忠不孝罪業繁	For a long time, they have dozed in the dream of the Three Realms Eternally enamored of the field of the Four Serpents ²⁷⁸ Their bodies, mouths, and hearts commit the Ten Evil Acts ²⁷⁹ Disloyal and unfilial, their sins are rampant
撥因果 无罪福 蕩逸昏迷营口腹 生之死之笑而哭 打東打北惣是曲	Dismissing the law of cause and effect, They do not reflect on their misdeeds or good fortune Unrestrained, they pursue fleshly desires Rejoicing at birth and grieving at death For this reason, they are flogged in the east and flogged in the north ²⁸⁰
業障重 功德輕 臨河見水火還盈 仏身裏見地獄 七宝上不看玉	Their sin is heavy And their merit light Facing the river, they see water engulfed in flames ²⁸¹ They see hell within the Buddha's body, But they do not see the precious value of the Seven Treasures ²⁸²
甘沢孜孜火四起 燒之爛之稻將粟 山河焦竭禽魚死 朝野亢陽淚相続	Rain attempts to fall, but fires rage all around Rice and millet are burned to a crisp The mountains and rivers are parched, and fish and game perish Courtiers and commoners alike suffer from this drought, and their tears do not stop
我皇垂願為人出 且智且仁臨八州 三教九流一心裏 四量六度萬劫修	Our emperor emerges, extending prayers for the people And in his wisdom and benevolence surveys the Eight Islands He is the embodiment of the Three Teachings and Nine Schools And has practiced the Four Immeasurable Charitable Minds ²⁸³ and Six Measures ²⁸⁴ for ten thousand <i>kalpa</i>

²⁷⁸ These are the four elements which comprise the body: earth, water, fire and wind, which are likened to poisonous snakes.

²⁷⁹ These are: killing, stealing, licentiousness (acts of the body), slander, equivocation, lying, fanciful speech (acts of the mouth), greed, wrath, and prejudice (acts of the mind).

²⁸⁰ This means that they are reborn in the realm of birds and beasts (*chikushōdō* 畜生道) and subjected to constant torment (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 168).

²⁸¹ Hungry ghosts 餓鬼 see nothing but flames even in a pool of water. This explanation is found in the *Nirvana Sutra*, where a group of hungry ghosts tormented by thirst can only see water from afar, which further aggravates their thirst (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 498).

²⁸² The Seven Treasures 七宝 are: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, white coral, ruby, and amber. This list may vary depending on the specific scripture or sect (Nakamura, 363).

²⁸³ This appears as 四量 in the original, but this is an abbreviation of 四無量心. The “Four Immeasurable Charitable Minds” are compassion 慈, mercy 悲, joy 喜 and equanimity 捨 (Nakamura, 375).

為人引咎避樓觀	For the sake of the people he accepted Heaven's wrath and left his lofty perch
為物減食日夕憂	For the sake of sentient beings he reduced the amount he ate and grieved day and night
寺々進僧開妙法	He pressed the monks at the temples to perform Dharma ceremonies
山々馳使禱祈周	He frequently sent messengers into the mountains to say prayers
老僧誦誦微雲起	Aged monks chanted sutras and faint clouds formed
禪客持觀雨足優	Meditating monks visualized rain, which started to fall in abundance
甘露乳水醞醐油	Sweet dew, milky water and nectar flowed through the mountains and valleys
濛々漫々山谷流	
桂嶺瀑布幾溺兔	Enough water flowed from the hills of Katsura ²⁸⁵ to drown many rabbits below
禾田沃澮堪没牛	Canals in rice fields filled with enough water to cover an ox
青々草木珠莊葉	Verdant trees and grasses are adorned with jeweled leaves
浩々陂池湛如瑠	Wide expanses of brimming reservoirs glisten like lapis lazuli
農夫也莫憂早看	Farmers, lament no more!
稔瞳苗老不	Take a look, have rice stalks, both young and old, sprouted?
南畝芄々苗嫁綠	Grains are growing in fields to the south
東臯韻々謳鼓鳩	Rhythmic beats of songs and drums fill the eastern paddies
先知千箱与萬庾	I predict a thousand carts and myriad rice storehouses
如抵如京亦似丘	Will be loaded with rice, like islands, like mountains, like hills ²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ 六度 in the original. This is another term for the Six Perfections of Mahayana Buddhist practice: charity 布施, discipline/adherence to the precepts 持戒, forbearance 忍辱, diligence 精進, concentration 禪定 and insight 智慧 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 169).

²⁸⁵ Katsura 桂 is located in the western part of Kyoto. The character 桂 also refers to "laurel trees," said to grow on the Moon. There may be a poetic association with the "rabbits" in the line below, since Chinese legend claims a rabbit lives on the Moon.

²⁸⁶ This is a reference to the poem by Fu Tian 甫田 in the "Minor Odes of the Kingdom" 小雅 section of the *Book of Songs*:

曾孫之稼	The crops of the distant descendant
如茨如梁	Look [thick] as thatch, and [swelling] like a carriage cover
曾孫之庾	The stacks of the distant descendant
如坻如京	Will stand like islands and mounds
乃求千斯倉	He will seek for thousands of granaries;
乃求萬斯箱	He will seek myriads of carts.
黍稷稻粱	The millets, the paddy and the maize,
農夫之慶	Will awaken the joy of the husbandmen;
報以介福	[And they will say] 'May he be rewarded with great happiness
萬壽無疆	With myriads of years, life without end!'

(Legge, *She king*, 379).

妙矣法威不可說	How marvelous! The authority of the Dharma is beyond explanation
幸哉帝力不能籌	How fortuitous! The power of the emperor is beyond measure
一唾能銷百界火	One drop of saliva can extinguish the flames in one hundred realms ²⁸⁷
一朝能滅萬人憂	Eliminated in a moment, the sorrows of the masses

寄言六道無明客	Giving language to the unenlightened transmigrating the Six Realms
我以仏言好心通	I reach out to them with the Buddha's words
男女若能持一字	If men and women can hold One Letter ²⁸⁸
朝々一觀自心宮	Each morning they can peer into the palace of the heart

自心只是三身土	And see that their hearts are the home to the Three Bodies of the Buddha ²⁸⁹
五智莊嚴本自豐	Naturally, the Fivefold Wisdoms of the Diamond Realm ²⁹⁰ are adorned in their full glory
欲知先入灌頂法	If you wish to learn these, first receive <i>abisekha</i>
纔入便持薩捶同	As soon as you enter the Buddhist path, if you hold to these teachings, you will become a bodhisattva

天食天衣自然雨	Food and clothing will rain down from the heavens
無為无事忘帝功	The emperor rules without action, we are unaware of his merits

Kūkai does not miss the chance to turn the change in meteorological fortunes into an opportunity to offer a sermon with political overtones. He frames the drought in terms of Buddhist eschatology: that the drought is a natural occurrence in the latter age of the Buddhist Law, and that the drought is broken through the emperor's powers as a *cakravartin*. Kūkai also avoids offending the existing socio-political order by stating that the emperor is also the “embodiment of the Three Teachings” (Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism) and the “Nine Schools”

²⁸⁷ According to the *Great Cessation and Insight*, a bodhisattva can extinguish a fire that has been raging for an eternity with just a drop of saliva (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 170).

²⁸⁸ The “One Letter” 一字 is the Sanskrit letter A, which symbolizes the fundamental non-birth of all phenomena (*aji honpushō* 阿字本不生) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 170).

²⁸⁹ Generally, the Three Bodies of the Buddha 三身 are the *dharmakaya* 法身 (body of the Dharma), *sambhogakaya* 報身 (enjoyment body) and the *nirmanakaya* 応身 (manifest body) (Nakamura, 170).

²⁹⁰ The Fivefold Wisdoms of the Diamond Realm 五智 consists of: “Wisdom that Perceives the Essential Nature of the World of Dharma” 法界体性智 (represented by Mahāvairocana and located in the center of the mandala), Mirrorlike Wisdom 大円鏡智 (represented by Aksobhya 阿閼 in the east), Wisdom of Equality 平等性智 (represented by Ratnamsabhava 宝生 in the south), Wisdom of Observation 妙觀察智 (represented by Amitabha 阿弥陀 in the west) and the Wisdom of Action 成所作智 (represented by Amoghasiddhi 不空成就 in the north) (Hakeda, 83-84; Sawa, 591, 627-628).

(Confucianism, Daoism, Yin-Yang, Legalism, School of Names, Mohism, School of Diplomacy, the Miscellaneous School and the Agriculturalists).²⁹¹ Yet, after giving superficial recognition to these non-Buddhist systems of thought, Kūkai goes to the crux of his argument: the realm and its people (both commoners and aristocrats) suffer due the decline of the Buddhist Law, and their only salvation is the power of esoteric Buddhism (which is embodied in the emperor through *abhisekha* transmission). The final line of the poem “The emperor rules without action, we are unaware of his merits” 無爲无事忘帝功 conflates Daoist ideas of *wu wei* 無爲 – virtuous governance without any action on the ruler’s part – with the Buddhist one of the *cakravartin*.

The following year, in 826, Kūkai composed a stele commemorating the completion of the Masuda Reservoir in Yamato Province. One of the greatest public works projects of the early Heian period, the reservoir was created by damming the Takatori River in order to provide drought relief to farmers in the province. While the actual reservoir no longer exists, archaeological evidence indicates that it had a surface area of approximately forty hectares. As can be seen in the stele text below, the project had a troubled history: it was originally ordered by Saga, but was suspended following his abdication. Only after his successor Junna commissioned two new court nobles as project overseers was the reservoir completed. The text of Kūkai’s congratulatory stele is as follows:²⁹²

若夫。感星銀漢下灑之功深。湖水天地上潤之德普。故能。中卉因之而鬱茂。蟲卵賴之而長生。至若。八氣播植。五才陶冶。北方之行偏居其最。坎之為德。遠矣哉皇矣哉。

²⁹¹ Rouzer translates the term 九流 as “all learned wisdom,” since it referred to the earliest bibliographic division in ancient Chinese libraries (Rouzer, 456).

²⁹² SRS 2:12.

The merit showered by the Heavenly Lake²⁹³ and the Milky Way is deep. The virtues nourished by the lakes and oceans spread across the land. Therefore, the grasses are lush and verdant, and insects thrive. When the Eight Spirits²⁹⁴ bring forth plants and the Five Talents²⁹⁵ create myriad objects, the waters from the north work their best. The virtues of water – how vast, how grand!

粵。有益田池。兩尊鼻子之洲。八鳥初道之國。地是漢諳之舊宅。号則村井之故名。去弘仁十三年仲冬之月。前和州監察藤納言紀大守末等。慮亢陽之可支。歎膏腴之未開。占斯勝處奏請之。論詔既宥。

Here is Masuda Reservoir. Located in the land of the gods Izanagi and Izanami, on the islands of Hanako,²⁹⁶ in the realm where the giant crow first led Emperor Jimmu.²⁹⁷ This land is the former residence of Amazora.²⁹⁸ The former name of this area is Murai. In the winter months of the thirteenth year of Kōnin, Councilor Fujiwara, the Inspector of Izumi Province, and Lord Ki,²⁹⁹ considered ways to prevent drought, and lamented that farmland remained undeveloped. They selected this excellent site and petitioned the emperor, and their request was granted.

爰則。令藤紀二公及円律師等勦功。未幾皇帝遊駕汾。藤公從之辭職。紀守亦遷越前。今上。膺堯揖奏。馭舜寶函。照玉燭乎二儀。撫赤子於八嶋。簡伴平章事国代檢国事。並拔藤広任刺史。兩公檢按池事。於焉。青鳧引塊。数千之馬日聚。赤馬駟人。百計之夫夜集。既而。車馬轟轟而電往。

²⁹³ 感池 above is likely a scribal error for 咸池. In traditional Chinese cosmology, 咸池 is the lake where the sun bathed. It is also the constellation of five stars responsible for the Five Grains (Tōdō, 209; Imataka et al., 224).

²⁹⁴ When the Eight Spirits are in accord with the Eight Correct Principles 八正, the rains and winds are in good order. The Eight Correct Principles are the correct forms of the Eight Winds 八風 (Watanabe, and Miyasaka, 192). There are various schemes regarding the nature and direction of each of these eight winds, but each “wind” is assigned a cardinal direction, and an attribute (hot, cold, cheerful, etc.)

²⁹⁵ These are the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 192).

²⁹⁶ This is the name of the first island that Izanami and Izanagi reared (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 192).

²⁹⁷ The story of a giant crow leading Emperor Jimmu from Kumano to Yamato after he subjugated the Eastern Barbarians can be found in the *Nihon shoki* (Imataka et al., 225).

²⁹⁸ The identity of Amazora 漢諳 is unknown (Imataka et al., 225)

²⁹⁹ The identities of these two cannot be determined with absolute certainty, but the prevailing view is that Councilor Fujiwara refers to either Fujiwara no Otsugi 藤原緒嗣 or Fujiwara no Tadamori (or Mimori) 藤原三守, and Lord Ki is likely Ki no Suenari 紀末成 (Imataka et al., 225).

The emperor directed Lords Fujiwara and Ki, and Vinaya Master En³⁰⁰, among others, to commence work. Shortly thereafter, the emperor left the Imperial Palace to set out on a progress.³⁰¹ Consequently, Lords Fujiwara resigned his post, and Lord Ki was ordered to Echizen Province. Emperor Junna assumed the throne of the treasured realm that Saga graciously relinquished.³⁰² The brilliant authority of the emperor illuminates both heaven and earth, and shows its mercy to the people throughout the land. Emperor Junna selected Councilor Ōtomo no Kunimichi to oversee affairs in the province, and appointed Fujiwara no Fujihiro³⁰³ to serve as the province's governor. Lords Ōtomo and Fujiwara inspected the construction of the reservoir. Ships carried the soil away, and thousands of horses were brought daily. Carriages brought people, and hundreds of workers assembled day and night. The sound of passing carriages traveling quick as lightning reverberated. .

男女礮々而雷歸。土雰々而雪積。堤倏忽而雲騰。宛如靈神之埏埴。還疑洪鑪之化產。成也不日。畢也不年。造之人也。弁之天也。爾乃。池之為狀也。左龍寺。右鳥陵。大墓南聳。畝傍北峙。來眼精舍鎮其良。武遮荒壟押其坤。十餘大陵連綿虎踞。四面長阜灑迤龍伏。雲蕩松嶺之上。水激檜隈之下。春繡映池觀者忘歸。秋錦開林遊人不倦。

Men and women made their way there in a thunderous roar. Soil piled up like snow, and in an instant, the dykes rose up like clouds. It was as though the gods kneaded the earth with their mysterious powers, or perhaps fired it in a giant kiln. It did not take days to start construction, nor did it take years to finish. The reservoir was built by humans, but with the consent of the heavens. The reservoir took shape, with the Dragon Temple³⁰⁴ to the left and Emperor Suizei's mausoleum to the right. Graves lie to the south, and Mt. Unebi towers to the north. The Kumedera temple guards the northeast, and Emperor Senka's mausoleum is to the southwest. The mausoleums of numerous great emperors are spread out, majestic like crouching

³⁰⁰ Since the text above identifies this individual only as 円律師, there is some debate regarding his identity. Medieval commentaries suggest that it was the Hossō monk Shin'en 真円, but there is no textual basis for this assertion. Kūkai actually had a disciple named Shin'en, (same characters), so he also could be the *vinaya* master in question (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 192, 496).

³⁰¹ This refers to Emperor Saga abdicating the throne in 823.

³⁰² In Kūkai's narration above, he refers to Emperors Saga and Junna as Yao and Shun, the mythical Chinese sage emperors. Yao's abdication of the throne is regarded as a virtuous act, since he decided against bequeathing the realm to his degenerate son Danzhu, instead granting it to Shun, a capable minister.

³⁰³ Ōtomo no Kunimichi 大伴国道, Fujiwara no Fujihiro 藤原藤広 (Imataka et al., 225).

³⁰⁴ This is a reference to the Ryūgenji 竜蓋寺, which is now known as Okadera 岡寺 temple (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 193). The temple is located in the Takaichi District of Nara Prefecture, and today is affiliated with the Buzan 豊山 sect of Shingon Buddhism (Nakamura, 90).

tigers, and the broad hills surrounding the area lie in wait like a dragon. The clouds billow above the pine forested peaks, and water drips down beneath the cypress. The embroidery of spring reflects on the water's surface, and those who view it forget to return home. The autumn brocade opens itself in the forests and visitors never tire of the sight.

鴛鴦鳧鴨戲水奏歌。玄鶴黃鵠遊汀爭舞。龜鼈延頸鮒鯉掉尾。淵獺祭魚林鳥反哺。泊如。積水含天。疊山倒景。深也似海。廣也超淮。笑昆明之非儔。哂耨達之猶少。虎嘯鼓濤則驚汰浚漢。龍吟決堤則容與不飽。襄陵之罔象。不得溢其塘。焦山之女魃。不能涸其底。六群蒙潤萬澮。

Mandarin ducks and wild ducks frolic in the water, singing songs. Aged cranes and white swans with yellowish hues playfully flutter along the water's edge. Turtles stick out their necks and carp whip their tails. River otters display the fish they have caught, and crows in the forest bring food to their mothers. When the swollen waters consume the heavens, and the rows of mountains cast their reflections upon the water, the reservoir is deep like the ocean, and wider than the Huai River. I laugh, Kunming Lake is not in the same league as this one, and I sneer at the small size of the Anavatapta Lake.³⁰⁵ When tigers growl and strike the waves, billows are formed, spilling into the Milky Way. When dragons sing and breach the embankments, water flows out leisurely and inexhaustibly. Even the water spirits who ascend the hills cannot make the water overflow the embankment. The god of droughts cannot dry up the reservoir. Fields in six districts benefit from this water, and innumerable fingers of water steadily flow.

一人有慶兆民賴之。舞之蹈之。詠千箱以擊腹。手之足之。唱萬歲而忘力。歎蒼海之數變。策銘詞乎余筆。貧道不才當仁。固辭不能。課虛吐章。迺為銘曰。

When the emperor does something benevolent, the masses benefit. Their hands and feet dance with joy, and they thump their bellies in celebration of the abundant harvest. They clap their hands and stomp their feet, forgetting the fatigue of their labors. The emperor laments the vicissitudes of the world³⁰⁶ and has asked that my brush compose these commemorative words. As a lowly Buddhist monk I have no talents to speak

³⁰⁵ This is a reference to the mythical lake at the center of the Buddhist world.

³⁰⁶ The phrase 蒼海之數變 above is an adaptation of the line “[I] have already seen the pines and oaks wither away and become firewood/Moreover, I hear the mulberry fields are under the sea” 已見松柏摧為薪更聞桑田變成海 found in the poem “In Place of Grieving for the White-Haired Old Man” 代悲白頭翁 by Liu Xi-yi 劉希夷 (ca. 651-ca. 678) (Tōdō, 605, 1622).

of, yet as this is a request from the emperor I cannot decline. I follow my empty mind and churn out these words to produce the following poem:

希夷象帝 In the era before the emperor, before there was form or sound,
ノ一未明 When heaven³⁰⁷ and earth had yet to come into being,
盤古不出 Before Pangu, the creator of the universe, appeared
国常无生 When Kuninotokotachi-no-mikoto had yet to be born

元氣倏動 The primordial force began to move
葦牙乍驚 The young reeds suddenly stirred
八風扇鼓 The Eight Winds fanned and blustered
五才縱橫 The Five Agents spread out

日月運轉 The sun and the moon revolved
山河錯峙 Mountains and rivers formed
千名森羅 Trees and grasses with countless names appeared,
萬物雜起 As myriad substances congeal and rise

藤膚既隱 *Linteng* and *depibing* have already vanished³⁰⁸
稷秬爰始 The grains have started to appear
天池人池 The great ocean and this man-made lake
灑霑功似 Gush forth and quench the land

前堯後禹 Emperor Yao and Emperor Yu
慮厚恤人 Thought deeply about the people and with concern for them
智略広運 Their wise strategies were carried far and wide
慈悲且仁 Compassionate, merciful and benevolent

機事不測 Their deeds cannot be measured
成功若神 Like the gods, they performed meritorious deeds
潤物如雨 Like the rain, they replenished the things below
榮人似春 Like the spring, they allowed people to prosper

³⁰⁷ The text in the NKBT and KDKZS use a vertical line to represent “heaven.” Here, it is substituted with a katakana *no* ノ due to software limitations.

³⁰⁸ *Linteng* 林藤 and *depibing* 地皮餅 appear in *Abhidharmakosa* 俱舍論 (*Treasury of Abhidharma*). These substances were created at the beginning of the world, when people shifted from feasting on their feelings of joy to substances they could perceive with their senses. During this transition, a variety of substances appeared and disappeared, until “fragrant rice” 香稻 remained (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 497).

綸綽雷震
有司創功
紀藤薙草
果績田豐

The emperor's edict booms like thunder
A multitude of officials commence their deeds
Lords Ki and Fujiwara plowed the grass
Their accomplishments are perfect and abundant

伴相施計
原守在公
良才奇術
民具靡風

Minister Ōtomo laid out his plans
And Lord Fujiwara assumed his duties
With superb talents and marvelous skills
The commoners bow to their authority

爰有一坎
其名益田
掘之人力
成也自天

There is a reservoir here
Its name is Masuda
Dug by human power
Completed by Heaven

車馬霧聚
男女雲連
歸來似子
畢功不年

Carriages and horses gather like mists
Men and women trail like clouds
They come and go as if children
Their task completed in less than a year

深而且広
鏡徹紺色
滉漾渺瀰
瞻望罔極

Deep, yet vast
Like a mirror, the waters are clear and blue
Deep and wide, the waters are endless
The view across the reservoir is without limit

百溪之宗
萬派之職
魚鳥涵泳
虬龍斯匿

The sources of a hundred mountain streams
The master of myriad waves
Fish and fowl frolic in the water
Horned dragons seclude themselves here

畎澮汎溢
畝畚播殖
孳々我芸
穰々我穡

Irrigation ditches overflow
Newly opened rice fields are planted
We plant rice until the fields are lush and green
We harvest the crops when they have ripened

如抵如京
足兵足食
井田我事

Like islets, like the capital,
There are enough soldiers, and enough food
We dig wells and mind the fields

堯帝何力 Why would we need Emperor Yao's strength?

The ideological thrust of this stele and its accompanying poem is a significant departure. In the earlier poem on rainmaking, Kūkai framed the returning rains and its beneficence in terms of Buddhist eschatology and merit-seeking, and even stated that in a realm where the Buddhist teachings are followed the emperor could rule through inaction. In contrast to this depiction of a Buddhist utopia, the monument to Masuda Reservoir is nothing less than a celebration of the Japanese state. First, Kūkai acknowledges that the land where the reservoir was dredged was “in the land of Izanagi and Izanami, on the island of Hanako, in the realm that the great crow first led Emperor Jinmu.” This is perhaps the only time Kūkai makes a direct reference to traditional Japanese mythology in his writings.³⁰⁹ The sense that the reservoir was constructed on sacred ground is heightened by references to the numerous imperial mausoleums which dot the surrounding area.

There is also an obvious sense of nationalistic pride in this proclamation. Kūkai claims that the width of the reservoir exceeds that of the Huai River, and that the Kunming Lake is “not in the same league.” Ironically, Kūkai is absolutely correct: the actual Kunming Lake, in Yunnan Province, has a surface area of 29,800 hectares (298 km² or 115 mi²) compared to Masuda Reservoir's mere 40 hectares.³¹⁰ The Huai River, known as one of China's Seven Great Rivers, has a length of 1,078 km (670 mi), and is almost 10 km (6 mi) across at one point. Geographical facts notwithstanding, Kūkai's grandiose statements indicate confidence in Japanese engineering, and in the power and prestige of the Japanese state and imperial line. In sharp contrast to Kūkai's

³⁰⁹ Hagiographies and legends on Kūkai often mention that he obtained the blessing of Niutsumenomikoto, the guardian goddess of Mt. Kōya, before asking Saga for permission to build a monastic training center there. However, in the petition where Kūkai asks the emperor to bequeath the mountain to him (presented below), there are no references to Niutsumenomikoto, or any other indigenous deity.

³¹⁰ This Kunming Lake should not be confused with the one on the grounds of the Summer Palace in Beijing. The lake at the palace was inspired by the actual Kunming Lake, but it was not built until the eighteenth century.

earlier poem, the emperor, his ministers, and the people appear in control of nature, as seen in Kūkai’s declaration, “When dragons sing and breach the embankments, water flows out slowly. Even the water spirits who ascend the hills cannot make the water flow over the embankment. The god of drought cannot dry up the reservoir.”

These two poems demonstrate Kūkai’s understanding of water in both its spiritual and practical aspects. In the first poem, he celebrates the return of the rainfall in purely Buddhist terms; it is a form of *abisekha* inducting the parched earth and its unenlightened masses into the Buddhist path. The decadence of the masses caused the drought, but it was broken by the emperor’s sage rule (in both the Buddhist and Daoist senses) and the clergy’s diligent prayers. The stele for the Masuda Reservoir, on the other hand, is a monument to human engineering and diligence, built within sacred space.

The Aesthetics and Politics of Kūkai’s Mountains

Mountains are prominent in the Buddhist landscape. Mt. Sumeru was believed to be the center of the Buddhist universe, and Vulture Peak was supposedly the site of Shakyamuni Buddha’s many sermons. After making the arduous trek across Central Asia into China, Buddhism found its home among the great mountains of China. Undoubtedly, to the ardent Buddhist practitioner, mountains represented the ideal site for spiritual and philosophical lucubration – they were remote, quiet, and nakedly natural, and sufficiently distant from interference by the authorities. Indeed, as seen from the inclusion of the word for “mountain” 山 in their names, temples are likened to mountain retreats even if they are located in the dead center of a bustling metropolis like Tokyo.

A sagely mountain tradition developed in Chinese literature. The Chinese character for sage 仙 is a combination of the characters for “person” 人 and “mountain” 山, a reflection of the

sage's traditional haunts. Eremitic life atop mountains and dialogues with sagely recluses were a frequent topic in Tang poetry. Paul Rouzer observes that these poems initially criticized hermits for their anti-social lifestyles, but assumed an appreciative stance by the late third century.³¹¹ He presents “In the Mountains: A Reply to the Vulgar” 山中問俗人 by Li Bai 李白 as an exemplar:³¹²

They ask me where's the sense on jasper mountains	問余何意棲碧山
I laugh and don't reply in my heart's own quiet	笑而不答心自閑
Peach petals float their streams away in secret	桃花流水窅然去
To other skies and earths than those of mortals	別有天地非人間

In this poem, a man approaches a sage and inquires about his reclusive life. He replies that atop the mountain he enjoys nature in its untamed aspect and his mind is in a state of equanimity. Although Western romanticism may interpret this poem as a celebration of a simple life amidst nature, it can also be read as a direct challenge to state authority. By declaring “To other skies and earths than those of mortals,” the sage alludes to knowledge of realms beyond the state's control.

The poetics of Kūkai's mountains can be understood as a confluence of traditional Buddhist, Chinese and Japanese sensibilities. In Kūkai's writings, mountains serve as sites of ascetic training, aesthetic refinement, and spiritual development, as well as tools to challenge

³¹¹ Rouzer, 450.

³¹² Translation by Arthur Cooper. Some collections present this poem under the title “Mid-Mountain Dialogue” 山中問答. Takebe Toshio, ed., *Ri Haku (jō)*, in Yoshikawa Kōjirō, et al., eds. *Chūgoku shijin senshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957), 46; Arthur Cooper, trans. and ed., *Li Po and Tu Fu* (London, Penguin Books: 1973), 115.

Rouzer presents his own translation:

You ask what I have in mind,
that I roost in jade-green hills
I laugh and don't reply –
but my heart is naturally at ease.
Peach blossoms and flowing waters
go off into the distance,
And this is some other universe,
not the realm of men.
(Rouzer, 450).

political orthodoxy. The opening paragraph to the *Sangō shiiki* states, “I climbed Mt. Tairyū in Awa Province and devoted myself to meditation on Cape Muroto” 躋攀阿波国大瀧嶽勤念土州室戸崎.³¹³ The mountains in Kūkai’s earlier works are devoid of any artifice – they are literally just tall mounds of earth that he happened to meditate upon or amble through amidst his spiritual pursuits. It is not until his return from China that his mountains become mystic, fantastic, politicized (or depoliticized) spaces.

Kūkai’s apparent unwillingness to take part in court affairs was the subject of more than one poetic exchange. Although fellow poets like as Yasuyo used poetic exchanges as a way to rebuke him for his aloofness, he stood firm, expounding on the ephemerality of court life.³¹⁴

問師何意入深寒
深嶽崎嶇太不安
上也苦下時難
山神木魅是為窟

You ask why I venture into the deep cold
The tall peaks and steep paths are extremely perilous
Ascent is treacherous and descent is difficult
Mountain ghosts and tree spirits make this place their home

君不見君不見
京城御苑桃李紅
灼々芬々顏色同
一開雨一散風
飄上飄落園中
春女群来一手折
春鶯翔集啄飛空

O, have you not seen, have you not seen?
The crimson red of the peach and plum blossoms in the palace garden
Dazzling, fragrant blossoms all the same color –
They open in the rain and disperse in the wind
Flying high, flying low, they scatter throughout the garden
Spring maidens gather and pick them up
Spring warblers take them in their beaks and soar into the sky

君不見君不見
王城城裏神泉水
一沸一流速相似
前沸後流幾許千
流之流之入深淵
入深淵轉々去
何日何時更竭哉

O, have you not seen, have you not seen?
The waters of the sacred spring behind the palace
The speed at which the water wells up and flows away is the same
How many thousands of times did the water well up just to flow away later?
Flowing away, flowing away, it enters the deep abyss
Entering the deep abyss, it is transformed and then departs
On what day, in what hour, will this all dry up?

³¹³ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 85.

³¹⁴ SRS 1:6. For other translations, see Hakeda, 50-51 and Rouzer, 450-452.

君不見君不見	O, have you not seen, have you not seen?
九州八嶋无量人	The countless numbers of people who have lived
自古今来无常身	In the Nine Provinces of China and the Eight Islands of Japan?
堯舜禹湯與桀紂	From ancient times their bodies have been ephemeral.
八元十乱將五臣	The emperors Yao, Shun, Yu, Cheng Tang, Jie and Zhou, the Eight Noble Ones, ³¹⁵ the Ten Ministers ³¹⁶ and the Five Retainers ³¹⁷
西嬙嫫母支離體	Renowned beauties such as Xi Shi and Wang Qiang are now as ugly as Mo Mu. ³¹⁸
誰能保得萬年春	Who can preserve spring for ten thousand years?
貴人賤人惣死去	The wealthy and poor all die and leave this world
貴人賤人作灰塵	The wealthy and the poor turn to ashes and dust
歌堂舞閣野狐里	The singing halls and dancing pavilions are now dens for wild foxes
如夢如泡電影賓	Like a dream, like foam ³¹⁹ – death is a guest that visits like a flash of lightning
君知不君知不	Do you not know, do you not know?
人如此汝何長	Such is man – how can you have long life?
朝夕思々堪断腸	Thinking about this day and night is enough to wrench one's insides
汝日西山半死士	Your sun has set in the western mountains and you are half dead
汝年過半若尸起	Your years are more than half over and you are like an awake corpse
住也住也一无益	Remaining, remaining – what point is there?
行矣行矣不須止	Away I go, away I go –
去来去来大空師	The master of the Great Void cannot stay
莫住莫住乳海子	The child of the Buddha cannot remain
南山松石看不厭	I never tire of gazing at the pines on the southern mountain
南嶽清流憐不已	The clear streams on the southern mount never cease to fill me with awe
莫慢浮華名利毒	Do not take pride in the poison of fleeting fortune and fame!
莫燒三界火宅裏	Do not be scorched in the burning house of the Triple World
斗藪早入法身里	Renounce the dust of the world and enter the realm of the Dharma-body ³²⁰

³¹⁵ The Eight Noble Ones were Bo Fen 伯奮, Zhong Kan 仲堪, Shu Xian 叔獻, Ji Zhong 季仲, Bo Hu 伯虎, Zhong Xiong 仲熊, Shu Bao 叔豹, Ji Li 季狸 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 172).

³¹⁶ The Ten Ministers 十乱 were the ten loyal ministers of King Wu of Zhou 周武王: Zhou Gong-dan 周公旦 (The Duke of Zhao), Zhao Gong-shi 召公奭 (The Duke of Shao), Tai Gong-wang 太公望 (also known as Jiang Ziya 薑子牙), Bi Gong 畢公 (Duke Bi), Rong Gong 榮公 (Duke Rong), Tai Dian 太顛, Hong Yao 閎夭, San Yi-sheng 散宜生, Nan Gong-shi 南宮適 and Yi Jiang 邑姜 (Watanabe and Miyasaka 179). A reference to the Ten Ministers as a category (not by individual name) can be found in the Tai Bo 泰伯 chapter of the *Analects*: “Shun had five officials and the Empire was well-governed. King Wu said, ‘I have ten capable officials.’ 舜有臣五人而天下治武王曰予有亂臣十人 (Imataka et al., 188; Lau, 95; Kanaya, 93).

³¹⁷ These were the five retainers of Emperor Shun: Yu 禹, Ji 稷, Qi 契, Gao Tao 皋陶, and Bo Yi 伯益 (Imataka et al., 188.).

³¹⁸ Details provided in the discussion below.

³¹⁹ This phrasing is found in the *Diamond Sutra* (Imataka et al, 173).

³²⁰ An alternative translation can be found in Hakeda, 51.

Kūkai reveals the ephemeral qualities of the trappings of refined court life – peach and plum blossoms, the birds, and the flowing water at Shinsen'en. Even the great sage-emperors of ancient China are shown as mere mortals no longer in this world. This is a departure from Kūkai's use of Chinese legends in his other writings, where he often invoked the names of legendary emperors like Yao and Shun to extol the virtues of the Japanese emperor. Also, his description of the waters at Shinsen'en is a carefully couched critique of the seemingly eternal and omnipotent nature of imperial power. The water ceaselessly flowing from Shinsen'en's spring is depicted in a manner that anticipates the opening lines to the *Hōjōki* 方丈記 (*An Account of My Hut*, 1212), but it is more than just a declaration of the impermanent nature of things. Since the Shinsen'en is part of the imperial palace, and the flowing waters are seen as emblematic of the emperor's virtue, Kūkai is indirectly declaring that the imperial institution itself is impermanent. In Chinese historiography, righteous kingship is linked to the Mandate of Heaven, so questioning the permanency of an imperial dynasty is not unheard of, but in Japan, where the imperial household has been constructed as an unbroken lineage initiated by the gods, anything remotely hinting that imperial institutions may be impermanent could have serious political ramifications.

Kūkai also invokes images of Xi Shi 西施 (506 BCE-?) and Wang Qiang 王嬙 (206 BCE–8 CE), who were revered as two of the Four Great Beauties of ancient China, and turns them on their head by holding them in the same regard as Mo Mu 嫫母, one of the concubines of the legendary Yellow Emperor. Although Mo Mu was considered to be very ugly, the Chinese tradition holds her in high regard because she was a virtuous woman, thus earning the Yellow Emperor's respect and admiration. In this poem, Kūkai plays upon their historical associations to maximize the rhetorical effect. . When in the mountains, or writing about the mountains, Kūkai

adheres to an egalitarian spirit not seen elsewhere in his writings. He concludes by informing his friend that he is already “half dead” and “like a living corpse.” The political machinations and aesthetic indulgences of the capital are merely fleeting phenomena, and it is only in the mountains where Kūkai can find the tranquility he seeks. His use of the *yue fu* 樂賦 (ballad) genre may also be read as an act of resistance: Kūkai could claim independence and authority by breaking with the court *shi* tradition and recasting the emperor along his own ideological lines.³²¹

Mountain poems were not just a political or aesthetic exercise for Kūkai. True to his Buddhist predilections, and the prevailing ideology of statecraftism at the court, he also used poetry for pedagogical purposes. In the poem below, which he entitled “Wandering Through the Mountains Longing for the Sage” 遊山慕仙詩, Kūkai borrows the Chinese genre known as the “roaming into transcendency poem” (*you xian shi* 遊仙詩) but adapts it for didactic purposes.³²²

五百三十言成。勒五十三字惣用陽韻。

Composed of 530 words, with fifty-three characters at the end of each couplet all rhyming with the character for *yang*.³²³

昔。何生郭氏。賦志遊仙。格律高奇。藻鳳宏逸。然而。空談牛躅。未說大方。余披閱之次見斯篇章吟詠再三。惜義理之未盡。遂乃。抽筆染素指大仙之窟房。兼悲煩擾於俗塵。比无常於景物。何必神龜照心一足也。大仙円智略有五十三焉鑿機応物其数不少。今之勒韻意在此乎。一覽才子。庶遣文取義。云爾。

Long ago, Mr. He³²⁴ and Mr. Guo³²⁵ devoted their energy to composing *you xian* poetry. These poems, which are marvelous in form and rhyme, are vibrant and unsurpassed. However, these poems pointlessly speak of matters as insignificant as water trapped in an indentation left by the hoof-print of an ox,³²⁶ and

³²¹ Rouzer, 455.

³²² SRS 1:1.

³²³ The rhyming characters are at the end of each couplet, and presented in boldface type.

³²⁴ This refers to He Shao 何紹 (236-?). One of his *you xian* poems is included in the *Wenxuan* (Imataka et al., 182).

³²⁵ This refers to Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324), another poet who wrote in the *you xian* genre. Eight of the fourteen *you xian* poems he wrote in his lifetime are included in the *Wenxuan* (Imataka et al., 182).

³²⁶ This phrase appears in the *Xin lun* 新論 by Huan Tan 桓譚 of the Later Han: “A puddle in a hoof’s track does not give birth to fish” (Imataka et al., 182).

they have yet to expound on the Great Way. As I open up these poems and read them, I look upon these verses. Though I recite them three times, I bemoan that they do not fully propound the Way. For this reason, I select a brush and put it to paper while pointing to the meditation cave of the Great Sage. I take pity upon the suffering in the world of dust and compare it to a scene of impermanence. Why would just one method suffice to illuminate the mind of a sacred turtle?³²⁷ The perfect wisdoms of the Great Sage are roughly fifty-three in number;³²⁸ when individual capacity and circumstance are taken into account, these vastly increase. Herein lies my intent in arranging the rhyme in this poem. Readers with talent are asked to put aside literary issues and take in the meaning of this poem.

高山風易興	On tall peaks, the wind is easily aroused
深海水難量	In deep seas, water is difficult to measure
空際無人察	The sky's limit cannot be gauged by man
法身獨能詳	Only the Dharmakaya can fathom such matters
鳧鶴誰非理	Duck and crane – is either unnatural in form? ³²⁹
螳龜詎巨擘	Ant and tortoise – are they hard to discern?
葉公珍假借	Duke Ye valued mere replicas ³³⁰
秦鏡照真相	While the mirror of Qin ³³¹ illuminated the truth
鷓目唯看腐	The eye of the crow sees only decay ³³²

³²⁷ Although the “sacred turtle” 神龜 appears in the *Zhuang zi*, the meaning of this statement is unclear (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 158).

³²⁸ The significance of this number may be based on the episode in the *Flower Garland Sutra* where Sudhanakumara visited fifty-three sages (Imataka et al., 182), or the thirty-seven buddhas from the Diamond Realm mandala plus the sixteen bodhisattvas of the Present Age 賢劫十六尊 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 158). Also, the number fifty-three coincides with the rhyming scheme of the poem.

³²⁹ This is a reference to the “Joined Toes” 駢拇 chapter of the *Zhuang zi*: “He who would attain to such perfection never loses sight of the natural conditions of his existence. With him the joined is not united, nor the separated apart, nor the long in excess, nor the short wanting. For just as a duck’s legs, though short, cannot be lengthened without pain to the duck, and a crane’s legs, though long, cannot be shorted without misery to the crane, so that which is long in man’s mortal nature cannot be cut off, nor that which is short be lengthened. All sorrow is thus avoided.” (Giles, 93).

³³⁰ Duke Ye was fond of dragons and adorned his residence with paintings of them. A real dragon heard of this and decided to take a look. When he peeked his head through a window and let his tail into the room, Duke Ye fled in panic. This anecdote can be found in the *New Prefaces* 新序 by Liu Xiang 劉向 (Imataka et al., 182).

³³¹ This mirror was used by the first emperor of the Qin 秦, and was supposedly able to detect the evil designs of women and diseases in others (Imataka et al., 182).

³³² Metaphors of this type are found in the *Zhuangzi*: “Owls and crows feed on mice” 鷓鴣耆鼠 鷓鴣耆鼠 and “An owl which had gotten the rotten carcass of a rat, looked up as the phoenix flew by, and screeched” 於是鷓得腐鼠鵂鵂過之仰而視之曰嚇 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 159; Giles, 43, 171).

狗心耽穢香	The heart of the dog is inebriated by the odor of filth ³³³
人皆美蘇合 愛縛以蜚螻	All people enjoy the Su Blend fragrance ³³⁴ Their love resembles that of a beetle for dung
仁恤麒麟異 迷方以犬羊	Benevolence and compassion differ from the <i>qilin</i> ³³⁵ Those who have lost their way resemble dogs and sheep
能言若鸚鵡 如說避賢良	The loquacious are like parrots ³³⁶ Their words are far removed from true wisdom and goodness
豺狼逐麋鹿 狻猊嚼麋麋	Mountain dogs and badgers pursue tame deer Lions devour deer large and small
睚眦能寒暑 劇談受痠瘡	Fury can survive heat and cold Those who exchange harsh words receive wounds and scars
營營染白黑	Buzzing about mixes black and white ³³⁷

³³³ This is an adaptation of a line in the *Zuochan sanmei jing* 坐禪三昧經 (*The Sutra on the Concentration of Sitting Meditation*): “It is like a dog eating excrement and saying that it is pure” 如狗食糞謂之爲淨 (T 614: 272a01) (Imataka et al., 182).

³³⁴ This is the name of a fragrance transmitted to China from somewhere in the western regions. There are two claims regarding its composition: one is that it is a mixture of various fragrances, the other is that it is a mixture of animal excrement (Imataka et al., 182).

³³⁵ According to the *Shou wen jie zi* 說文解辭, the oldest known dictionary of Chinese characters, the *qilin* is regarded as a benevolent animal, and appears when there is benevolent rule (Imataka, et al., 182)

³³⁶ This is a reference to the *Book of Rites*: “A parrot may speak, but it still a bird nonetheless” 鸚鵡能言不離飛鳥 (Imataka et al., 182-183).

³³⁷ The meaning of this line is that the delusional confuse good and evil. White is soiled and becomes black, and black is soiled and becomes white (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 160). The phrase “buzz about” 營營 comes from the following poem in the *Book of Songs*:

營營青蠅	They buzz about, the blue flies
止于樊	Lighting on the fences.
豈弟君子	O happy and courteous sovereign,
無信讒言	Do not believe slanderous speeches.

營營青蠅	They buzz about, the blue flies,
止于棘	Lighting on the jujube trees.
讒人罔機	The slanderers observe no limits,
交亂四國	And throw the whole kingdom into confusion.

營營青蠅	They buzz about, the blue flies,
止于榛	Lighting on the hazel trees.
讒人罔機	The slanderers observe no limits,
構我二人	And set us two at variance.

(Legge, *The She King*, 394-395)

讚毀織災殃	Praise and condemnation weave calamity
肚裏蜂蠆滿 身上虎豹莊	The depths of the heart brim with wasps and scorpions Over the body hover tigers and leopards
能銷金与石 誰顧戒剛強	Words can pulverize gold and stone ³³⁸ Yet who will reflect and admonish the mighty and strong?
蒿蓬聚墟壠 蘭蕙鬱山陽	Mugwort clusters on ruins and hillocks Orchids cover the southern slopes
季舒如矢運 四節令人僵	The days advance, swift as arrows The four seasons bring about the death of man
柳葉開春雨 菊花索秋霜	Willow leaves open in the spring rain Chrysanthemum blossoms wither in the autumn frost
窮蟬鳴野外 蟋蟀帳中傷	Spent cicadas cry out in the fields Crickets behind curtains lament
松柏摧南嶽 北邙散白楊	Pine and cypress wither on the southern peak ³³⁹ Atop Bei Mang white willows scatter ³⁴⁰
一身独生没 電影是无常	Man is born alone, and dies alone ³⁴¹ A flash of lightning: this is impermanence
鴻鷺更來去 紅桃落昔芳	Geese and swallows incessantly come and go Red peach blossoms scatter with the fragrance of the past
華容偷年賊 鶴髮不禎祥	Flowery beauty is stolen by the thief called time White hair is not an auspicious sign
古人今不見 今人那得長	People of old are no longer visible Why do people of the present seek longevity?

³³⁸ This is based on a similar line in the “Discourses of Zhou” 周語 chapter in the *Guo yu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*) (Imataka et al., 183).

³³⁹ This signifies that even something which is supposedly unchanging, like evergreen pines and cypresses, eventually die. This line is based on one in the *Gu shi shi jiu shou* 古詩十九首 (Nineteen Old Poems): “Pines and cypresses wither away and become firewood” 松柏摧為薪 (Imataka et al., 183; Tōdō, 591).

³⁴⁰ The “pines and oaks” in the line above and the white willows in this one are all trees found in graveyards. Bei Mang was the name of a graveyard located to the northeast of Loyang 洛陽 (Imataka et al., 183).

³⁴¹ Similar lines can be found in the *Sutra of Infinite Life* 無量壽經 and the *Zhuang zi*. The sutra reads: “Born along, dies alone, goes alone, comes alone” 独生独死独去独来 (T. 360: 274c24-25). According to the *Zhuangzi*: “going alone and coming alone” 獨往獨來 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 160).

避熱風巖上	I escape the heat atop the wind-swept crag
逐涼瀑飛漿	I pursue coolness in the waterfall's mists
狂歌薜蘿服	Wearing robes made from creeping vines, I sing like a madman
今醉松石房	Drunk with song in my home made of pine needles and rocks
渴飲澗中水	When thirsty, I sip valley water
飽喫煙霧糧	When hungry, I quaff mountain mist
白朮調心胃	<i>Baizhu</i> regulates my heart and stomach
黃精填骨肪	<i>Huangjing</i> nourishes my bones and flesh. ³⁴²
錦霞爛山幄	Brocades of morning mist shimmer against the hills
雲幕滿天帳	Curtains of cloud drape across the sky
子晉凌漢攀	Prince Jin ³⁴³ parted the clouds as he ascended the heavens
伯夷絕周梁	Prince Boyi denied himself millet from the Zhou ³⁴⁴
老聃守一氣	Lao-tsu preserves Primordial Force
許脫貫三望	Xu You ³⁴⁵ disregarded the wishes of the king
鸞鳳梧桐集	The phoenix roosts in the paulownia tree
大鵬伏風床	The roc ³⁴⁶ makes the wind its bed
崑嶽右方廡	Mt. Kunlun makes its home in the west
蓬萊左辺廡	Mt. Penglai makes its home in the east
名賓害心実	Name is secondary, it defiles the reality of the mind ³⁴⁷

³⁴² In addition to their medicinal properties, both *baizhu* 白朮 (*rhizoma atractylodis macrocephalae*) and *huangjing* 黃精 (*rhizoma polygonati*) were believed to increase longevity (Imataka et al. 183). These medicines are still used today in traditional Chinese medicine; *baizhu* for gastrointestinal ailments, and *huangjing* to alleviate fatigue and to tonify the kidneys.

³⁴³ He was the son of King Ling of Zhou, and enjoyed playing the *sheng* 笙 (panpipes). His encounter with the sage Fu Qiu-gong 浮丘公, inspired him to seclude himself on a mountain. After thirty years, he turned into a white crane and ascended into the heavens (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 161; Imataka et al., 183).

³⁴⁴ Bo Yi and his younger brother Shu Qi 叔齊 remained loyal to the Shang 商 even after it fell to the Zhou 周. In protest, they refused to eat Zhou millet and fled to Mt. Shouyang 首陽山, where they stoically subsisted on mountain ferns until they starved to death. Later generations upheld the brothers as exemplars of virtue, featuring them in numerous paintings and poems (Imataka et al., 183; Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 80.

³⁴⁵ Xu You 許由 was a virtuous hermit who was offered the throne by Emperor Yao, but declined (Imataka et al., 183). This episode can be found in the "Transcendental Bliss" 逍遙 chapter of the *Zhuang zi* (Giles, 30).

³⁴⁶ The roc 大鵬 is a mythical bird of prey that appears in the *Zhuang zi*. According to legend, a giant fish of immeasurable proportions transformed itself into a bird (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 161, 493).

忽駕飛龍翔	So I mount a flying dragon and soar into the heavens
飛龍何處遊	Where will the flying dragon go?
寥廓無塵方	It will fly in a direction that is wide and unsullied
無塵寶珠閣	Non-defilement is a jeweled palace
堅固金剛牆	Surrounded by an unbreakable adamantine wall
眷屬猶如雨	With his attendants following like rain,
遮那坐中央	Mahāvairocana is in the center
遮那阿誰号	Whose name is Mahāvairocana?
本是我心王	Fundamentally he is our King of Mind
三密遍刹土	The Three Mysteries spread throughout the realm
虛空巖道場	The skies adorn our training hall
山毫点溟墨	Mountains become brushes and dip themselves into the inkwell of the seas
乾坤經籍箱	Heaven and Earth are a sutra repository
萬象含一点	The entire universe is contained in the One Point ³⁴⁸
六塵閱縑緇	The Six Defilements ³⁴⁹ can all be found in books
行藏任鐘谷	Moving forward and stepping aside ³⁵⁰ are like the echo of a bell in a valley
吐納挫鋒鋦	Speech is sharp enough to shatter the tip of a sword
三千隘行步	The three thousand-fold universe is too narrow to walk
江梅少一嘗	The rivers and seas are small enough to be drunk in one sip
壽命无始終	Life has no beginning or end
降年豈限壘	How can life have a limit?

³⁴⁷ This is also found in the section of the *Zhuang zi* where Xu You declines the throne. After being offered the throne, Xu You declined, saying: “Supposing, therefore, if I were to take your place now, should I gain any reputation thereby? Besides, reputation is but the shadow of reality; and should I trouble myself about the shadow?” 我猶代子吾將為名乎名者實之賓也吾將為賓乎 (Giles, 30).

³⁴⁸ “One Point” 一点 refers to the Sanskrit letter *M*, which is represented as a dot (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 162). In the *Unjigi* 卍字義 (*The Meaning of the Word Hum*), Kūkai explains the character’s significance as follows: “Indeed, the great Self is one, yet can be many. It is small, yet contains that which is large. Thus, interpenetration of many in one and one in many is the ultimate meaning of the letter *M*” (Hakeda, 258).

³⁴⁹ These “defilements” are the objects of attachment which affect the six senses: form, sound, scent, taste, touch and the mind (Nakamura, 847).

³⁵⁰ This is found in the *Analec*s: “The Master said to Yen Yuan, ‘Only you and I have the ability to go forward when employed and to stay out of sight when set aside’” 子謂顏淵曰用之則行舍之則藏唯我與爾有是夫 (Imataka et al., 184; Lau, 87; Kanaya, 93).

光明滿法界 一字務津梁	Brilliant light fills the Dharma Realm The One Letter is a bridge to the other shore
景行猶仰止 思齋自束裝	Revere this profound truth! Pray for equality and prepare yourself
飛雲幾生滅 靄々空飛揚	Floating clouds form and dissipate Trailing clouds rise up idly
纏愛如葛施 萋々山谷昌	Fierce desire is like being overrun by vines Covering the mountains and valleys
誰如閉禪室 澹泊亦徬徨	What could be better than cloistering oneself In a meditation chamber and roaming the Buddhist path?
日月光空水 風塵无所妨	The sun and the moon shine in the skies and on the waters The wind and the dust provide no obstruction
是非同說法 人我俱消亡	Good and evil both preach the Dharma Self and Other are both obliterated
定惠澄心海 无緣每湯々	Meditative wisdom brings clarity to the sea of the mind Compassion spreads forth without limit
老鷄同黑色 玉鼠号相防	Aged crows are all black Though they have the same name, their differences are like rats and jade ³⁵¹
人心非我意 何得見人腸	As my mind differs from those of others How can I see into their hearts?
難角无天眼 抽示一文章	Still mired in practice, I lack clairvoyance But nonetheless humbly record this composition

In the preface, Kūkai criticizes the attitudes expressed in *you xian shi* poems. . He acknowledges that the *you xian shi* genre of poetry is “marvelous in form and rhyme” and “vibrant and unsurpassed.” Yet, his evaluation of the actual poetry is rather harsh, claiming that “these poems pointlessly speak of matters as insignificant as water trapped in an indentation left by the hoof-

³⁵¹ According to the *Book of the Later Han*, a man from Zheng 鄭 sold a *pu* 璞, to a man from Zhou. The man from Zhou thought that he was getting a piece of unpolished jade, only to find out that in Zheng, *pu* referred to a dried rat (Imataka et al., 184).

print of an ox, and they have yet to expound on the Great Way.” In effect, Kūkai appropriates a genre generally associated with the Daoist immortal tradition and turns it against itself in order to assert the superiority of Esoteric Buddhism.

As with the *yue fu* rhapsody above, Kūkai again demonstrates his literary independence by utilizing a Chinese poetic genre uncommon in Japan, as Kūkai’s *you xian* poem is likely the only extant composition by a Japanese poet. While the genre was well-established in China, only fourteen complete compositions remain.³⁵² Although Japanese poets did not create their own *you xian shi*, they likely had some familiarity with them since eight examples are grouped together in the *Wenxuan* as an independent category. One is by He Shao, and the other seven are by Guo Pu (the “Mr. He” and “Mr. Guo” mentioned in Kūkai’s *you xian shi* preface), both of the Jin dynasty (265-420). That Kūkai transformed this genre to serve an esoteric Buddhist agenda is evident when his *you xian* poem above is compared to the eight examples from the *Wenxuan*. He Shao’s verse:

青青陵上松	Pines on verdant slopes
亭帝高山柏	Cypress on towering peaks
光色冬夏茂	Brilliant hues, lush in winter and summer
根柢無凋落	At their roots, no fallen leaves
吉士懷貞心	The gentleman has a chaste heart
悟物思遠託	Enlightened by this sight, he wishes to be far from the world
揚志玄雲際	Lifting his ambitions high into the clouds
流目矚巖石	Moving his eyes, gazing at the rocks
羨昔王子喬	Envyng Wang Ziqiao ³⁵³ of antiquity

³⁵² Robert Joe Cutter, “Poetry from 200 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 264.

³⁵³ According to the *Lie xian chuan* 列仙傳 (*Biographies of Transcendents*), Wang Ziqiao was the son of King Ling 靈王 of Zhou 周 and a prince. He often played the panpipes and imitated the call of the phoenix. When he visited the area between the Yi and Lou rivers, he encountered Fu Qiugong, a sage. He then spent over thirty years atop Mt.

友道發伊洛	Befriending a sage, he departs from the Yi and Lou rivers
迢遞陵峻岳	Crossing steep mountains yonder
連翩御飛鶴	Riding a crane soaring through the skies
抗跡遺萬里	Raising the remains, forgetting ten thousand <i>li</i>
豈戀生民樂	How can he love the pleasures of common folk?
長懷慕仙類	Long desiring to seek out the Sage,
眇然心縣邈	His heart spreads wide and far

The next seven are by Guo Pu. His *you xian shi* compositions are characterized by “their discontent with conventional society and their desire to escape from it,” rather than a “quest for immortality:”³⁵⁴

1. 京華遊俠窟	Dazzling capitals are dens for playboys
山林隱遯棲	Mountain forests are haunts for recluses
朱門何足榮	However much glory exists within the vermilion gates,
未若託蓬萊	Nothing compares to life in the wilderness of tall grasses
臨源挹清波	Gazing upon the river source, scooping pure ripples
陵崗掇丹萸	Climbing hills, plucking cinnabar blossoms
靈谿可潛盤	Mystic valleys ought to be enjoyed secretly
安事登雲梯	Why would one climb a ladder of clouds?
漆園有傲吏	The Lacquer Garden has haughty officials
萊氏有逸妻	Mr. Lai ³⁵⁵ has an outstanding wife
進則保龍見	Moving forward, one maintains dragon-sight
退爲觸藩羝	Going backward, one becomes like a sheep that has rammed a wall
高蹈風塵外	Taking a big step outside the world of wind and dust
長揖謝夷齊	Clasping my hands in greeting, I bow to Prince Boyi and Shu Qi

Chonggao 崇高山 (Uchida Sennnosuke and Ami Yūji, *Monzen (shihen) jō*, in *Shinshaku kanbun taikai*, vol. 14, (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1963), 154).

³⁵⁴ David R. Knechtges, trans., *Wen Xuan: Or Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 37.

³⁵⁵ Mr. Lai’s wife was “excellent” because she stopped him from accepting an official posting (Uchida and Ami, 146).

2. 青谿千餘仞 Qing Valley, over one thousand *ren*³⁵⁶ deep
 中有一道士 Within it resides a Sage
- 雲生梁棟間 Clouds form between the rafters of his home
 風出窓戶裏 Winds blow from the back window
- 借問此何誰 I ask: who is this person?
 云是鬼谷子 They say he is Gui Guzi³⁵⁷
- 翹迹企潁陽 Lifting his feet, he looks to the north side of the Ying River
 臨河思洗耳 Gazing upon the river, he wishes to wash out his ears
- 閶闔西南來 Southwesterly winds blow
 潛波渙鱗起 Gentle waves form a fish-scale pattern
- 靈妃顧我笑 The Divine Concubine looks back and laughs at him
 粲然啓玉齒 Showing her teeth, glimmering like jade
- 蹇脩時不存 A matchmaker like Jian Xiu³⁵⁸ no longer exists
 要之將誰使 Who shall he send to arrange marriage to her?
3. 翡翠戲蘭苕 Kingfishers frolic in the orchids
 容色更相鮮 Vibrant colors enhance one another
- 綠蘿結高林 Creeping vines entwine towering forests
 蒙龍蓋一山 Covering entire mountains with luxuriant verdure
- 中有冥寂士 Here resides a gentleman in reticent solitude
 靜嘯撫清絃 Whistling softly, he strums pure tones
- 放情陵霄外 Liberating his passions, he ascends to the heavens
 嚼藥搗飛泉 Masticating medicinal grasses, scooping mist

³⁵⁶ During the Zhou Dynasty, a *ren* 仞 was a unit of height/depth equal to 1.57 meters (Tōdō, 47). Therefore, “over one thousand *ren* deep” would be at least 1,570 meters, but another possibility is the measurement was used hyperbolically to refer to an immeasurable depth.

³⁵⁷ Gui Guzi was a sage who lived in the Qing Valley, collecting medicinal herbs and mastering the Way (Uchida and Ami, 148). Commentaries suggest Gui Guzi may refer to Guo Pu himself (Uchida and Ami, 148).

³⁵⁸ Jian Xiu 蹇脩 was a famous matchmaker in days of antiquity (Tōdō, 1194).

- 赤松臨上遊 The Red Pine Sage gazes at kingfishers fluttering above
 賀鴻乘紫煙 A wild goose as his carriage, he rides purple wisps
- 左挹浮丘袖 His right hand tugs at Fu Qiu's sleeve
 右拍洪崖肩 His left hand taps Hong Ya's shoulder³⁵⁹
- 借問蜉蝣輩 Companion to the ephemeral mayfly, I ask you:
 寧知龜鶴年 How can you know the life of a tortoise or crane?
4. 六龍安可頓 How can the Six Dragons³⁶⁰ be stopped?
 運流有代謝 Time flows and the seasons change
- 時變感人思 With the passage of time people's hearts are moved
 已秋復願夏 Autumn has come, yet they yearn for summer once more
- 淮海變微禽 The Huai River and seas transform small fowl
 吾生獨不化 I alone am born but do not change
- 雖欲騰丹谿 Though I wish to climb the cinnabar valley³⁶¹
 雲螭非我駕 Dragons soaring among the clouds are not my carriage
- 愧無魯陽德 I am ashamed that I lack Lu Yang's virtue³⁶²
 迴日向三舍 To bring back the setting sun three Solar Mansions³⁶³
- 臨河哀年邁 Gazing upon the river, lamenting the passing years
 撫心獨悲吒 Soothing my heart, I grieve alone
5. 逸翮思拂霄 Swift birds seek to soar high
 迅足羨遠遊 Galloping stallions yearn to journey far
- 清源無增瀾 Sources of pure water are free of rising waves
 安得運吞舟 How can boat-swallowing fish navigate?
- 珪璋雖特達 Ceremonial jade, though particularly superb,

³⁵⁹ Hong Ya 洪崖 was a sage said to have already lived three thousand years by the time Yao assumed the throne (Uchida and Ami, 149).

³⁶⁰ The Six Dragons 六龍 pull the chariot of the sun (Uchida and Ami, 150).

³⁶¹ The cinnabar valley 丹谿 refers to the land of immortality (Uchida and Ami, 150).

³⁶² This refers to Lu Yang's ability to strike his spear at the sun and pull it back, preventing it from setting (Uchida and Ami, 150).

³⁶³ A Solar Mansion 舍 can refer to either one of the twenty-eight constellations in the night sky, or the distance an army could march in a day (thirty *li*) (Uchida and Ami, 150). In either case, the ability to move the sun "three solar mansions" means moving the sun a considerable distance, thus forestalling nightfall.

- 明月難闌投 Bright moonlight is not easily cast into darkness
- 潛穎怨青陽 Shade-loving grasses despise spring sunshine
陵苕哀素秋 Hilltop rush lament autumnal bleakness
- 悲來惻丹心 Sadness comes, tormenting my heart
零淚綠纓流 Teardrops run down my tassel
6. 雜縣寓魯門 *Za xian* birds roost at Lu Gate
風煖將爲災 Warm winds blow, beckoning calamity
- 吞舟湧海底 Boat-swallowing fish rise from the seafloor
高浪駕蓬萊 Raging billows consume Penglai Island
- 神仙排雲出 Divine sages appear, pushing the clouds aside
但見金銀臺 Only the gold and silver dais is visible
- 陵陽挹丹留 Ling Yang³⁶⁴ picks *dan liu*³⁶⁵
容成揮玉杯 Rong Cheng shakes a jade chalice
- 姮娥揚妙音 Heng E³⁶⁶ sings in exquisite tones
洪崖頷其頤 Hong Ya moves his chin in agreement
- 升降隨長煙 Ascending and descending, the sages follow the long trail of smoke
飄飄戲九垓 Light and airy in spirit, they frolic in the Nine Heavens
- 奇齡邁五龍 With marvelous longevity surpassing five dragons
千歲方嬰孩 Even a millennium later, they resemble infants
- 燕昭無靈氣 King Zhao of Yan lacked a mystic aura
漢武非仙才 Emperor Wu of Han was not a sagely talent³⁶⁷
7. 晦朔如循環 From the first to last days, months are like an endless cycle

³⁶⁴ Ling Yang 陵陽 and Rong Cheng 容成 are sages who appear in the *Liexianzhuan* 列仙傳 (Biographies of Transcendants) (Uchida and Ami, 152).

³⁶⁵ The precise nature of *dan liu* 丹留 is unclear, but commentaries claim it is a reddish substance that emanates from rocks (Uchida and Ami, 152).

³⁶⁶ Heng E 姮娥 is another name for Chang E 嫦娥, who is known in Chinese mythology as the “lady in the moon.” According to an episode in the *Huainanzi*, her husband obtained an immortality elixir from the Queen Mother of the West, which she then stole and took to the moon with her (Uchida and Ami, 152).

³⁶⁷ King Zhao of Yan 燕昭 and Emperor Wu of Han 漢武 both sought out sages, but failed to find them (Uchida and Ami, 152).

月盈已復魄	The full moon has once again turned dark
蓐収清西陸	Ru Shou ³⁶⁸ purified the western regions
朱羲將由白	Zhu Xi ³⁶⁹ followed the White Path
寒露拂陵苕	Frigid dew brushes aside hillside rush
女蘿辭松柏	Creeping vines fall from pines and cypresses
薜榮不終朝	Roses of Sharon do not last the morning
蜉蝣豈見夕	Mayflies – how will they see the night?
圓丘有奇草	Mt. Yuan ³⁷⁰ has mysterious grasses
鍾山出靈液	Mt. Zhong ³⁷¹ exudes ethereal fluids ³⁷²
王孫列八珍	Though Duke Wang’s progeny arrange the Eight Delicacies ³⁷³
安期鍊五石	The sage An Qi refined the Five Stones ³⁷⁴
長揖當塗人	Clasping my hands in greeting to the official
去來山林客	I set out to visit the mountain forests

In addition to Kūkai’s references to “Mr. He” and “Mr. Guo,” the content of the *you xian shi* presented demonstrates that they served as his models. He drew inspiration from both poets, adopting He Shao’s depiction of “seeking the sage” and using Guo Pu’s eremitism as a backdrop. Both poets represent nature with a pure, unsullied intensity, creating the ideal environment for those seeking to frolic with the sages.

³⁶⁸ According to the *Book of Rites*, Ru Shou 蓐収 is a god of early autumn (Uchida and Ami, 153).

³⁶⁹ Zhu Xi 朱羲 refers to the sun (Uchida and Ami, 153).

³⁷⁰ Mt. Yuan 圓丘 supposedly has a tree of immortality (Uchida and Ami, 154).

³⁷¹ Divine grasses can be found on Mt. Zhong 鍾山 (Uchida and Ami, 154).

³⁷² The “ethereal fluids” 靈液 refer to *yu gao* 玉膏, a medicinal balm that promotes longevity (Uchida and Ami, 153, 154).

³⁷³ The Eight Delicacies 八珍 refer to the food items listed in a commentary to the *Book of Rites*: the Rich Fry (*chun ao* 淳熬), where pickled meat is placed atop rice that has been grown on dry soil and enriched with liquid fat; the Similar Fry 淳母, which was like Rich Fry except millet was substituted for white rice; roasted suckling pig (*pao tun* 炮豚); roasted lamb (*pao zang* 炮臜); roasted beef, lamb and deer (*tao zhen* 燔珍); steeped dishes (*zi zhi* 漬); dishes cooked over fire (*ao* 熬) and liver meat (*gan liao* 肝膋) (Uchida and Ami, 154; Legge, *The Book of Rites*, 468-469).

³⁷⁴ The “Five Stones” 五石 refer to the following five medicines prepared from rocks or minerals listed in the *Baopuzi*: cinnabar (*dansha* 丹砂), orpiment (*xionghuang* 雄黃), alum (*baifan* 白礬), *shiceng* 石曾 (stone used for making longevity elixirs) and celadon stones (*qingci* 青磁) (Uchida and Ami, 154).

In contrast, Kūkai's depicts nature in harsh, unforgiving terms. Craggs are swept by hot winds, fierce animals roam about, crows are attracted to decay, and dogs savor the aroma of filth. Parrots are “loquacious” 能言 but their words lack “true wisdom and goodness” 如說避賢良. Landscapes are decrepit and overgrown – the mugwort grass emblematic untamed serenity in He Shao and Guo Pu's works overtakes the slopes.

This is similar to what Kūkai did in the *Sangō shiiki*, where he used representatives of Confucianism and Daoism as foils to promote his Buddhist arguments. Unlike the *Sangō shiiki*, the poem above is solely a rebuke of Daoism. Despite Kūkai's dismissal of the Daoist pursuit of immortality, it is clear that he has adopted the aesthetics of a Daoist sage in this poem. He nourishes himself with mountain mist, much like the sage who lives on vapor, and heals himself using medicines from the Daoist tradition. For example, *baizhu* 白朮 (white atractylodes rhizome) was commonly used for its *qi*-stimulating properties, and *huangjing* 黄精 (*rhizoma polygonati*) was used for relieving fatigue.

Conversely, in his 816 petition to Saga for permission to build a new monastic complex atop Mt. Kōya, he largely dispenses with the fantastic imagery and rhetoric, and instead chooses to deal with the task at hand:³⁷⁵

沙門空海言。空海聞。高山則雲雨潤物。水積則魚龍產化。是故。耆闍峻嶺。能仁之迹不休。孤岸奇峯。觀世之蹤相續。尋其所由地勢自爾。又有。台嶺五寺禪客比肩。天山一院定侶連袂。是則。国之宝。民之梁也。

The monk Kūkai speaks these words. Kūkai has heard that if the mountain is high, then clouds and rain nourish things. When water accumulates, fish and dragons are born and dwell. For this reason, the traces of Shakyamuni Buddha on steep Vulture Peak have yet to vanish. On the lonely shore of Potalaka, Avalokitesvara's signs endure. This is all due to topography. Also, there are five temples atop Mt. Wu-tai,

³⁷⁵ SRS 9:94. An earlier translation can be found in Hakeda, 47.

and in one temple on Mt. Tien-tai there is a string of meditating monks. They are a treasure to the nation and a pillar for the people.

伏惟。我朝歷代皇帝留心佛法。金剎銀台。櫛比朝野。談義龍象。每寺成林。法之興隆於是足矣。但恨。高山深嶺乏四禪客。幽藪窮巖希入定賓。實是禪教未傳住處不相應之所致也。今准禪經說深山平地尤宜修禪。

I think that successive generations of emperors in our land have given their hearts to the Buddhist Law. Golden temples and silver platforms line our nation like the teeth of a comb. Priests expounding the meaning of Buddhism resemble dragons, and every temple is surrounded by a forest. Are these places sufficient for bringing forth the Law? The only thing I lament is the lack of fourfold meditation³⁷⁶ monks atop the high mountains and the deep peaks, and few are those who enter the deep thickets and crammed crags. The precepts of meditation have yet to reach our land, and there are no appropriate places for monks to reside. Scriptures on meditation state that a flat basin deep in the mountains is most suited for this purpose.

空海少年日。好涉覽山水。從吉野南行一日。更向西去兩日程。有平原幽地名曰高野。計當紀伊國伊都郡南。四面高嶺人縱絕密蹊。今思。上奉為國家下為諸修行者芟夷荒藪聊建立修禪一院。

Kūkai, in his younger days, enjoyed walking and viewing the mountains and waters. If one travels one day south from Yoshino and heads further west for about two days, there is a flat plain in a secluded area called Takano.³⁷⁷ It is located in the southern portion of Itō district of Kii province. On four sides it is surrounded by towering peaks, and there are no paths that lead inside. Now I think that for the greater purpose of the nation and the lesser purpose of providing for the followers of Buddhism, the overgrowth should be cleared and a small temple should be erected.

經中有誠山河地水悉是國主之有也。若比丘受用他不許者既犯盜罪者。加以。法之興廢悉繫天心。若大若小不敢自由。望請。蒙賜彼空地早遂小願。然則。四時勤念以答雨露之施。若天恩允許。請宣付所司。輕塵震宸狀深悚越。

³⁷⁶ Fourfold meditation is described in the *Lankavatara sutra* 楞伽經 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 398).

³⁷⁷ This gloss for 高野 is found in the *kakikudashi* (classical Japanese rendering) of the Chinese original in the NKBT (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 398).

In the sutras, there are admonitions such as “The mountains, rivers, land and water all belong to the sovereign. If a *bhikkhu* uses them without permission, then he has committed the offense of theft. In addition, the rise or fall of the Dharma hinges upon the will of the emperor. Whether great or small, things do not go according to individual will. I beseech you to bequeath this parcel of empty land so my humble request can be immediately fulfilled. Services will be performed year-round in gratitude for your generosity. Should you grant my request, I ask that temple officials be assigned. I apologize for offending you with this petition.

This letter to emperor is short and to the point (for Kūkai), but an analysis of its content reveals some interesting points. First, Kūkai uses topography to justify his need for a remote mountain location, citing the examples of Vulture Peak and Mt. Tien-tai. This might reassure Saga that although Kūkai’s new temple would be far away from the court, it would function in the service of the nation. Next, although many hagiographies depict Kūkai’s negotiations with the mountain gods for permission to build his temple, there is no evidence of that here. In fact, Kūkai states that “the mountains, rivers, land and water all belong to the sovereign,” and cites Buddhist sutras as his textual authority. Therefore, in granting Kūkai license to build a temple atop Mt. Kōya, the emperor is not acting in the capacity of a sovereign descended from the gods; rather he is performing his role as a *cakravartin*. Finally, by saying that it is an offense to use these lands without permission, Kūkai is affirming that Buddhist monks are servants of the state.

Perhaps the most unusual example of mountain imagery in Kūkai’s writings appears in the memorial epitaph he composed for the recently deceased monk Shōdō 勝道 (?-817) in 817. Very little is known about Shōdō, except that he was born into the Wakata clan and climbed Mt. Nikkō in 782, spending four years there. In Kūkai’s own words, he and Shōdō were never acquainted, and the only reason he agreed to compose the epitaph is because Professor I 伊博士 of Shimotsuke Province arrived in the capital and lamented that there was no one to chronicle

Shōdō's deeds. This epitaph is almost as long as the one he wrote his master Hui-guo in 805. However, at that time, Kūkai was a student in China and could devote himself wholeheartedly to the affairs of the Qinglongsi temple, but the situation was completely different in 817. By this time, Kūkai was firmly entrenched in early Heian political life, and he had just received permission from Saga to build his new esoteric monastic complex atop Mt. Kōya.

Why did Kūkai take the time and effort to write a lengthy and dense epitaph for a provincial monk he had never met? Perhaps he was enchanted by Shōdō's ascetic, politically undisturbed life atop Mt. Nikkō, and saw it as a potential “spiritual blueprint” for Mt. Kōya.³⁷⁸

蘇巔鷲嶽異人所都。達水龍坎靈物斯在。所以異人卜宅。所以靈物化產。
豈徒然乎請論之。夫。境随心變心垢則境濁。心逐境移境閑則心朗。心境冥會。道
德玄存。至如。能寂常居以利見。妙祥鎮住以接引。提山垂迹。孤岸津梁。並皆靡
不依仁山託智水。

Mt. Sumeru and Vulture Peak are home to extraordinary beings. Lake Anuttara³⁷⁹ and Dragon Lake are where supernatural entities reside. That extraordinary beings divine the right place to make their home, that spiritual beings transform and come into existence – are these just meaningless occurrences? If you please, I will attempt to explain this. The environment changes in accordance with one's heart. The filth in one's heart therefore pollutes the environment. The heart follows the environment. If the environment is tranquil then the heart is serene. If the heart and environment are united, then virtue becomes manifest. Shakyamuni is ever-present and mingles with the masses. Manjusri calmly resides and guides people onto the right path. Shakyamuni left his traces atop Mt. Kharadiya and guided sentient beings to the shores of Mt. Potalaka. There is no one who does not rely on the mountain of benevolence or partake of the waters of wisdom.³⁸⁰

台鏡瑩磨俯忘機水者也。有沙門勝道者下野芳賀人也。俗姓若田氏。神邈救蟻之齡。
意清惜囊之齒。桎枷四民之生事。調飢三諦之滅業。厭聚落之轟々。仰林泉之皓然。

³⁷⁸ SRS 2:11.

³⁷⁹ This is a mythical lake at the center of the Buddhist universe where dragons reside (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 182).

³⁸⁰ This refers to a line in the *Analects*: “The wise find joy in water; the benevolent find joy in mountains” 知者樂水仁者樂山 (Lau, 84; Kanaya, 85).

粵有同州補陀洛山。蔥嶺銀漢。白峯衝碧落。礮雷腹而鼉吼。翔鳳足而羊角。魑魅罕通。人蹊也絕。借問振古未有攀躋者。

There is a person who polished the mirror atop the dais and dove into the waters of humanity, and he is a monk named Shōdō, from Haga in Shimotsuke Province. His worldly name was Wakata. In spirit, he left behind the vulgar world during his ant-saving days.³⁸¹ His heart was pure at the age of twenty. Considering the professions of the Four Classes³⁸² to be shackles, he hungered for enlightenment through the Three Principles;³⁸³ detesting the clamor of villages and hamlets, he revered the brightness of forests and springs. Here, in the same province, is Mt. Potalaka. Its verdant ridges pierce the Milky Way, snow-capped peaks jut into the blue sky. Thunder rolls along the flank of the mountain and growls like an alligator. Soaring phoenixes compete with each other at the foot of the mountain. Creatures and spirits pass by infrequently. It is off the beaten track. I ask you: from days of old, has there ever been anyone to climb this peak?

法師。顧義成而興歎。仰勇猛以策意。遂以去神護景雲元年四月上旬跋上。雪深巖峻。雲霧雷迷。不能上也。還住半服。三七日而却還。又天応元年四月上旬。更事攀陟。亦上不得也。二年三月中。奉為諸神祇。写經函仏。策裳裹足。弃命殉道。緇負經像。至于山麓。誦經礼仏。

Shōdō reflected upon Shakyamuni and lamented. His reverence for Shakyamuni's ascetic discipline buoyed his spirits. Finally, in the beginning of the fourth month of the first year of Jingo Keiun,³⁸⁴ he blazed a trail up the mountain. The snow was deep and the crags were steep. Lost amidst the clouds, mist and thunder, he could not complete his ascent. He turned back and camped on the flank of the mountain. After 37 days, he returned home. Again, in the beginning of the fourth month of the first year of Ten'ō,³⁸⁵ he attempted to climb the mountain, but once again was unsuccessful. During the third month of the second year, as an offering to the gods he copied sutras and made images of the Buddhas. He tore his robes and used the cloth

³⁸¹ The “ant-saving days” refer to fifteen or sixteen years of age. For a detailed explanation, refer to the memorial stele Kūkai composed for Hui-guo presented in Chapter One.

³⁸² This is the typical Confucian scheme: officials 士, farmers 農, artisans 工, and merchants 商 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 183).

³⁸³ This is the Tian-tai adaptation of Nagarjuna's threefold principle of truth: all phenomena are inherently empty, phenomena are empty but exist provisionally from a worldly perspective, and phenomena are simultaneously empty and provisional (Nakamura, 324).

³⁸⁴ 767 in the Western calendar.

³⁸⁵ 781 in the Western calendar.

to bind his feet, and he forsook his life in pursuit of the Way. Carrying the sutras and images on his back, he arrived at the foot of the mountain. He recited the sutras and worshipped the Buddhas.

一七日夜。堅發誓曰。若使神明有知。願察我心。我所因寫。經及像等。當至山頂。為神供養。以崇神威。饒群生福。仰願。善神加威。毒龍卷霧。山魅前導。助果我願。我若不到山頂。亦不至菩提。如是發願訖。跨白雪之皚々。攀綠葉之璀璨。腳踏一半身疲力竭。憩息信宿終見其頂。恍々惚々。似夢似悟。不因乘查忽入雲漢。不啻妙藥得見神窟。一喜一悲心魂難持。

Seventeen days later, he firmly pledged, “If you gods possess wisdom, then I implore you to peer into my heart. I want to go to the top of the mountain and offer the gods the sutras I copied and the images of Buddhas I carved. I shall worship the might of the gods and enrich all living things. I pray that I be helped in the fulfillment of my prayers – I pray that the benevolent gods lend me their strength, that the venomous dragons dissipate like mist and that the mountain spirits guide me. If I cannot reach the top of the mountain, I cannot reach enlightenment.” Upon concluding his prayer in this manner, he stepped onto the glistening white snow and climbed up the jeweled leaves. Halfway through his journey his body became tired and depleted of strength. After two days’ rest he finally saw the peak of the mountain. Awestruck, it was like a dream, it was like reality. Without latching onto a piece of driftwood³⁸⁶ he entered the Milky Way. Without sipping the mystical medicine³⁸⁷ he was able to see into the cave of the gods. Overwhelmed by emotion, it was difficult for him to maintain his composure.

山之為狀也。東西龍伏彌望無極。南北虎踞棲息有興。指妙高以為儔。引輪鐵而作帶。咲衡岱之猶卑。晒崑香之又劣。日出先明。月來晚入。不假天眼萬里目前。何更乘鶴白雲足下。千般錦花無機常織。百種靈物誰人陶冶。北望則有湖。約計一百頃。東西狹。南北長。西顧亦有一小湖。合有二十餘頃。

The shape of the mountain is like a dragon sprawled out from east to west, goes on forever. From north to south, it is like the home to a crouched tiger, elegant in appearance. These mountains look to Mt. Sumeru as their companion, and pull at the ring of steel³⁸⁸ to create a belt. He laughed at the low height of Mt. Heng and Mt. Tai, and he ridiculed the inferiority of Mt. Kunlun and the Fragrant Mountain.³⁸⁹ The sun rises and immediately it becomes bright. When the moon appears, it sets late. Without the benefit of clairvoyance

³⁸⁶ This is based on the Later Han legend of Yuan Jun-ping 嚴君平 of Shu 蜀, who latched onto a raft and floated into the Milky Way (Imataka et al., 222).

³⁸⁷ This refers to an elixir from the Daoist tradition (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 184).

³⁸⁸ Mt. Sumeru is likened to a mountain of steel, and the seas surrounding it to a belt (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 184).

³⁸⁹ In Buddhist cosmology, the Fragrant Mountain is located to the north of Mt. Sumeru (Imataka et al., 222).

he can see 10,000 *li*³⁹⁰ ahead of him. Why is it that he rides a giant swan? The white clouds are between his feet. A thousand brocade flowers are constantly woven without a loom. A hundred varieties of mystical sights – who created them? Looking to the north, there is a lake, whose size is approximately 100 *qing*. It is narrow from east to west but wide from north to south. Looking to the west, there is a small lake, whose size is at least 20 *qing*.

眇坤更有一大湖。羣計一千餘町。東西不闊。南北長遠。四面高峯倒影水中。百種異莊木石自有。銀雪敷地。金花發枝。池鏡無私。萬色誰逃。山水相映。乍看絕腸。膽佇未飽。風雪趁人。我結蝸菴于其坤角住之。礼懺動經三七日。已遂斯願便歸故居。

To the southwest, there is another big lake. The lake covers a total of 1,000 *ting*. It is not wide from east to west, but long and far from north to south. Tall peaks on four sides cast their shadows on the water. A hundred varieties of exotic decorations – the trees and stones exist naturally. Silver snow covers the ground, and golden blossoms sprout forth from the branches. On the mirror-like surface of the lake personal sentiments do not exist, who can escape the myriad colors? The mountains and water reflect each other. Suddenly, he looked at an awe-inspiring sight. He was not yet tired of gazing at the scenery when the wind and snow stopped him in his tracks. He built a grass hut no larger than a snail's shell on the southeast side of the mountain and lived there. He said his prayers and made his repentance, and before he knew it 37 days had gone by. Having fulfilled this vow, he returned to his original abode.

去延曆三年三月下旬更上。經五個日。至彼南湖邊。四月上旬。造得一小船。長二丈。廣三尺。即与二三子。棹湖遊覽。遍眺四壁。神麗夥多。東看西看。汎濫自逸。日暮与餘。強託南州。其洲則去陸。三百丈來。方圓三千丈餘。諸洲之中。美花富焉。復。更遊西湖去東湖。十五許里。又覽北湖去南湖。三十許里。並雖盡美惣不如南。其南湖。則碧水澄鏡。深不可測。

At the end of the third month of the third year Enryaku [784], he climbed the mountain once again. Five days later, he reached the shores of the southern lake. In the beginning of the fourth month, he was able to construct a small boat two *zhang* in length and three *chi* wide. Then he and two or three disciples paddled their way around the lake. Looking around in all four directions, they saw many mystical and marvelous

³⁹⁰ The Chinese units of measurement which appear in this document, such as *li* 里 (unit of distance), *ting* 町 (unit of surface area), *zhang* 丈 and *chi* 尺 (units of length), *wei* 圍 (unit of circumference), and *qing* 頃 (unit of surface area) are left unconverted since it is unclear whether Kūkai used the Chinese or Japanese standards for these measurements.

sights. To the east and to the west, the scenery abounds, and is naturally peaceful. At nightfall enchantment lingered in the air, and they reluctantly made their way to an island in the southern part of the lake. That island was separated from land by 300 *zhang*. The island is over 3,000 *zhang* in length and it abounds in beautiful flowers. He travelled further to the west lake, which was about 15 *li* away from the east lake. He also viewed the north lake, 30 *li* from the south lake. Although both of these lakes were extraordinarily beautiful, they could not compare to the south lake. The emerald waters of the southern lake were clear like a mirror and were of unfathomable depth.

千年松柏。臨水而傾綠蓋。百圍檜杉。竦巖而構紺樓。五彩之華一株而雜色。六時之鳥同響而異鳴。白鶴舞汀。紺鳧戲水。振翼如鈴。吐音玉響。松風懸琴。砥浪調鼓。五音爭奏天韻。八德澹々自貯。霧帳雲幕。時々難陀之羈羸。星灯電炬。數々普香之把束。見池中円月。知普賢之鏡智。仰空裏彗日。覺遍智之在我。

Thousand-year old pines and oaks gaze upon the water form a canopy. Cedars and cypress trees 100 *wei* in circumference stand atop the crags, forming a blue tower. The five-hued blossom is of the same plant, yet they are of different colors. Throughout the day, the birds create the same resonance yet their cries are different. White cranes dance where the waves break, and blue ducks frolic in the water. The flapping of their wings sounds like a bell, the cries they utter chime like a jewel. The wind whistles through the pines as though it were plucking the strings of a zither, the waves lap against the pebbles as though it were beating a drum. The Five Tones³⁹¹ compete and create a natural melody, the Eight Virtues³⁹² flow and naturally accumulate. Mist curtains and cloud drapes – on occasion Nanda³⁹³ makes his home here. The glimmer of the stars and the flash of the lightning –these are often bundled by the Prince of Venus.³⁹⁴ Looking at the reflection of the full moon on the lake, I gain the clear wisdom of Samantabhadra; looking at the sagacious sun in the sky, I realize the Four Noble Truths reside within me.

託此勝地。聊建伽藍。名曰神宮寺。住此修道。荏苒四祀。七年四月。更移住北涯。四望無尋。沙場可愛。異花之色難名驚目。奇香之臭叵尋悅意。靈仙不知何去。神

³⁹¹ These are the five traditional notes in Chinese music: *gong* 宮, *shang* 商, *jiao* 角, *zheng* 徵, and *yu* 羽 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 187).

³⁹² These are the eight types of “virtuous water:” sweet 甘, cool 冷, soft 軟, light 輕, pure 清淨, not foul-smelling 不臭, not damaging to the throat when drunk 飲時不損喉, not damaging to the stomach after a meal 飯已不傷腸. This list appears in the *Abhidharmakosa* 俱舍論 (*Treasury of Abhidharma*) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 187).

³⁹³ In this context, this refers to the Dragon King Nanda 難陀龍王, who was one of the Eight Dragon Kings present when Shakyamuni Buddha preached the *Lotus Sutra* (Sawa, 566; Watson, 5).

³⁹⁴ The Prince of Venus 普香 is considered a manifestation of Akasagarbha 虛空藏 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 187).

人髣髴。忿歲精之無記。惜王侯之不遊。思餓虎而不遇。訪子喬而適去。觀花藏於心海。念實相於眉山。蘊蘿遮寒。蔭葉避暑。喫菜喫水樂在中。乍彳乍予出塵界外。九臯鶴聲易達于天。

At this scenic spot he constructed a temple which he named Jingūji. As he resided here practicing the way, four years gradually passed by. In the fourth month of the seventh year of Enryaku,³⁹⁵ he moved further and took up residence on the northern frontier. The view was unobstructed in all four directions, and the sand on the shore was lovely. The hues of alien flowers were difficult to name and they dazzled the eye. The scents of the mysterious fragrances were difficult to track down and they pleased the heart. Who knows where the mountain wizards disappeared off to, but it was as though the holy sages were present. He was outraged that this place is not recorded in Dong's *Records*,³⁹⁶ and he lamented that Wang³⁹⁷ had never visited. Though he thought of the starving tigress,³⁹⁸ he had yet to encounter her; though he sought out Zhi-qiao³⁹⁹ he was already gone. He perceived the Lotus Realm in the ocean of his heart, and he contemplated the True Reality within the mountain between the Buddha's eyebrows. Accumulated grasses block out the cold, the leafy shade repels the heat. He partook of wild vegetables and sipped water; the pleasure was within him.⁴⁰⁰ Going hither and fro, he set out beyond the realm of dust. The cries of cranes⁴⁰¹ deep in the valleys reached the heavens with ease.

³⁹⁵ 788 in the Western calendar.

³⁹⁶ Dong 東 refers to Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (c. 140-87 BCE), a Daoist wizard who at one time served Emperor Wu in the capacity of Senior Councilor of the Palace 太中大夫, but was demoted for being disrespectful. However, because of his erudition and wit, Emperor Wu allowed him to continue to serve in the palace so that he could provide the emperor with entertainment. Dongfang Shuo is considered the founder of the *shelun* 設論 (hypothetical discourse) form of writing, where the author contemplates whether to remain in public life or to withdraw from the world. *Shelun* poetry was viewed as a way to “safely” lodge criticisms against the political order (Dominik Declercq, *Writing Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third & Fourth Century China* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998) 15-16, 20-21). The *Records* is likely a reference to the *Hai nai shi zhou ji* 海內十洲記 (*Ten Provinces Within Our Seas*), a forged text that is incorrectly attributed to Dongfang Shuo (Imataka et al., 222).

³⁹⁷ This refers to Wang Sun-hou 王孫侯, a Daoist mystic (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 188).

³⁹⁸ This refers to a *jataka* (story of the Buddha's prior lives) tale recorded in the *Sutra of the Most Victorious King* 最勝王經 where Shakyamuni offers his body to a starving tigress (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 495).

³⁹⁹ Wang Zhi-qiao 王子喬 was supposedly a Daoist immortal who was active during the era of King Ling of Zhou 周靈王 (Imataka et al., 223).

⁴⁰⁰ A similar phrase can be found in the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘In the eating of coarse rice and the drinking of water, the using of one's elbow for a pillow, joy is to be found. Wealth and rank attained through immoral means as much to me as passing clouds’” (Lau, 88; Kanaya, 96).

⁴⁰¹ Kūkai borrows a line from the “He Ming” 鶴鳴 poem in the *Book of Songs*: “The crane cries in the ninth pool of the marsh...” 鶴鳴于九臯聲聞于野 (Legge, *The She King*, 296).

去延曆中。柏原皇帝聞之。更任上野国講師。利他有時。虚心逐物。又建立華嚴精舍。於都賀那城山。就此往彼。利物弘道。去大同二年。国有陽九。州司令法師祈雨。師則上補陀落山祈禱。応時甘雨霽霽。百穀豐登。所有仏業。不能縷說。咨。日車難駐人間易變。

During the Enryaku years, the Kashihara Emperor⁴⁰² heard about Shōdō's accomplishments and promptly appointed him to be the Buddhist lecturer⁴⁰³ for Kōzuke Province. He never missed an opportunity to benefit to others, and with an unfettered mind he attended to his duties. He also founded the Kegon Temple in Shikinoyama, Tsugano District. Here, he enriched the people and propagated the Buddhist path. In the second year of Daidō,⁴⁰⁴ there was a drought throughout the province. The provincial officials ordered Master Shōdō to pray for rain. He promptly ascended Mt. Potalaka and prayed. Then, sweet rain fell in torrents, and the hundred grains verdantly grew. It is not possible for me to expound all his Buddhist deeds in detail. Ah! It is difficult to stop the sun and the moon, and the realm of humans is ever so fickle!

從心忽至四蛇虛羸。撰誘是務能事畢矣。前下野伊博士公。与法師善。秩滿入京。于時法師。歎勝境之無記。要属文於余筆。伊公与余。故固辞不免。課虛抽毫。乃為銘曰。

He reached the age of seventy and the four snakes⁴⁰⁵ in his body began to atrophy. Summoned, he accomplished what he set out to do. Lord Professor I, formerly of Shimotsuke Province, was on good terms with the master and returned to the capital upon completing his appointment. At times, the master had lamented that there was no record of this marvelous place, so I was eventually given the task of taking up my brush and writing about it. Though I strongly refused, I could not avoid it since Lord I⁴⁰⁶ and I are on good terms. Anyway, I select a brush and compose the following monument:

鷄黃裂地	The yolk of the chicken rends the earth
粹氣昇天	The pure spirit ascends into the heavens
蟾烏運轉	The frog and crow revolve
萬類踰闡	Myriad forms of matter gather and move about

⁴⁰² This is another name for Emperor Kanmu (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 188).

⁴⁰³ This person is responsible for the *kokubunji* 国分寺 (branch temple) located within their province. Duties included supervising the monks and nuns, and lecturing on scripture (Imataka et al., 223).

⁴⁰⁴ 807 in the Western calendar.

⁴⁰⁵ These are the four elements believed to comprise the human form: earth, water, fire and wind (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 189).

⁴⁰⁶ Nothing is known about Lord I himself, but from his title of *hakase* 博士, he likely taught at the State College (Imataka et al. 223).

山海錯峙 幽明殊阡 俗波生滅 真水道先	The seas intersect and the mountains soar high Darkness and light take different paths Life and death amidst the vulgar waves The waters of truth are the forerunner of the Way
一塵構嶽 一滴深湖 埃涓委聚 画飭神都	One speck of dust forms a mountain A drop of water deepens the lake Dust and droplets accumulate They draw and adorn the sacred citadel ⁴⁰⁷
嶺岑不梯 鸞鷲無囷 皓々雪嶺 曷矚誰廬	Nothing forms a bridge to the mountain peak Phoenixes cannot measure the mountain's height The glistened snowcapped peaks Who sees them, who makes them their home?
沙門勝道 竹操松柯 仰之正覺 誦之達磨	The monk Shōdō Pliant like the bamboo and firm like a pine bough Revering these Buddhas, Chanting the Dharma
歸依觀音 礼拝釈迦 殉道斗藪 直人嗟峨	Taking refuge in Avalokitesvara Revering Shakyamuni Following the Way as a priest Entering straight into the steep mountain
龍跳絶巘 鳳拳經過 神明威護 歷覽山河	Ascending the protruding peak like a leaping dragon Passing over it like a dancing phoenix The gods protect him He views mountains and rivers, one after another
山也崢嶸 水也泓澄 綺花灼々 異鳥嚶々	The mountains are rugged and towering The waters are clear Beautiful flowers are ablaze Exotic birds chirp in unison
地籟天籟 如筑如箏 異人乍浴 音樂時鳴	The earth tremors, the heavens rumble Like a lute, like a zither Otherworldly ones reside here Their music reverberates throughout

⁴⁰⁷ The “sacred citadel” supposedly refers to Mt. Futaara 二荒山 in Nikkō (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 191).

一覽消憂	Looking around, my depression vanishes
百煩自休	A hundred vexations ease
人間莫比	No comparison to the realm of humans
天上寧儔	The heavens are instead my companions

孫興擲筆	Sun Xing ⁴⁰⁸ threw aside his brush
郭詞豈周	The orator Guo Pu ⁴⁰⁹ was at a loss for words
咄哉同志	Oh, you who share the same aspirations as I!
何不優遊	Why do you no longer frolic in the mountains?

This epitaph and accompanying poem are a marvelous crystallization of Kūkai's engagement of the literary, spiritual, political and aesthetic aspects of mountains in his poetic practice, depicting the ideal eremitic life a Buddhist monk should follow. Since Kūkai had no first-hand knowledge of Shōdō's life or career, he was able to merge the accounts he received from Professor I with his own ideals. As Mt. Nikkō was located on the periphery of the region controlled by the court, Kūkai was able to depict Shōdō's ascent in fantastic terms. The sinograph for different/alien 異 is used to describe the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who reside on the mountain 異人 (alien people), the cacophonous cries of the birds 異鳴, and the exotic flowers 異花 that bloom on its slopes. The natural features of the mountain are depicted in musical terms: its rumblings are compared to the tunes of the lute 築 and the zither 琴, and exotic birds chirp in unison 異鳥嚶々.

Unlike Mt. Kōya, which Kūkai readily acknowledged was within the emperor's control, Mt. Nikkō was placed in the periphery of the Japanese state in both political and spatial terms. Kūkai boldly asserts that the mountain is none other than Potalanka itself, suggesting that dwelling place of Kannon lies within the political boundaries of Japan itself. Everything about the mountain is exotic and tantalizes the senses. In the poem following the epitaph, Kūkai

⁴⁰⁸ This refers to the poet Sun Chuo 孫綽 (320-377) who was known for his *fu* 賦 (rhapsody) poetry, particularly on metaphysical themes (Cutter, 271-272).

⁴⁰⁹ Refer to the *you xian* poem above for information on Guo Pu.

invokes the Tang mountain hermit tradition when he says “there is no comparison to the realm of humans” 人間莫比 words very similar to the last line of Li Bai’s “Mid-Mountain Dialogue.” Kūkai’s description of Mt. Nikkō blurs the boundaries between Japan, China, and the realm of Buddhist cosmology. Shōdō is also presented as the ideal example of an eremitic mountain monk. During his time on the mountain, he is free from the binds of state authority and ritual, and can devote himself to meditation.

Circumscribing the Early Heian State: Colonization via Prose and Poetry

During Kūkai’s time, what is known today as the Tōhoku district was a liminal space not completely under the court’s control. Although the Japanese had made numerous attempts to pacify and colonize the northeastern hinterlands since the seventh century, fierce resistance and frequent uprisings by the indigenous Emishi were a never-ending source of irritation to the court and nobility.⁴¹⁰ Since the Taika Reforms, the region was nominally incorporated into the Japanese state and christened Mutsu Province, but government control over the region remained tenuous.⁴¹¹

In the sixth year of Kōnin (815), Kūkai’s friend and fellow poet Ono no Minemori was appointed governor of Mutsu Province. Minemori’s reputation as one of Saga’s court poets and his involvement with the compilation of the *Ryōunshū* might make him an unlikely candidate for the governorship of a rebellious province. However, Minemori had the proper lineage for the job, as he was the third son of Ono no Nagami 小野永見 (dates unknown), who previously served as

⁴¹⁰ There is a lack of consensus among historians and archaeologists as to the exact identity of the Emishi. Some propose that they are genetically different from the Japanese and are closer to the Ainu, others suggest that they are “uncivilized Japanese,” while others hypothesize that they are a mix of the two. In the texts presented below, Kūkai does not actually use the word “Emishi” 蝦夷, but instead uses the Chinese names for peripheral barbarians (details below) or simply as the “hairy people” 毛人. For the purposes of this study, an “Emishi” is anyone who lives along Japan’s northeastern frontier, does not recognize the authority of the Emperor, and is not included in the household registry system.

⁴¹¹ William H. McCullough, “The Heian Court,” in Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, eds. *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

Vice-General for Pacifying the Barbarians 征夷副將軍 and Vice-Governor of Mutsu 陸奧介.

Perhaps more importantly, as a poet of the first rank, Minemori was exactly the kind of bureaucrat-poet needed to bring the emperor's civilizing force to the frontier.

Kūkai and Minemori were on friendly terms and exchanged poems. On the eve of Minemori's departure for his new posting, Kūkai sent him the following congratulatory letter and poem:⁴¹²

戎狄難訓。辺笳易感。自古有。今何无。公抱大廈之材。出鎮豺狼之境。堂中久闕定省之養。魏闕遠阻龍顏之謁。雖云。天理合歡然人情豈无感歎。貧道与君遠相知。山河雲水何能阻。白雲之人。天辺之吏。何日无念。聊拙拙歌。以弁辺霧之解頤。

The Rong and Di are difficult to tame, so the sound of the reed flute in the frontier easily stirs the heart. It has been this way since ancient times, why would it have changed now? You will take your immense talents and set off to pacify the frontier of badgers and foxes. For quite some time you will not perform the customary courtesies to your parents at home and your distance from the court will prevent you from having audiences with the emperor. In principle your appointment is worthy of congratulations, yet who with feelings would not lament? You and I have known each other for a long time; how can the mountains, rivers, clouds and waters keep us apart? Though I am a man in the white clouds and you are a bureaucrat on earth, will there be a day when we do not think of each other? I dash off the following poem for you in the hope it dispels the frontier fog.

日本麗城三百州	In the three hundred islands that comprise the beautiful land of Japan,
就中陸奧最難柔	The province of Mutsu has been the most difficult to tame.
天皇嚇怒幾按劔	On numerous occasions the emperor has gripped his sword in fury,
相將軍帳中爭馳謀	Ministers and generals argue in battlefield tents and hatch strategy,
往帝伐今上憂	Previous emperors have taken up the battle cry, and the current emperor laments.
時々牧守不能劉	Previous governors have been unable to vanquish the barbarians,
自古將軍悉啾々	From ancient times, generals have cried in agony.

毛人羽人接境界 The Hairy People and Feathered People⁴¹³ violate our borders,

⁴¹² SRS 1:3.

⁴¹³ References to the “Hairy People” 毛人 and “Feathered People” 羽人 appear in the *Shan hai jing* 山海經 (*The Canon of Mountains and Seas*), an Early Han mythic geography (Imataka et al., 185). The material in this extensive collection is considered the source of many myths and legends that appeared in later ages. Hu Ying writes, “A fantastic map of a largely imagined universe, it is a collection of strange flora and fauna, gods and goblins, and

猛虎豺狼処々鳩
老鷄目猪鹿裘
髻中挿著骨毒箭
手上每執刀与矛
不田不衣逐麋鹿
靡晦靡明山谷遊

Forming packs like ferocious lions, badgers, and foxes.
With eyes like an old crow, they don skins made of boar and deer,
Poisoned arrows made of bone pierce their hair knots,
Swords and spears are ever present in their hands.
They do not cultivate rice fields nor do they weave clothes, they hunt for deer.
Day and night, they wander around the mountains and valleys.

羅刹流。非人儔
時々来往人村里
煞食千萬人与牛
走馬弄刀如電擊
彎弓飛箭誰敢囚
苦哉辺人被毒
歳々年々常喫愁

They are like the man-eating Raksasa devils, they are not human.
They frequently come to our settlements,
Where countless people and oxen are massacred and eaten.
Their galloping horses and brandished swords are like flashes of lightning.
When they pull their bowstrings and let loose their arrows, people get hit.
How terrible it is!
The locals are always getting injured and suffer year in and year out.

我皇為出世能鑒
亦咨焉刃局
千人萬人拳不応
唯君一箇帝心抽
山河氣五百賢

For the sake of the realm, our emperor set out and examined various precedents.
He sighed and returned his sword to its scabbard.
Though tens of thousands of soldiers rallied, it was no use.
Only you were chosen by the emperor.

允武允文得自天
九流三略肚裏吞

With wisdom tall as a mountain and deep as a river,
You are a genius that appears once every five hundred years.
Your talent in military and literary arts was bestowed by the heavens.
Your belly contains the teachings of the Nine Schools and the *Three Strategies*.⁴¹⁴

鵬翼一搏睨此境
毛人面縛側城辺
凶兵蘊庫待冶鑄
智劍滿胸幾許千
不戦不征自無敵
或男或女保天年

With one flap of your mighty wings, you survey the province below.
The Hairy People are rounded up and brought to the castle.
Their lethal weapons are stored away and await being melted and reformed.
How many thousands of wisdom swords fill your bosom?
No fighting, no conquests, and no enemies –
Men and women live their lives under the heavens.

昔聞媯帝于儻術

I heard that long ago Emperor Shun mastered the art of dancing with his shield,⁴¹⁵

今見野公略无疋
京邑梅花先春開
京城楊柳茂春日

Now I see your tactics are in a league of their own.
In the capital the plum blossoms herald the arrival of spring,
The willows at the imperial palace flourish under the spring sun.

humans of every imaginable shape” (Hu Ying, “Records of Anomalies” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 544-545.

⁴¹⁴ The *Three Strategies* 三略 is a treatise on military strategy written by the general Zhang Liang 張良 (262-189 BCE).

⁴¹⁵ This refers to Emperor Shun’s ability to pacify his enemies without resorting to force (Imataka et al., 185).

辺城遅暖無春蘂	Yet at your provincial citadel warmth arrives late and there are no spring blossoms
辺墨早冬无茂実	Winter comes early to your frontier fortress and the branches bear no fruit.
高天雖高聴必卑	Though the emperor may be in the heavens, his ears are always close to the ground
況乎鶴響九臯出	All the more will the cry of the crane be heard from the deepest marsh!
莫愁久住風塵裏	Do not lament your extended residence in the land of wind and dust,
聖主必封萬戸秩	Our emperor will surely make you the lord of ten thousand households.

This letter and poem are quite a divergence from the poetic mode seen in other works by Kūkai. Here, there are no traces of Buddhist rhetoric, with two exceptions: “though I am the man who walks in the white clouds” (a metaphor for a Buddhist monk), and the description of the frontier peoples as Raksasa (a type of man-eating demon that frequently appears in Buddhist literature and art). Rather, the entire text reads as a Confucian sermon on the importance of loyalty to the emperor and the state, and the need to pacify the frontier. Although these people were more commonly known as the Ezo, Emishi, or the Ainu, the name that Kūkai gave them, the Rong and the Di, are borrowed directly from the Chinese tradition. This is another attempt by Kūkai to textually shape the Heian state along Chinese lines, complete with its own “barbarians” who have yet to be brought into the fold of the Confucian state. In this worldview, the Heian court replaces China as the source of civilized virtue, and the more distant from the court, the less one can enjoy the benefits of the emperor’s civilizing power.

These frontier “barbarians” are depicted in the most uncomplimentary terms. Kūkai casts the conflict between the Heian court and the frontier as a battle between the rational order of the Confucian state and the primitive chaos of the frontier. The Emishi are depicted as being nothing but animals guided by their basest instincts, and who form packs “like ferocious lions, badgers, and foxes.”

“They do not cultivate rice fields nor do they weave clothes, they hunt for deer/Day and night, they wander around the mountains and valleys” is Kūkai’s declaration that the Emishi have rejected the foundations of East Asian agricultural communalism and social organization. The phrase “Their lethal weapons are stored away and await being melted and reforged” suggests that their instruments of war will be recast into “useful” agricultural implements. This brand of agricultural chauvinism did not die out in premodern Japan; indeed, the practice of the Japanese and Chinese assessing the cultural worth of the peripheral peoples based on whether they practiced wet-rice agriculture persisted into the early twentieth century.

Minemori’s tour of duty in the frontier appears to have been moderately successful. However, problems along the frontier persisted. Ten years later, in 825, Junna decided to send another governor to manage the troubled region. This time, Ōtomo no Kunimichi 大伴国道 (778-828), an aristocrat with a troubled past due to his affiliation with the Ōtomo clan, was chosen. The periphery of the Heian state was not unfamiliar to Kunimichi; after his father Ōtomo no Tsuguhito 大伴継人 (?-785) was executed for the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu, the seven-year-old Kunimichi was exiled to Sado Island, where he remained until pardoned in 803. Although his eighteen-year exile removed him from the mainstream of Heiankyō politics for what should have been the formative years of his career he quickly distinguished himself upon his return to the capital and quickly rose through the ranks. One of his major achievements was overseeing the completion of the Masuda Reservoir. By the time he was appointed to the governorship in 823, he held the rank of Junior Fourth Rank, Upper Grade. Once again, Kūkai wrote a congratulatory epistle and poem:⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ SRS 3:17.

夫。膚寸無心南北。遇風則飛順之德也。人臣無意東西。銜命則馳忠之至也。葦爾毛夷迫居良垂。豺心蜂性歷代為梗矣。昔。景行皇帝。撫運之日。東夷未賓。日本武尊。率左右將軍。武彥武日命等征之。毛人面縛之。日命則君之先也。

The clouds have no desire to go north or south, but should they encounter the wind, they fly off – this is the virtue of obedience. The Emperor’s retainers have no desire to go east or west, they go where they are ordered – this is the pinnacle of loyalty. The petty Hairy Barbarians have been closing in on our northeastern frontier and making a nuisance of themselves for generations with their wolf-hearts and bee-like natures. Long ago, when Emperor Keikō pacified the nation,⁴¹⁷ the Eastern Barbarians had yet to submit to his authority. Yamato Takeru led the generals Takehiko no Mikoto and Takehi no Mikoto⁴¹⁸ into battle to subjugate them, and the Hairy Barbarians surrendered. Takehi no Mikoto is none other than your ancestor.

延曆中亦反之。桓武皇帝。令大將軍伴弟滿等即罪。從武日平之已來。每時時作逆。遣諸氏將。令罰其辜。然猶。人面獸心。不肯朝貢。今上。乾坤為德。仁義其心。麒麟不踏昆蟲鳳凰來巢阿閣。風調不暴。今上。刑厝不尸。太平之治五稔于今矣。

During the Enryaku years, the Hairy Barbarians rose up again. Emperor Kanmu ordered General Tomo no Otomitsu to immediately subjugate them. Since the time of Takehi’s pacification, there have been frequent rebellions. Various ministers and generals were sent and ordered to punish them for their transgressions. However, although they have the faces of humans, they have the hearts of beasts and refuse to offer tribute to the emperor. The present emperor displays the virtues of heaven and earth, directing his heart toward benevolence and righteousness. The *kirin* does not trample on insects, and the phoenix makes the grand palace its nest. The winds are calm and do not flare up. Although the Penal Law is on the books, it is never used. It has been five years since Saga ascended the throne, and peace has prevailed throughout the land.

夫。无為之世致有苗之伐。垂拱之時有涿鹿之戰。時已澆季仁義之鄉返為胡越。此屬。神光怪氣發東。地震流星起西。皇帝納隍軫慮。即欲遣文翁孫子。鎮押東夷。

⁴¹⁷ Emperor Keikō 景行天皇, the twelfth emperor, supposedly reigned during the fourth century. He is considered one of the “legendary emperors,” as there is a lack of documentation about his reign. Yamato Takeru, the famous (and also legendary) general who subjugated the “hairy people” served Emperor Keikō (William Wayne Farris, *Heavenly Warriors: The Evolution of Japan’s Military, 500-1300*, (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1995), 84).

⁴¹⁸ These generals were in the service of Yamato Takeru and Emperor Keikō during their subjugation of the Emishi and the Kumaso (Imataka et al., 262).

During the reign of Emperor Shun, a time when the realm ruled itself, he ordered the invasion of the Kingdom of You Miao;⁴¹⁹ during the reign of the Yellow Emperor, a time when the emperor could rule with his arms folded across his chest, there was the battle at Zhoulu.⁴²⁰ In this time of moral decay, realms of benevolence and righteousness will become barbaric like the lands of Yue and Hu. Recently, there have been mysterious lights and strange phenomena in the east, and earthquakes and shooting stars in the west. The emperor takes the plight of the villages into account and wants to send you to conquer the Eastern Barbarians, since you are just like Wen Weng⁴²¹ or Sun Zi.

君。智而謀。果而惠。門即累葉。人寔平章。吐議允聖心衆亦推之。是故授斧節於龍顏。撫皇化于蝦荒。賜餞賜詩天沢霈然。侍坐奉和詩則為什。當之暉榮史策舉音絲竹。

While you possess sharp intelligence, strategic prowess and decisiveness, you are also compassionate. Your family is an accumulation of the leaves of learning; truly you possess the qualifications of an imperial scribe. You present arguments that please the emperor, and you enjoy the support of the people as well. Therefore, you were presented the ceremonial sword by the emperor, and you will instill his virtues in the vulgar barbarians. You were given a farewell banquet and presented with poems; the emperor showered you with a deluge of benevolence. You sat before the emperor and exchanged many poems with him. Your glory shall be recorded in the history books and the rhythm of your poetry shall be set to music.

加之。舉城寮族知旧悉皆餞惜。貧道与君淡交玄度遠公。緇素區別伴佐昆季。送人以言古人道之。三軸秘錄。一篇拙詩。加持神藥。以弁別後之思。人至乞垂檢。春辭秋入。聖君之明詔。載馳載驟。早奏辺烽之無塵。云爾。

In addition, your colleagues, relatives and friends throughout the city have presented you with farewell gifts and lament [your departure]. Our friendship is like plain company,⁴²² and we are like Xuan Du and Yuan

⁴¹⁹ The Kingdom of You Miao is the homeland of a non-Han people featured in the *Book of Documents* (Imataka et al., 262).

⁴²⁰ During the reign of the Yellow Emperor, Chi You 蚩尤 started a revolt. The emperor ordered retaliatory action, and Chi You was killed at Zhoulu 涿鹿 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 220).

⁴²¹ Wen Weng 文翁 was the regional magistrate 群守 of Shu 蜀 and was fond of learning. He devoted himself to “civilizing” the Shu, who developed an interest in learning as a result (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 220).

⁴²² Kūkai uses a line from the *Zhuangzi* to demonstrate the depths of his friendship with Kunimichi and how it transcends the interests of the vulgar world: “Moreover, the intercourse of superior men is tasteless as water, while

Gong.⁴²³ Although priests and laymen are separate, the Ōtomo and Saeki clans are brothers. The ancients said that a person should be sent off with words. I present you with the *Three Strategies*, a piece of poetry, and medicines that have been esoterically blessed. When my messenger arrives, I ask that you inspect these items. It is the emperor's esteemed wish that you depart in the spring and return in the autumn. Gallop away, gallop away! I present the following poem in hopes that you will quickly dispatch the fires and dust on the frontier.

君門開關皇王將	Since the founding of our nation, your clan served the emperor as generals,
智勇英謀允聖神	Your wisdom, bravery, insight and strategy are truly divine.
持節犯霜如松柏	You possess loyalty that resists the frost, like pine or cypress,
含貞凌雪似竹筠	Your righteousness withstands the snow, like bamboo.
良將折衝何出塞	Why does the skilled general leave the fort to engage the enemy?
賢才妙略帳中陳	Superior strategies by a brilliant talent are conceived inside a battlefield tent.
毛夷螳陣一把草	The Hairy Barbarians are like a legion of ants; they are merely a handful of grass,
羽狄豺羆半掬塵	The Feathered Barbarians are like a pack of wolves, merely half a handful of dust.
飛禽也識恩將義	Birds are aware of gratitude and righteousness,
猛虎尚智慧與仁	Vicious tigers know about generosity and benevolence.
治亂在吾不在敵	Pacifying the insurrection is incumbent upon you, not the enemy
歸心叛意為己身	Whether they submit or revolt depends upon your intent

that of mean men is sweet as new wine. But the tastelessness of the superior men leads on to affection, and the sweetness of the mean men to aversion.” 且君子之交淡若水 小人之交甘若醴 君子淡以親 小人甘以絕 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 501; Legge, *Chuang tsu*, 35). The character 淡 means “bland” or “simple,” and describes human relations that are “refreshing” in contrast to the “cloying relations of the ‘petty man which are sweet as sugar” (Pollack, 85).

⁴²³ The identity of Xuan Du 玄度 cannot be ascertained, but it may be another name for Xu Xun 許詢 (fl. ca. 358?), a Daoist poet who enjoyed mountaineering, but was also present at Wang Xi-zhi's 王羲之 poetry gathering at the Orchid Pavilion 蘭亭 in 353 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 501; Imataka et al., 263). Yuan Gong 遠公 (dates unknown) was a monk who lived in the wilderness. In the poem above, Kūkai presents Xuan Du as Kunimichi, and Yuan Gong as himself (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 501).

天簡在君不須讓	The emperor has appointed you, and this appointment cannot be declined
忘家為国之忠臣	Forgetting one's home for the nation – such is a loyal retainer
鳥声悲唳園花落 雲旆飛馳軍令申	The birds cry in their sad voices and blossoms fall in the garden War banners fly like clouds and marching orders are issued
孫子張良彼何物 六韜三略用此春	Sun Zi and Zhang Liang – what are they? The Six Secret Teachings and Three Strategies will be used this spring
東涯萬里少一步 一咤早馳荒服馴	The ten thousand 10,000 li eastern frontier is just a step away Just shout and gallop in on your horse – the ruffians will submit

The rhetoric and imagery here is similar to that of the earlier epistle and poem Kūkai sent to Minemori. The Emishi are depicted as recalcitrant, animal-like barbarians who do not accede to the emperor's authority. Once again, Kūkai makes no significant attempt to situate the conflict with the Emishi within Buddhist discourse. The problem is solely Confucian in nature (the emperor's virtue not properly radiating out to the frontier) as is its solution (send court bureaucrats well-versed in the literary and military arts with the emperor's blessing).

Dispatching scholar-bureaucrats with limited (or perhaps no) formal military background demonstrates the Heian court's desperation in bringing the frontier in line with the Confucian worldview. Kūkai's writings depict the Emishi as aggressive, socially unorganized, non-agricultural, subsistence hunters and gatherers, but the archaeological record actually tells a different story. Although climatic conditions until around the sixth century did not make wet-rice agriculture practical on a large scale in the Tōhoku region, there is archaeological evidence it was practiced in parts of modern-day Aomori Prefecture from as far back as the early Yayoi

period (ca. 300 (400) BCE-300 CE).⁴²⁴ Furthermore, the Emishi were clearly a match militarily for the Heian court: Kūkai is not engaging in hyperbole when he claims “tens of thousands of soldiers were rallied, but it was of no use,” as it is known through historical records the court sent numerous military campaigns (perhaps with as many as hundreds of thousands of peasant conscripts) into the frontier, with limited success.⁴²⁵ Indeed, the Emishi were skilled horsemen and a formidable military force, and the constant pacification campaigns against them were a major drain on the state treasury, especially at a time when the court was building a new capital.⁴²⁶ Also, Kūkai’s observation that “Recently, there have been mysterious lights and strange phenomena in the east, and earthquakes and shooting stars in the west” 此属神光怪気 東地震流星起西 shows a certain anxiety at court; after all, if imperial virtues were properly maintained, such phenomena would not occur.

Minemori and Kunimichi’s assignment to the frontier, commemorated by Kūkai’s congratulatory epistle-poems, demonstrate a discursive shift in the court’s handling of frontier affairs. Previous emperors viewed the Emishi problem as primarily a military matter to be handled by seasoned generals, but emperors Saga and Junna viewed it a problem of cultural integration as well as military pacification. Webb observes that attempts to textually integrate peripheral peoples can be seen as early as the *Nihon shoki*,⁴²⁷ but in Minemori and Kunimichi’s cases, the court adopts the opposite approach: the poet is sent to the frontier. Indeed, the court could not have selected better scholar-bureaucrats to further its cultural colonization of its frontier: Minemori excelled in Chinese poetry and was intimately involved with the compilation

⁴²⁴ Mark J. Hudson, *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 198; Okamura Michio, *Jōmon no seikatsushi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2002), 338-339, 361.

⁴²⁵ Sakaue, 108-109.

⁴²⁶ McCullough, “The Heian Court,” 32.

⁴²⁷ Webb, 166.

of the imperial anthologies, and Kunimichi carried on the scholarly and literary tradition of the Ōtomo clan.

Despite sharing a number of rhetorical similarities, there is a key functional difference between the epistle-poem sets sent to Minemori and Kunimichi. Aside from congratulating Kunimichi on his new posting and extolling his many literary and martial virtues, the letter and poem sent to Kunimichi serve to politically rehabilitate the Ōtomo lineage. Certainly, the Ōtomo are well-known in the history of Japanese literature, producing such outstanding poets as Tabito 旅人 (665-731) and his son Yakamochi. Tabito's maternal half-sister Ōtomo no Sakanoue no Iratsume 大伴坂上郎女 (ca. 695-active until 750), had over seventy poems included in the *Man'yōshū*.⁴²⁸

The Ōtomo were also known as a powerful warrior clan, and their involvement in court politics from the Nara Period on led to their decline. Tabito himself was implicated in the Prince Nagaya 長屋王 (684(?)-729) incident, where members of the Fujiwara clan falsely accused the prince of treason.⁴²⁹ The prince was sentenced to death and eventually committed suicide, and Tabito was temporarily relegated to Dazaifu and charged with pacifying the Hayato due to his association with him. Ōtomo no Komaro 大伴古麻呂 (?-757) was tortured to death for his suspected involvement in the unsuccessful plot to overthrow Empress Kōken 孝謙天皇 (718-770, r. 749-758, 776-770), led by Tachibana no Naramaro 橘奈良麻呂 (721(?)-757).⁴³⁰ Komaro's son was none other than the aforementioned Tsuguhito. Furthermore, while Tsuguhito

⁴²⁸ Cranston, *A Waka Anthology*, 407-408.

⁴²⁹ Naoki Kōjirō and Felicia G. Bock, "The Nara State," in Delmer M. Brown, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 248.

⁴³⁰ Cranston, "Asuka and Nara Culture," 480; Sakaue, 30.

was held responsible for the incident at Nagaokakyō, many historians believe that Yakamochi was actually the ringleader.⁴³¹

Kūkai's epistle and poem focuses on the literary tradition of the Ōtomo clan, and makes no mention of their political troubles in the late eighth century. Kunimichi's ancestors are depicted as loyal servants of the emperor and the nation, leading armies into battle to subjugate barbarians on the frontier. In addition to lauding the past military accomplishments of the Ōtomo, Kūkai also lavishly praises Kunimichi's abilities as an orator and a poet, "Your glory shall be recorded in the history books and the rhythm of your poetry shall be set to music." Kūkai's testament to Kunimichi completely elides the past transgressions committed by his ancestors and presents him with a rehabilitated lineage.⁴³²

⁴³¹ Sakaue, 30.

⁴³² This epistle-poem may have greater implications for the history of Japanese literature than Kūkai could have possibly imagined. Until Tsuguhito was posthumously pardoned, and Kunimichi was recalled from provincial exile and installed in a court office, the fortunes (both financial and political) of the Ōtomo clan were in a steep decline. Although it was Tsuguhito, not Yakamochi, who was executed for the assassination of Tanetsugu, all of Yakamochi's property was seized in a typical "guilt-by-association" judgment. Yakamochi died in 785, and perhaps the legacy of the *Man'yōshū* would have died with him, if not for a posthumous pardon in 805. Although more research is required, it could be that epistles such as this one played an indirect role in rehabilitating the *Manyōshū* itself and bringing it back into public prominence. Of course, Kūkai himself would have had a vested interest in restoring the glory of the Ōtomo lineage, since his birth family, the Saeki, was a branch family of the Ōtomo (Kūkai clearly states as much when he says, "Although priests and laymen are separate, the Ōtomo and Saeki clans are brothers"). Therefore, another way to understand the "decline" of "Japanese" poetry and the "rise" of "Chinese" poetry during the early Heian period could be to view them as part of a conflict between two opposing family lines: the Ōtomo, who were "Japanese" poets but happened to be on the wrong side of the line during certain political events, and the Fujiwara, who worked to solidify their position at court and were active contributors to the "Chinese" collections. Members of the Fujiwara clan contributed six poems to the *Bunka shūreishū*, five poems to the *Ryōunshū*, and nine poems to the *Keikokushū*, compared to only one poem submitted by a member of the Ōtomo to the *Ryōunshū*. Considering that the members of the Ōtomo clan were also competent in Chinese poetry (Tabito hosted Chinese-style plum viewing and poetry parties in Dazaifu, and Yakamochi wrote prefaces in Chinese for poems in the *Man'yōshū*) it is strange that the Ōtomo clan is so poorly represented in the imperial anthologies. This is likely because the Ōtomo were poetically purged from public literary discourse in the early Heian period due to their involvement in various late Nara and early Heian political scandals, and were viewed as the type of anti-imperial troublemakers that the strengthened *ritsuryō* system and its heavy dose of continental Confucian ideology hoped to remedy. As the kana preface to the *Kokin wakashū* makes reference to *Man'yōshū* poets, it is clear that at least by the mid-ninth century Japanese literati were familiar with the material. Although it is highly speculative at this time, the relationships between Kūkai, the pardoning of members of the Ōtomo clan, and the reappearance of the *Man'yōshū* in public literary discourse are worthy of further investigation.

Conclusion

Kūkai's engagement with the court literati after his return from China reveals a great deal about his literary theories and practices. As a member of Saga's close circle, Kūkai was a participant in the discourse of statecraft, often affirming the power of the written word as a means to educate the masses and maintain control. Yet, in other writings, he portrays a Buddhist utopia that goes beyond the control of the state – Kūkai's poem celebrating the return of the rainfall and his monument to Shōdō are two conspicuous examples. The Shōdō biography portrays a perfect, almost other-worldly realm of Buddhist eremitism. While Mt. Nikkō was geographically within the confines of the early Heian state, Kūkai liberated it from the clutches of the *ritsuryō* system by transforming it into a mystical realm that fused Japanese, Chinese and legendary Buddhist elements.

While Mt. Nikkō was accorded special status in Kūkai's geographic imaginary, the frontier areas of the Tōhoku region were not. Kūkai's epistle-poem sets sent to Minemori and Kunimichi serve to textually circumscribe the borders of the Heian state along the lines of a center-periphery ideology inspired in part by Chinese tradition. In Kunimichi's case, the epistle and poem also aided in the rehabilitation of the Ōtomo lineage, bringing it back into the fold of Japanese political, and possibly literary, history.

Chapter Three About the *Henjō Hakki Shōryōshū*

Introduction: The Making of the *Henjō Hakki Shōryōshū*

The texts collected in the *Henjō hakki shōryōshū* (henceforth, *Shōryōshū*)⁴³³ are not widely studied by scholars either in Japan or abroad.⁴³⁴ This is not surprising, since the *Shōryōshū* lacks the thematic cohesion and philosophical synthesis of his religious treatises. Nonetheless, the *Shōryōshū* contains many important documents: letters that Kūkai wrote to various officials while in Tang China, the epitaph he dedicated to his departed master Hui-guo, letters seeking permission to build a new monastic compound atop Mt. Kōya, and numerous poems, memorials, and votive documents. At present, a mere fraction of the *Shōryōshū*'s contents are available in English translation, and most studies of early Heian Japanese literature make only passing reference to the collection. Chapters One and Two presented several selections from the *Shōryōshū* in English translation, examples include the steles Kūkai composed for Hui-guo, Shōdō and the Masuda Reservoir, the poems he presented to Minemori and Kunimichi prior to their postings in the eastern hinterlands, and his esoteric Buddhist *you xian shi* poem.

David Gardiner, who has published translations of two documents from the *Shōryōshū*, offers the following comments:

Although the *Shōryōshū* does not contain any of Kūkai's major doctrinal works, many of its texts portray esoteric Buddhist theories as refracted through the lens of actual practice, thereby revealing how Shingon Buddhism took shape in its initial stages, during his lifetime. The *Shōryōshū* is an important historical resource for understanding

⁴³³ A note on the transcription: while texts from the Heian period transcribe the characters 性靈集 as *Seireishū*, this study shall follow modern conventions and transcribe the collection's title as *Shōryōshū*.

⁴³⁴ An exception is Judith Rabinovitch and Timothy Bradstock's *Dance of the Butterflies: Chinese Poetry from the Japanese Court Tradition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). They hold the *Shōryōshū* in high regard, stating "Kūkai's collection of largely Buddhist Chinese poetry and prose, *Seireishū* [*Shōryōshū*] remains a classic in the Chinese literary tradition of the Heian court and bears testimony to his belief in the high value of Chinese letters in imparting Buddhist doctrine" (Rabinovitch and Bradstock, 20).

the concrete means by which Kūkai propagated Shingon Buddhism.⁴³⁵

Indeed, since the *Shōryōshū* is a collection of miscellaneous documents on a variety of subjects produced over the course of Kūkai's life, it provides a variety of insights into his everyday activities in religion, politics, and literature.

The *Shōryōshū* contains 111 documents, most of which are attributed to Kūkai. Several years before his death in 835, his disciple Shinzei 真濟(800-860) started gathering the documents that appear in the collection. In addition, Shinzei authored the preface, a key text in understanding his attempt to canonize his master and generate political capital for himself. The preface is presented below:

西山禪念沙門真濟撰集

Compiled by Shinzei, Meditation Monk in the Western Mountains⁴³⁶

余少小也頗貴先氏之風。志學之後。樂寂歷而不屑此事。仰幽人之幽行。爰有一上人。耽大道之大妙。号曰大遍照金剛。青襟積槐林之春秋。絳帳富山河之英萃。遂則陋域中近智。慕超然遠猷。出俗入真去偽得貞。

When I was young, I had deep respect for the scholarly ways of my ancestors. But after reaching the age of “aspiration to learning,”⁴³⁷ I found solace in tranquility and lost interest in the Confucian teachings.

Revering the profound actions of profound people,⁴³⁸ I immersed myself in the great mysteries of the Great Way. There is a saint named Dai Henjō Kongō. In the spring and fall of his student days he wore a blue collar⁴³⁹ and plucked the fruits of the forest of learning. Then, he displayed the scarlet curtain⁴⁴⁰ of a

⁴³⁵ David Gardiner, “The Consecration of the Monastic Compound at Mt. Kōya” in David White, ed., *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 127.

⁴³⁶ The Western Mountains refer to the Takaosanji temple (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 150).

⁴³⁷ The age of fifteen, as recorded in the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart’s desire without overstepping the line’” 子曰吾十有五而志乎學三十而立四十而不惑五十而知天命六十而耳順七十而從心所欲不踰矩 (Lau, 62; Kanaya, 28).

⁴³⁸ “Profound people” 幽人 refers to the buddhas and bodhisattvas (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 150).

⁴³⁹ Blue collars as student emblems are based on a poem in the *Book of Songs*:

青青子衿	O you, with the blue collar,
悠悠我心	Prolonged is the anxiety of my heart.
縱我不往	Although I do not go [to you]
子寧不嗣音	Why do you not continue your messages [to me]?

teacher and collected the flowers of the mountains and rivers. Despising the shallow wisdom of our isolated land, he yearned for the transcendent and the profound. He left the vulgar and entered the true; he departed from the false and obtained the pure.

復巖豁溪之美。神木靈草之區。耳目所經未嘗不究。每歎曰。堤葉彫落久。龍葩待何春。吾生之愚憑誰歸源。但法有在。起予是天。天隨其願果擢求法。去延曆未銜命入唐。適見京城青龍寺大德惠果阿闍梨。

The beauty of the towering peaks and wide valleys and the variety of holy trees and sacred grasses tantalized his eyes and ears, and he could not help but be astounded. He frequently lamented, “It has been an eternity since the *bodhi* leaves fell. What spring does the dragon blossom tree await?”⁴⁴¹ As I was born foolish, whom shall I rely upon to return to the Source? Yet, surely this Dharma exists, and what shall guide me is Heaven.”⁴⁴² The emperor, assenting to his prayer, finally selected him to be a Dharma-seeking monk. At the end of the Enryaku reign, an era now long past, he journeyed to Tang China on the emperor’s orders.⁴⁴³ In the capital, he happened to meet the *archaya* Hui-guo, the revered priest of the Qinglongsi temple.

即南天竺大弁正三藏上足弟子。代宗皇帝所師供也。和尚始一目以喜。待已厚曰。吾待汝久。來何遲矣。生期向闕。精勤早受。則授二部大曼荼羅法。百餘部秘藏。上人性也。得善聆聲知意經目止口。積年之功旬時學得。

Hui-guo was a senior disciple of the Indian monk Amogavajra, the Great Senior Preceptor of the Tripitaka

(Imataka et al., 152; Legge, *The She King*, 144).

⁴⁴⁰ The “scarlet curtain” 絳帳 is the scarlet silk curtain displayed by Confucian scholar and commentator Ma Rong 馬融 (79-166) when he lectured (Imataka et al., 152). According to the *History of the Later Han*, Ma “occupied an elevated hall. He sat before a scarlet curtain to teach his students; behind it were his female musicians. The students taught one another in order of seniority; rarely did anyone ‘enter his chamber’” (Haun Saussy, “Classical Exegesis,” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 912).

⁴⁴¹ The dragon blossom tree is supposed to blossom when the *bodhisattva* Maitreya appears in the world (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 151).

⁴⁴² This is an allusion to the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘There is no one who understands me.’ Tsu-kung said, ‘How is it that there is no one who understands you?’ The Master said, ‘I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame Man. In my studies, I start from below and get through to what is above. If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven.’ 子曰莫我知也夫子貢曰何為其莫知子也子曰不怨天不尤人下學而上達知我者其天乎 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 150; Lau, 129; Kanaya, 203). “Heaven” indicates the emperor.

⁴⁴³ The phrase “sent on a mission on the ruler’s orders” 銜君命而使 appears in the *Li ji* 禮記 (*Book of Rites*) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 150).

who had served Emperor Daizong.⁴⁴⁴ Hui-guo took one look at him [Kūkai] and was overjoyed.

Welcoming him, warmly he said, “I have waited for you for so long. Why did you come so late? My life is almost at an end. Be diligent and quickly receive my teachings.” Then, Hui-guo conferred the teachings of the dual Womb and Diamond mandalas and one-hundred-plus⁴⁴⁵ texts from the secret treasury. Saint Kūkai’s nature was such that he could understand the import of what he heard, and whatever his eye passed over was retained by his tongue. He accumulated years’ worth of effort and learning in a single season.

大師亦奄然而從化。故付法云。今有日本沙門來求聖教。以兩部秘奧壇儀印契。唐梵無差悉受於心。猶如寫瓶。吉矣汝傳燈了吾願足焉。金剛薩捶扣大日之寂後。所謂第八折負者吾師是也。故得傳命以唐梵之式。答恩以秘密之實。真言加持之道日來漸。曼荼羅頂之風是時彌布。

The Great Master Hui-guo suddenly went to his death.⁴⁴⁶ That is why when Hui-guo transmitted the Dharma to Dai Henjō Kongō he said, “Now, there is a monk from Japan who came to seek the sacred teachings, embodied in the secret rituals and mudras of the Womb and Diamond platforms. He has taken the pledge in both the Womb and Diamond *mandala* chambers. Whether in Chinese or in Sanskrit, he received the teachings in his heart; it was like pouring water from one jar into another. How fortunate that I transmitted the lamp to you! My prayers have been fulfilled.” My master is the eighth in line from Vajrasatta, who sought the *samadhi* of Mahāvairocana.⁴⁴⁷ That is why he used both Chinese and Sanskrit rituals to fulfill his mission of transmitting the Dharma to Japan and used the treasure of esoteric teachings to display his gratitude to the emperor. The way of Shingon rituals was transmitted on that day, and *abhisekha* using *mandala* spread from that moment on.

是即以我上國聖出運大化兼徹。而令印度新教授若人以安來者矣。于嗟迷方問津何得千里即目。弟子久渴清塵恭至下風。鐘籟相響新扣如舊。執事年深未見其淺。誠知二氣變龍雲雷成章。信不虛言哉。和尚昔在唐日作離合贈土僧惟上。前御史大夫泉州別駕馬綰一時大才也。覽則驚怪因送詩云。

⁴⁴⁴ Emperor Daizong 代宗 ruled from 762-779 (Tōdō, 1526).

⁴⁴⁵ According to the *Goshōrai mokuroku*, there were 142 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 151).

⁴⁴⁶ 化 is an abbreviation of 遷化, which refers to the death of a high priest (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 151).

⁴⁴⁷ Vajrasatta 金剛薩捶 is considered the second patriarch of esoteric Buddhism. In the *Mahāvairocana sūtra*, Vajrasatta resides in Mahāvairocana’s cosmic palace and serves as his interlocutor for his discourses on all-embracing wisdom and enlightenment (Abe, 131-132).

Our Emperor Kanmu, a sage whose like appears once every thousand years, spread his vast virtue throughout the realm, making it possible for Kūkai to bring peace to future generations with these new teachings from India. Ah! Lost, I ask for the way to the ford; how can I see thousands of *li* ahead?⁴⁴⁸ I, his disciple, have long sought a world free of dust, so I reverently received his teachings. Just as a bell and flute are in perfect harmony, newly-acquainted people may speak to each other as though they were old friends. Though I have served him for many years, I have yet to see anything shallow in his thought. The dual forces of yin and yang transforming into a dragon and then forming clouds which create thunder – I now know that this is not an empty saying!⁴⁴⁹ Long ago, when the master was in China, he composed a poem in the *li he* style and presented it to Wei-shang, a local monk.⁴⁵⁰ Ma Zong, the former Inspector General and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou,⁴⁵¹ was one of the great talents of his generation. He saw

⁴⁴⁸ In the *Analects*, Zi lu (Tsu-lu) 子路 asks two men plowing a field for directions to the river crossing. Upon learning that Zi-lu was a disciple of Confucius, one of the men says (in derision) that Confucius should already know the way (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 152; Lau, 150; Kanaya, 253-254). Here, it seems that Shinzei has inverted the rhetorical thrust of the source text and turned it into an expression of humility.

⁴⁴⁹ Modern commentators have opposing interpretations: Shinzei is praising his ability to immediately absorb Kūkai’s teachings (Imataka et al., 154), or the inability of his disciples to perceive fully the profundity of his actions (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154). The second interpretation draws on commentary to the *Dao de jing* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 493).

⁴⁵⁰ Wei-shang was one of Hui-guo’s disciples, and was mentioned in the epitaph Kūkai composed for Hui-guo (refer to Chapter Two). *Li he* 離合 (separating and joining) refers to a “miscellaneous” style of Chinese poetry where the component of the Chinese character (such as the radical or the remainder) used to start the first line is then used to begin the second line. Although the *li he* poems that Kūkai and Wei-shang exchanged are no longer extant in any sources from the period, the *Kansekishō* 緘石鈔, a commentary on the *Shōryōshū* written by Saisen, claims to contain one of the *li he* poems Kūkai wrote in China:

磴危人難行	Stone-paved slopes crumble, they are difficult for people to traverse
石嶮獸無登	The rocks are steep, wild beasts do not climb them
燭暗迷前後	The torch is extinguished, there is confusion all around
蜀人不得過	People from Shu would be unable to make their way through

The first character in the second line 石(stone) is the radical from the character which opens the first line 磴 (stone-paved slope). The reverse operation is performed in the third and fourth lines: the non-radical remainder (in this case, the phonetic portion) of the first character in the third line 燭 (torch) is used to start the fourth line 蜀(Shu, a non-Han kingdom located near present-day Chengdu, Sichuan Province) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 493).

⁴⁵¹ Shinzei lists two distinct titles for Ma Zong: former Inspector General 前御史大夫 and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou 泉州別駕. Quanzhou is part of modern-day Fujian Province. Inspector General was a fairly high position (Junior Third Rank, one step below the Ministers of State) and responsible for supervising government officials. A provincial vice-governor was classified as Fifth Rank, Lower. The *Old Records of the Tang* 旧唐書 and the *New Records of the Tang* 新唐書 both mention that Ma Zong was appointed vice-governor as a demotion, but not his former service as an Inspector General (Imataka et al., 154). Ma Zong also claimed to be the descendant of Ma Yuan 馬元 (14-49), the famed Han general who suppressed a rebellion in what is modern-day Vietnam and erected “bronze pillars” to mark the southern boundaries of the Han state. Historical veracity notwithstanding, Ma Zong also claimed to have erected bronze pillars at the same site to commemorate his great-ancestor’s achievement. (Liam Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu, HI: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 7, 102).

Kūkai's poetry and was astounded with disbelief. Therefore, he sent Kūkai the following poem:

何乃萬里來	Why have you come from so far away?
可非銜其才	Surely not to flaunt your talents!
增學助玄機	Study even harder and aid the profound teachings!
土人如子稀	People here like you are rare

其後藉甚滿邦縉素仰止。詩賦往來動剩篋笥。遂使絕域寫憂殊方通心。詞翰俱美誠興東方君子之風。故毘陵子胡伯崇歌云。

Afterward, his fame spread⁴⁵² throughout the land, and he was revered by both laymen and clergy. Poems and rhapsodies were exchanged back and forth and before long his letter box was filled with poetry. In this way he let out his laments in a faraway land, and gave expression to his feelings in a foreign country. His diction and writing were both beautiful and he truly adopted the style of the Eastern gentleman.⁴⁵³

That is why Hu Bochong of Piling⁴⁵⁴ said in his song:

說四句演毘尼	Preaching on the Four Verses ⁴⁵⁵ and expounding on the Precepts
凡夫聽者盡歸依	All those who hear these shall take refuge

天假吾師多伎術。就中草聖最狂逸。不可得難再見。是以啄雞奔獸之點獨留九州。涌雲迴水之畫盛變八紘。或臥煙霞而獨嘯任意腑詠。或對天問以獻納隨手成章。至如慕仙詩。高山風易起。深海水難量。又遊神泉。高台神構非人力。池鏡泓澄含日暉。

The heavens have granted my master many skills, but none as extraordinary as his grass script. How rare – it will be difficult to see such talent again! It is for this reason that the calligraphic styles depicting the power of a rooster's beak or a charging beast have remained in the Nine Provinces of China, and

⁴⁵² The phrase 藉甚 is an abbreviated quotation of a line from the *Records of the Han*: 名聲藉甚 (Imataka et al., 154-155).

⁴⁵³ The “Records of Eastern Barbarians” 東夷傳 chapter of the *Records of the Later Han* 後漢書 refers to a land of gentlemen across the eastern seas (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154).

⁴⁵⁴ Hu Bochong 胡伯崇 (dates unknown) was a poet Kūkai apparently encountered in China, but very little is known about him, and the specific location of Piling cannot be ascertained from Chinese gazetteers of the period (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154, 493).

⁴⁵⁵ This is likely to be from a *gatha* 偈 known as the *Gatha on the Admonitions of the Seven Buddhas* 七仏通戒偈, a compilation of the common teachings of the historical Buddha and the six Buddhas who came before him. The “four verses” are:

諸惡莫作	Commit no acts of evil
衆善奉行	For the benefit of all, perform acts of good
自淨其意	Keep one's thoughts pure –
是諸仏教	These are the teachings of the Buddhas

(Watanabe and Miyasaka, 493).

brushwork like floating clouds and flowing water have spread to Japan.. One day, Kūkai lay in the mist talking to himself and committed his thoughts to poetry. On another day, he presented a poem in reply to the emperor, and it was as though the writing just flowed from his hand. In a poem where he seeks the mountain sage he wrote, “On tall peaks, the wind is easily aroused/In deep seas, water is difficult to measure.” Also, when he visited the Shinsen’en Garden, he wrote, “The high dais is the work of the gods and not of man/The mirror-like surface of the pond is crystal clear and absorbs the sunlight.”

比興爭宣氣質衝揚。風雅勤戒煥乎可觀。夫其詩賦哀讚之作。碑誦表書之制。所遇而作不假草案。纔了不競把。無由再看之。弟子憂金玉糶谿。歎蘭桂壓秋艾。侍坐而集記略得五百以來紙。兼摭唐人贈答。稍警策雜此帙中。編成十卷。名曰遍照發揮性靈集。其餘調分卷別者。今之所不撰也。願吾黨好事永味師迹。俾禪餘之憩來。時時披對此文。唯備一菴遊目。誰稱他人沽哉。

In these verses simile and metaphor vie with each other, and instruction and odes shine throughout.⁴⁵⁶ The poems, rhapsodies, laments and praises he composed and the monuments, prayers, petitions and calligraphy he produced were created on the spot without benefit of a draft. If you did not grab a text as soon as he finished it, you would never see it again. I, his disciple Shinzei, worry that the gold and jade will mingle with stones in the riverbed, and lament that the orchids and cassia will be overrun by the autumn mugwort. Serving at his side, I have collected and transcribed his writings, accumulating over five hundred pieces of paper. In addition, I have included his correspondence with people of Tang as outstanding examples of poetry and prose. This collection of ten volumes I have named the *Henjō hakki shōryōshū*. Extraneous texts that fall outside the categories presented in these volumes have been excluded for the time being. It is my wish that Kūkai’s disciples savor his writings for years to come, and that they occasionally open and read these volumes as respite from their meditation. Mere amusement for the eye while alone in one’s hut – who would think of peddling them to others?⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ Shinzei references four of the six modes of expression found in the *Book of Songs*: *bi* 比 (simile), *xing* 興 (metaphor), *feng* 風 (instruction) and *ya* 雅 (odes). The remaining two are *fu* 賦 (description) and *song* 頌 (hymn) (Imataka et al., 155; Victor H. Mair, “Introduction: The Origins and Impact of Literati Culture,” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 5).

⁴⁵⁷ This is a reference to the *Analects*: “Tsu-kung said, ‘If you had a beautiful piece of jade here, would you put it away safely in a box or would you try to sell it for a good price?’ The Master said, ‘Of course I would sell it. Of course I would sell it. All I am waiting for is the right offer’” 子貢曰有美玉於斯韞匱而藏諸求善賈而沽諸子曰沽之哉沽之哉我待賈者也 (Imataka et al., 156; Lau, 98; Kanaya, 122).

The first half of the preface provides a summary of the key elements common to hagiographic narratives on Kūkai: his first encounter with Hui-guo, how this encounter was predicted by Hui-guo, and how transmitting the esoteric teachings to Kūkai was as simple as “pouring water from one jar into another.” Kūkai’s facility in Chinese and Sanskrit – staples in any account that mentions Kūkai’s sojourn in Tang China – are also mentioned.

Once the requisite details establishing Kūkai’s background and lineage are provided, Shinzei describes Kūkai’s literary accomplishments. He does not attempt to situate Kūkai’s literary output into an overtly Confucian “statescraftism” or esoteric Buddhist discursive frame; rather, he presents Kūkai as a literary talent in his own right. By mentioning Kūkai’s encounters with literati-bureaucrats such as Ma Zong 馬綜 (?-823), who declares Kūkai to possess a talent rarely found even in China. Shinzei establishes Kūkai as a literary figure on par with the Chinese, something that very few Japanese literati (even those who were prolific poets in Chinese) could claim. However, this strategy should not be interpreted as an attempt to marginalize *kanshi* composed by other Japanese as inferior. Rather, Kūkai’s experiences in China are used to compensate for his lack of proper credentials – the completion of a course of study at the State College. In other words, since Kūkai was not in a privileged position as a canonical writer, “China” is evoked to provide an alternative source of legitimacy, not to challenge the quality of Japanese *kanshi*. Finally, Shinzei cites specific poems composed by Kūkai and presents them as examples of “simile” 比 and “metaphor” 興, demonstrating Kūkai’s mastery of poetic forms found in canonical sources such as *The Book of Songs*.

Shinzei also explicitly states another major objective in compiling the *Shōryōshū*: collecting and preserving Kūkai’s best literary works for the benefit of his disciples and for future generations. He also presents the potential for Kūkai’s writings to serve as a diversion by

suggesting that the monks read them when taking a break from meditating. Finally, Shinzei hints at sharing Kūkai’s writings with a wider readership when he says “Mere amusement for the eye while alone in one’s hut – who would think of peddling them to others?” 唯備一菴遊目誰稱他人沽哉.

The title of the collection, *Henjō hakki shōryōshū*, reveals a great deal about Shinzei’s motives. While Kūkai saw himself as a religious and philosophical pioneer, and part-time statesman, Shinzei wanted to use the *Shōryōshū* to establishing Kūkai as a literary figure. The title itself is infused with Buddhist and Daoist literary aesthetics. *Henjō* 遍照 (shines throughout the world, i.e., Vairocana), which was often used in part of Kūkai’s Buddhist name Henjō Kōngō 遍照金剛 (the adamantine that shines throughout the world). The expression of *hakki* 發揮 is taken directly from a line in the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*), that states, “The six lines, as explained (by the Duke of Kau [Zhou]), bring forth and display (its meaning), and everything about it is (thus) indirectly exhibited” 六爻發揮旁通情也.⁴⁵⁸ In other words, this phrase refers to the manifestation of latent abilities. *Shōryō* 性靈 literally means “the spirit of the essence;” in this case, the “essence” of Kūkai’s writings. Shinzei appropriated the concept of *shōryō* from a line in the *Wenzhang* 文章 (Essay on Literature) section of the *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*Family Instructions for the Yen [Yan] Clan*) by Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-591).⁴⁵⁹ The *Yanshi jiaxun* was composed during the turbulence of the late Northern and Southern Dynasties period (420-589),

⁴⁵⁸ James Legge, *The I Ching*, 415.

⁴⁵⁹ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 36. Yan Zhitui was reared in the Confucian tradition, but was also a Buddhist with a keen sense of politics. *The Family Instructions for the Yen Clan* is a valuable document since it provides a detailed look into aristocratic life of the period through its admonitions on a vast array of topics, such as familial relations, proper study habits, the reconciliation of theory and practice, self-sufficiency, as well as the literary arts. This collection is also considered the prototype for the “family instructions” 家訓 genre of writing. As a devout Buddhist, he also vigorously defended the Buddhist faith against its critics. In addition to his writings defending the tenets of Buddhism, he also compiled the *Yuan hun zhi* 冤魂志 (*Accounts of Ghosts with Grievances*), a collection of tales of karmic retribution (Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Victor H. Mair, “Buddhist Literature,” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 171).

and its author rebuked the decadent tendencies of southern literature, as opposed to the relative austerity of northern culture.⁴⁶⁰ Specifically, the line Shinzei quoted reads, “I have often thought, on the basis of accumulated (experience), a body of essays exhibits the writer’s interests, develops his nature, and makes him proud and negligent of control as well as determined and aggressive” 原其所積文章標舉興會發引性靈使人矜伐故忽於持操果於進取.⁴⁶¹ Although somewhat cumbersome, perhaps the most accurate translation of the title would be “Collection of Works that Reveal the Hidden Literary Talents of the One Who Illuminates the World.”⁴⁶²

Yet, no anthology is a transparent enterprise. While a surface reading of Shinzei’s motives suggests he is merely attempting to preserve exemplars of his master’s writing for posterity, the political milieu in which he operated cannot be ignored. Japanese scholarship generally affirms Shinzei’s stance and views the anthology as a literary monument to his master.⁴⁶³ After Kūkai’s death, rivalries among Shingon-affiliated temples, particularly Tōji and Kōyasan, meant there was no central temple, or unified voice, for the fledgling Shingon

⁴⁶⁰ Dore J. Levy, “Literary Theory and Criticism,” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 929-930.

⁴⁶¹ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 36; Teng Ssu-yu, trans., *Family Instruction for the Yen Clan* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1968), 90.

⁴⁶² Other translations of the title include *Collected Inspirations* (Donald Keene), *The Spirit and Mind Collection: The Revelations of Priest Henjō [Kūkai]* (Rabinovitch and Bradstock), and *Henjō’s Collection for Giving Free Rein to the Spirit* (Emanuel Pastreich) (Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from the Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 187; Rabinovitch and Bradstock, 99; Emanuel Pasterich, “The Reception of Chinese Literature in Japan,” 1084).

⁴⁶³ Perhaps this is not such a surprise, considering that the major scholarly treatments of the *Shōryōshū* have been by scholars with sectarian affiliations. One of earliest attempts to provide a modern interpretation of the *Shōryōshū* is Sakata Kōzen’s *Shōryōshū kōgi* 性靈集講義, published in 1942. Sakata was a professor at Kōyasan University, and the volume is a compilation of his lectures on the collection. The work itself is impressive: it presents each text in the *Shōryōshū* line by line, with phonetic glosses, explanations of difficult characters, a summary in modern Japanese, and a few interpretative comments. However, he provides no background information aside from what Shinzei presents in his preface, and he appears to accept it uncritically. The liberal use of honorifics to refer to Kūkai and describe his actions reveals the author’s sectarian bias (Sakata Kōzen, *Shōryōshū kōgi* (Wakayama, Japan: Kōyasan Jihōsha, 1942)). Watanabe Shōkō and Miyasaka Yūshō, the co-editors of the NKBT edition used as the primary source for this study, provide much more historical detail regarding Shinzei’s life, but do not entertain the possibility of political motivations.

school.⁴⁶⁴ While there appeared to be no direct animosity among his disciples, differing political loyalties inevitably put them at odds.⁴⁶⁵ One such example is Shinzei's acceptance of a request from Emperor Montoku 文徳天皇 (827-858, r. 850-858) in 850 to perform prayers so that his son, Prince Koretaka 惟喬親王 (844-897), could ascend to the throne.⁴⁶⁶ Koretaka's mother was Ki no Seishi 紀静子 (?-866), the daughter of Ki no Natora 紀名虎 (?-847), so Shinzei was a blood relative of the prince.⁴⁶⁷ However, this was opposed by the Minister of the Right, Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 (804-872), whose daughter Meishi 明子 (829-900) was also a consort to Montoku and mother of Prince Korehito 惟仁親王 (850-881). Yoshifusa enlisted the services of Shinga 真雅 (801-879), another Kūkai disciples who established the Shingon'in at the Tōdaiji temple, to perform similar prayer rituals on behalf of Korehito. Thus, Shingon priests representing two different temples were used as pawns in a proxy war between the Ki and the Fujiwara, with the latter emerging victorious.⁴⁶⁸ After Montoku's abdication, Korehito assumed the throne as Emperor Seiwa 清和天皇 (r. 858-876), allowing Yoshifusa to consolidate his power base.

Therefore, Shinzei's compilation of the *Shōryōshū* may be interpreted as an attempt to acquire political and cultural capital by monopolizing Kūkai's literary legacy. His origins in the highly erudite Ki clan made him well-suited to the task, and the preface to the *Shōryōshū* amply demonstrates Shinzei's facility in literary Chinese and his knowledge of continental source materials. His acknowledgment of the existence of texts excluded from the *Shōryōshū*, and his

⁴⁶⁴ Stanley Weinstein, "Aristocratic Buddhism," in Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 498.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Sakaue, 216.

⁴⁶⁸ A somewhat corrupted version of this event is recreated in Chapter Eight of the *The Tale of the Heike*. (Helen Craig McCullough, trans. *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 260-261).

reference to “over five hundred pieces of paper” demonstrates a deliberate agenda regarding the collection’s editorial policy. Shinzei is declaring that he is in possession of Kūkai’s writings, and will determine which ones are published. Also, his concern that “the gold and jade will mingle with the stones in the riverbed” and lament that “the orchids and cassia will be overrun by the autumn mugwort” suggests anxiety that his rivals might attempt to publish their own Kūkai anthologies and establish competing interpretive traditions. Shinzei reassures his readers that he had exclusive access to Kūkai and his writings, claiming that he served “at his side” as his amanuensis.

The 111 pieces of prose and poetry contained in the *Shōryōshū* are divided into ten volumes, with each volume generally dedicated to a specific category of writing. Volume One contains lyrical poetry 詩 and rhapsodies 賦. Volume Two contains the memorials and epitaphs 碑 Kūkai composed, including the one for his departed master, Hui-guo. Volume Three is an assortment of petitions presenting gifts to the emperor 表, letters and poems sent to fellow literati assuming posts on the frontier, poems sent to foreign emissaries, and a poem Kūkai composed on the occasion of his fortieth birthday 中寿感興詩 (“A poem in reflection of my fortieth birthday”).⁴⁶⁹ Volume Four contains more petitions accompanying Kūkai’s gifts of calligraphy to the emperor, a petition to hold services based on the *Sūtra of the Virtuous King for the Protection of the Nation* 仁王護国般若波羅蜜多經, letters 状 and an offertory letter 啓 presenting calligraphy brushes to the Crown Prince. This volume also contains several documents Kūkai drafted on behalf of others, such as a will for Princess Sakahito 酒人内親王 (754-829, a half-sister and minor consort of Emperor Kanmu), a letter for Fujiwara no Makawa 藤原真川 (dates

⁴⁶⁹ An English translation of this poem can be found in Takagi Shingen and Thomas Eijō Dreitlein, trans. *Kūkai on the Philosophy of Language* (Tokyo: Keiō University Press, 2010).

unknown) recommending Kiyomura no Kiyotoyo 浄村浄豊 (dates unknown) for reappointment as a court tutor, and a letter seeking an official post for Fujiwara no Munenari 藤原宗成 (785-858). Volume Five is a collection of the epistles Kūkai dispatched to various officials during his sojourn in Tang China. Volumes Six through Eight contain the text of various prayers (*ganmon* 願文) or alms-giving texts (*dasshin* 達嚩) offered by Kūkai. The last two volumes (Nine and Ten) contain petitions to the emperor 奏状, the petitions pertaining to the construction of the Mt. Kōya monastic complex, as well as numerous poems praising famous monks. Volume Ten also includes the regulations for the Shugeishuchiin 綜芸種智院, the private school Kūkai founded in 828 to provide an education to children regardless of their social rank.

Textual studies on the transmission of the *Shōryōshū* text show that the first seven chapters of the collection have remained intact since their original compilation by Shinzei. However, at some point during the mid-Heian period the last three volumes were lost, so in 1079 Saisen 濟暹 (1025-1115), a scholar-monk at the Ninnaji 仁和寺 temple in Kyoto, visited various temple libraries and recompiled the missing volumes using primary source texts he located. Strictly speaking, volumes Eight, Nine and Ten are referred to as the *Shōryōshū hoketsushō* 性靈集補闕鈔 (*Supplement to the Shōryōshū*), but for the purposes of this study, the entire collection shall be referred to as the *Shōryōshū*. Some of the texts in the supplement cannot be accurately dated, so their authorship is in dispute, but only texts that can be positively attributed to Kūkai will be presented in this study.

The texts in the *Shōryōshū* provide a glimpse into the multiple facets of Kūkai's complex life that cannot be readily discerned solely from his doctrinal writings. They demonstrate that Kūkai was not only an innovative theologian and erudite writer, but he was also a shrewd

politician, a formidable advocate, and a passionate educator. Also, as these texts were produced by Kūkai during his actual lifetime, the *Shōryōshū* makes it possible to extricate Kūkai from the discourse of the Kōbō Daishi legend and squarely position him within the political, social and literary milieu of his day. Since the texts that are more “literary” in nature (such as his poems and writings on calligraphy) will be examined elsewhere in this study, this chapter presents and examines some of the “non-literary” texts (prayers, petitions, etc.) in the collection.⁴⁷⁰ In particular, this chapter focuses on the texts Kūkai composed in the aftermath of the Prince Iyo Incident and the Kusuko Incident, as well as documents that underscore his cordial relations with the Nara Buddhist establishment.

The Prince Iyo Incident and Its Aftermath

Prince Iyo 伊予親王 (783(?)-807) was the third son of Emperor Kanmu and Fujiwara no Yoshiko 藤原吉子 (?-807), who was from the Southern House 藤原南家 of the Fujiwara clan.⁴⁷¹ Aside from being one of Emperor Kanmu’s favorites, Prince Iyo also enjoyed the patronage of his maternal relatives, particularly his politically powerful maternal uncle Fujiwara no Otomo 藤原雄友(753-811).⁴⁷² Yoshiko and Otomo had an impeccable political lineage, as their father was the Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Korekimi 藤原是公 (727-789).⁴⁷³ Otomo was an influential politician in his own right, attaining the rank of Major Councilor 大納言 at the peak of his career. During his youth, Prince Iyo was tutored by none other than Ato no Ōtari, Kūkai’s maternal uncle.⁴⁷⁴

In 807, Prince Iyo was approached by Fujiwara no Munenari 藤原宗成 (755-858) of the

⁴⁷⁰ An exception is the poem Kūkai attached to a gift of tangerines he presented to Saga, since it is situated within the context of the aftermath of the Prince Iyo and Kusuko incidents. Refer to “Kūkai and the Tangerines” below.

⁴⁷¹ Sakaue, 40.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Abe, 71.

Northern House of the Fujiwara clan, who attempted to prod him into leading a coup d'état against his elder brother, Emperor Heizei.⁴⁷⁵ Although Munenari's great-grandfather was Minister of the Left Fujiwara no Nagate 藤原永手 (714-771) and his grandfather was Fujiwara no Ieyori 藤原家依 (743-785), a Councilor 参議 of the Junior Third Rank, virtually nothing is known about his father, Fujiwara no Mitsuoki 藤原三起 (dates unknown).⁴⁷⁶ Munenari himself was only Senior Sixth Rank, Upper at the time he proposed the overthrow. Otomo became aware of Munenari's designs and promptly reported them to the Minister of the Right, Fujiwara no Uchimarō 藤原内麻呂 (756-812), and Prince Iyo informed the emperor.⁴⁷⁷ Upon further questioning, Munenari claimed that Prince Iyo had in fact instigated the plot against the emperor.⁴⁷⁸ Heizei decided the most prudent course would be to punish both of them – Prince Iyo and his mother Yoshiko were confined to the Kawaradera 川原寺 temple in Asuka, Yamato Province, and Munenari was exiled to the province of Iyo. During their confinement at the temple, Prince Iyo and Yoshiko committed suicide, ingesting poison after refusing food and water for ten days.⁴⁷⁹ Although Otomo was not implicated in the events leading to the plot, he was also banished to Iyo due to his blood relationship to the prince. Middle Councilor Fujiwara no Takatoshi 藤原乙叡 (761-808) was also dismissed from his post because of his familial ties to the Southern House.⁴⁸⁰

Prince Iyo was posthumously exonerated of any involvement in the attempted overthrow,

⁴⁷⁵ Sakaue, 40.

⁴⁷⁶ Tōin Kinsada, *Sonpi bunmyaku*, reprinted in *Kojitsu sōsho* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1905), vol. 11, 27. The *Sonpi bunmyaku* 尊卑文脈 (*Bloodlines Noble and Base*) is a collection of genealogies compiled during the late fourteenth century by Tōin Kinsada 洞院公定 (1340-1399).

⁴⁷⁷ Sakaue, 40.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Although Takatoshi was also from the Southern House, he belonged to a different line than Otomo, so they would have been distant cousins at best. Heizei likely dismissed Takatoshi because he committed the discourtesy of vomiting alcohol at a party Heizei hosted while he was still Crown Prince, not because he had any actual connection to the Prince Iyo incident.

and the grave where he and his mother were interred was later rebuilt into a mausoleum. Otomo was later pardoned by Emperor Saga in 810 and restored to his former rank, and was appointed Superintendent of the Board of Censors 彈正尹. Takatoshi was also pardoned and restored to his former rank, but was not appointed to an office. Despite these exonerations, pardons and reappointments, the incident and its aftermath irreparably damaged the Southern House's fortunes and precipitated its decline.

Although Munenari was a member of the Northern House (which was gaining in political prominence), he perhaps fared the worst among those who survived the incident. Unlike other aristocrats who returned from exile and assumed high offices due to their intellectual abilities and political savvy, Munenari apparently did not have much to redeem him: the *Nihon Montoku Tennō jitsuroku* 日本文德天皇実録 entry recording his death states he was deficient in both talent and learning.⁴⁸¹ He remained in exile in Iyo throughout all of Saga's reign, and probably was not allowed to return to the capital until around 825, the year that Kūkai “ghost wrote” the following letter for him, seeking a court appointment.⁴⁸²

某乙啓。某乙聞。巨石者也重沈。蚊虻者也短飛。雖然。巨石得舟者。過深海於萬里。蚊虻附鳳者。翔高天於九空。遇与不遇。何其遼哉。

I offer my respects. I have heard that giant stones are heavy and sink, that mosquitoes and gadflies are short and fly. However, a giant stone loaded on a boat can travel 10,000 *li* across the broad seas, and mosquitoes and gadflies riding a phoenix can soar high into the heavens and across the Nine Skies. Why is there such a gulf between encountering and not encountering good fortune?

伏惟。我右僕射馬足下。鐘鼎累代。阿衡一人。能仁能惠。四海之父。允文允智。萬民之依。何不仰止。某乙不幸。遇罹時變。左遷外蕃。非農非桑。蠶食者多。不商不賈。蠹費者衆。

⁴⁸¹ *Nihon Montoku Tennō jitsuroku* entry for the twenty-seventh day of the fifth month of Ten'an 2 (858).

⁴⁸² SRS 4:37.

In my humble view, our Minister of the Right⁴⁸³ is like A-Heng,⁴⁸⁴ whose merits were inscribed on bells and sacred vessels for generations.⁴⁸⁵ Abounding in benevolence and charity, he is father to the people of the realm. Erudite and wise, he is relied upon by the people. How can he not be revered? Unfortunately, I was embroiled in an incident and banished to an outlying province. Many of the people there are engaged in neither agriculture nor sericulture, they are gluttons like mulberry-consuming silkworms. The multitude does not peddle their wares or maintain their storefronts, they devour food as though they were silverfish.

先人田園。日々消男女之口。考妣舍宅。年々盡僮僕之服。一兩親眷。不給千里之糧。四隣知友。誰濟一朝之飢。遂使。妻妾作邊壤之塵。僕徒為行路之人。弔影欲死不死。訴天欲生不生。涕与雨露争隕。形將木石枯衰。常歎不応為邊壤之冤鬼。但恨不作都下之生人。

The fields of their ancestors vanish into the mouths of these men and women every day. Year in and year out, the homes of their late parents are exhausted to feed their servants. My one or two relatives will not send food to such a remote location, and who among my friends will alleviate my morning hunger? This has caused my wife and concubines to scatter like dust throughout this hinterland, and my servants have become strangers. Mourning the vestige of my former self, I yearn for death but do not die, I plead to the heavens for my life yet am not allowed to live. My tears vie with raindrops and dew as they fall to the ground, and my body dries up and withers away like the trees and rocks. I frequently lament that I will perish in this hinterland and that the crimes for which I have been falsely accused shall not be exonerated, and I resent not having a life in the metropolis.

幸沐春雨之牙澤。再入聖賢之闕。石瓦之望於此足矣。然猶。人非懸瓠。身非金石。寒暑數浸。身无覆體之衣。烏兔代謝。口乏支飢之食。男女滿庭。朝々歎生苔之竈。僕隸側舍。夜々忿飛塵之甌。居諸荏苒霜鬢颯然。星霜如矢清河何日。

Fortunately, I have bathed in the spring rains and once again entered the palace of the sages. Here, my

⁴⁸³ Kūkai refers to the Minister of the Right using its Chinese name 右僕射. At this time, the office was held by Fujiwara no Otsugu 藤原緒嗣 (774-843) (Imataka et al., 329).

⁴⁸⁴ A-Heng 阿衡 was the “style name” given to Yi Yin 伊尹 (ca. 1600 BCE-ca. 1549 BCE), a minister in the early Shang Dynasty.

⁴⁸⁵ This tropes a passage in the *Mozi* 墨子 “...a lord might yet record it on bamboos and silk and engrave it on metal and stone and write it up into maxims on the bell and the ting to hand down to posterity 則書之於竹帛鏤之於金石以為銘於鍾鼎傳遺後世子孫 (Imataka et al., 329; Mei Yibao, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse*. (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1973), 92. The *Mozi* debates whether a lord’s deeds will be remembered for posterity even if they are unjust. In his letter, Kūkai strips this anecdote out of context and recasts the image of inscriptions on bells and ceremonial vessels (*ting*) as monuments to virtuous rule.

insignificant wishes – which are no more than a piece of stone roof tile – are satisfied. However, people are not hanging gourds,⁴⁸⁶ nor are their bodies made of gold and stone. My body does not have clothing to protect itself from frequent invasions of heat and cold, and my mouth lacks food to stave off daily hunger. Men and women assemble in their gardens every morning and lament that their pots are covered with moss. Servants stand alongside their homes, infuriated that dust flies out from their rice steamers night in and night out. Days and months pass by like wind breezing through silver locks of hair. Time flies like an arrow, when will the river be clear again?

伏乞。翻江海之波瀾。賜執鞭之一任。然則。涸轍之途。忽掉江湖之鱗。遊岱之魂。乍齊倚陶之財。今不任小願之至情。謹奉啓不宜謹啓。

I implore you to grace me with great waves from the rivers and seas and bestow upon me a humble position. Appointing me to a position would be like suddenly giving water to a fish suffering in a dried-out wheel rut on a roadway so it can move its fins, like a soul destined for death atop Mt. Tai receiving wealth equal to that of Yi Dun and Tao Zhugong.⁴⁸⁷ I can only humbly pray for relief! Humbly, I offer my plea.

Kūkai’s description presents Munenari’s place of exile in the bleakest of terms – the local residents are indolent and do not engage in agricultural activity, violating a core tenet of Confucian economics. The use of “agricultural chauvinism” as an idiom to describe the “uncivilized” nature of frontier life appears elsewhere in the *Shōryōshū*.⁴⁸⁸ From this document, it can be ascertained that Munenari was allowed to return to the capital and restored to his former rank, but he was not appointed to an office. According to the *Nihon Montoku Tennō jitsuroku*,

⁴⁸⁶ This is a reference to the *Analects*: “Moreover, how can I allow myself to be treated like a gourd which, instead of being eaten, hangs from the end of a string?” 吾豈匏瓜也哉 (Lau, 144; Kanaya, 240).

⁴⁸⁷ Mt. Tai 泰山 is the legendary haunt of Dashanfuqun 大山府君 one of the attendants of Yama, the god of the underworld in Hinduism, Daoism and Buddhism. Yi Dun 猗頓 and Tao Zhuzhong 陶朱公 were very wealthy men in Chinese legend (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 261).

⁴⁸⁸ Specifically, SRS 1:3 and 3:17, presented in Chapter Two.

Munenari was abandoned by society and died in abject poverty at the age of 74.⁴⁸⁹

Even those not connected with the conspiracy suffered setbacks. One example is Kiyomura no Kiyotoyo, another Chinese classics tutor to Prince Iyo. After the prince and his mother committed suicide, Kiyotoyo suddenly found himself unemployed, and had difficulties securing new employment due to his association with the late Iyo. Kūkai wrote the following letter to the Minister of the Right, Fujiwara no Sonohito 藤原園人 (756-819), on behalf of Fujiwara no Makawa, who served as Chancellor of the State College (*daigaku no kami* 大學頭).⁴⁹⁰

眞川等啓。昧金照面必待瑩拂。童矇開眼定因師訓。然則。恩之重者師德為最。如今。故中務卿親王之文學。正六位上淨村宿禰淨豐者。故從五位上動十一等。晉卿遙慕聖風遠辭本族。誦兩京之音韻改三吳之訛響。口吐唐言發揮嬰學之耳目。

Makawa et al. bid you respect. The glimmering surface of unearthed gold inevitably awaits polishing, and the enlightenment of an ignorant child is determined by his teacher's lessons. Therefore, a teacher's virtue is the most valuable of all blessings. Here we have Kiyomura no Sukune Kiyotoyo, Senior Sixth Rank Upper, the Chinese classics tutor to the late Minister of State Prince Iyo and the ninth son of the late Jin Qing, Junior Fifth Rank Upper in Japan and the Eleventh Rank in China. Jin Qing left his faraway homeland to seek out the virtuous airs of our emperor. He could pronounce Chinese in the styles of both the capitals of Chang-an and Lo-yang, and he corrected our pronunciation, which was based on the accent of the Three Wu Kingdoms. He spoke the language of the Tang and invigorated the eyes and ears of his young pupils.

遂乃。位登五品。職踐州牧。男息九人任中而生。弘秀兩人。則任經中外。俸食判官。竝皆降年。短促不幸而殞。最弟一身。孑然孤留。是則眞川等受業之先生也。文賀陶心。廉貞養素。去延曆中沐天恩於駿州錄事。次遷親王文學。

For that reason he advanced to the Fifth Rank and assumed a provincial governorship. His nine sons were born during his tenure. Hong was born during his governorship and Xiu was born after he resigned his

⁴⁸⁹ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 256.

⁴⁹⁰ SRS 4:36.

post.⁴⁹¹ He received the stipend of a commissioner. Unfortunately, all of his sons had short life spans. His youngest son was left alone. He is the teacher who taught people like Makawa [myself]. His heart is polished by literary elegance, and his righteousness nurtured his character. In the days of the former Enryaku reign, he basked in the emperor's beneficence and served as secretary in Suruga Province. Next, he moved and served as Prince Iyo's tutor in the Chinese classics.

忽遇罹時變。進士途窮。今儻賴震宮之大造朝參暮謁。年歲推移欣厚過望。還歎薄命徒老。原憲之室柴炭如金。孔伋之家米菜似玉。既而。風朝月夕。與飢蟬而繞悲。雪夜霜晨。將旅鴈以多歎。至如冒雨涉泥。藜杖為馬。戴星歸舍。蔬飧支命。充庭黃口。無粒啄拾。

Suddenly, Prince Iyo was involved in an incident that cut off Kiyotoyo's path to service as a court official. He received a year-end audience at the Court due to the grand pardon issued by the emperor. The years went by, and his elation surpassed his hopes. However, he lamented the brevity of his life and the cruelty of age. In Yuan Xian's home,⁴⁹² firewood and coal were like gold, and in Kong Ji's home,⁴⁹³ rice and vegetables were like jade. Already, the morning breeze and the evening moonlight surround him with sadness, along with the starving cicadas. Snowy nights and frosty mornings accompanied by the cries of migrating geese are filled with lament. Crossing through the mud while being rained on with a cane of gooseweed in place of a horse, and returning home on a starry night and eating a meager meal to support oneself – this is like the flock of sparrows in the garden having nothing to peck with their yellow beaks.

巢裏寒婦。珠泣向隅。每尚一忠於百君。還悲五尺之無容。悲哉。春雨榮林。新栽無藥。秋風茂野。孤幹未實。眞川等。潤訓有年。酬德無日。無勢無力。空竭肝膽。伏惟。相國閣下。帝寵伊霍。濟物為心。

In the back of the nest, his wife shivers from poverty and faces the corner, shedding tears the size of

⁴⁹¹ This appears to be a discrepancy, since the previous sentence claims that all nine sons were born during Jin Qing's tenure as governor.

⁴⁹² Yuan Xian 原憲 was raised in poverty and later became one of Confucius's disciples (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 258).

⁴⁹³ Kong Ji 孔伋 was Confucius's grandson, and was so poor that he only ate nine times in twenty days (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 258).

jewels. He wishes to serve one hundred lords with his unwavering heart,⁴⁹⁴ yet laments he does not have a home. How sad, indeed! The spring rains invigorate the forest, yet the new plants have no blossoms; the autumn winds luxuriate the fields, yet the lone branch has yet to bear fruit. Although many years have passed since we [Makawa et al.] have been nourished by Kiyotoyo's teachings, not a day has come when we might repay his kindness. Without any authority or wealth, the only thing we can do for him is to worry. I believe that Your Excellency the Minister of the Right has received the kind of imperial patronage that Yi Yin and Huo Guang⁴⁹⁵ did, and that it is your nature to come to the aid of others.

天假仁慈。博愛是務。飛沈生其一眇。榮悴因其咳唾。伏願。貸恩波於涸鱗。賜德花乎窮翼。則漢語易詠。吳音誰難。敢抽愚款。煩黷簪珪。謹奉啓不宜謹啓。

The heavens have entrusted you with benevolence and compassion, and you perform your duties with a sense of charity. With a blink of your eye you can promote or demote an official, with a cough you can allow that official to prosper or fail. We humbly implore you to lend the waves of your gratitude upon the fish floundering in the dried-out puddle and bequeath the flower of your virtue unto the bird with beleaguered wings.⁴⁹⁶ If you do so, Chinese will be easy to recite, and who will have difficulty with Wu tones? In our foolish sincerity, we impose ourselves upon someone of your high office with this bothersome request. We humbly present this letter to you.

This letter sheds light on the assimilation of Chinese immigrants and the nature of Chinese language study in early Heian Japan. Very little is known about Kiyotoyo's father, Yuan Jinqing 袁晋卿 (dates unknown), except that he emigrated from China to Japan in 735 as a young man of

⁴⁹⁴ This is an adaptation from an anecdote recorded in the *Tales of Yanzi* 晏子春秋, where Yanzi recommends that an official serve with a consistent mindset, regardless of the number of masters served (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 506-507).

⁴⁹⁵ Yi Yin served under King Tang 湯王, but also faithfully served his successor Da Jia 太甲 after his death. Likewise, Huo Guang 霍光 of the Han Dynasty served Emperor Wu 武帝 and his son Emperor Zhao 昭帝. Here, Yi Yin and Huo Guang are presented as loyal officials who continue to serve even after their initial patron's death (Imataka et al., 328).

⁴⁹⁶ This is based on an anecdote in the *Xu qi xie ji* 續齋諧記 (*Continued Chronicles of Qi Xie*), a collection stories by Wu Jun 吳均 (469-520): at the age of nine, Yang Bao 楊宝 rescued an injured bird and fed it flowers for over one hundred days. Sporting new feathers, the bird soared off. That evening, a young boy visited Yang Bao and introduced himself as a messenger of the Queen Mother of the West. In recognition of Yang Bao's generosity, the messenger gave him four white rings, which would make his progeny upright and pure, allowing them to ascend to the highest of government offices (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 507).

eighteen or nineteen.⁴⁹⁷ According to the *Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀, Jinqing was well-versed in the *Wenxuan* and *Er'ya* 爾雅 (*Approaching Elegance*), an ancient encyclopedia and lexicon.⁴⁹⁸ He must have been received as a person of considerable ability, since he was incorporated into the aristocratic structure and even served as the Chancellor of the State University and the governor of Awa Province.⁴⁹⁹ In this regard, “citizenship” in Heian Japanese society resembled that of Tang China – recognition of the emperor was sufficient to be considered a subject of the state. Certainly the fact that Jinqing was a native speaker of Chinese, and proficient in the styles of both Chang-an and Lo-yang, would have made him a valuable asset in the eyes of the Japanese. As can be seen in the statement, “...and he corrected our pronunciation, which was based on that of the Three Wu Kingdoms” 誦兩京之音韻改三吳之訛響, the Japanese of the era had little experience learning “proper” Chinese pronunciation from learned men of the historical capitals. Rather, they were accustomed to the dialects and accents of the coastal provinces. Jinqing transmitted his knowledge of Chinese to his son Kiyotoyo, who then made a career for himself as an imperial tutor.

Nothing is known of Kiyotoyo after this letter was submitted. The lack of attestations in documentary sources suggests that either Makawa’s request was denied, or like Munenari, Kiyotoyo was awarded a court rank but not appointed to an office. These letters provide a rare glimpse into how disgraced officials during the early Heian period viewed their predicaments.

However, there was still the matter of pacifying Prince Iyo’s spirit. Ever since the Prince Sawara incident in Nagaokakyō, the imperial court was wary of otherworldly retribution from

⁴⁹⁷ Imataka et al., 328. Jinqing’s age is mentioned in the entry for the eighteenth day of the twelfth month of Hōki 9 (776) in the *Shoku Nihongi* (Kuroita Katsumi, ed., *Shoku Nihongi*, vol. 2, in *Shintei zōho kokushi taikai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1979), 446.

⁴⁹⁸ Webb, 49.

⁴⁹⁹ *Shoku nihongi*, entry for the eighteenth day of the twelfth month of Hōki 9 (776) (Kuroita, 446).

vengeful spirits.⁵⁰⁰ Prince Iyo, like Prince Sawara before him, was falsely accused of attempting to usurp the establishment, and steps needed to be taken so that Prince Iyo's spirit would not interfere with the business of the living. There were reports of Heizei becoming mentally unstable due to his feelings of vexation over the handling of Prince Iyo.⁵⁰¹ During the first year of his reign, Saga commissioned the carving of Buddhist images to placate the prince's spirit, and Kūkai composed the following prayer:⁵⁰²

粵。有大聖。號薄伽梵。孕大虛而為體。豁織壻而建都。其通也。則
汲溟海於毛端。其術也。則入巨嶽於小芥。四量用心。六度為行。无親无怨三界
耶孃。不捨不倦四生則子。塵沙德海欲談舌卷之也。

There is a great sage named Bhagavant, The World Honored One. He embraces the vastness of the sky and makes it his body, and purifies specks of dust to build his capital. With his supernatural powers, he scoops the vast seas with the tip of a hair, and with his divine arts he places giant mountains into a small poppy. The Four Immeasurable States of Mind function in his heart, and the Six Perfections are manifest in his actions. He does not have friends or enemies; he is the parent to the Threefold Universe. He does not abandon anyone or grow weary of them; the Four Forms of Life are his children. The infinite sands in the ocean of virtue wish to speak but their tongues are tied.

伏惟。皇帝陛下。允仁允慈含弘光大。且智且文道義是親。所以。為故中務卿親
王及故夫人藤原氏。敬造刻檀釈迦牟尼佛像一軀。觀世音菩薩像一軀。虛空藏菩
薩一軀。竝金銀泥畫四大忿怒王像四軀。四攝八供養八大天王像等。各副法曼荼
羅。兼延法侶開肆齋筵。

In my humble view, Your Majesty the Emperor abounds in benevolence and compassion, and these qualities are vast as the earth and as boundless as the heavens. Wise and erudite, you are intimately familiar with the ways of kings. It is for this reason you have honorably sculpted sandalwood statues of Shakyamuni Buddha, the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, and the bodhisattva Akasagarbha for the late Minister of State Prince Iyo and his mother Lady Fujiwara. Alongside these, images of the Four Fierce

⁵⁰⁰ Abe, 57.

⁵⁰¹ Sakaue, 40-41.

⁵⁰² SRS 6:49.

Kings⁵⁰³ were drawn from gold and silver dust, as well as images of the Four Guardian Bodhisattvas,⁵⁰⁴ the Eight Attendant Bodhisattvas,⁵⁰⁵ and the Guardians of the Eight Directions.⁵⁰⁶ Seed-syllable and symbolic-attribute mandalas were prepared for each of these assemblies. Also, Buddhist monks were invited, and they performed Buddhist services.

爾乃。妙業揮刀。眞容宛爾。尊々玉質。智々金山。香饌斷結。妙花含光。伏願。藉此勝業。拔翊煢魂。持金翅於空々。攀蓮步於如々。珍寶日新。山壽无窮。股肱良哉。元々康哉。幽顯同福。併鑒本有之五鏡。常沐佛護。鎮遊法苑。

The carvings were made by Buddhist statue sculptors of extraordinary ability wielding their blades, and their sculptures were faithful representations of these deities. These revered images were jade-like in their quality and their wisdom was like a mountain of gold. Offerings of incense sever delusional attachments and marvelous flowers encapsulate the entire universe. I humbly pray these outstanding deeds will allow Prince Iyo's lonely soul⁵⁰⁷ to attain salvation. Shakyamuni Buddha soars in the skies with golden wings, and climbs the truth with steps that bring lotuses into bloom. Your Majesty's virtue is a rare treasure which grows by the day, and the life of the nation is limitless like a mountain. Your ministers are wise and the common people are content! Both the worlds of the living and the dead will receive good fortune from your deeds and everything is reflected in the inherent nature of the Five Mirrors of Wisdom. May Prince Iyo always bask in the Buddha's grace and peacefully journey to the Garden of the Dharma.

This prayer serves a dual purpose: while praying for the placation of Prince Iyo's spirit, it is yet another text which affirms the emperor's position as a *cakravartin*. Also, as Gardiner pointed out earlier in his own translation of a *Shōryōshū* document, this prayer provides a detailed

⁵⁰³ The Four Fierce Kings 四大忿怒王 are another name for the Four Mantra Kings 四大明王: Trilokavijaya 降三世, Kundali 軍荼利, Yamāntaka 大威德 and Vajrayaksa 金剛夜叉 (Watanabe, and Miyasaka, 299).

⁵⁰⁴ These are the bodhisattva who guard the four gates of the Diamond Realm: Vajrānkusa 金剛鉤 (Diamond Hook), Vajrapāsa 金剛索 (Diamond Rope), Vajrasphota 金剛鑲 (Diamond Chain), and Vajravesa 金剛鈴 (Diamond Bell) (Sawa, 298).

⁵⁰⁵ These are the bodhisattva who serve as the inner and outer attendants to Mahāvairocana: Vajralasi 金剛嬉 (Diamond Happiness), Vajramala 金剛鬘 (Diamond Garland), Vajragita 金剛歌 (Diamond Song), Vajranrta 金剛舞 (Diamond Dance), Vajradhūpa 金剛香 (Diamond Incense), Vajrapusba 金剛華 (Diamond Blossom), Vajraloka 金剛燈 (Diamond Torch) and Vajragandha 金剛塗香 (Diamond Perfume) (Sawa, 564).

⁵⁰⁶ The Guardians of the Eight Directions 八大天王 are Issanna 伊舍那, Indra 帝釋, Agni 火天, Yama 閻魔, Rākṣasa 羅刹, Varuna 水天, Vayu 風天 and Vaiśravaṇa 毘沙門天 (Watanabe and Miyasaka 299).

⁵⁰⁷ The same usage of "lonely soul" 煢魂 can be found in the *You xian ku* 遊仙窟 (Dwelling of Playful Goddesses) (Imataka et al., 410).

description of actual Buddhist practice in the early Heian court.⁵⁰⁸ Another noteworthy aspect is the absence of an image of Mahāvairocana Buddha from this ritual, suggesting a theological compromise between the court and Kūkai. Although the primary image was that of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, Kūkai managed to have esoteric elements introduced via the display of the seed-syllable and symbolic-attribute mandalas.

Heizei abdicated the throne to his younger brother Saga in 810, and then relocated to the former imperial palace in Nara, taking Fujiwara no Kusuko 藤原薬子 (unknown-810) and numerous court bureaucrats with him. Kusuko was the mother of one of his consorts, accused of having a “scandalous relationship” with Heizei.⁵⁰⁹ A month before Heizei’s abdication, Kusuko’s elder half-brother Fujiwara no Nakanari 藤原仲成 (764-810) moved to Nara to begin major repairs on the palace with 2,500 laborers in his employ.⁵¹⁰ However, at the urging of Kusuko and Nakanari, Heizei attempted to usurp Saga’s power and return the capital to Nara. Saga dispatched a court army led by general Sakanoue no Tamuramaro 坂上田村麻呂 (758-811) to quell Heizei’s rebellion.⁵¹¹ Defeated by Saga’s forces, Kusuko committed suicide by ingesting poison while Heizei took the tonsure and confined himself to Nara.⁵¹²

Kūkai and the Tangerines

In 811, after political calm had returned to the land, Saga appointed Kūkai superintendent (*bettō* 別当) of the Otokunidera 乙訓寺 temple, located on the outskirts of the capital. The temple was supposedly founded by Shōtoku Taishi on the orders of Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (554-628, r. 593-628), but the oldest records date back only as far as 781, when the temple was

⁵⁰⁸ David Gardiner, “Japan’s First Shingon Ceremony,” in George J. Tanabe, Jr., ed. *Religions of Japan in Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 153.

⁵⁰⁹ McCullough, “The Heian Court,” 33.

⁵¹⁰ Sakaue, 41.

⁵¹¹ Sakaue, 42.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

granted land in Otokuni District in Yamashiro Province.⁵¹³ Land was granted to the temple so that it could protect the new capital of Nagaoka, then under construction. After the assassination of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu, Prince Sawara was confined to the temple prior to his banishment to Awaji Island. When Kūkai assumed his post at the temple, he turned it into an esoteric Buddhist center that performed rituals for the benefit of the state.⁵¹⁴ Also, the temple grounds had a grove of tangerines, and Kūkai attached a letter and poem to a gift of fruit presented to the emperor.⁵¹⁵

沙門空海言。乙訓寺有數株柑橘樹。依例交摘取來。問數足千。看色如金。々者不變之者也。千是一聖之期也。又此菓本出西域乍見有興。輒課拙詞敢以奉上。伏乞。天慈曲垂一覽輕贖聖眼伏深悚懼。沙門空海。誠惶誠恐謹言。

It is the monk Kūkai who speaks these words. Otokunidera temple has many tangerine trees. In accordance with custom, we have picked their fruit and brought them to you. When one inquires as to the number of fruit, it is one thousand; when one looks upon its color, it is gold. Gold is the everlasting color, and one thousand is the epoch of a sage. Also, these fruits originally come from the western regions. Looking upon them piques my interest and compels me to dash off a poem. In all my audacity I present it to you. I humbly beseech you to view this poem with your spirit of imperial sympathy, though I fear it may be an offense to your sacred eyes. In reverent humility, the monk Kūkai.

桃李雖珍不耐寒
豈如柑橘遇霜美
如星如玉黃金質
香味忖堪實篋篋
太奇珍妙何將來

定是天上王母里
忖表千年一聖會

攀摘持獻我天子

Peaches and plums, though marvelous, do not withstand the cold,
What could be more beautiful than a tangerine touched by frost?
Like stars, like jade – golden in quality
Fragrant scents fill the offering basket
They are extremely rare, marvelous and mysterious –whence did they come?
Without a doubt, from the village of the Queen Mother of the West
They manifest themselves upon meeting the sage who appears once every thousand years
Climbing the trees, picking the fruit – I present them to my Sovereign

小柑子六小櫃

⁵¹³ Sawa, 66.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ SRS 4:27.

大柑子四小櫃

Six small trunks of small tangerines

Four small trunks of large tangerines

右乙訓寺所出。依例奉獻。謹遣寺主僧願演。随状奉進。謹進。

The aforementioned tangerines were produced at the Otokunidera temple. In accordance with custom, I humbly dispatch the priest Gan'en, temple administrator, to present them to you.

The tangerine tree (*tachibana* 橘) was already well-established in the Japanese court poetic tradition through *Man'yōshū* poems that viewed them as a symbol of perennial beauty: buds in the spring, blossoms in the summer, fruit in the autumn, and verdant leaves in the winter.⁵¹⁶ Yamanoe no Okura's *chōka* in the *Man'yōshū* is a celebration of the plant, describing its beauty throughout the four seasons.⁵¹⁷ From the *Kokinwakashū* on, the most important poetic association of *tachibana* blossoms was its fragrance, which invoked a sense of nostalgia. Also, since only the blossoms were of interest to *waka* poets, the *tachibana* plant became seasonally associated with early summer.

Despite their established position in the native poetic tradition, Kūkai is transfixed by the exotic qualities of these tangerines. The “western regions” 西域 he refers to are in Kashmir, far to the west of Tang China. Kūkai invokes the image of the western frontier to set the stage for his suggestion that the tangerines come from the village of Xi Wang-mu 西王母 (the Queen Mother of the West). This is at odds with the continental tradition, which designates peaches, not tangerines, as the queen's immortal fruit.⁵¹⁸ Xi Wang-mu is an important figure in Chinese

⁵¹⁶ Cranston, *A Waka Anthology*, 464.

⁵¹⁷ MYS 4135-4136. For an English translation, see Cranston, *A Waka Anthology*, 464-465.

⁵¹⁸ Michael Como, *Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 97.

narratives of virtuous kingship because she is said to have visited Emperor Han Wu-ti and presented him with peaches in recognition of his governance.⁵¹⁹

Kūkai draws on three discursive strands in composing this poem to Saga: the evergreen imagery of the *tachibana* established in the *Man'yōshū*, the Xi Wang-mu legend, and Buddhist concepts of kingship. The poem's opening lines, "Peaches and plums, though marvelous, do not withstand the cold/ What could be more beautiful than a tangerine touched by the frost?" 桃李雖珍不耐寒豈如柑橘遇霜美 echoes the imagery of the tangerine as a beautiful evergreen established in the *Man'yōshū*. The next line, "Like stars, like jade – golden in quality" 如星如玉黃金質 develops this theme by depicting the tangerines as radiant, gem-like orbs set against the frigid winter. Toward the end of the poem, Kūkai declares that the tangerines must have come from the village of the Queen Mother of the West, manifesting themselves in response to a sage who appears once every thousand years. The invocation of the queen implies that Saga is a worthy ruler, much like Han Wu-ti of legend, but tangerines are presented instead of the peaches the queen is said to have offered. Kūkai describes Saga as "a sage which appears once in a thousand years," simultaneously alluding to the *Records of the Later Han*,⁵²⁰ and to the Buddhist kingship ideal.

Although subtle, the political symbolism of the tangerines cannot be ignored: unlike plums and peaches, which are damaged by the frost, the tangerine is all the more beautiful. Two levels of symbolism can be detected here: first, since plums and peaches are often used in Chinese poetry composed in Japan to invoke images of China, the tangerines represent the eternal quality of the Japanese imperial line, unlike the Chinese line, which is subject to the Mandate of Heaven. Second, the plums and peaches can be understood as representing the reigns

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Imataka et al., 314.

of Kanmu and Heizei, which were damaged by the “cold” of the Prince Sawara and Prince Iyo incidents, while the tangerine serves as a trope for Saga’s reign, which is golden, everlasting, and all the more beautiful, despite the difficulties incurred due to the Kusuko Incident.

Kūkai’s Connections with Nara Buddhism

Prior scholarship on Kūkai has demonstrated his cordial relations with the Nara Buddhist establishment. In particular, Abe successfully showed that Kūkai’s relationship with the old Nara temples was anything but antagonistic – despite his desire to propagate the esoteric Buddhism he brought back from China, he worked largely within the existing framework of the *ritsuryō* state and the Nara Buddhist bureaucracy to further his agenda.

Kūkai enjoyed close ties with the Gangōji 元興寺 temple, one of the “seven great temples” that formed the “institutional nucleus” (to use Abe’s term) of Nara State Buddhism. During the Nara and early Heian periods, Gangōji served as a base for the Sanron 三論 and Hossō 法相 schools, and its monks were actively engaged in copying sutras.

One of Kūkai’s contacts at the Gangōji temple was a high-ranking monk named Gomyō 護命 (750-834). Gomyō is credited with systematizing Hossō thought in Japan, and is the author of *Hōssō kenjin shō* 法相研神章 (*Treatise Inquiring into the Spirit of Yogacara*). He is also well known for opposing Saichō in 819 regarding the manner and location of precept ordination. Saichō denounced existing practices in Nara as Hinayanistic in character, proposing that they be replaced with the Mahayana precepts to be bestowed atop Mt. Hiei.⁵²¹ Saichō’s bold attempt at changing the fundamental practice by which new monks were ordained demonstrates the sharp differences between Kūkai and Saichō’s political strategies in dealing with the powerful Nara

⁵²¹ Abe, 50-51.

clergy. The following is the letter and poem that Kūkai composed in celebration of Gomyō's eightieth birthday in 829:⁵²²

夫。翔天之鴈不失次第。蚊地之螻亦守陳列。何況。天地最靈。含識為首。誰遺尊長老貴眉壽乎。礼著鄉飲。經稱供宿。良有以也。元興寺大德僧正。年登八十。智明十二。无著世親之論。探奧諳旨。慈恩惠沼之章。括文綜義。晝則对筌蹄而忘食。夜則觀魚菟而廢寢。是故。問津者遠近雲集。懷疾者小長霧合。

The wild geese soaring in the heavens never lose their place in the flock, and the ants crawling along the earth maintain their place in line. Under the heavens, humans are the apex of sentient life, so how can it be said that any among them would forget to revere their seniors or show respect to those with the eyebrows of longevity?⁵²³ The *Book of Rites* mentions festivals of wine in the countryside to honor one's seniors,⁵²⁴ and the sutras dictate that offerings are made for the elderly.⁵²⁵ Truly, this is how things should be. The Senior Priest of Great Virtue Gomyō has surpassed eighty years of age, and is well versed in the Twelffold Sutras. He probes deep into the discourses of Asanga and Vasubandhu and thoroughly comprehends their purport.⁵²⁶ He compiled the writings of Yogacara masters Ci-en and Hui-zhao, and

⁵²² SRS 10:104.

⁵²³ “The eyebrows of longevity” 眉壽 is a metaphor for the elderly, and is found in several poems in the *Book of Songs*. One example:

天錫公純嘏	Heaven will give great blessing to our prince,
眉壽保魯	So that with the eyebrows of longevity he shall maintain Loo.
居常與許	He shall possess Chang and Heu,
復周公之宇	And recover all the territory of the duke of Chow.
魯侯燕喜	Then shall the marquis of Loo feast and be glad,
令妻壽母	With his admirable wife and aged mother;
宜大夫庶士	With his excellent ministers and all his [other] officers.
邦國是有	Our region and State shall he hold,
既多受祉	Thus receiving many blessings,
黃髮兒齒	To hoary hair, with a child's teeth.

(Legge, *The She King*, 628-629).

⁵²⁴ According to the *Book of Rites*, “If the drinking ceremonies at country feasts were discontinued, the order between old and young would be neglected, and quarrelsome litigations would be numerous” 鄉飲酒之禮廢則長幼之序失而爭鬥之獄繁矣 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 434; James Legge, *The Book of Rites*, in F. Max Mueller, ed., *The Sacred Books of the East* (London, Clarendon Press, 1885), vol. 28, 259). The specifics of the ceremony are described in the “The meaning of the drinking festivity in the districts” 鄉飲酒義 chapter of the *Book of Rites* (Imataka et al., 707).

⁵²⁵ The obligation to provide offerings to the elderly is mentioned in the *Samādhirājacandrapradīpa-sūtra* 月灯三昧經 (*Sutra of Basking in the Moonlight*, T. 639).

⁵²⁶ Asanga 無著 was a fourth century Indian monk who is credited with systemizing Yogacara teachings, authored numerous works on Yogacara, such as the *Māhayāna-saṃgraha* 撰大乘論 (*The Mahayana Compendium*) (Nakamura, 783). Vasubandhu 世親 was Asanga's younger brother and is considered to be a major figure in the

summarized their meaning.⁵²⁷ During the day, he stares fixedly at the sutras and forgets to eat, and during the evening, he meditates upon their meaning and does away with sleep. For that reason, students seeking his teachings gather like clouds from near and far, and the ill, young, and old come together like the mist.

二美兼脩。六度具行。可謂。佛家之棟梁。法門之良將。者也。銳鋒易脫臯響則達。弘仁太上拔大僧都。天長今上住僧正。人能弘道聞之古。道能通人見于今。

He practices the beautiful virtues of enriching oneself and enriching others, and performs the Six Paramitas. He can be said to be a pillar in the House of the Buddha, and a great general of the Dharma Gate. A sharp saw easily cuts through its pouch,⁵²⁸ and the call of the swamp crane reaches the heavens. The former Emperor Kōnin selected Gomyō to be a Senior Prelate, and Emperor Tenchō, the present emperor, appointed him to the office of Senior Priest. I heard that in days of old “Man could broaden the Way,”⁵²⁹ but I see before me that “The Way allows people through.”

貧道。忝備下菜。思齊上聖。慨澆醜於禮儀。悲陵遲於道德。是故。取鄉水上齒之禮。仰天士供尊之義。聊與二三子。設茶湯之談會。斯醍醐之淳集。是日也。金風入管。玉露泣菊。闍婆奏葉。繁落則舞。八音寥亮。四眾忘味。言之不足。故事詠歌。乃作詩曰。

I am grateful to be one of his disciples, and I wish to be equal to this great saint.⁵³⁰ I lament that courtesy has slackened, and am saddened that morality is on the decline. Therefore, I partake in the ritual of

systemization of Yogacara thought. He was also a prolific writer and commentator on both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism (Nakamura, 487).

⁵²⁷ Ci-en 慈恩 is the posthumous name for the Chinese monk Kuiji 窺基 (632-682), the first patriarch of the Faxiang (Hossō) school of Yogacara Buddhism. Kuiji was one of the lead disciples of Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), the Chinese scholar-monk who travelled from China to India in order to resolve various textual discrepancies he encountered during his Buddhist studies in China. Xuanzang received instruction in Yogacara thought from the Indian monk Silabhadra (529-645) at the Buddhist university in Nalanda. Hui-zhao 惠沼 (640-714) studied Faxiang Buddhism under Xuanzang and Kuiji's tutelage, and is also considered one of the school's patriarchs (Nakamura, 238, Watanabe and Miyasaka, 434).

⁵²⁸ A sharpened saw is capable of puncturing the pouch in which it is stored and revealing itself to the outside world, a reference to *The Records of the Grand Historian* (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 434). Therefore, Kūkai suggests that Gomyō is of a caliber that liberates him from the binds of the everyday world.

⁵²⁹ This is a reference to the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘It is Man who is capable of broadening the Way. It is not the Way that is capable of broadening Man.’”子曰人能弘道非道弘人也 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 435; Lau, 136; Kanaya, 219).

⁵³⁰ The phrase 思齊 (wish to be an equal) is likely a reference to the *Analects*: “The Master said, ‘When you meet someone better than yourself, turn your thoughts to becoming his equal. When you meet someone not as good as you are, look within and examine your own self.’”子曰見賢思齊焉見不賢而內自省也 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 535; Lau, 74; Kanaya, 58).

drinking country wine out of reverence to my senior, and I make offerings to this gentleman of superior learning. A few of us shall meet for a casual tea gathering and we hope that it will be an opportunity to partake in Gomyō's supreme wisdom. This will be the day that the golden breezes of autumn shall whistle through shafts of bamboo, and the emerald dew shall shed tears of joy on the chrysanthemums. Gandharva deities perform music and Kimnara deities dance,⁵³¹ and the high notes from eight types of musical instruments⁵³² cause the Four Classes of believers to forget the taste of food. Words are insufficient, so I offer a poem:

寂業遺教	The teachings Shakyamuni left behind
轉授其人	Are passed on from person to person
三藏稽古	Those versed in the Tripitaka look to the past
六宗惟新	The Six Schools – these are new ⁵³³
法相之將	Gomyō is the Great Master of the Hossō teachings
推師當仁	Promoting this teacher is an act of benevolence ⁵³⁴
瑚璉其體	His body is like a gemmed sacrificial vessel ⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Gandharva 闍婆 and Kimnara 緊落 are deities who perform song and dance in numerous exoteric and esoteric sutras (Watanabe, et al., 435). In the *Lotus Sutra*, Gandharva and Kimnara kings are depicted as attendants to Indra (Burton Watson, trans. *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5).

⁵³² These are instruments made from gold, stone, silk, bamboo, gourds, earth, leather, and wood (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 535).

⁵³³ The Six Schools 六宗 refer to the six schools of Nara Buddhism: Kegon 華嚴, Sanron 三論, Hossō 法相, Kusha 俱舍, Jōjitsu 成實, and Ritsu 律 (ibid). The rhetorical point of these two lines is that the “old” Buddhist teachings established in India and China have found “new” life in Japan in the form of the Six Schools. Here, Kūkai may be alluding to the following poem from the *Book of Songs* (emphasis added):

文王在上	King Wan is on high;
於昭于天	Oh! bright he is in heaven.
周雖舊邦	Although Chow was an old country,
其命維新	The [favouring] appointment lighted on it recently.
有周不顯	Illustrious was the House of Chow,
帝命不時	And the appointment of God came at the proper season.
文王陟降	King Wan ascends and descends
在帝左右	On the left and right of God

(Legge, *The She King*, 427-428).

⁵³⁴ Here, Kūkai takes a line from the *Analects* and turns it on its head: “The Master said, ‘When faced with the opportunity to practice benevolence do not give precedence even to your teacher’” 子曰當仁不讓於師 (Lau, 137; Kanaya, 222). However, Kūkai considers Gomyō such an exemplary Buddhist teacher that extolling his deeds constitutes an act of benevolence.

⁵³⁵ A gemmed sacrificial vessel 瑚璉 is used to offer millet at ancestral tombs (Tōdō, 796). Kūkai's description of Gonzō as a “gemmed sacrificial vessel” is a reference to the following passage in the *Analects*: “Tsu-kung asked, ‘What do you think of me?’ The Master said, ‘You are a vessel.’ ‘What kind of vessel?’ ‘A sacrificial vessel.’” 子貢問曰賜也何如子曰女器也曰何器也曰瑚璉也 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 435; Lau, 76; Kanaya, 62). Confucius opines that his disciple is of such high quality that he is worthy of comparison to a gemmed sacrificial vessel (Kanaya, 62).

龍象其身	His flesh is like a dragon and an elephant ⁵³⁶
弁挫邪鏢	His speech cracks the sword of heresy
智明正因	His wisdom illuminates the true nature of karma
講經講論	He lectures on sutras, he lectures on treatises
乍秋乍春	Whether in autumn or in spring
聽者市井	Listeners form a town
學徒雲臻	Students gather like clouds
著世幽趣	The sublime import of Asanga and Vasubandhu's teachings
非公不陳	Cannot be taught if not made available to all
兩帝仰止	Revered by Emperors Saga and Junna
四衆梁津	The Four Classes of Believers take shelter in his teachings
名賓僧正	Although he may hold the title of Bishop
實德佛隣	In reality his virtue is next to that of the Buddha
伊余尚德	Here I revere his virtue
設饌迎賓	A celebration is held and guests are welcomed
絲竹金土	The tones from silk, bamboo, gold and earthen instruments
感動鬼神	Inspire and move demons and gods
怨親既歎	Friends and foes already rejoice
何況昵親	So would not those close to him celebrate all the more?
卓彼人寶	A superior man – he is a treasure
可謂國珍	Who can be said to be a marvel of the nation

The poem and its preface attest to Gomyō's outstanding abilities as a Buddhist scholar, teacher and administrator. Kūkai casts himself as Gomyō's inferior through phrases such as “I, Kūkai, am grateful to be one of his disciples, and I wish to be equal to this great saint” 貧道忝備下菜思齊上聖 and “A few of us shall meet for a casual tea gathering and we hope that it will be an opportunity to partake in Gomyō's supreme wisdom” 聊与二三子設茶湯之淡会期醍醐之淳集. Although Kūkai had already developed a reputation as an innovative theologian and talented poet and calligrapher by this time, and was granted the Tōji temple in 823, he still held only the

⁵³⁶ Since dragons are the kings of the seas, and elephants reign on land, the phrase “dragons and elephants” is used to describe Gomyō's superiority (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 435).

rank of Junior Prelate 少僧都 which made him Gomyō's junior in both rank and age.

Kūkai's involvement with Gangōji was not limited to felicitous events. Fifteen years earlier, in 814, he intervened when a monk named Chūkei 中環 (dates unknown) was accused of sending scurrilous correspondence to one of the Emperor's ladies (although apparently the charges were never substantiated). On Chūkei's behalf, Kūkai issued the following plea to Saga:⁵³⁷

沙門空海言。空海聞。緩刑之文顯在前書。宥責之言聞于囊策。是以草纓艾鞵揚美垂拱年。赭衣画冠流譽無為日。伏惟。皇帝陛下。慈過春風。惠踰夏雨。至孝之名勝潛龍夕。弘仁之號播御鳳朝。天地感応風雨不迷。四海康哉百穀豐稔。

I, Kūkai, hereby state: I have heard that texts of old clearly call for the lessening of punishments. Ancient texts speak of pardoning crimes. With this in mind, the realm enjoyed years of tranquility through the ancient practice of making prisoners wear blue tassels and light blue lap-ropes,⁵³⁸ and glorious days of effortless governance passed through making criminals wear red caps inscribed with the names of their crimes.⁵³⁹ When I think about this, Your Majesty's compassion blows through the land like a spring breeze, and your generosity exceeds that of the summer rain. When you were the Crown Prince, you were the epitome of filial piety, and upon ascending to the throne, the name of your reign, Kōnin [spreading virtue], spread throughout the land. Heaven and Earth sympathetically responded by never erring with the winds and rains, keeping the seas calm, and creating a bounty of grain.

夫。鄧林幹中必有枯枝。無為化下非無桎枷。伊祁之子不肖聖孝。瞿雲之息不以覺父。金石薰蕕物之對也。賢聖愚頑何能相離。伏見。元興寺僧傳燈大法師中環。不護戒行。不慎國典。身忝役掘川。竊。尋其罪過。則死而有餘辜。

Nonetheless, among the branches in the great forest there is always one rotten one. Does not even a well-

⁵³⁷ SRS 4:29.

⁵³⁸ The legendary emperors Yao and Shun required prisoners to wear these as emblems of their incarceration (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 245).

⁵³⁹ A form of punishment during the Han Dynasty (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 245).

governed realm have cangues and fetters? The son of Emperor Yao⁵⁴⁰ lacked his father's sagacity and piety, and the son⁵⁴¹ of Siddhartha Gautama did not resemble his enlightened father. Gold and stones form opposing pairs, as do fragrant and pugnacious grasses. How can sagacious virtue and foolish stubbornness be separated? I see that the monk Chūkei of the Gangōji temple, who holds the rank of Great Transmitter of the Dharma Lamp,⁵⁴² has acted in violation of the precepts and has offended the laws of the land. He ought to be sentenced to penal servitude and dig ditches. Upon further inquiry, his crimes call for his death.

論其犯臟。則碎也猶未飽。非但一己之亡身喪名。抑亦。汗穢佛法。違越王制。下愚不移蓋斯之謂歟。春生秋煞天道之理也。罰罪賞功王者之常也。雖然。冬天无暖景則梅麥何以生花。守法不賞盜則秦人何以流美。況復。大樹仙人廻迹於曲城。慶喜道者被惱于鄧家。

When one delves into the nature of his illicit acts, crushing his body is insufficient. To do so would be to merely extinguish Chūkei's body and cast his name into oblivion. He has defiled the Buddhist Law and has committed transgressions against the Emperor's rule. Is this what is meant by the saying "The foolish never change?"⁵⁴³ The law of the heavens is to be born in the spring and to wither in the autumn. It is the duty of the ruler to punish crimes and praise achievements. However, if there is no warmth in the winter sky, then how can the plums and barley bloom? How could Duke Miao of Qin attain fame without observing the law and praising thieves?⁵⁴⁴ Even the Sage of the Big Tree followed the path to the citadel of maidens,⁵⁴⁵ and even Shakyamuni's disciple Ananda was troubled by the sensual Matanga.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁰ This refers to an anecdote involving Emperor Yao's troublesome son Danzhu 丹朱. He was considered a petty man and an unworthy successor to his virtuous father, so Yao ceded the throne to Shun (John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol. 3 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 28, 42).

⁵⁴¹ Siddhartha Gautama's son Rahula 羅睺羅 also entered the Buddhist priesthood where he excelled. Rahula was held in high regard by his peers for his diligent practice, but was chastised by Shakyamuni for his condescending attitude (Nakamura, 823).

⁵⁴² This was the fourth-highest rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the time (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 264).

⁵⁴³ This is an adaptation of a line from the *Analects*: "The Master said, 'It is only the most intelligent and the most stupid who are not susceptible to change'" 子曰唯上知與下愚不移 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 226; Lau, 143; Kanaya, 237).

⁵⁴⁴ This refers to an anecdote found in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, where Duke Miao did not punish a group of men who stole his horses for food during a famine, but instead rewarded them with wine. Later, when Duke Miao was surrounded by the Jin army, these men came to his rescue and routed the Jin forces (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 246).

⁵⁴⁵ This anecdote can be found in volume five of Xuanzang's *Da tang xi yu ji* 大唐西域記 (*The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*) (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 246, 505). As it is quite long, only a summary is presented here: in the city of Kusumapura (the capital of the country of Kanyakubja), there was a sage who meditated for so long that his body became like a tree. One day, while taking a break from his meditation, he noticed

往古賢人猶亦不免。濁世凡夫豈得无愆。恕過令新謂之寬大。宥罪納贓稱之含弘。見苦起悲觀音用心。視危忘身仁人所務。伏乞。陛下。解網而泣辜。絕纓而報讎。去秦政之必罪。取周成之措刑。更与天下而新。

Ancient sages were not exempt from temptation. How can ordinary men in our world of defilement not commit transgressions? Pardoning an offense and reforming the offender are said to be “tolerant,” and allying an offense and accepting illegal acts are said to be “broad-hearted.” Seeing suffering and giving rise to compassion is Avalokitesvara’s duty, and viewing danger⁵⁴⁷ and forgetting oneself is the mission of one with benevolence. I plead to His Majesty the Emperor to release Chūkei’s bonds and weep at his crimes⁵⁴⁸ and to cut the string on your cap and reward your enemy.⁵⁴⁹ Do away with the ways of the Qin – where every offense called for an execution during the reign of its first emperor – and replace them with the ways of the Zhou, where not a single execution was held during the forty years kings Cheng and Kang

the king’s daughters playing in the woods, a sight which aroused him. His mind contaminated, he asked the king for permission to marry one of his daughters. However, none of them accepted the sage’s proposal. The king feared that the sage would use his supernatural powers to wreak havoc upon them. His youngest daughter sympathized with her father’s plight and agreed to marry the sage. The sage was displeased with the girl’s appearance, and was so offended that none of the other daughters wished to marry him, that he turned the king’s daughters into hunchbacks (Li Rongxi, trans. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center from Buddhist Translation and Research, 1996), 139-141).

⁵⁴⁶ Matanga 摩登伽 was a young peasant woman who fell in love with Ānanda 阿難. Ānanda was troubled by Matanga’s affections, so he consulted Shakyamuni, who instructed Ānanda to bring Matanga to the Jetavana Monastery. There, Shakyamuni told her that if she wished to be the wife of a *bhikku*, she must take monastic vows and join the order. She gladly complied with Shakyamuni’s request, and after a year of monastic training, realized that her love for Ānanda was just based on illusory desire. The complete story of Matanga’s transformation into a *bhikkuni* can be found in the *Matanga sūtra* 摩登伽經 T. 1301.

⁵⁴⁷ This is based on a passage in the *Analects* where Confucius is asked what constitutes a complete man. In his explanation, he says, “But to be a complete man nowadays one need not be all these things. If a man remembers what is right at the sight of profit, is ready to lay down his life in the face of danger, and does not forget sentiments he has repeated all his life even when he has been in strained circumstances for a long time, he may be said to be a complete man” 今之成人者何必然見利思義見危授命久要不忘平生之言亦可以為成人矣 (Imataka et al., 320; Lau, 125-126; Kanaya, 192-193).

⁵⁴⁸ The source of this phrase is an anecdote in the *Shuo yuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Stories*) an anthology of stories compiled and annotated by Confucian scholar Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BC). According to legend, King Yu, the mythical founder of the Xia Dynasty (c. 2700-c. 1600 BC), wept at the sight of a criminal, feeling that his own lack of virtue was the reason the criminal committed his misdeeds (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 247).

⁵⁴⁹ The origins of this phrase can also be found in the *Records of the Grand Historian*. A man named Tang 湯 (*dang* in *pinyin*) saw a rustic in fields laying out nets in four directions. The rustic informed Tang that the nets were laid in all directions so that any bird that flies by would be caught in his nets. Upon hearing this, Tang felt pity for the birds and took away three of the nets so that “those which wanted to go to the left should go left, and those which wanted to go right should go right, and that only those which were the victims of fate should be caught in the net.” When the princes heard of this, they exclaimed, “Tang’s kindness is extreme, and extends even to birds and beasts” (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 505).

governed.⁵⁵⁰ I ask you to incorporate these into the realm and bring about new ways.

然則。木石知恩。人鬼感激。空海。從聞此事。腸迴魂飛。口忘食味。心不安禪。明知。身賤而言不行。口開而災禍入。雖然。不任以身代物輕黷威嚴伏深戰越。沙門空海。誠惶誠恐謹言。

By doing so, even the trees and rocks shall know gratitude, and humans and spirits shall be moved. I, Kūkai, was very disturbed when I heard about Chūkei's transgressions and almost fainted. My mouth could not taste anything I ate, nor was my mind at ease. I know that the words from someone of my lowly station will not be put into action, and I invite calamity by opening my mouth. Nonetheless, I cannot bear to turn a blind eye to his situation. I have offended Your Majesty's dignity through my levity, for which I deeply apologize. I present these words to Your Majesty with humble sincerity.

This letter aptly demonstrates Kūkai's skill in simultaneously deploying Confucian and Buddhist discourses to further his arguments. Since the transgressor was a fellow Buddhist monk, Kūkai prudently opens with a Confucian argument by evoking ancient continental precedent regarding the remission of punishments, and portraying Saga as the epitome of Confucian virtue. Kūkai would certainly have been aware that the emperor would take seriously a Buddhist priest imposing himself on his court ladies, especially in light of the Kusuko Rebellion, which may have had the tacit backing of certain segments of the Nara clergy. Kūkai is straightforward in his belief that Chūkei's transgressions warrant "penal servitude digging ditches," or perhaps execution. However, by declaring that Chūkei violated both the Buddhist precepts and the law of the land, he makes two points clear: first, lascivious activity is forbidden by the precepts (therefore, Buddhist monks are not decadent degenerates by nature), and second, Buddhist monks are also obligated to obey national law (therefore, Buddhist monks are required to respect non-ecclesiastical institutions, such as the imperial household). As the letter progresses, Kūkai

⁵⁵⁰ This is based on similar passages in the *Records of the Grand Historian* and the *Records of the Han* (Imataka et al., 320).

strengthens its Buddhist tone by subtly redefining the emperor as the paragon of Buddhist compassion through stating, “Seeing suffering and giving rise to compassion is Avalokitesvara’s duty, and seeing danger and forgetting oneself is the mission of one with benevolence.” Kūkai does not just see the emperor as merely a *cakravartin* – the corporeal embodiment of Buddhist and secular law in the temporal realm – he now likens Saga to Avalokitesvara and ascribes the bodhisattva’s attributes of compassion to him.

This letter also provides a glimpse into the state of capital punishment and criminal justice in early Heian Japan. Saga is often credited for abolishing the death penalty during his reign, and this notion is reinforced by later texts, such as the *Nihon ryōiki*, where the author states that Saga, true to his reign name Kōnin (spreading benevolence), simply exiled those who would have normally warranted execution. Also, Kūkai’s plea for leniency, and his suggestion that retributive justice via executions be replaced with what may be construed as “rehabilitation” to modern Western sensibilities, seems to support the notion that Saga inaugurated an era of enlightened justice. However, aside from Nakanari’s execution for his involvement in the Kusuko Rebellion, historical records do not present any evidence of executions for crimes other than insurrections being carried out since the implementation of the *ritsuryō* system. Therefore, although this letter reads as a plea for Chūkei’s life, precedent demonstrates that it was highly improbable that he would be executed for his transgressions. Since Chūkei’s alleged crimes were an offense against the imperial household, perhaps they were viewed as an act of insurrection. Although nothing is known of what happened to Chūkei’s fate after Kūkai submitted his letter, he most likely was laicized and banished far from the capital, never to return.

Conclusion

The texts presented in this chapter provide an overview as to the types of documents

contained in the *Shōryōshū*, showing how they situate Kūkai into the literary, political, aesthetic and social milieu of his day. While Kūkai may have seen the systemization and propagation of esoteric Buddhism in Japan to be his primary mission, these texts show that, as a writer, he did not limit himself to Buddhist rhetoric. The letters Kūkai wrote on behalf of Fujiwara no Makawa and Kiyomura no Kiyotoyo show his wide range of contacts in Heiankyō society and his connections to various branches of the Fujiwara family.

More importantly, Shinzei's preface shows a conscious attempt to construct Kūkai as a writer in the *belles-lettres* tradition during his lifetime. Hagiographies composed after Kūkai's death primarily concerned themselves with his accomplishments as a master theologian and yogin. Although these texts also refer to some of the non-doctrinal documents writings Kūkai produced during his lifetime, they are inevitably placed in a subordinate position to his religious endeavors. Shinzei's preface demonstrates the extent to which Kūkai's background and literary activities diverged from those of the mainstream Heiankyō *kanshi* literati. Kūkai lacked the credentials of his Japanese contemporaries: he did not graduate from the State College, he did not have an aristocratic posting, nor was he an active participant in Saga's literary coterie. Therefore, Shinzei presented an alternative vision of literary legitimacy: obtaining cultural capital directly at the source, in this case, Tang China. The letter Kūkai wrote on behalf of Makawa and Kiyotoyo emphasizes the native Chinese language skill Kiyotoyo acquired from his Chinese émigré father, and Shinzei's inclusion of this text serves to valorize those with direct access to continental culture. Kiyotomo, similar to Kūkai in his earlier years, was on the periphery of Heiankyō society due to political misfortune. Therefore, Kūkai explicitly mentions Kiyotoyo's parentage and background to generate cultural capital for Kiyotoyo, and by extension, for himself.

Shinzei's desire to canonize Kūkai via the *Shōryōshū* also suggests that his stature as a writer was not uncontested during his lifetime. The anthology serves as a monument to Kūkai's life and work, preserving and presenting a diverse array of texts. The inclusion of a number of texts in the *Shōryōshū*, such as letters and monuments, serves as evidence Shinzei wanted them to be appreciated for their belletristic qualities, not just their pragmatic content. Indeed, the *Shōryōshū* and its preface present a different aspect of Kūkai – Kūkai the writer – that has not been emphasized in other doctrinal or hagiographic texts.

Chapter Four Kūkai's Theories of Calligraphy

Introduction

Centuries after his death, Kūkai's reputation as a master calligrapher has endured, and he is still revered as perhaps the finest calligrapher in Japanese cultural history. Modern edited collections of his calligraphy will invariably include one of the installments of the *Fūshinjō* 風信帖, a series of three letters he wrote to Saichō between 810-812.⁵⁵¹

Kūkai apparently left a lasting impression as a calligrapher while in China. According to legend, there was a wall in the imperial palace inscribed with calligraphy by celebrated calligrapher Wang Xi-zhi 王羲之 (303-379), the revered writer of semi-cursive script who was also known to the Chinese as the Sage of Calligraphy 書聖. Over time, the wall fell into disrepair, and there was no one who could restore it, so the Tang emperor issued an edict ordering Kūkai to restore the calligraphy to its former glory. Legend has it that Kūkai took up five brushes at once — one in each hand, one in each foot, and one in his mouth — and simultaneously wrote five lines of calligraphy. The emperor and his ministers were astonished, and in recognition of this feat, the emperor decreed that Kūkai would be known as the “Five Brush Monk” 五筆和尚. Word quickly spread throughout Chang-an, and children on the street would approach Kūkai and ask if he was indeed the “Five Brush Monk.” This story first

⁵⁵¹ In these letters, Kūkai responded to Saichō's request to borrow esoteric Buddhist texts so that he could produce copies of them for his own use. The first installment is likely the most recognizable of the series, since it is the one that is the most frequently published. These letters are known collectively as the *Fūshinjō* from the opening line of the first installment: 風信雪書自天翔臨 (Your correspondence has descended from the heavens as though it were wind or snow...).

appeared in a Japanese source in the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* 金剛峯寺建立 (*Legends on the Practices Regarding the Founding of Kongōbuji*, 968), 134 years after Kūkai's death.⁵⁵²

This anecdote takes an interesting turn in Ōe no Masafusa's 大江匡房 (1041-1141) *Kōbō Daishiden* 弘法大師伝 (*A Biography of Kōbō Daishi's Life*). Ōe begins with the standard introduction: how Kūkai was born in Sanuki, how he was interested in Buddhism from a young age, how he initially studied under Gonzō at the Daianji Temple, and how he eventually made passage to China. He also describes the initial meeting between Kūkai and Hui-guo, and how Hui-guo took advantage of the opportunity to give Kūkai a full transmission in esoteric Buddhism. However, this is where the similarities with other hagiographic accounts end. Ōe then devotes the second half of his biography on Kūkai to extol his virtues as a calligrapher:⁵⁵³

大師兼善草法。昔左右手足及口秉成書。故唐朝謂之五筆和尚。帝都南面三門竝以應天門額大師所書也。其應天門額應字上點故落之。上額之後。遙投筆書之。

The Master was also proficient in grass script. Long ago, he wielded brushes with his left and right hands, left and right feet, and mouth to produce calligraphy. Therefore, the Tang Court declared him the “Five Brush Monk.” The calligraphy on the Three Gates in the Southern Walls of the Imperial Capital [Heiankyō] and the placard atop the Ōtenmon [應天門] gate were also by Kūkai. When he wrote the character for [應]

⁵⁵² According to this account, after Kūkai responds to the child's inquiries in the affirmative, he is asked to provide a demonstration of his skills. “During a stroll through the city, he [Kūkai] paused to gaze upon a flowing river. Then, a child with scruffy hair and tattered robes appeared before him and asked if he was the Five Brush Monk from Japan.” Kūkai answered ‘Yes.’ The child said, ‘If you are indeed the Five Brush Monk, you should be able to write on this flowing water.’ Obeying the child's request, Kūkai then composed a poem in praise of the clear water. Drops of ink effortlessly flowed onto the water. Seeing this, the child smiled with delight, and then said ‘Now, I shall write something, and you shall watch.’ Then, the child wrote the character for ‘dragon’ on the water, but when he did not include the final stroke on the right side of the character, the character did not flow away, but floated upward instead. Then, when the final stroke was added, it let out an echo, emitted rays of light, and became the Dragon King. This dragon-character ascended into the sky. The child was the bodhisattva Manjusri, and his tattered robes were his jeweled garments.” (Takeuchi Kōzen, “Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi no kenkyū,” in *Kōyasan daigaku mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, vol. 11 (1999) (Wakayama, Japan: Koyasan University), 38-39. In addition to reinforcing Kūkai's image as a talented calligrapher, the appearance of the bodhisattva Manjusri also serves to lend a magico-religious character to the act of calligraphy.

⁵⁵³ Ōe no Masafusa, “Kōbō daishi den,” in Hase Hōshū, ed., *Kōbō daishi den zenshū*, vol. 1 (Kyoto, Japan: Rokudai Shimpōsha, 1934), 187-188.

on the plaque, he intentionally omitted the uppermost mark. After the plaque was raised, he threw his brush up into the air and filled in the missing mark.

朱雀門額又有精靈。小野道風難之曰可謂米雀門。夢有人來。稱弘法大師使踏其首。道風仰見履鼻入雲不見其人。陰陽寮額三度書之。始書後。夢有神人曰。此額太凡可被改書。後改書之。又夢此額太畏。不堪過過此下。可改書。

There was also the matter of the plaque at the Suzaku Gate being possessed by a spirit. Troubled by this, Ono no Michikaze said, “This should be called the “Rice Sparrow Gate [米雀門].” In a dream, he was met by someone who said he was a messenger of Kōbō Daishi and stood on Michikaze’s neck. Looking up, he saw clouds going into his slippers, but he did not see the person wearing them. Michikaze wrote the plaque for the Bureau of Divination three times. After he started writing, in a dream a sage appeared who said, “The writing on the plaque is large and ordinary, and must be re-written.” After he redid the calligraphy, he saw in a dream that the placard was extremely large. It was not possible to pass under the placard, so it needed to be rewritten.

Although the image of Kūkai wielding five brushes at once strengthens his reputation as a skilled calligrapher, the term “five brushes” is believed to simply refer to the five styles of calligraphy that were in vogue in Tang China at the time: “regular print” script 楷書, “moving” script 行書, “grass” script 草書 “seal” script 篆書, and “official” script 隸書. Presumably, Kūkai had mastered all five.

Kūkai’s fame seems to have lasted well beyond his stay in China; when Saichō’s disciple Enchin 円珍 (814-891) went to China in 853, Hui-guan 惠灌 (dates unknown), the abbot of the Kaiyuansi Temple 開元寺 in Fuzhou inquired, “Is the Five Brush Monk still alive?” Upon being informed that Kūkai was dead, Hui-guan “pounded his chest in grief, declaring that Kūkai’s exceptional talents had yet to be matched.” Also, Enchin reported that he was surprised to hear

the monks at the Qinglongsi, Kūkai’s old temple, speak of his calligraphic accomplishments fifty years later.⁵⁵⁴

In an episode of the *Kokon chomonjū* 古今著聞集 (*Stories Heard from Old Writers and New*, 1254), Saga supposedly acknowledges Kūkai as the superior calligraphic talent. This is high praise, considering that Saga, an accomplished poet, was also one of the Three Brushmasters (*sanpitsu* 三筆), a distinction he shared with Kūkai and fellow poet Tachibana no Hayanari. Indeed, even a casual glance at the works attributed to Kūkai reveals his affinity for the new, flowing Tang calligraphic style, a stark contrast to the rigid, formal style of the Nara period.

Kūkai’s significance as a calligrapher is found not only in his artistic production, but also in his letters and petitions asserting both the political utility and artistic nature of calligraphy. Shinzei’s inclusion of these documents in the *Shōryōshū* demonstrates that he considered them representative of Kūkai’s thought, and worthy of dissemination to a wider readership. Also, in the preface, he explicitly called attention to Kūkai’s talents as a calligrapher, noting “his diction and writing were both beautiful” 詞翰俱美, and a Chinese poet declared him the “Sage of Calligraphy” 草聖. These texts Kūkai authored are invaluable to the study of early Heian calligraphic theory and practice because they are among the few extant documents that engage these issues. His writings present theories of calligraphy rooted in Chinese theories of language, statecraft, and the body, as well as Sanskrit linguistics. In addition, they represent the earliest attempt to create a theoretical and artistic foundation for calligraphic practice in Japan.

This attempt should not be conflated with the creation of a uniquely “Japanese” calligraphic tradition. The term *sanpitsu* is not a product of Kūkai’s era, nor was there any notion

⁵⁵⁴ Takagi Shingen, *Kūkai: shōgai to sono shūhen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997), 58.

of “Japanese” calligraphy, much less one of “Japanese” calligraphic history, in Kūkai’s day. Both were creations of a later age, one that sought to appropriate Kūkai and his times into a seamless narrative of Japanese cultural history. Kūkai’s writings on numerous topics make it clear that he understood Japan to be a geopolitically distinct entity from Tang China, but nowhere does he appeal to “unique” Japanese cultural sensibilities. Quite to the contrary, a number of the calligraphic treatises presented in this chapter will demonstrate that Kūkai saw great potential in Chinese calligraphy to serve as a generator of Chinese-style cultural legitimacy. Finally, Japonocentric narratives on Kūkai’s calligraphic “genius” ignore Kūkai’s attempts at introducing Sanskrit calligraphy and orthography as the superior mode of writing. National discourses aside, Kūkai’s writings on calligraphy are a significant attempt to elevate it to an art and elucidate its theoretical principles.

This chapter will first present a brief outline of Kūkai’s early experiences with calligraphy and his debut as a court calligrapher at Saga’s behest. The first work he produced was a copy of selections from the *Shi shou* 世説 on a set of screens. The finished screens were submitted to the court with a letter where Kūkai demonstrates his knowledge of Chinese calligraphic history. The discussion of Kūkai’s early calligraphic endeavors is followed by an epistle he sent to Saga in 816. Here, Kūkai presents a theory of calligraphy rooted in Buddhist metaphysics and Chinese anthropomorphism. Next, two letters Kūkai appended to a set of brushes he commissioned are presented. While he does not delve into specific brushmaking techniques, his comments reveal the emergence of domestic brush production. The final document presented in this chapter is the letter Kūkai included with a set of Sanskrit calligraphy he presented to Saga. This text is perhaps the most sophisticated exposition of Kūkai’s linguistic thought.

Kūkai's Early Calligraphic Education

There is little in Kūkai's own writings about his early encounters with calligraphy. Since he was born into an aristocratic family and his maternal relatives had high hopes for his education and career, instruction in calligraphy would undoubtedly have been a part of his studies. Although calligraphy was taught at the State College, there was no evidence he received any instruction there. Furthermore, there are no textual records which attest to the texts, styles or methods he was exposed to, or to how his calligraphy was received. The only surviving example of a text attributed to Kūkai's hand prior to his journey to China is the manuscript of the *Rōko shiiki*, which he wrote in 797.⁵⁵⁵ Hirayama Mitsuki, in his analysis of the manuscript, noted that at first glance Kūkai wrote in a “stiff and emaciated cursive calligraphic style” 瘦硬味を感ずる行書体, perhaps indicating that Kūkai had difficulties mastering calligraphy in his earlier years.⁵⁵⁶ The lack of textual attestation to Kūkai's calligraphic ability prior to his journey to China suggests that his development as a calligrapher largely took place while in China.

Unfortunately, Kūkai did not record much about his calligraphic education during his stay in China either. In a letter to Saga in 816, he simply wrote, “Kūkai happened to encounter a master who was versed in calligraphy and received an oral transmission in the art” 空海儻遇解書先生粗聞口決. This letter is included in the *Shōryōshū* and will be presented later in this chapter. Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 (1866-1934), the eminent scholar of Oriental History at Kyoto Imperial University, suggested that his teacher may have been Han Fang-ming 韓方明 (dates

⁵⁵⁵ Although this document is in the possession of Kōyasan, there is no evidence that definitively proves that it was written by Kūkai. Ultimately, this means that there are no pieces of calligraphy prior to his journey to China which can be positively attributed to him (Fujita Tsuneyo, “*Kūkai no sho*” in Wada Shunjō and Takagi Shingen, eds., *Kūkai (Nihon meisō ronshū*, vol. 3) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1982), p. 416).

⁵⁵⁶ Hirayama Mitsuki, *Eien no shozō: Kūkai hen* (Tokyo: Yūhōdō, 1965), 90.

unknown), but provides no solid evidence to support this assertion, aside from some similarities in technical terminology.⁵⁵⁷

Although Kūkai's calligraphic lineage cannot be absolutely ascertained, his writings provide a great deal more information about the calligraphic treatises and pieces he brought back from China. For example, the letter accompanying a number of calligraphic works submitted to Saga in 811 stated Kūkai was presenting works by renowned Tang calligraphers such as Emperor Dezhong 德宗(742-805, r. 779-805), Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), Zhang Yi 張誼 (dates unknown), along with Wang Xi-zhi.

Kūkai's Calligraphic Debut: The *Shi Shuo* Screens

After a three year stay in Kyushu, Kūkai was finally allowed to return to the capital in 809 when Saga assumed the throne following Heizei's abdication. Saga permitted Kūkai to take up residence at the Takaosanji temple in the mountains outside of Kyoto.⁵⁵⁸ Today, the area is administratively part of the city of Kyoto, but in the early Heian period it was considered outside the capital. Therefore, while Kūkai's appointment to the Takaosanji temple certainly brought him

⁵⁵⁷ Naitō Konan, "Kōbō Daishi no bungei," in *Naitō Konan zenshū*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1930), 22. This is a transcript of a lecture that he gave on June 15, 1912 in commemoration of Kūkai's birthday. In his lecture, he indicates that Kūkai used terminology from Han Fan-ming's *Bi fa yao shuo* 筆法要說、(*Outline of Calligraphic Technique*, date unknown). However, Fujita counters that the *Shippitsuhō oyobi shihitsuō* 執筆法及使筆法(*Brush Techniques*) – the text attributed to Kūkai which contains these similarities – was probably written at a later date and attributed to Kūkai to lend it credibility (Fujita, 417).

⁵⁵⁸ The Takaosanji 高尾山寺 temple was founded around 784 by the Wake 和氣 clan. Prior to leaving for China, and shortly after returning to Japan, Saichō was invited to give lectures on numerous occasions, but Kūkai assumed Saichō's place at the temple after being invited back to the capital in 809. In 824, the Wake decided to merge the Takaosanji temple with the Jinganji 神願寺, another one of its temples, which was located in Kawachi Province. After relocating the Jinganji to the Takaosanji site, the newly combined temple was renamed Jingoji 神護寺, its present name. Jingoji was accorded *jōgakuji* 定額寺 ("fixed amount temple") status, which placed it one rank below the national temples 官寺 and the provincial temples 国分寺. The *jōgakuji* system was imposed by the *ritsuryō* government to bring the increasing number of privately-built Buddhist temples under government control. Temples with *jōgakuji* status were given fixed amounts (hence the name) in governmental subsidies for maintenance and rice husks for lighting. In exchange, they were required to submit an asset ledger to the government for auditing. Also, these temples received annual ordinands 年分度者, which meant that their resident monks were also fully incorporated into the state-run ecclesiastical system. The Jingoji temple commended twenty *chō* (approximately 637,270ft² or 194,240m² of wet rice paddies it owned in Bizen Province to Kūkai (Nakamura, 417, 460; Sawa, 406-407).

closer to the capital than before, he was still sufficiently removed from day-to-day capital life. Here, Kūkai hoped to devote his time to meditation and the development of his esoteric Buddhist thought.

Saga took a keen interest in Kūkai's literary and artistic abilities. Although Saga may have been the Japanese sovereign, he fancied himself a Chinese literatus and was delighted by the presence of someone like Kūkai. In the tenth month of Daidō 4 (809), Saga dispatched a palace official to Takaosanji bearing a request to produce calligraphic works for the court. Apparently dismayed by the imposition on his spiritual endeavors, Kūkai sent the following reply:⁵⁵⁹

奉今月三日。大舍人山背豐繼。奉宣進止。令空海書世說屏風兩帖。空海。緇林朽枝。法海爛屍。但解。持鉢以行乞。吟林藪而住觀。寧有。現鬼墨池之才。跳龍返鵲之藝。豈圖。燕石魚目。謬當天簡。天命難違。敢汗珍繪。既无驚人之拔劍。環繞穢目之死蛇。悚之慄之。心魂惘然。謹附豐繼。敢以奉進。謹進。

...On the third day of this month, Grand Palace Chamberlain Yamashiro no Toyotsugu received an imperial proclamation which read, "Have Kūkai write passages from the *Shi shuo* on two folding screens."⁵⁶⁰ I, Kūkai, am a rotten branch in the forest of black-robed monks; a decomposing corpse on the Sea of the Dharma. The only things I know are carrying a bowl and staff while begging for alms, and humming in the woods and engaging in contemplation. How can I have talent that makes a demon cry, or turns a pond black with ink? How can I have the artistry of a flying dragon or a magpie flapping its wings? How can fish eyes be mistaken for jade from Yan and be chosen by the emperor? As the emperor's orders are difficult to evade, I took it upon myself to defile a rare silk. I lack a dagger I can pull out to startle people; my writing is rather like a dying snake which offends the eyes. Frightened and trembling, my heart is in disarray. I humbly entrust this reply to Toyotsugu and dare to submit this to you. In humility.

⁵⁵⁹ SRS 4:19.

⁵⁶⁰ The *Shi shuo* 世說, more properly known as the *Shi shuo xin yu* 世說新語 (*A New Account of Tales of the World*) is an anthology of anecdotes concerning over 1,130 literati, artists and musicians from the end of the Later Han period to the end of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, covering a period from approximately the years 150-420. The collection was compiled by Liu Yi-qing 劉義慶 (403-444) of the Liu Song 劉宋, one of the kingdoms during the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Liu Yi-jing was the nephew of dynasty founder Liu Yu 劉裕 (363-422).

Aside from the reference to the Grand Palace Chamberlain Yamashiro no Toyotsugu 大舍人山背豊繼, a Japanese name and title, almost everything else in this short missive is firmly rooted in Chinese literary discourse. While Kūkai does not explicitly name any famous Chinese calligraphers, he alludes to some of the most important people in the history of Chinese calligraphy. The phrase “talent which makes a demon cry, or turns a pond black with ink” 現鬼墨池之才 pays homage to two legendary figures, Cang Jie 蒼頡 and Zhang Zhi 張芝. Cang Jie is credited with the creation of Chinese characters, and according to the *Benjingxun* 本經訓 (Fundamental Norms) chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, “the skies rained millet and demons wailed through the night” 天雨粟鬼夜哭 in response.⁵⁶¹ Zhang Zhi practiced calligraphy with such intensity that the pond in his garden turned black from constant brush washing.⁵⁶² Kūkai continues by stating he does not have “the artistry of a flying dragon or a magpie flapping its wings,” 跳龍返鵲之藝, a reference to Wang Xi-zhi found in a commentary to the *Thousand Character Classic* 千字文.⁵⁶³ Then, Kūkai proceeds to the crux of his inquiry: why was he the one chosen to do the emperor’s bidding? Here, once again, he poses his question using a Chinese literary and geographic reference – “How can fish eyes be mistaken for a jade from Yan and chosen by the emperor?” 燕石魚目謬當. Yan 燕 refers to a range of mountains in modern-day Gansu Province known as a source of jade,⁵⁶⁴ and “fish eyes” 魚目 are a metaphor for a counterfeit article, since they resemble jade.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶¹ Imataka et al., 307.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Watanabe and Miyasaka, 228.

⁵⁶⁵ This is based on a poem found in the *Wenxuan* (Imataka et al., 307).

Kūkai's self-effacing attitude can be interpreted as either humility in the face of the emperor or as a sincere desire to avoid his assigned task. Indeed, Kūkai did not respond to the emperor's request until two months after receiving the folding screens, unwilling to interrupt a meditative retreat to accommodate Saga's request. Abe observes, "Kūkai's behavior, suggestive of lack of respect, or even disloyalty, to the throne, seems to have invited criticism from his fellow courtiers."⁵⁶⁶ However, he was not in a position to disobey a request from the emperor, and had enough sense to realize that his knowledge of continental culture and learning provided him the social and political capital needed to maneuver in Heiankyō's aristocratic circles and advance his agenda. While he may have personally wished to devote his time to meditation, he certainly knew that he did not possess the political credentials held by the other members of the aristocracy and priesthood. Kanmu and Heizei had no interest in Kūkai whatsoever, and it was not until Saga, a sinophile through and through, ascended the throne that Kūkai was allowed to return to Heiankyō. He saw firsthand how his abilities in composing classical Chinese created opportunities that he otherwise would not have had in Tang China, and he would have done the same to gain political and cultural currency in Japan.

This short letter is important evidence of the transmission of the *Shi shuo* to early Heian Japan. The *Shi shuo* was an extremely popular text in China due to its colloquial language and penetrating (and somewhat iconoclastic) character assessments. Imahama Michitaka, a sinologist interested in the Japanese reception of Chinese texts, states, "It is known that the *Shi shuo* by Liu Yi-qing was transmitted to the early Heian court early on, and it was read by a wide number of people."⁵⁶⁷ Certainly, by the late ninth century the text was circulated among the literati, since it

⁵⁶⁶ Abe, 308.

⁵⁶⁷ 『世説』がはやくからわが平安朝に将来され、広く読まれていたらしいことは、すでによく知られている。(Imahama Michitaka, "Heianchō to sesetsu (ni)" in *Nihon bungaku kenkyū* (Yamaguchi, Japan: Baikō Jogakuin Nihon Bungaku Kenkyūkai), no. 11 (1981), 11).

was listed in the *Nihonkoku genzai shomokuroku* 日本国見在書目録 (*Chinese Books Seen in Japan*) compiled by Fujiwara no Sukeyo 藤原佐世 (?-898).⁵⁶⁸ However, it may be an overstatement to claim that the text was widely read during the *early* ninth century. Saga likely asked Kūkai to copy the text onto the screens precisely because it was new, and he was interested in admiring (and displaying) the latest texts to arrive from the continent.

The final question to be addressed is why the *Shi shuo* was selected for copying. The answer may lie in the nature of the text itself: character assessment. Nanxiu Qian provides the following observations:

The focal point of this intellectual interaction was character appraisal, which started in the Later Han Era as the basis of selecting officials for bureaucratic posts, when leading local scholars evaluated and recommended candidates according to Confucian moral criteria. During the Wei-Chin period, character appraisal gradually shed its political emphasis and evolved into a comprehensive study of human nature. Character appraisal incited intense competition in gentry society, nurturing in turn the growth of self-awareness that had resulted from the collapse of the Han Confucian moral codes. Self-awareness furnished character appraisal with a profusion of personalities, moving the development of this practice in the direction of psychological and aesthetic concerns.⁵⁶⁹

The *Shi shuo* would have been of interest to Saga for a number of reasons. He made his request to Kūkai in 809, one year before the Kusuko Rebellion, but it was still a time of political instability in the capital. Heizei had just abdicated a few months earlier due to apparent mental illness, and memories of the Prince Sawara incident lingered at court. The *Shi shuo* provided a means to examine a broad range of personalities from the “cultured” social strata, and might have served as a practical guide to conduct for a learned courtier. Another radical aspect of the *Shi shuo* is its inclusion of thirty-two anecdotes regarding women under the category of “worthy beauties” (*xian yuan* 賢媛).

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Nanxiu Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin yu [shi shuo xin yu] and Its Legacy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 6.

Calligraphy as Theory: Kūkai's 816 Letter

Perhaps the most lucid testament to Kūkai's views on calligraphy and their relationship to his literary and linguistic thought can be found in a letter he wrote to Saga in 816. By this time, a decade had passed since Kūkai's return from China, and his position as the preeminent esoteric Buddhist was well established in court circles. Although Kūkai still resided at the Takaosanji temple, he had sent a written request to Saga for permission to build an exclusive esoteric Buddhist training center on Mt. Koya in Kii Province two months earlier. Therefore, when Fuse no Ama 布勢海, the Vice Superintendent of Palace Maintenance (*tonomon no suke*, 主殿助), called upon Kūkai bearing blank screens and a request from the Emperor to adorn them with calligraphy, Kūkai initially responded with:⁵⁷⁰

忽奉天命。驚悚難喻。空海聞。物類殊形。事群分體。舟車別用。文武異才。若當其能。事則通快。用失其宜。雖勞無益。空海。元耽觀牛之念。久絕返鵲之書。達夜數息。誰勞穿被。終日修心。何能墨池。人非曹喜。謬對漢主之邸。欲辭不能。強揮龍管。

...Receiving the emperor's orders, I was stunned beyond words. I have heard that things vary in form and their functions are distinct. Ships and carriages have different uses, and scholars and soldiers have different talents. If talents are used in accordance with their function, affairs proceed smoothly. If function loses its value, however hard one works there is no gain. From the onset, I immersed myself in contemplative meditation and have divorced myself from calligraphy for quite some time. Throughout the night, I regulate my breathing via meditation; what kind of person would struggle with calligraphy to the point of puncturing his sleeve?⁵⁷¹ During the day, I practice training my mind; how can I blacken my pond with

⁵⁷⁰ SRS 3:14.

⁵⁷¹ This is a reference to Zhong Yao 鍾繇 (151-230), a statesman of Cao Wei 曹魏, one of the Three Dynasties kingdoms, and a master calligrapher who was credited with creating *kai shu* 楷書 (regular) script. Biographies claim that Zhong Yao was so dedicated to the mastery of calligraphy that he would spend his evenings in a prone position so that he could write on the sleeves of his robes. He would practice writing on his sleeves until holes formed in them (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 210).

ink?⁵⁷² I am not Cao Xi, but in error I head to the mansion of Han Tu.⁵⁷³ I wish to decline, but am unable, so I force myself to take up my dragon brush.

Through this long preface, Kūkai attempts to establish that he is not a calligrapher and wishes to spend his time immersed in meditation. However, Kūkai acquiesces to the emperor’s request, and goes on to expound on the principles of calligraphy:

古人筆論云。書者散也。非但以結裏爲能。必須遊心境物。散逸懷抱。取法四時。象形萬類。以此爲妙矣。

A person of antiquity wrote in *A Treatise on the Brush*, “Calligraphy is dispersion.” This does not mean, however, that proper calligraphic form alone makes dispersion possible. Calligraphy must allow the heart to journey into objects, must allow thought to be concentrated in objects, must allow the principles of calligraphy to follow the four seasons, and must allow shapes to mimic myriad forms. This is the ultimate genius of calligraphic technique.

Here, Kūkai quoted *The Treatise on the Brush* 筆論 attributed to Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-92 BC), a scholar versed in calligraphy, as well as mathematics and astronomy. On the art of calligraphy, Cai Yong wrote:⁵⁷⁴

書は散なり。書かんと欲はば先づ懷抱を散ずべし。情に任せ、性を恣にして然して後に之を書す。若し事に迫らば、中山の菟毫と雖も佳なること能はじ。

Calligraphy is dispersion. First, if you wish to write, the thoughts in your heart must be liberated. Follow your emotions, let your nature run free – then write them down. If you force things, you will be unable to produce superior work even with a fine rabbit hair brush from Zhongshan.

⁵⁷² This is another reference to Zhang Zhi, who appeared in the previous letter.

⁵⁷³ Cao Xi 曹喜 was a vassal of Han Tu 漢土, and a master of seal script. Here, Han Tu refers to Saga. (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 210).

⁵⁷⁴ The relevant section from *The Treatise on the Brush* is quoted in Watanabe and Miyasaka, 499 as a *kakikudashi* text.

Both Cai Yong and Kūkai use the word “dispersion” 散 to describe calligraphy. This character means “to disperse, to scatter, to loosen,” and at first glance, it would appear that Kūkai is advocating calligraphy as a form of mental diversion or recreation. However, he argues the opposite: “dispersion” does not refer to an unorganized “scattering” of mental effort, but rather to the “liberation” of the mind so that it can fully penetrate the object of its study.

Cai Yong advocates following the flow of one’s feelings and temperament, seeing nature as the ultimate inspiration for calligraphy.⁵⁷⁵ Kūkai expands this concept, calling for actually mentally penetrating, and becoming one with, the object of study. For Cai Yong, the beauty of calligraphy lies in one’s ability to unleash one’s emotions and express them with a brush. In fact, he claims that “forcing things” will lead to inferior work, even if a superior brush is used. Although Kūkai does not explicitly articulate his views on the metaphysics of calligraphy, his belief that “calligraphy must allow the heart to journey into objects” can be interpreted as a reflection of his earlier Nara Buddhist, particularly Kegon (Hua-yen), training. Fa-zang 法藏 (643-712), the third patriarch of the Hua-yen school, claimed that “perfected nature” 円成実性 (*parinispāna-svabhava*) was the true nature of the object without any mediating suppositions or prejudices.⁵⁷⁶

The calligraphic theory Kūkai imported from China drew its inspiration from a wide array of plants and animals, both real and mythical. Individual plants, animals or objects served as models for a calligraphic style, and they were all created as a result of “people’s hearts being moved by an object” 人心感物而作也. Kūkai continues,

⁵⁷⁵ Li-hua Ying, “Negotiating the Past: The Art of Calligraphy in Post-Mao China,” *ASIA Network Exchange*, vol. 19, no. 2, (Spring, 2012), 37.

⁵⁷⁶ Lewis Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 57.

是故蒼公風心。擬鳥跡而揮翰。王少意氣。想龍爪而染筆。蛇字起唐綜。蟲書發秋婦。軒聖雲氣之興。務仙風非之感。垂露懸針之體。鶴頭偃波之形。麒麟鸞鳳之名。瑞草芝英之相。如是六十餘體者竝皆人心感物而作也。

This is why Duke Cang, in all his elegance, took up a brush and emulated chicken tracks, and Wang Shao enthusiastically visualized a dragon's claw when he dipped his brush in ink.⁵⁷⁷ Snake characters arose from Tang Zong,⁵⁷⁸ and silkworm writing began with the wife of Qiu.⁵⁷⁹ The style of cloud writing of Sage Xuan;⁵⁸⁰ the sensation of “leeks in the wind” writing by the Hermit Wu;⁵⁸¹ the styles of the “dripping dew” and the “hanging needle;”⁵⁸² the forms of the “crane’s head” and “low waves;” the names of the *qilin* and the *luanfeng*; the appearance of the auspicious *zhi ying* grass – in this way, the sixty some-odd styles of calligraphic writing were all created by people’s hearts being moved by an object.

Kūkai’s positions the origins of calligraphy a mythical history. Once again, he invokes the image of Duke Cang – the same semi-mythical Cang Jie mentioned in a previous letter to Saga. This time, Cang Jie is not only credited with creating a certain style of sinograph, he is also depicted as possessing “elegance” 風心. Here, Kūkai is suggesting that calligraphic writing has the potential to be more than just a state-controlled technology for the production of edicts, imperial anthologies, and state-sanctioned histories; it is also as a medium for artistic refinement. Then, he reinforces the mythical character of calligraphy through the invocation of legendary creatures

⁵⁷⁷ Wang Shao 王少 is an abbreviation of Wang Xi-zhi’s courtesy name, Yi-shao 逸少. “Dragon’s claws” 龍爪 is based on an anecdote recorded in the *Shang shu gu shi* 尚書故實 by Li Chuo 李綽 (dates unknown, but alive during the Tang Dynasty). One evening, Wang Xi-zhi was drunk and wrote numbers on a pillar. These characters resembled dragon claws, hence the name (Imataka et al., 255).

⁵⁷⁸ Tang Zong 唐綜 of Lu dreamt of being wrapped by a snake, which served as an inspiration for the characters (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 212).

⁵⁷⁹ “Silkworm characters” were inspired by the image of washed silkworms. The “wife of Qiu” was of Lu, and married to Qiu Hu 秋胡. She went to another province and never returned, and the letter she sent to her husband was written using “silkworm characters” (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 212).

⁵⁸⁰ Sage Xuan 軒聖 refers to Xuan Yuan 軒轅, the personal name of the Yellow Emperor. This writing was created based on the light, lively clouds which formed when peace prevailed in the realm (Imataka et al., 256).

⁵⁸¹ The Hermit Wu 務仙 was 務光, a hermit who created a form of writing after seeing leeks swaying in the wind. These characters are presented in contrast to the aforementioned “cloud writing” (ibid.).

⁵⁸² The “dripping dew” 垂露 and “hanging needle” 懸針 styles are attributed to Cao Xi. “Dripping dew” characters have bold strokes, and “hanging needle” characters have thin ones (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 499).

like the *qilin* 麒麟 and *luanfeng* 鸞鳳. Calligraphy is accorded an auspicious quality through a reference to the *zhi ying* 芝英 grass, which blooms once every three years.

The invocation of these life forms, mythical or otherwise, reveals the organismic character of calligraphy. Terms like “dragon’s claw” 龍爪, “snake characters” 蛇字 and “silkworm writing” 蟲書 serve both as descriptors and metaphors for their respective styles.

Regarding physiological metaphors in calligraphy, John Hay observes:

It is immediately effective to ask someone, in their first meeting with calligraphy, to look at the characters as though they were a body structure – as supporting skeletal structures made beautiful with flesh, and strong movement, so that they can perceive the tensions and balance within the writing through these same functions within their body.⁵⁸³

While Hay is arguing for an anthropomorphic interpretation of calligraphy through the conferral of somatic features like “skeletal structures” and “flesh,” the same concept can be applied to Kūkai’s writings on the subject. For him, sinographs are liberated from the static, sterile framework of Nara period sutra-copying and energized with the life-force of the flora and fauna that inspired their creation.

The mythical lineage and inspirations of calligraphy is followed by a discussion that closely aligns calligraphic and poetic practice. Arguably, the following passage is the part of Kūkai’s output that has best endured the centuries that followed:

或曰。筆論筆經。譬如詩家之格律。詩有調聲。避病之制。書亦有除病會理之道。詩人不解聲病。誰編詩什。書者不明病理。何預書評。又作詩者。以學古體爲妙。不以寫古詩爲能。書亦以擬古意爲善。不以似古跡爲巧。所以。振古能書。百家體別。

Someone also said that *A Treatise on the Brush* and *A Classic on the Brush*⁵⁸⁴ can be likened to a poet’s rhyme and rhythm. Poetry has a system of avoiding “faults” through tonal arrangement. Calligraphy also

⁵⁸³ John Hay, “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy,” in Susan Bush and Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 76.

⁵⁸⁴ *A Classic on the Brush* 筆經 is by Wang Xi-zhi (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 211).

removes “faults” and conforms to principle. If poets did not comprehend tone and faults, then who would compile poetic anthologies? If calligraphers were unclear on the pathology of faults, what would be entrusted to the works of calligraphic criticism? Composers of poetry create ingenuity through the mastery of ancient forms; they do not create anything good through copying ancient poems. Calligraphy also creates good through the emulation of ancient intent, but it does not create skill through the imitation of ancient remnants. Therefore, from ancient times talented calligraphers were divided into a hundred houses and styles.

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, the notion of “faults” (literally, “illnesses”) in poetic theory was not new to the Japanese of the early Heian period. However, Kūkai’s *Bunkyo hifuron* presented an expanded list of twenty-eight faults for Chinese compositions, as opposed to Hamanari’s eight for *waka*.⁵⁸⁵ In addition, Kūkai adds to Japanese knowledge of calligraphic

⁵⁸⁵ The poetic faults that Kūkai presented in the *Bunkyo hifuron* are as follows: 1: “Level Head” 平頭, where the first and sixth syllables, or the second and seventh syllables share the same tone; 2: “Raised Tail” 上尾, where the fifth and tenth syllables share the same tone; 3: “Wasp’s Waist” 蜂腰, where the second and fifth syllables share the same tone; 4: “Crane’s Knee” 鶴膝, where the fifth and fifteenth syllables share the same tone; 5: “Gross Rhyme” 大韻, where words from the same “rhyme category” are used; 6: “Petty Rhyme” 小韻, where words other than the ones at the end of the line rhyme with the “rhyme word”; 7: “Side Knot” 傍紐, where alliteration occurs in the same line of verse; 8: “Direct Knot” 正紐, which is another form of alliteration; 9: “Withered Wood” 木枯, where there is a tonal error in the third and eighth syllables; 10: “Cracked Metal” 金缺, where there is a tonal error in the fourth and ninth syllables; 11: “Missing Spouse” 闕偶, where no parallelism and “matching words” are present; 12: “Saying Too Much” 繁說, where there is repetition or tautology in diction or imagery; 13: “Dissonance” 齟齬, where two syllables within the middle of a sequence share the same tone; 14: “Clumped Together” 叢聚, where an associated set of images are used in more than two consecutive lines (for example, using the words “clouds,” “mist,” “wind” and “moon” over the space of four lines since they are associated with the “weather”); 15: “Taboo” 忌諱, where national taboos (such as using inauspicious words to refer to the realm) are violated; 16: “Suggestion” 形迹, where an allusion is improperly applied; 17: “Side Reference” 傍突, where an improperly applied allusion results in inauspicious diction; 18: “Reversed Words” 翻語, where reversed word order creates an inappropriate or embarrassing phrasing; 19: “A Series of Cinches” 長擷腰, where a sense of “tightness” is created by the third syllable of each line being semantically similar; 20: “A Series of Loose Stirrups” 長解鑿, where the first and second, as well as the third and fourth, syllables in a line are joined images, leaving the final syllable to “complete the sense of the line;” 21: “Disjointed” 支離, where there is incongruent imagery; 22: “Mutual Excess” 相濫, where an allusion is used twice; 23: “Mixed Seasons” 落節, where imagery from one season is used to describe another; 24: “Out of Order” 雜亂, when the idea that should conclude the poem is presented in its opening; 25: “Superfluity” 文贅, where the presence of commonplace imagery detracts from the otherwise sophisticated devices deployed in the poem; 26: “Contradiction” 相反, where the imagery in the first line is opposed by what follows in the second; 27: “Repetition” 相重, where there is redundancy in diction or image; 28: “Joined Toes” 駢拇, where two lines make an identical statement (Bodman, 267-361).

theory by introducing the concept of “faults” in calligraphy as well.⁵⁸⁶ The concept of “illness” in calligraphy is another indicator of the animate quality of Chinese calligraphic practice. Hay presents a passage from the *Bi chen tu* 筆陳圖 (*Battle Array of the Brush*), a Jin dynasty text:

Calligraphy by those good in brush strength has much bone; that by those not good in brush strength has much flesh. Calligraphy that has much bone but slight flesh is called sinew-writing; that with much flesh but slight bone is called ink-pig. Calligraphy with much strength and rich in sinew is of sage-like quality; that with neither strength nor sinew is sick. Every writer proceeds in accordance with the manifestation of their digestion and respiration of energy, *hsiao-shi* [*xiaoxi* 消息].⁵⁸⁷

This selection demonstrates that calligraphic quality is equated with health, and that the finished product is a result of somatic processes, namely digestion and respiration.⁵⁸⁸ Kūkai expands the Chinese concept of “illness” through his reference to “pathology” 病理, suggesting the possibility for the rational calligraphic faults. Attaching the sinograph 理 (principle/reason) to 病 indicates “illnesses” in calligraphy are not a result of random, mysterious processes, but knowable patterns.

In Kūkai’s understanding of calligraphy, the association between “quality” and “health” does not mandate blind adherence to prescribed forms. Returning to Kūkai’s epistle, the lines that follow the reference to illness, “Also, composers of poetry create ingenuity through the mastery of ancient forms; they do not create anything good through copying ancient poems” 又作詩者以学古体為妙不以写古詩為能 were adapted by Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644-1694) eight centuries later in his *Kyoriku wo okuru kotoba* 許六を送る辞 (On Sending Off Kyoriku). Here, Bashō wrote, “Do not seek the traces of the ancients, seek what they sought” 古人の跡を求めず、古人の求めたるところを求めよ. Both Kūkai and Bashō address the paradox that the

⁵⁸⁶ Kūkai does not specifically identify individual calligraphic “faults,” but Watanabe and Miyasaka provide a few examples in their commentary, e.g., “lack of strength and muscle” 無力無筋 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 211).

⁵⁸⁷ Hay, 85.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

poet must confront: simultaneously seeking inspiration from the “ancients” while attempting to blaze their own path.⁵⁸⁹ Once again, somatic language is present, as Kūkai uses the sinograph for “body” 體 to refer to poetic “forms.” In his view, the ideal poet masters “ancient forms” (bodies), but does not imitate “ancient poems.” He extends this discussion to calligraphic practice, declaring that a calligrapher should master “ancient intent” (mind) 意, but refrain from mimicking “ancient remains” 跡. These statements treat calligraphy as an art, where the practitioner learns “forms” and “intents” and reinterprets them to create new works.

Kūkai concludes his letter with a lengthy request to be pardoned for his lack of ability, nevertheless, his theories on calligraphy and language can be detected:

蔡雍大笑。鍾繇深歎。良有以也。空海。儻遇解書先生。粗聞口訣。雖然。所志道別。不曾留心。今。賴聖雷之震響。拔心地之蟄字。折六書之萃楚。積八體之英華。學轉筆於鼎態。擬超翰乎草聖。想山水。而擺撥。法老少。而始終。

It is a matter of course that Cai Yong laughs⁵⁹⁰ heartily and Zhong Yao sighs deeply.⁵⁹¹ I, Kūkai, happened to encounter a master who was well-versed in calligraphy and thus received an oral transmission in the art. However, I sought a different path, so much of what the master said did not sink in. Now, I rely on the reverberations of holy thunder to extract the characters hibernating like insects in my heart. I break off the superb branches of the Six Styles⁵⁹² and pluck the fine blossoms of the Eight Forms.⁵⁹³ I learned how to move my brush from the three-legged vessel⁵⁹⁴ and imitated the superlative brush-wielding technique of the

⁵⁸⁹ Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory and the Poetry of Bashō* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 266.

⁵⁹⁰ There are no reliable sources for this anecdote, but it may be based on an anecdote where Cai Yong examines a piece of calligraphy in a stone chamber and is delighted by its form (Imataka et al., 257).

⁵⁹¹ Zhong Yao “sighed deeply” because he was not as fortunate as Cai Yong in obtaining calligraphic skill (Imataka et al., 257).

⁵⁹² This refers of the six types of sinographs: pictographs 象形, logograms 指示, compound ideographs 会意, phonetic-ideographic 形声(諧声), derivative characters 轉注 and phonetic loan-characters 假借 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 212).

⁵⁹³ These are the forms of characters: ancient 古文, great seal 大篆 (pre-Qin), lesser seal 小篆 (characters standardized during the Qin Dynasty), simplified seal script 隸書, *ba fen* 八分 (a style between seal and simplified seal script), semi-cursive script 行書, “flying” script 飛白 (script with faded lines), “grass” script 草書 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 212).

⁵⁹⁴ This refers to the characters etched into the vessel (Imataka et al., 258).

Sage of Grass Script.⁵⁹⁵ Thinking of the mountains and waters, I take up my brush, and obey the rules of stroke thickness and thinness in my writing.

君臣風化之道。含上下畫。夫婦義貞之行。藏陰陽點。尊卑愛敬。客主揖讓。弟昆友悌。三才變化。四序生煞。大小次第。隣里和平。寰區肅恭。此等深義。悉韞字々。雖功謝書池。竊庶幾雅趣。又夫。右軍累功。猶未得其妙。衆藝弄沙。始會其極。

The path where the people are guided by the ruler can be found in the upper and lower parts of the characters, and propriety between husband and wife is found in the *yin* and *yang* positions. Courtesies between host and guest are observed,⁵⁹⁶ there are cordial relations between brothers, heaven, earth and man are transformed, and birth and death follow the course of the seasons. There is compassion and respect between the noble and the lowly, and order between things small and large. Neighboring villages are in harmony, and the realm is at peace. Characters contain all of these profound meanings. Although my efforts are inferior to those of Zhang Ying, I humbly hope that they are elegant in taste. Also, although the Right General made continuous effort, he was unable to attain the genius of calligraphic technique. In any art, only after playing with its many grains of sand can one, for the first time reach, the ultimate level.

自外凡庸。何解點畫之奧。何況空海。耳聞其義。心不存理。空費筆墨。忝汗珍屏。一悚一懼。心魂飛越。于時。堯曦流光。葵藿自感。對山握管。觸物有興。自然之應。不覺吟詠。輒抽十韻。敢書于後。

How are ordinary people – to say nothing of me – able to comprehend the profundities of strokes and dots? My ears have heard their meanings, but their principles do not remain in my heart. In vain I expend brushes and ink, and reluctantly defacing a marvelous screen. In fear and apprehension, my mind and spirit leap out of my body. Emperor Yao's radiance shines throughout, and hollyhock buds naturally respond. Facing the mountains, I take up my brush; stirred by the scenery, I am moved to poetry. Therefore, I have selected the following ten rhymes and append them to the end of this letter...

⁵⁹⁵ The Sage of Grass Script is Zhang Bo-ying 張伯英. Bo-ying is Zhang-ying's courtesy name (Imataka et al., 258).

⁵⁹⁶ Commentators have raised the possibility that this is a metaphor for the radical and non-radical components of sinographs (Imataka et al., 258).

On its surface, the conclusion to Kūkai’s epistle reads like a string of apologies, yet it also serves as a summary of the calligraphic theories discussed throughout the document. First, the manner he learned calligraphy from “a master” via “oral transmission” sets the stage for the “esotericization” of what is seemingly secular culture. A specific example would be the “esoteric” ceremonies created by the literati during the Kamakura period to indoctrinate new initiates into the art of *waka* poetic practice. As Abe has pointed out, despite the “foreboding” connotations of the word *mikkyō* 密教 (secret teachings), “esotericism” refers more to a manner of transmission than secrecy.⁵⁹⁷ Next, Kūkai’s declaration that “Now, I rely on the reverberations of holy thunder to extract the characters hibernating like insects in my heart” 今頼聖雷之震響拔心地之蟄字 is an acknowledgment that Saga’s request (the “holy thunder”) is the force that revived his calligraphic abilities (the “characters hibernating like insects”). While this statement was likely just a rhetorical flourish on Kūkai’s part, it can also be tied into the larger narratives borrowed from ancient China regarding the emperor’s ability to evoke language. Finally, Kūkai praises the power of Chinese characters to maintain the natural order of the universe: propriety in various human relationships (host/guest, husband/wife, nobles/commoners, as well as siblings and neighboring villages) and ensure the natural progression of the seasons. In this epistle, Kūkai sees Chinese characters as more than an orthographic medium for expressing ideas; his declaration that “characters contain all of these profound meanings” 此等深義悉韞字々 is an argument concerning the ontology of characters themselves. By their very essence, Chinese characters have the ability to regulate the natural order. At the same time, although Kūkai appreciated the value of Chinese orthography as a temporal political technology, he also understood its limitations, a problem he would explore in his other writings.

⁵⁹⁷ Abe, 1.

After this rather lengthy epistle, which was a mixture of theory and apologia, Kūkai concludes with a poem consisting of ten pairs of seven character lines, wherewith a rhyme at the end of each couplet⁵⁹⁸

蒼嶺白雲觀念人 等閑絕却草行 眞	Emerald peaks, white clouds, a man immersed in meditation I have abandoned the Grass, Moving and True styles of characters
心遊佛會不遊筆 不顧揚波爾許 春	My heart journeys to meet the buddhas and I do not amuse myself with a brush How many springs has it been since I gazed upon the rising waves?
豈謂明皇交染翰 鵠頭龍爪爲君 陳	How is it that the brilliant emperor orders me to dip my brush? I present the crane's head and dragon's claws to His Majesty.
祥雲濃淡御邸出 瑞草秋冬感帝 仁	Auspicious clouds, thick and thin, emanate from the palace Felicitous grasses sense imperial benevolence in the fall in winter
青山翠岳見翔鳳 花苑瓊林望走 麟	Green mountains and verdant ridges see the soaring phoenix The "sprinting <i>qilin</i> " looks upon the flower gardens and jade forests
更有懸針與倒韭 切思相伴竭丹 宸	In addition, there is the "hanging needle" and the "leeks in the wind" With all my heart, I devote myself to the Vermilion Palace
龍管臨池調漆墨 烏光忽照點豪 賓	My dragon brush faces the inkwell and I prepare lacquer-black ink The sunlight of the crow suddenly shines and "dots" the brush with ink
暴風驟雨莫來汗 此是君王所愛 珍	Fierce winds and sudden showers of brush strokes come, yet nothing is polluted, Something Your Majesty deeply cherishes
松巖數霧菴中濕 恐汗望晴經月 旬	The pine crest is frequently fogged in and my hut is damp Fearing defilement, I pass the months and seasons hoping for clear skies
畫虎畫龍都不似 心寒心暑幾逡 巡	Though I draw tigers and dragons, they do not resemble the genuine article My heart freezes and thaws as I hesitate.

The structure of the poem mirrors the letter to which it accompanies. The opening line, "Emerald peaks, white clouds, a man immersed in meditation" 蒼嶺白雲觀念人 refers to none other than Kūkai himself, immersed in meditation in his hermitage on Mt. Takao. The question posed in the

⁵⁹⁸ The rhyming characters are presented in bold.

fourth line, “How many springs has it been since I gazed upon the rising waves?” 不顧揚波爾許春 contains an allusion to the *Chu ci* 楚辭 (*Songs of the South*), a poetic anthology compiled during the Han Dynasty. The phrase “rising waves” 揚波 can be interpreted literally, but Kūkai accords it multiple layers of metaphorical meaning. In the “The Fisherman” 漁夫 chapter of the *Chu ci*, the exiled poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (343-278 BC) was recognized by a local fisherman. When the fisherman asked why he was exiled, Qu Yuan replied, “The entire world is muddy; I am the only one who is clear. The multitude is inebriated; I am the only one sober. Thus, I have been exiled” 举世皆濁 我独清衆人皆醉 我独醒是以見放.⁵⁹⁹ However, the fisherman countered with “The sages are not attached to things and can give the world progress and transformation. If everyone in the world is muddy, how is it that they do not soil the mud and give rise to its waves?” 聖人不凝滯於物 而能与世推移世人皆濁 何不涸其泥而揚其波.⁶⁰⁰ This anecdote gave rise to the phrase “rising waves” to refer to an activity carried out by the general populace. Therefore, when Kūkai rhetorically asked how long it had been since he “gazed upon the rising waves,” he was establishing himself as one uninvolved in the daily intrigues of capital life, and also informing Saga that calligraphy is a commonplace activity he no longer engages in.

The rhetoric of political disengagement aside, this letter is a sophisticated discussion of continental calligraphic theory. Organic metaphors recast calligraphic styles as dynamic, animated representations of living forces. This is linked to “illness,” another “biological” concept presented by Kūkai.

⁵⁹⁹ David Hawkes, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 90.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Kūkai the Brush Artisan

Buddhist sutras and treatises, ritual objects, Chinese poetry, and pieces of calligraphy are not the only things Kūkai brought back from China. While in China, he acquired the skills for producing Chinese calligraphy brushes, which he then introduced to artisans in Japan. In 812, Kūkai commissioned Sakanai Kiyokawa 坂名井清川 (dates unknown) to create a set of brushes in accordance with his instructions, as a gift to Saga. Along with the brushes, Kūkai appended the following letter:⁶⁰¹

狸毛筆四管	Four badger hair brushes:
真書一	One for “regular print” script
行書一	One for “moving” script
草書一	One for “grass” script
寫經一	One for copying sutras

右伏。奉昨日進止。且教筆生坂名井清川。造得奉進。空海。於海西。所聽見如此。其中大小長短強柔齊尖者。隨字勢麤細。惣取捨而已。簡毛之法。纏紙之要。染墨藏用。竝皆傳授訖。空海。自家試看新作者。不減唐家。但恐。星好各別。不允聖愛。自外。八分小書之樣。蹋書臨書之式。雖未見作。得具足口授耳。謹附清川奉進。不宣謹進。

In compliance with the emperor’s recent orders, the aforementioned brushes were made by brush craftsman Sakanai Kiyokawa using techniques I taught him, and presented them to the Court. These are just like the brushes I saw in Tang China, which lies in the western seas. There are brushes large and small, long and short, strong and soft, flat and pointed, and the one to be used should be selected according to the amount of pressure applied to the brush. The method of selecting the hairs, the method of arranging the paper, and the method of dipping the brush prior to use were all taught to Sakanai. The new brushes that I attempted to make under my own design are in no way inferior to those in Tang China. However, just as the stars have their own preferences, I fear that these brushes will not suit the emperor’s revered tastes. Aside from this, although I have yet to produce calligraphic pieces in the *ba fen* style, or pieces which are copied, I was able to receive verbal instruction in these styles and have transmitted them to Kiyokawa. Although my words here are insufficient, I humbly present this letter to you.

⁶⁰¹ SRS 4:23.

Kūkai's description of the brushes reveals a growing diversity in calligraphic implements and techniques. The mere fact he took the time and effort to commission a set of brushes and attach an explanatory epistle suggests the brush making techniques he imported were superior to those current in Japan. Also, his mention and presentation of a broad range of brushes is indicative of a wider, and more private, writing culture in Tang China, in contrast to the state-controlled one in Japan. Although Kūkai does not provide the details, he suggests there is a specific process for fashioning the brushes, starting with the proper selection of hair. Finally, he reveals that he learned the art of brush making via oral transmission. Kūkai could have easily created written instructions for the manufacture of brushes, but chose to teach Sakanai verbally. This is indicative of Kūkai's "esoteric" stance toward cultural transmission: i.e. direct, verbal master-to-disciple teaching is preferable to creating written manuals. Just as Kūkai served as the receptacle of Hui-guo's esoteric Buddhist knowledge, Sakanai was entrusted with everything Kūkai learned about calligraphy during his two years in Chang-an.

The same year, Kūkai also presented a set of badger hair brushes to Crown Prince Ōtomo (the future Emperor Junna). This time, in the accompanying letter, he discusses the importance of selecting the proper brush for the task at hand, comparing the calligrapher to an artisan:⁶⁰²

右伏。奉今月十五日令旨。即教筆生。槻本小泉。且造得奉進。良工先利其刀。能書必用好筆。刻鏤隨用改刀。臨池逐字易筆。字有篆隸八分之異。眞行草藁之別。臨寫殊規。大小非一。對物隨事。其體衆多。率然不能惣造。伏願。鑒察要用者。且附村國益滿。謹隨狀謹進。

I received an imperial edict on the fifteenth of this month, so I instructed brush artisan Tsukinomoto no Koizumi to fashion a set of brushes. He was finally able to complete them, which I now present. A good artisan first sharpens his blade; a skilled calligrapher without fail uses an excellent brush. Different blades are used for different types of sculpting, and in the practice of calligraphy, brushes are changed in accordance with the type of characters to be written. Characters have different forms, such as seal script

⁶⁰² SRS 4:26.

and clerical script, and different classifications, such as “regular,” “moving” and “grass” forms. The rules for writing these are different, and the characters vary in size. Objects vary in form in accordance with their substance. It is not possible to create everything at once. I humbly ask that you inspect these brushes. These brushes have been entrusted to Murakuni no Masumitsu, who will humbly present them in accordance with this document.

Kūkai’s thoughts on brush selection reveal that the commonly-used phrase *Kōbō fude wo erabazu* (Kōbō Daishi does not select his brush; i.e., a craftsman does not blame his tools) is not grounded in his actual thought; actually, his personal feelings on the matter appear to be quite the reverse – a “skilled calligrapher” 能書 uses an “excellent brush” 好筆.⁶⁰³ As in his earlier letter to Saga, this letter also underscores the variety of calligraphic styles, and the necessity of using techniques and implements suitable for the each.

Sanskrit and Kūkai’s Theories of Language and Statecraft

Literary Chinese was not the only language Kūkai mastered during his studies in China. Prior to his visit to the Qinglongsi temple, he spent several months at the Ximingsi temple in Chang-an, where he studied Sanskrit under the tutelage of Prajna, an Indian monk. The presence of Sanskrit letters lent an extra layer of mystique to esoteric Buddhism, since only properly trained monks were capable of reading, writing, and deciphering them. Kūkai was fascinated by the potential of Sanskrit to serve as a linguistic medium for expressing philosophical truths, since the symbols of its phonetic alphabet were not semantically burdened like Chinese characters. The

⁶⁰³ The expression *Kōbō fude wo erabazu* appears to be a Japanese adaptation of a passage from the *Dian qian zong lu* 丹鉛總錄 (*Preface to General Collections of Studies on Lead*) by Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), a Ming Dynasty poet and scholar. The Chinese text reads “Master Tai bai [Li Bo] could have said ‘The skilled calligrapher does not choose his brush’” 太白可謂能書不撰筆矣 (Tanaka Yoshinobu et al., eds., *Koji kotowaza no jiten* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1989), 950-951). The exact process in which this Chinese saying was transformed into one on Kūkai is unclear, but it likely occurred in the early Edo period, since the *Dian qian zong lu* was a Ming Dynasty text. Like the first instance of the term *sanpitsu* appearing in an encyclopedia compiled by Kaibara Ekken, this proverb demonstrates that much of what is associated with “Kōbō Daishi’s calligraphy” in the Japanese cultural imagination is an Edo period construct.

Goshōrai mokuroku he presented to Heizei in 806 included numerous Sanskrit texts, and Kūkai offered the following justification for the use of Sanskrit as a Buddhist liturgical language:

Buddhism originated in India. In India and China, however, circumstances are quite different. The sound system as well as the script is [sic] dissimilar. As a result, only through translations can we savor the refreshing breeze of Indian spirituality. The mantras, however, are mysterious and each word is profound in meaning. When they are translated into Chinese, the original meanings are modified and the long and short vowels confused. In the end we can get roughly similar sounds but not precisely the same ones. Unless we use Sanskrit, it is hardly possible to differentiate the long and short sounds. The purpose of retaining the source materials, indeed, lies here.⁶⁰⁴

Here, Kūkai questions the ability of Chinese translations/transliterations of Buddhist scriptures and incantations to manifest the benefits promised by the mantras. From the standpoint of esoteric Buddhist theory, the inability of Chinese transliterations to properly express Sanskrit vowel lengths could result in the loss of the magical powers of the original Sanskrit. Buddhist rituals that may be viewed as “esoteric” were present in Japan from the Nara period, for example, *dhāranī* chanting to summon rain, dispel plagues, and prevent calamities, but naturally, these Sanskrit chants were performed in Chinese transliteration. In addition to restoring “the refreshing breeze of Indian spirituality,” chanting the *dhāranī* in actual Sanskrit would improve the efficacy of these rituals. However, as mentioned earlier, Emperor Heizei, unlike his predecessor Emperor Kanmu, was uninterested in Buddhism, so the Sanskrit texts and knowledge Kūkai brought back from China went unnoticed until Emperor Saga ascended the throne.

Kūkai had to wait until 814 for his next chance to extol the benefits of Sanskrit to the emperor. Once again, Fuse no Ama called on Kūkai at the emperor’s behest to request various Chinese texts. This time, Kūkai seized the opportunity and attached the following letter.⁶⁰⁵

沙門空海言。空海聞。帝道感天。則秘錄必顯。皇風動地則靈文聿興。故能。龍卦龜文。待黃犧以標用。鳳書虎字。候白姬以呈體。於焉。結繩廢而三墳燦爛。刻木

⁶⁰⁴ Hakeda, 144.

⁶⁰⁵ SRS 4:28.

寢以五典鬱興。明皇因之。弘風揚化。蒼生仰之。而知往察來。不出戶庭。萬里對目。不因聖智。三才窮數。

It is the monk Kūkai who writes these words. I have heard that when the emperor's virtue reaches the heavens, mysterious texts appear without fail. When the same virtue moves the earth, sacred writings begin to take form. Therefore, the dragon marks and tortoise script waited for the Yellow Emperor and Emperor Fu Xi before revealing themselves, and phoenix writing and tiger characters awaited Shaohao and Shiyi before showing their form.⁶⁰⁶ Thus, the practice of tying ropes together was abandoned, and the Yellow Emperor, Emperor Shenhuang, and Emperor Fu Xi shone brilliantly as the Three Sage Emperor Calligraphers. Carving notches into wood was discontinued, and the calligraphy of the Five Emperors⁶⁰⁷ flourished. With this, enlightened emperors spread virtue and raised the fruits of edification. The people revere this, learning about the past and understand the future. Without leaving the palace the emperor's eyes look out over ten thousand *li*, and without relying on the wisdom of the sages he can know the fates of heaven, earth and man.

稽古溫故。自我垂範。非書而何矣。況復。悉曇之妙章。梵書之字母。體凝先佛。理含種智。字絡生終。用斷群迷。所以。三世覺滿。尊而爲師。十方薩埵。重逾身命。滿界之寶。半偈難報。累劫之障。一念易斷。文字之義用。大哉遠哉。

Reflecting upon the ancient, inquiring into the past, and setting one's own models – how can these be accomplished without writing? All the more the marvelous texts written in Siddham script and the sounds of Sanskrit letters assumed form long before the Buddha came into the world, and their logic encapsulates the totality of wisdom. These characters entwine beginnings and endings and function to shatter delusion. Therefore, the perfectly enlightened Buddhas of the Three Realms revered these symbols and made them their master, and the bodhisattvas in the Ten Directions treasured them more than life itself. The universe is filled with treasures that cannot easily be expressed in half a *gatha*, but accumulated eons of sin can easily be expiated with a single thought. How vast and profound are the meanings and uses of written characters!

⁶⁰⁶ Shaohao 少昊 and Shiyi 史佚 were semi-mythical rulers. In response to Shaohao's virtue, a phoenix appeared, giving birth to "phoenix writing" 鳳書. Shiyi's virtues were rewarded by the appearance of a sacred beast, which gave birth to "tiger characters" 虎字.

⁶⁰⁷ The "Five Emperors" 五典 are Shaohao 少昊, Zhuan Xu 顓頊, Ku 嚳, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 242).

伏惟。皇帝陛下。貫三表號。減五稱首。道邁規矩。明齋烏兔。露沈文下。六合無爲。風動琴上。一人垂拱。玉燭調和。金鏡照耀。所謂。輪瑞之運。于今見矣。

In my humble view, Your Majesty is indeed the Chinese ideogram for “three” with a line piercing through it, and the character for “five” with a line taken away. Your kingly ways exceed the scales and measures of the everyday world, and your brilliance is equal to that of the sun and moon. Dew permeates your writings and the entire realm is governed without incident. Winds blow across the zither, and you stand in your robes with arms crossed. The four seasons are in harmony, glowing like jade, and your virtue shines as brilliant as a gold mirror. The good fortune of the *cakravartin* can be seen before my very eyes.

空海。人是瓦礫。每仰金仙之風。器謝巢許。久臥堯帝之雲。窟觀餘暇。時學印度之文。茶湯坐來。乍閱震旦之書。每見蒼史古篆。右軍今隸。務光韭葉。杜氏草勢。未嘗不野心忘憂。山情含笑。有諺曰。奴口甘。郎舌甜。敢因斯義。欲獻久矣。

I, Kūkai, am no more than rubble as a man, but I have always revered the teachings of the Golden Sage.⁶⁰⁸ My vessel lacks the capacity of Chao Fu and Xu You, and for a long time I have just rested on the cloud of Emperor Yao.⁶⁰⁹ I study Indian texts when I take a break from meditating, and I peruse Chinese writings when I sit down for tea. Every time I look at the ancient script by Cang Jie, the modern characters by General Wang of the Right Army,⁶¹⁰ the “drooping leek” characters by Wu Guang, or the grass script by Master Du,⁶¹¹ I forget the boorishness in my heart, my mind is refreshed, and I cannot help but smile. A certain proverb says, “What is sweet in the servant’s mouth is also sweet on the master’s tongue.” With this proverb in mind, for a long time I have wanted to commit the audacious act of presenting these writings to you.

⁶⁰⁸ A reference to Shakyamuni Buddha (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 243).

⁶⁰⁹ Chao Fu 巢父 and Xu You 許由 were hermits who lived during the days of Emperor Yao. Emperor Yao wished to relinquish his throne to Chao Fu, who promptly declined. Next, Emperor Yao approached Xu You and asked if he would assume the throne. Xu You also declined, but to purify his ears from the worldly pollution of the emperor’s offer, he washed his ears in a river. Both are considered exemplars of those who have renounced worldly affairs (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 504). “I have just rested on the cloud of Emperor Yao” refers to Saga’s patronage of Kūkai.

⁶¹⁰ General Wang of the Right Army 王右軍 is another name for Wang Xi-zhi.

⁶¹¹ Master Du is Du Bo-du 杜伯度, a master of “grass script” calligraphy during the Later Han (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 243).

然猶。狼藉汗穢。還恐觸塵聖眼。微誠潛達。先聞于天。伏奉布勢海口勅。欣踊繕裝。古今文字讚。右軍蘭亭碑。及梵字悉曇等書。都一十卷。敢以奉進。伏乞。天慈。不嫌涓滴。一覽飛塵。伏願。陛下。一披梵字。梵天之護森羅。

As such, I have put these volumes into disarray and defiled them, and I fear that I will offend your sagely eyes by presenting them to you. I have humbly expressed my insignificant thoughts in this regard. I am delighted to have received your edict, which was relayed by Fuse no Ama, and I present ten bound volumes, including *Praises of Characters Past and Present*, the General of the Right Army's *Monument to the Orchid Pavilion*, and texts written in Sanskrit and Siddham. I commit the offense of humbly presenting these to you, and humbly pray that in your heavenly benevolence you will look upon these volumes, which are insignificant as specks of dust, and not dislike them, though they are mere droplets. I humbly pray that when Your Majesty looks upon the Sanskrit characters, the protection of Brahma spreads throughout the realm.

再閱神書。神人之衛逼側。達水遙浦。忽入封壇。嵩山夔岫。來受正朔。常住之字。加持不壞之體。遂古之民。擊耕于今辰矣。龍瑞紀官。永豫姑射。鳳祥名職。放曠金閣。

Looking upon these sacred writings again will concentrate the protective powers of the sages. The faraway bays of Lake Anavatapta are immediately brought within our borders, and the lofty peaks of Mt. Song come and obey the emperor's orders. Sanskrit characters – eternal and unchanging – protect the emperor's indestructible body, and from antiquity commoners have sung the praises of the emperor's rule. With his auspicious dragon-signs, the emperor's virtue keeps his officials in line and maintains tranquility in the Imperial Palace.

Kūkai deploys a number of familiar rhetorical strategies observed elsewhere, but in this case he applies them to a theory and history of writing. He opens his epistle by declaring that when the emperor's virtue reaches the heavens, “mysterious texts” 秘録 are created. When the same virtues move the earth, a variety of “sacred scripts” 靈文 are formed. These two introductory statements squarely place the emperor as the intermediary between heaven and earth, and

demonstrate that textual production is the natural product of his virtue. Next, Kūkai provides a brief synopsis of the creation of different scripts, linking them to different mythical Chinese emperors. By overlapping Chinese imperial and orthographic history, Kūkai implies that writing is an imperial creation, and by extension, that writing is the property of the state. He expands on this notion to demonstrate how writing is used as a tool to create history, disseminate proper learning, and to govern the realm. Following this line of reasoning, the advent of orthography allowed the ancient Chinese to record their affairs with a greater degree of precision and permanence than the former practices of “tying ropes together” 結繩 and “carving notches into wood”⁶¹² Indeed, the introduction to this epistle shows that Kūkai has a thorough understanding of, and proper respect for, the history of (Chinese) writing in the management of the state.

Once he properly pays homage to the lineage and function of Chinese writing, he shifts the focus to his main topic: the benefits of Sanskrit writing. Although Kūkai is careful not to directly compare the merits and demerits of the respective scripts, a close reading of the text shows he considered Sanskrit to be the superior orthographic mode. Whereas Chinese characters were brought into being through imperial virtue (thus existing through a causal relationship), Sanskrit writing predates the birth of the historical Buddha himself. Following Kūkai’s reasoning, Chinese characters are *a priori* a historically and ethically conditioned medium, while Sanskrit writing encapsulates pure truth and transcends linear and teleological histories by “entwining beginnings and endings” 字絡生終. Chinese characters are merely used as a tool to create written histories, instruct the commoners, and govern the realm, whereas Sanskrit writing

⁶¹² It is believed that around the twenty-eighth century BC, the ancient Chinese tied ropes together to serve as reminders of various matters. The importance of the recorded matter was signified by the size of the knot. Later, the practice of tying ropes together was replaced by carving notches into wood. One line of reasoning is that these simple notches evolved into pictorial representations, which served as the precursors for the “oracle bone” script 甲骨文 Christopher J. Earnshaw, *Sho: Japanese Calligraphy* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co, Inc., 1988), 88.

actually serves as the locus of truth. Hence, the relationship between reader and text is completely inverted: Chinese characters are in the service of the emperor, but the “Buddhas of the Three Realms” consider Sanskrit writing to be their master.

Whether through happenstance or deliberate design, Kūkai strategically avoids overstating his case on the superiority of Sanskrit writing and returns to a discussion on Chinese characters. Saga is positioned within Chinese orthographic discourse through Kūkai’s puns declaring him to be “the Chinese ideogram for “three” with a line piercing through it and the character for “five” with a line taken away.” Both puns refer to the sinograph for “king” 王. Here, Kūkai casts Saga not only as the Japanese emperor – a member of a supposedly unbroken lineage extending back to the ancient Japanese gods – but also as a Chinese-style “king” who unifies heaven, earth and mankind. Again, a convergence between the body and writing is evident. In essence, Kūkai reaffirms the Chinese vision of the origins of sinographs: they appear as a result of virtuous rule. Thus, the character 王 exists due to Saga’s enlightened governance, while he simultaneously is its embodiment. After establishing Saga’s kingliness, Kūkai praises his writing and musical talents, which he then links to the emperor’s effortless governance of the realm and the orderly progression of the seasons. Through these declarations, Kūkai reaffirms his official commitment to the Chinese political and cultural program that has permeated throughout early Heian *ritsuryō* society.

Although carefully packaged in the rhetoric of Chinese linguistic and historical discourse, Kūkai makes several more attempts to advance his Sanskrit/Buddhist worldview prior to concluding his letter. After extolling Emperor Saga’s virtues within a Chinese framework, he then abruptly says, “The good fortune of the *cakravartin* can be seen before my eyes” 所謂輪瑞之運于今見矣. However, immediately after according Saga *cakravartin* status, Kūkai quickly

retreats to the realm of politically safe Chinese historical rhetoric, claiming that he lacks the “capacity” of Chao Fu and Xu You, choosing instead to bask in the emperor’s benevolence.

Within the space of one short letter, Kūkai successfully ascribes dual monarchical roles to Emperor Saga: he is simultaneously a temporal ruler based on the Chinese model of kingship and a sacred ruler in the Buddhist tradition. For Kūkai, positioning the Japanese emperor as a *cakravartin* was essential in order to rationalize the use of Sanskrit writing, but it was not without significant political risk. After all, the early Heian *ritsuryō* state was grounded in Chinese notions of statecraft, so any attempt to completely extricate the emperor from the existing historical framework would have been radical indeed. Therefore, Kūkai compromises by presenting a dual historical approach: the Japanese emperor is simultaneously incorporated into Chinese historiography and depicted as a sage on a par with the mythical Emperor Yao, while being completely removed from that history and then recast as a *cakravartin*.

Kūkai concludes by making a pragmatic case for the benefits of Sanskrit writing: it has the ability to protect the state. In his final statement, “Sanskrit characters – eternal and unchanging – protect the emperor’s indestructible body, and from antiquity commoners have sung the praises of the emperor’s rule” 常住之字加持不壞之体遂古之民擊耕于今辰矣, Kūkai synthesizes these two seemingly disparate textual lineages. In his reasoning, the emperor’s somatic form is physically indestructible due to the protection of Sanskrit characters, which then results in the commoners singing the praises of the Emperor’s rule – another anecdote from the Chinese tradition related to Emperor Yao. Ultimately, Kūkai analysis is quintessentially esoteric Buddhist in its orientation: Sanskrit writing serves as an immutable, universal principle, while the Chinese textual tradition serves as its temporal manifestation.

Conclusion

While Kūkai (via the Kōbō Daishi tradition) enjoys a considerable reputation as a seminal figure in traditional Japanese calligraphy, the primary sources presented and analyzed in this chapter challenge and deconstruct many of the ideas associated with these received narratives. Much like his contemporaries, Kūkai was thoroughly sinocentric in orientation, viewing calligraphy as a technology for political governance. The frequent references and allusions he made to continental precedents demonstrate that Kūkai saw himself as participating in a sinocentric cultural discourse, not one “Japanese” in essence.

Nevertheless, Kūkai’s writings represent the earliest extant record of an attempt to delineate the artistic and theoretical foundations of calligraphy. The calligraphy of the Nara period possessed a formal rigidity, valorizing its practical aspects, namely the dissemination of knowledge. Kūkai’s writings on calligraphy engage a vast body of continental text, and recast sinographs as dynamic agents in an intricate theory of language, writing and statecraft. His efforts were not limited to abstract theorizing, he also introduced the latest in Chinese brushmaking techniques to Japanese artisans.

An aspect of Kūkai’s theories on calligraphy and writing often ignored in traditional literary and artistic histories is his views on Sanskrit writing.⁶¹³ While he acknowledged the semi-mythical pedigree of Chinese characters, ultimately they were an imperfect medium for representing truth. To Kūkai, Sanskrit orthography did not merely represent truth –it served as the embodiment of truth itself. Despite his strong views on the superiority of Sanskrit writing, he carefully packages his arguments within the politically acceptable rhetoric of Chinese political theory, and also emphasizes the ability of Sanskrit writing to provide practical benefits to the state.

⁶¹³ However, scholars in Buddhist studies have written on this topic. Refer to Abe, 291-293.

Kūkai's views on calligraphy further demonstrate that the linguistic, literary and artistic ideologies at work in the early Heian were radically different from what is generally associated with Heian period culture. In Kūkai's time, the practice of writing was a masculine endeavor intricately linked to early ninth-century Japanese national discourse. Previous chapters discussed the qualifications for admission to the State College: male and aristocrat. Thus, the act of writing (albeit in literary Chinese) was a gendered technology in service of the Heian state and its entrenched male power structure. Although Kūkai's writings create avenues to establish calligraphy as an art form, they are intertwined with narratives of imperial power. For Kūkai and his contemporaries, the power of the written word lay in its ability to justify imperial rule and to provide stable governance. National and gender discourses extend even to the practical level, as the brush artisans were also male, and Kūkai considered the brushes he commissioned equal in quality to those from the continent.

The canonical literary texts from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries reveal a discursive shift in calligraphic practices. The emergence of female writers was accompanied by female perspectives on the calligraphic arts. Writers such as Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 (c. 966-1017) and Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (c. 978-1014/1015) situated calligraphy within a larger aesthetic discourse, where calligraphy was matched with seasonally-appropriate flowers, incense and paper. In the "A Branch of Plum" chapter of *The Tale of Genji*, the eponymous protagonist discusses the quality of the Japanese calligraphy of his day. Hikaru Genji has high praise for new "Japanese" pieces created in the "woman's hand," criticizing older "Chinese" works as unoriginal. Nevertheless, the weight of masculine "Chinese" calligraphy hovers over the narrative, acting as the bearer of cultural legitimacy.

Despite discursive and ideological shifts in calligraphic practice between the early- and mid-Heian periods, Kūkai's contributions and innovations cannot be denied. He imported numerous texts from China, which he then copied for Saga upon request. More importantly, his letters were saturated with sophisticated theoretical discussions on the role of calligraphy and its relationship to language.

Conclusion

In his introduction to *Kūkai: Major Works*, Yoshito Hakeda described Kūkai as one whose “life and works reveal in him the existence of certain polarities in a state of harmonious tension. In the same manner, the *kū* (sky) and *kai* (sea) of his name suggest two entities which are forever separate and yet conjoined.”⁶¹⁴ Expanding on this description, one might say that although the sky and sea appear to merge at the horizon, it is forever beyond reach, despite its illusory accessibility. Indeed, Kūkai’s own name serves to foreshadow the challenges awaiting those who attempt to research his impressive life and massive corpus. Ryūichi Abe echoed these very sentiments in his acknowledgements to *The Weaving of Mantra*, where he compared the immense difficulties of doing research on Kūkai to the relative smoothness of his first book-length project on Ryōkan: “...my notes on Kūkai refused to come together. Like amoeba cells they kept proliferating, all the while changing their shapes.”⁶¹⁵

Previous scholarship generally attends to the doctrinal aspects of Kūkai’s life and work. Even if his literary abilities are recognized, they are generally subordinated to his work as a theologian, or situated within the framework of his religious endeavors. Therefore, this study had three major objectives: 1) to provide original, scholarly translations of Kūkai’s literary and other non-doctrinal writings, 2) to elucidate his characteristics as a writer, based on an analysis of these translations, and 3) to generate new knowledge regarding literary practices in early ninth-century Japan. Naturally, any research on Kūkai inevitably engages his religious background, but this study minimized discussions of doctrine in order to focus on literary matters.

A limited scope should not be confused with conceptual simplicity. Just as Abe’s notes “refused to come together,” the contextual complexity of Kūkai’s works resist any attempt at

⁶¹⁴ Hakeda, 2.

⁶¹⁵ Abe, xi.

totalization. The texts presented testify to multiple aspects of Kūkai's character: a talented poet, shrewd politician, master calligrapher, and textual scholar. Although the aim of this project was not to produce a work along the lines of "The Life and Times of Kūkai," certain aspects are inevitably biographical. The assortment of poems, epistles, monuments, and epitaphs discussed in the preceding chapters provide as much insight into his life as into his literary practices.

This study has argued that Kūkai was a peripheral literary figure in his own time, and it was Shinzei, one of his senior disciples, who was instrumental in his canonization. Saga kept Kūkai and his immense talents within reach, but the circumstances surrounding his early life and education would prevent him from being a full-fledged member of the emperor's poetic coterie. He was educated outside the Heiankyō mainstream, learning the classics from his maternal uncle and his initial indoctrination into Buddhism was unconventional. The circumstances surrounding his inclusion in the 804 mission to Chang-an are unclear, but it appears he was not the court's first choice. Yet, from the moment he set foot in China that Kūkai would distinguish himself from his Japanese contemporaries.

Chapter One assumed a biographical approach, tracing Kūkai's early years through the lens of his writings. All indicators prior to his voyage to China suggested he would lead an unremarkable life. His declining family fortunes and withdrawal from the State College made advancement in the Heiankyō court bureaucracy nearly impossible. Kūkai chose another path – that of the unordained monk – and wandered until he was officially ordained and granted a spot on the 804 mission to China. As evidenced by the epistles sent to the Fuzhou magistrate, he possessed an impressive command of literary Chinese from his early years. Kūkai further leveraged this ability in Chang-an, finally encountering Master Hui-guo. Perhaps Kūkai's crowning achievement as a writer during this period was the memorial stele he composed upon

Hui-guo's death in 806. Hui-guo had many Chinese disciples with years of seniority over Kūkai, yet he was the one selected. This text was truly transnational, targeting readerships in both Tang China and Heian Japan. Kūkai used this text in China to legitimate himself as the true heir of Hui-guo's esoteric Buddhist legacy. In Japan, the text of the epitaph served as a testament to Kūkai's outstanding facility in literary Chinese and the authenticity of his esoteric Buddhist lineage. This is a rare case where a text produced by a Japanese literatus has a readership in both Japan and China, and for different objectives. Although previous scholarship frequently mentions this epitaph, this study is the first to present a complete, annotated translation.

One of the ironies of Kūkai's life is that it was his literary talent, not his doctrinal innovation, which caught Saga's attention. Chapter Two introduces several translations of Kūkai's writings – many of them new – to explore his engagements with the Heian court. These poems, epistles and monuments demonstrate the complexity of his relationships with Saga and the Heiankyō aristocracy. Using autumn poetry as an example, Webb has argued that membership in Saga's poetic coterie required mastery of specific diction and imagery the sovereign deemed acceptable. Nevertheless, at the Shinsen'en garden Kūkai showed his independence as a poet with a composition that violated Saga's sensibilities. His composition could be interpreted as a challenge to the orthodoxy Saga sought to impose – the emperor may have been a devout sinophile, but Kūkai was the one who had actual experience composing, and exchanging, Chinese poetry in China. While the poems he wrote in China were included in the *Keikokushū*, his Shinsen'en verse was conspicuously absent.

The poems and monuments discussed in this chapter underscore the multifaceted character of Kūkai's activities at court. He composed poems extolling the emperor's virtue, linking an abundance of water to righteous governance. The poems he composed when

Minemori and Kunimichi were appointed to provincial governorships lamented their absence from the emperor's graces. Kūkai depicts the frontier as an untamed hinterland, lacking the trappings of Sinitic-inspired civilization -- rice agriculture, written language, and recognition of the emperor as sovereign. Yet, despite these poems that affirm continental discourses of imperial rule, the memorial epitaph he composed for Shōdō portrayed Mt. Nikkō in supernatural terms, a locus outside the state's reach.

Kūkai's reinterpretation of *you xian shi* poetry represents his most radical literary innovation. Originally a Daoist eremitic genre, most extant examples are in the *Wenxuan*. These poems celebrate detachment from city life and revere nature in its raw, naked form. However, Kūkai's *you xian shi* appropriate the Daoist imagery and diction found in the *Wenxuan*, creating a sermon on Esoteric Buddhism. Here, he exerts his literary independence by implementing a genre ignored by the Heiankyō literati.

Chapter Three is an overview of the *Shōryōshū*, the only extant anthology of Kūkai's writings. Shinzei's preface was a monument to Kūkai's literary talents and an embodiment of his wish to preserve the best examples of his writings for future generations. Situating the *Shōryōshū* within the political milieu of its day reveals another agenda: creating political and cultural capital for Shinzei after Kūkai's death. A lack of unity in the newly formed Shingon "school" inevitably put Kūkai's disciples at odds, so Shinzei drew on his background as a member of the erudite Ki clan to recast his departed master as a literary figure. In the preface, he established himself as an authority on Kūkai's writings by highlighting his unparalleled access and editorial powers. The interpretation and transmission of Kūkai's legacy in the years following his death are often understood within the framework of hagiographies based on the Kōbō Daishi legend. In contrast, the *Shōryōshū* and its preface present an opposing tradition, where Kūkai is venerated as a real

person navigating the literary and political milieu of his day.

Calligraphy is another area where Kūkai is highly regarded, yet modern reception is rooted in either Kōbō Daishi hagiography, or aesthetic appreciation. Chapter Four generates new knowledge of Kūkai’s calligraphy by translating and analyzing many of his writings on the subject in the *Shōryōshū*. These documents provide insight into his views on the relationship between language and calligraphy. Although later generations credited Kūkai with creating a “Japanese” style of calligraphy, his own writings show that his thought was firmly rooted in continental discourse.

Another document that challenged the received tradition of Kūkai as a calligrapher is the epistle where he extols the virtues of Sanskrit writing. Modern accounts on Kūkai’s calligraphy valorize the “Japanese” character of his art, resulting in the marginalization/elision of “non-Japanese” aspects. His letter attached to a set of texts – one in Sanskrit and the others in Chinese – can be read as a sophisticated work of linguistic and political theory. Clearly, Kūkai viewed Sanskrit writing as superior to Chinese, yet he was cognizant of his immediate political context. Therefore, he attempted a compromise by strategically inserting statements affirming the superiority of Sanskrit within a narrative that glorifies Chinese writing, and Chinese-style kingship.

Kūkai and his contemporaries were active at a time that literary historians once labelled *kokufū ankoku jidai* (the dark ages of the national style). As stated earlier, the construct of *kokufū ankoku jidai* was largely informed by Romantic-era preferences for vernacular literature. Thus, writings from this period were generally marginalized in both English and Japanese-language scholarship. However, recent studies by LaMarre, Webb and Heldt have contributed new insights into the literary discourse of the early ninth century. Writings once dismissed as haphazard

attempts at imitating continental models have been rehabilitated, depicted as agents in a lively literary scene. This study adds to the body of knowledge of this period through its detailed translations and analysis of source materials.

Did Kūkai Write *Waka* Poetry?

It may seem a digression to discuss Kūkai's *waka* poetry in a study that is primarily interested in his Chinese poetry and prose. However, a number of *waka* poems attributed to Kūkai can be found in major poetic anthologies and medieval hagiographies, and major reference works like Inukai Kiyoshi's *Waka daijiten* contain entries on Kūkai and his alleged *waka*. Furthermore, Kūkai is credited as the author of the *iroha* verse, the forty-seven syllable poem that contains every syllable found in the Japanese language, often used to memorize the Japanese alphabet.⁶¹⁶ In addition to the *iroha* poem, approximately forty *waka* poems are attributed to Kūkai, the majority written on Buddhist themes. One such example:

Yo wo ushi no Hanaguruma ni	The world is pulled By the sad blossom-viewing ox-drawn carriage
Nori no michi Hikarete koko ni Mawarikinikeri	Along the path Of the Buddhist Law And brought around here

While this is an example of poetry that deals with Buddhist aesthetics, the following verse addresses notions of “original enlightenment,” one of the core doctrines of Kūkai's Buddhism:

Kumo harete Nochi no hikari to Omohu na yo Moto yori sora ni Ariake no tsuki	Do not think That the clouds will clear And there will be light later – The dawn moon was in The sky from the beginning
Satori ete Kaherite mireba Inishihe no	Looking back After gaining enlightenment I encounter the mind

⁶¹⁶ For a discussion on the problems regarding the authorship of the *iroha* poem, refer to Matsuda, 1.

Mayohi to ihishi
Kokoro narikeri

I called “deluded” in the past

Other poems attributed to Kūkai reflect his interest in the Sanskrit alphabet and in particular the significance of the letters *a* and *un*. They are the first and last letters, representing beginnings and endings:

Imamono wa ya
Nochi no yo no tsutome mo
Sezarikeri
Aun no niji no
Aru ni makasete

It is said the people of today
Do not perform the services
For the world beyond –
They just rely on the existence
Of *a* and *un*

Umaretsutsu
Ideteiru iki no
Sono mama ni
Aun no niji no
Taema nakereba

The breath that wells forth
As we are born
Just as it is –
There is no break
Between *a* and *un*

However, despite the numerous *waka* poems attributed to Kūkai, the question remains: did he actually compose *waka* poetry? While this question cannot be answered with absolute certainty, the extant works attributed to him are of dubious authorship and transmission.

The first clue is that these *waka* were not anthologized until the mid-fourteenth century, over 500 years after Kūkai’s death.⁶¹⁷ If someone of Kūkai’s stature had actually composed *waka* poetry, they surely would have been included in mid-Heian period collections like the *Kokinshū*, *Gosenshū*, or the *Shūishū*. Some of the *waka* attributed to him can be found in various accounts, but these are also generally from the medieval period. Another piece of evidence, albeit circumstantial, is that he makes no mention of *waka* poetry or poetics in any of his writings.

Finally, although a purely aesthetic and subjective assessment, Takaoka En’ō notes the quality of

⁶¹⁷ Tsukada Kōshin, “Kūkai no waka” in *Tokushū: Kōbō daishi kūkai – ima mo ikitsuzukeru mikkyō fumetsu no tomoshibi* (*Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō*, May 2005), 108. The poems presented above were quoted in this article, and are anthologized the *Kōbō daishi zenshū*. The *Kōbō daishi zenshū* took most of these poems from the *Kōbō daishi nenpu*.

the *waka* ascribed to Kūkai pales in comparison to his Chinese compositions.⁶¹⁸ For these reasons, any *waka* attributed to him should be regarded with suspicion.

In Conclusion: Directions for Future Research

While this study attempted to expand knowledge of Kūkai's literary works and practices, many areas require further research. One is the transmission of the *Shōryōshū* after Kūkai's death. As seen above, Shinzei certainly saw the *Shōryōshū* as a way to generate political and cultural capital for himself by recasting Kūkai as a literary figure. Yet, despite his stated intention that Kūkai's works be appreciated by a broader audience, the *Shōryōshū* does not appear to have been widely read outside the monastic community. Nevertheless, the appearance of verbatim quotations of *Shōryōshū* selections in several biographical accounts written by such literati as Ōe no Masafusa suggests the anthology was known to at least some. Therefore, more work is required on the transmission and reception of the *Shōryōshū* in both monastic and lay circles.

The influence of Japanese literary sensibilities on Chinese poetic practice is another area requiring additional inquiry. Thus far, studies on the *wa-kan* dialectic have largely focused on the influence of continental materials on Japanese poetics. However, one of the poems presented in Chapter Three written during Kūkai's early days in Chang-an contained a sinified version of a Japanese *makurakotoba*. Although previous discussion certainly problematizes the authorship any *waka* attributed to Kūkai, he was likely familiar with Japanese poetic practice due to his Ōtomo lineage. More research on Kūkai's literary Chinese compositions, and those of his contemporaries, might reveal the degree to which they were influenced by *waka* conventions.

⁶¹⁸ Takaoka En'ō, "Shikan: Kōbō daishi no waka," in *Mikkyōgaku*, vol. 2, (March, 1966), 74.

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