

The Ritual World of Buddhist “Shinto”

The *Reikiki* and Initiations on Kami-Related Matters (*jingi kanjō*) in Late Medieval and Early-Modern Japan

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This article describes a set of rituals, closely related to esoteric Buddhist initiations, in which imperial and kami symbols often replace Buddhist ones. These rituals were at the basis of the transmission of knowledge and practices concerning the kami within the larger framework of medieval and early-modern kenmitsu religiosity, a form of applied honji suijaku. Particularly important among these rituals is the role of Reiki kanjō, the secret initiation to the Reikiki, an influential but elusive key text of pre-modern combinatory religion. After the Meiji period these ritual traditions have been dismissed as syncretic aberrations from “pure” Buddhist or Shinto orthodoxy, and have never been studied in depth. However, it was within the context of esoteric kami initiations that the first Shinto lineages took concrete shape. Finally, this article also points out that while these ritual traditions were of medieval origin, they reached their largest diffusion in the early nineteenth century. This fact forces us to reconsider the established image of Edo-period Shinto as a religion moving away from Buddhism.

Keywords: initiation rituals (*kanjō*) — kami-related initiation rituals (*jingi kanjō*, *shintō kanjō*) — *honji suijaku* — Shingon — *Reikiki*

IN MEDIEVAL JAPAN the transmission of all important texts and knowledge in general was carried out through the performance of initiation rituals (*kanjō* 灌頂). Originally, *kanjō* was a typical esoteric Buddhist ceremony that served to transmit doctrines and practices and sanctioned the practitioners' level of attainment. Around the end of the Heian period, and more frequently in the Kamakura period, different forms of *kanjō* began to appear as kinds of secret initiation rituals (*kuden* 口伝 or *hiden* 秘伝) concerning peculiar esoteric texts, doctrines, and rituals, often of heterodoxical nature, such as those of the Tachikawaryū 立川流 and Genshi kimyōdan 玄旨帰命壇 ideas and prac-

tices.¹ Gradually, initiation rituals came to be performed also to transmit knowledge concerning literary texts such as poetry collections and the *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 (*waka kanjō* 和歌灌頂), performing arts (Nō 能, music), professional tools and crafts, and so forth.²

It is within this broader social and epistemological context that, in the Kamakura period, initiation rituals on kami 神 texts and doctrines, generally known as *shintō kanjō* 神道灌頂 or *jingi kanjō* 神祇灌頂, began to develop.³ The intellectual content of these rituals is usually constituted by oral instructions on and esoteric interpretations of myths from the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. However, it is not the *Nihon shoki* but another text, the *Reikiki* 麗氣記, that seems to constitute the mythological and ontological framework for such rituals. In fact, several medieval authors explicitly point to the *Reikiki* as the origin of *shintō kanjō*. It is therefore necessary to investigate this text in order to gain a better understanding of these rituals and their intellectual context.

The reason for the development of such a wide range of initiation rituals is not clear. I believe it was a consequence of the systematic “mandalization” that was carried out in medieval Japan by esoteric Buddhism as a way to establish a sort of cultural hegemony among the intellectual elites. In such a framework, each text, each cultural artifact, including non-religious ones, was understood as a potential esoteric symbol endowed with several levels of secret meanings. A particular role was played by texts concerning kami issues, with their emphasis on cosmology, cosmogony, and the specificity of Japan. References to kami in these texts also added a layer of localness and concreteness to highly metaphysical Buddhist speculations.

The attainment of secret knowledge transmitted through initiation rituals was a soteriologic goal, since it was equivalent to the attainment of salvation (becoming a buddha or, in the case of *shintō kanjō*, identifying oneself with the kami) and involved a promise of worldly benefits (outside of the religious world, this translated as professional and artistic success); it was also a moral obligation as the realization of the essential principles and duties of a specific craft or profession (and, at the same time, the attainment of the “trade secrets” of a specific family lineage).

This article addresses Buddhist initiation rituals on kami-related matters (*shintō kanjō* or *jingi kanjō*) and initiation genealogies

¹ On Tachikawaryū, see MIZUHARA 1981; SANFORD 1991; MANABE 1999; on Genshi kimyōdan and other Tendai initiation rituals, see STONE 1999, pp. 130–37.

² On *waka kanjō* see KUSHIDA 1979 pp. 523–30; KLEIN (forthcoming); on initiation rituals for professions, see RAMBELLI (forthcoming b). On *kuden* in general, see ISHIDA 1967; KUMAKURA 1988.

³ For a general introduction to rituals of this kind, see KUSHIDA 1964, pp. 233–328; 1979, pp. 511–44.

(*kechimyaku* 血脈), especially as they developed the so-called Shingon 真言 Shinto traditions of the Goryū 御流 (centered at Murō-ji 室生寺 in the mountains east of Nara) and the Miwaryū 三輪流 (centered at Byōdō-ji 平等寺 and Ōmiwa-dera 大御輪寺, the former *jingū-ji* 神宮寺 of present-day Ōmiwa shrine 大神神社, near Nara). I focus particularly on rituals based on the *Reikiki* known as *reiki kanjō* 麗氣灌頂 because of their centrality (at least, initially) in the Buddhist kami discourse. I discuss the forms and contents of these rituals, and the objects and activities involved, and trace their developments from the middle ages through the Edo period. In order to do that, I will briefly introduce the *Reikiki* to provide background knowledge for the understanding of the *kanjō* related to it. I also analyze transmission genealogies and the way in which the participants to these rituals envisioned the history and boundaries of their own tradition. Finally, I explore the social and ideological dimensions of Buddhist Shinto, also in relation with other and competing forms of “Shinto” discourses that began to emerge during the Tokugawa period.

Shingon Initiation Rituals

Generally speaking, the expressions *jingi kanjō* or *shintō kanjō* indicate the transmission or initiation (*kanjō*) of doctrines and practices related to the kami (*shintō* [*jindō*?] or *jingi*)⁴ that take place within the Ryōbu 兩部 *shintō* traditions centered mainly at Miwa and Murō-ji. Similar initiations were also performed in Tendai 天台 temples. *Jingi kanjō* have the same structure as esoteric Buddhist initiations—more precisely, the special ritual of consecration of a monk (*denbō kanjō* 伝法灌頂)—but modified to a certain extent to better represent myths presented in the *Nihon shoki* and the spatial structure of kami cult places. It is therefore useful to start with a brief description of the Shingon *denbō kanjō*, and then discuss in more detail some particular forms of *jingi kanjō* and the role of the *Reikiki* in them.

Initiation (*kanjō*, Sk. *abhiṣeka*) is a ritual in which a master (Jp. *ajari* 阿闍梨, Sk. *ācārya*) transmits to a disciple the essence of esoteric Buddhism. Literally, the term means “pouring (water) on (someone’s) head,” from the central part of the ritual. Originally, *abhiṣeka* was per-

⁴ On *jindō* vs. *shintō* in medieval Japan, see Mark TEEUWEN’s essay in this issue. In fact, it is in the context of *shintō kanjō* that the reading “*shintō*” was first devised, as a way to emphasize issues of ritual and moral purity. The elimination of the voiced sounds (*nigori*) *ji* and *dō* in “*jindō*,” resulting in “*shintō*” was a way to rectify the signifier in order to show its deep relations with its signified (*nigori* in Japanese also means “muddiness” and “impurity”). Therefore, these kinds of rituals are, literally, on the borderline between “*jindō*” as a set of Buddhist practices to deal with local deities, and “*Shintō*” as a distinct religious tradition.

formed in India as the enthronement ceremony for a new king or for the proclamation of the heir to the throne. Water especially drawn from the four oceans was aspersed on the head of the new ruler (or the prince) signifying his legitimate control over the entire world. The adoption of this ritual within the esoteric tradition to signify the transmission of doctrines and practices indicates a constant circulation of religious and imperial imageries in Buddhism. In Japan, a *kanjō* ceremony was first performed by Saichō 最澄 (767 [or 766]–822) at Takaosan-ji 高尾山寺 in 805; the first complete *kanjō* of the two mandalas was carried out by Kūkai 空海 (774–835) at the same temple in 812.

There are several forms of *kanjō*, classified in a number of ways and levels by various texts.⁵ The most common typology consists of five categories (*goshu sanmaya* 五種三昧耶, literally “five kinds of *samaya* [symbolic activities leading to salvation]”). The first *samaya* is the worship of and giving offerings to a mandala. This category corresponds to the rituals performed for a mandala (such as the *mandaraku* 曼荼羅供), and is not, properly speaking, a form of initiation. The second *samaya* is the initiation in which a karmic relationship with an aspect of esoteric Buddhism is established (*kechien* 結縁 *kanjō*). In it the initiate, with his/her eyes covered, has access to a mandala, throws a flower on it, and on the basis of the deity on which it lands, the master teaches him/her a mantra and a mudra. The third *samaya* is performed when one becomes a disciple of a master (*jumyō* 受明 *kanjō*, lit. “initiation in which a formula is bestowed [upon the disciple]”); in it, a specific meditation object (mantra, mudra, and visualization), among other things, is taught to the initiate. The fourth *samaya* is the most important one: called *denbō kanjō* (“initiation ritual of the transmission of the Dharma”), it takes place after the disciple has completed a certain curriculum of study and religious practice and thereupon becomes a new master himself. A fifth *samaya* exists, a “secret initiation” (*himitsu* 秘密 *kanjō*) performed on particular occasions and for special recipients.

The template of medieval and early-modern initiations to kami-related matters appears to be the *denbō kanjō*, and perhaps also the *himitsu kanjō* (given the extra-canonical origin of Shinto rituals). Since the *denbō kanjō* is the most systematic and complete, let us examine it more in detail.

The initiation proper is preceded by a phase of purification of body and mind (*kegyō* 加行, literally “additional practices”) that can last from one week to a hundred days. The body is cleansed by bathing in perfumed holy water and by wearing a white robe. The mind is purified by receiving the *samaya* precepts (*sanmayakai* 三昧耶戒), by

⁵ For an overview, see MDJ pp. 409c–410c.

taking refuge in the three jewels, and by pledging allegiance to a number of Buddhist ethical propositions.

The space where the initiation ceremony is to take place is divided into an outer and an inner area (respectively, *gejin* 外陣 and *naijin* 内陣). In the inner area there are two altars on which are placed the Vajra and the Womb mandalas used for the flower-throwing ritual (see below); there is also another altar, called “altar of true awakening” (*shōgakudan* 正覺壇), where the *kanjō* proper is performed. On the eastern and western walls of the inner area are the portraits of the eight Shingon human patriarchs: Nāgārjuna, Nāgabodhi, Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空), Śubhakarasiṃha (Shanwuwei 善無畏), Yixing 一行, Huiguo 惠果, and Kūkai. The setting is thus a replica of the entire Shingon tradition; the ritual aims at putting the initiate on the same level as those patriarchs in an operation that denies history and emphasizes instead unchanging continuity.

The initiate enters the inner area with his face covered, reaches one of the altars with the mandala, and throws a flower on it to determine the deity to whom he is karmically related.⁶ After that, the cloth covering his face is removed, in a gesture representing the final separation from the delusory world of everyday reality and the opening of the eye of wisdom to the absolute realm of mandala. The initiate is then led to the altar of true awakening (*shōgakudan*), where the initiation proper is to take place. He sits on a mat representing an eight-petal flower—Mahāvairocana’s own seat in the mandala, and receives the initiation from the master. The actual content of initiation varies, but in general it consists of very specific and practical instructions on how to perform certain rituals and how to interpret certain texts (what mudras to employ, the succession of mantric formulae, etc.). The master also gives the disciple a series of sacred objects (a crown, a *vajra* club, a *horagai* 法螺貝 shell trumpet, a mirror, etc.) to certify the successful completion of the initiation. These objects symbolize the transformation of the initiate into Mahāvairocana’s adamantine body-mind. The initiated then pays homage to the images of the patriarchs to inform them of his newly attained initiation. Finally, the master hails the former disciple as a newly born master and shades him under his parasol to signify respect and equality. The ritual ends here.

Kanjō rituals were a natural complement to the semiotics of esoteric Buddhism, which configures itself as a form of salvific knowledge

⁶ In the description of this ritual, pronouns are usually in the masculine case only; this is because there is no proof that these rituals were ever performed for women in premodern Japan.

extracted directly from the signs.⁷ Because of the nature of such knowledge, not everyone is entitled to receiving it; initiation rituals, with their strict regulations, function as devices to control the access and the proliferation of meaning and knowledge. They were also ways to control legitimacy. Contrary to common understanding, initiations do not generally reveal occult doctrines or “esoteric” truths. Those are (and were also in the past) relatively easily available in texts studied before the performance of the initiation ritual. What the ritual enacts is the sanctioning to teach certain doctrines and perform certain rituals. It also guarantees the soteriologic attainment of the initiated, which was often related to his social position in a religious institution’s hierarchy. In other words, initiation rituals control the structuring and the reproduction of the Buddhist esoteric system—a system both of knowledge and of power. It is not by chance, then, that in medieval Japan *denbō kanjō* became the template for procedures to transmit legitimate knowledge in general as part of certain hierarchical systems, such as family lineages dealing with specific literary and artistic texts, with technologies, and with extra-canonical teachings such as matters related to the kami.

Shintō Kanjō

The relation between religious and imperial imageries typical of esoteric Buddhist initiation rituals was further developed in esoteric Buddhist rites for the transmission of doctrines and practices concerning the kami, in which the ritual objects and images were directly related to the Japanese emperor. Many texts describing *shintō kanjō* still exist. Apparently there was not a single template, but several models, all patterned on Shingon *denbō kanjō* as summarized above. As we will see below, in time *shintō kanjō* became more and more complex, with the addition of new ritual segments, sacred objects, meanings and images. What follows in this section is a description of a typical Miwa initiation rite to kami matters based on the *Miwaryū jingi kanjō* 三輪流神祇灌頂 (1818).

PASSAGE THROUGH THREE TORII AND PURIFICATION

In major Shinto shrines, one has to pass through three torii 鳥居 gates before arriving at the main hall. The first stage of Shinto initiations is analogously presented as a passage through three torii, during which various purifications of body and mind are performed. The three torii refer to, respectively, heaven, man, and earth, each corresponding to

⁷ On the semiotics of esoteric Buddhism, see RAMBELLI 1994.

five kami among those listed in the *Nihon shoki* for a total of fifteen kami.⁸ At the first torii the disciple performs a ritual of protection (*goshinpō* 護身法) to defend himself during the contact with the divine;⁹ at each torii, the master asperses water on the disciple; together they chant mantras and invocations to the kami.

APPROACH TO THE MAIN ALTAR

The initiate first purifies his body with incense smoke and perfumed holy water, while intoning formulas, chanting mantras, and visualizing Sanskrit letters. Then, his eyes covered with a white or red cloth, he enters the main ritual space. To do that, he has to pass above an elephant-shaped incense burner and expose his body to the incense smoke. The incense smoke signifies the final elimination of afflictions, the arising of the *bodhicitta*, and the acquisition of bodhisattva Fugen’s 普賢 mind (the elephant is, in fact, Fugen’s mount in traditional iconography). The initiate is now standing in front of the altar shaped like an eight-petal lotus, clearly derived from esoteric Buddhism. At the center there is Tenshō daijin surrounded by five kami closely related with the Miwa cultic center, e.g., Miwa 三輪, Sumiyoshi 住吉, Kumano 熊野, Kasuga 春日, and Hachiman 八幡. All around them are the twenty-four main deities of the major shrine complexes of Japan.¹⁰ The initiate throws a flower on the mandala altar, thus establishing a karmic relation with a kami. The cloth is now removed from his eyes; he can see the real world of the deities, and pays homage to them. Behind this altar is another square sacred space, surrounded by torii and fences on all four sides, each representing one of the material ele-

⁸ The five kami in each category are, respectively, Kuni no sazuchi no mikoto 国狭狹尊, Toyokumunu no mikoto 豊斟淳尊, Uhijini suhijini no mikoto 泥土煮・沙土煮尊, Otonoji ōtomabe no mikoto 大戸之道・大峯辺尊, Omodaru kashikone no mikoto 面足・懼根尊; Ama no ya-kudari musuhi no mikoto 天八降魂命, Ama no mi-kudari musuhi no mikoto 天三降魂命, Ama no ai-musuhi no mikoto 天合魂命, Ama no yahohi musuhi no mikoto 天八百日魂命, Ama no yasoyorozu hi musuhi no mikoto 天八十万日魂命; and Ki no oya kukunochi musubi no mikoto 木祖匂々迺馳魂命, Hi no oya kakutsuchi no mikoto 日祖軻遇突智命, Tsuchi no oya haniyasu no mikoto 土祖墳安命, Kane no oya kanayama hiko no mikoto 金先祖金山彦命, Mizu no oya mizuhame no mikoto 水祖網象女命.

⁹ The *goshinpō* consists of the purification of body, speech, and mind (the three factors of karma) through the performance of mudras, the chanting of mantras, and visualization. See MDJ p. 610a–b.

¹⁰ This is the list: Kōya daimyōjin 高野大明神, Kibune 貴船 daimyōjin, Inari 稻荷 daimyōjin, Gion 祇園 daimyōjin, Tatsuta 龍田 daimyōjin, Tateyama 立山 daimyōjin, Hakusan 白山 daimyōjin, Zaō gongen 歳王権現, Kibitsu 吉備津 daimyōjin, Suwa 諏訪 daimyōjin, Kamo 賀茂 daimyōjin, Hirano 平野 daimyōjin, Hirota 広田 daimyōjin, Ohara 大原 daimyōjin, Atsuta 熱田 daimyōjin, Kitano tenjin 北野天神, Sekisan 赤山 daimyōjin, Hikosan daigongen 彦山大権現, Aso 阿蘇 daimyōjin, Sannō 山王 daigongen, Kitsuki 杵築 daimyōjin, Katori 香取 daimyōjin, Kashima 鹿島 daimyōjin, Niu 丹生 daimyōjin.

ments of the cosmos (earth, water, fire, and air, plus space and consciousness) and a kami (Ame no mikudari musubi no mikoto 天三降魂命, Ame no ai musubi no mikoto 天合魂命, Ame no yahohi musubi no mikoto 天八百日魂命, Ame no yahoyorozuhi musubi no mikoto 天八百万日魂命, Ame no minakanushi no mikoto 天御中主命). At the center of this space there is a *sakaki* 榊 tree covered with a cloth representing Tenshō daijin while hiding in the heavenly cavern, as told by the *Nihon shoki* myth.¹¹ A mirror hangs from the *sakaki* tree, representing the sacred mirror (*yata no kagami* 八咫鏡), the first of the imperial regalia. Its front side symbolizes Tenshō daijin, while its back side symbolizes Toyouke daijin 豊受大神—the two main deities of the Ise Shrines. Their combination is represented by the sacred jewel (*yasakani no magatama* 八坂瓊曲玉), the second of the imperial regalia. On both sides of the mirror are two swords representing the sacred sword (*ame no murakumo no tsurugi* 天叢雲劍), the third of the imperial regalia. Other objects are present in this sacred space (e.g., garlands, *ema* 絵馬 tablets, copies of the *Heart Sutra*) in a complex combination of motifs taken from esoteric Buddhism and kami cults.

Overall, the sacred space of the ritual is a representation of the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 universe, in which kami objects are symbols of the buddhas in the mandala. In fact, this ritual can be defined as a form of *honji suijaku* in practice. The metaphorical structure underlying the ritual—a passage from the profane to the sacred, from ignorance to wisdom, from the human realm to that of the deities—is a direct adaptation/translation of esoteric Buddhist imagery (the flower-throwing segment, the unveiling of the realm of the deities, the mandala, etc.), with the substitution of appropriate kami-related items (the torii, the *sakaki* tree, the altar, the kami replacing buddhas and bodhisattvas, etc.). The initiation process itself, which in esoteric Buddhism is described through the symbolism of Nāgārjuna opening the Iron Stūpa in South India (see ORZECZ 1995), is represented in *shintō kanjō* by references to the myth of the opening of the heavenly cavern in which Amaterasu had hidden herself. The actual content of the initiation—the true nature of Ise deities—is represented by the three imperial regalia, much as in the esoteric Buddhist model, in which initiation and enlightenment was described by borrowing Indian imperial metaphors.

EMBODYING THE KAMI'S SACRED SPACE

When the initiate enters the sacred space of the kami he embodies the cosmology of the system it represents. This is expressed by a secret poem recited on the occasion: “My body is the sacred space of the kami

¹¹ *Nihon shoki*, vol. 1, p. 112; see also *Kojiki*, pp. 51–53.

(*kami no yashiro* 神の社); my breath is the Outer and the Inner Shrines [of Ise]" (*Miwaryū jingi kanjō shōjū shi ki*, p. 53). The *Miwaryū shintō kanjō ho shinshō* 三輪流神道灌頂補真鈔 explains: "This ritual hall is emptiness; emptiness is the single mind. This is the Pure Land. This Pure Land is where the kami abide. By entering this ritual hall and receiving the initiation, one separates oneself from the delusion of life-and-death and attains the mind of Mahāvairocana Tathāgata" (*Shintō ho shinshō*, p. 82; see also HATTA 1991, pp. 87–88). This soteriologic stage is equated with the altars in the Yuki 悠紀 and Suki 主紀 halls at the time of imperial enthronement ceremony (*daijōsai* 大嘗祭).

THE "ALTAR OF PERFECT AWAKENING" (*SHŌGAKUDAN*)

The next stage of the ritual takes place by the "altar of perfect awakening." Master and disciple sit on cushions decorated with an eight-petal lotus on both sides of the rectangular altar. The cushions represent the lion seat of the Buddha, symbolizing that both participants in the initiation are already fully realized buddhas. The master asperses the disciple with holy water. Then he intones a formula that is related to an esoteric visualization: "On the head of the initiate there is the letter *kham*. It puts forth an intense light. On its center there is a lunar disk, and on it there is the letter *vam*. It turns into a one-pronged *vajra*. The *vajra* turns into Toyouke Daijin. On the same lunar disk of the mind there is the letter A. It turns into the sacred mirror. The mirror turns into Tenshō daijin (Amaterasu)" (*Miwaryū jingi kanjō shōjū shi ki*, p. 53). The disciple purifies himself once more with incense smoke, and the master gives him the three imperial regalia (the jewel, the sword, and the mirror) together with mantras and secret explanations. Finally, the initiate, as a confirmation of his attainment, intones a secret poem saying that henceforth all his thoughts and actions are the working of the kami. The kami is interpreted here as a life force inside human beings.

REIKI KANJŌ

The next ritual segment is the initiation to the *Reikiki*. It represents the embodiment of the mind of the kami, outwardly symbolized by the three imperial regalia and by the Outer Shrine of Ise. I will discuss this phase in the next section of this paper.

INITIATION TO THE SECRET MEANING OF THE MYTH OF THE HEAVENLY CAVERN

The mythic narrative at the basis of this ritual segment is that in which Tenshō daijin, tired of the evil deed of her brother Susanoo スサノヲ, hides herself in a cavern. Miwaryū interprets this myth as the comple-

tion of the *Reiki kanjō* previously performed. The cavern represents the Sacred Hall (*shinden* 神殿) of the Inner Shrine; Tenshō daijin inside the cavern is envisioned as a metaphor for the *tathāgatagarbha*, according to which Buddha-nature is present in all beings but hidden. Initiation to the secret meaning of this myth reveals to the initiate his own Buddha-nature and the presence within himself of Tenshō daijin's mind. In this case, Tenshō daijin is called Ōhirume no muchi 大日女貴.

SECOND AND THIRD LEVELS OF SHINTŌ KANJŌ

All the above was the first level (*shōjū* 初重) of *shintō* initiation ritual. Documents such as the *Miwaryū shintō genryū shū* 三輪流神道源流集 also describe a second and a third level of initiations. Their structure is essentially the same as the first; however, the kami involved and some mantras and mudras are different. It is interesting to note that the second level is called in some documents “Sokui kanjō bun 即位灌頂分” (“Section of the enthronement initiation”), an even more explicit reference to imperial rituals. During the ceremony the master says to the disciple:

The seal (*jinji* 神璽) is the symbol of the ruler of this country. It is kept in the imperial palace and given to the emperor at the enthronement ceremony. Now I give it to you. To enter this enthronement initiation hall means that commoners are on the same level as the emperor. As monks are on the same level as the Buddha, when commoners look at this altar they attain the imperial seat. It is an indication that ordinary people are buddhas. (*Miwaryū shintō genryū shū*, p. 347)

This passage proposes a soteriologic model for laypersons consisting in “attaining the imperial seat,” that is, becoming emperors, as an intermediate stage in their process to becoming buddhas. The idea behind this model is perhaps the following. In order to become a buddha directly, one has to abandon the profane world (*shukke* 出家) and become a monk; in this sense, “monks are on the same level as the Buddha.” Commoners need to go through an intermediate stage, that of the emperor, who was thus envisioned as a manifestation of the Buddha in Japan. Similar statements equating commoners with the emperor—statements with which the master attributes the emperor's prerogatives to the initiate—accompany the transmission of the two other imperial regalia.¹² It is not clear, however, whether this ritual was performed also for commoners, as the previous formula seems to suggest, or whether its statements were primarily rhetorical. I will return to this issue in the Conclusion.

¹² For another example of the imperial imagery in the rites of this kind, see *Hōō kanjō hiketsu daiyon* (*Miwa*).

The third level of initiations is apparently without mudras and mantras. As one text explains, the essential part of this level is the recitation of the following sentence:

I am Tenshō daijin. [...] kami and buddhas are not external to us; I am Mahāvairocana, the Tathāgata of original enlightenment. [...] To the deluded ones, Tenshō daijin is different from ordinary beings. To the enlightened ones, ordinary beings and Mahāvairocana are one and the same.

(*Miwaryū shintō genryū shū*, p. 349)

In other words, the second and third levels deepen the awareness of the initiate’s identity with the emperor on the one hand, and with Tenshō daijin on the other hand. I will address some implications of these identifications in the Conclusion of this article.

Shintō kanjō rituals, like other esoteric initiations, were secret rituals. In their paradigmatic form, only a limited number of selected disciples had access to them; many texts related to the *Reiki kanjō* in particular specify that only one disciple should receive the initiation from each master. Secrecy was emphasized by malediction formulae at the end of the texts. For example, a document says: “The one who violates these rules [concerning secret transmission] is not a descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami” (“Nihongi shiryō,” in ABE 2000, p. 72), thus suggesting a sort of excommunication from the progeny of Amaterasu (and, perhaps, from the Japanese people as well?). Other texts warn that the instructions they contain “should not be transmitted even for a thousand pieces of gold”; they “should be kept in the utmost secret and violators of this rule should fear punishment by the kami (*shinbatsu* 神罰)” or divine punishment in general (*meibatsu* 冥罰).¹³

At the Origin of Shintō Kanjō: The Reikiki

In his *Jindaikan shikenmon* 神代卷私見聞 the Tendai priest Ryōhen 良遍 (late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries) wrote: “what Shingon calls *kanjō*, Shinto calls *reiki* 麗氣”; *reiki* is thus “a different term for *kanjō*” (p. 585). It is not possible to know how widespread Ryōhen’s explanation was, but the importance of the *Reikiki*, and *Reiki kanjō* in particular, in Buddhist kami rituals is clear. More specifically, the Jōdo-Shingon priest Shōgei 聖岡 (1341–1420) wrote in his commentary on fascicle 12 of the *Reikiki*: “According to an oral instruction (*kuden*) the

¹³ Respectively: *Miwa shogan jōju shodaiji*, p. 44; *Miwaryū shintō buyūbu shin*, p. 51; *meibatsu* is mentioned in *Miwaryū shintō kanjō juyōshiki*, p. 77. On malediction rituals in general in medieval Japan, see RAMBELLI 2002.

origin of initiation (*kanjō*) is to be found in this fascicle” (*Reikiki shishō* 麗氣記私抄, p. 30). The *Reiki seisakushō* 麗氣制作抄 reiterates this: “It is indicated that the origin of *kanjō* is to be found in this [i.e., the twelfth] fascicle” (p. 163). Thus, the commentators make an explicit connection between the origin of *shintō kanjō* and the *Reikiki*, in particular its twelfth fascicle. Given the importance of the *Reikiki* for the history and the understanding of *shintō kanjō*, and since our subsequent discussion of the ritual will frequently refer to this elusive text, it is necessary to provide some information on it, before translating its twelfth fascicle.

Reikiki is one of the most important texts of the so-called Ryōbu *shintō* tradition. It is composed of eighteen fascicles: fourteen constitute the main text, and the last four contain only iconographic material. Many copies exist of the text, but scholars have pointed to the presence of at least three different versions.¹⁴ This strange and puzzling text defies all categories that academics and religionists alike have been developing over the centuries to classify Shinto doctrines and rituals. Its peculiar combination of Japanese, Chinese, and Indian elements makes it quite anomalous in the panorama of medieval Japanese religion and culture. Thus, it is probably not by chance that the *Reikiki* has been little studied.¹⁵

Despite its importance, very little is known about the genesis of the *Reikiki*. It has been attributed in the past to several personages such as Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師,¹⁶ Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子,¹⁷ and even to a collaborative effort of En no Gyōja 役行者, Kōbō Daishi, Dengyō Daishi 伝教大師 and Emperor Daigo 醍醐.¹⁸ The text itself claims to be the transcription by Emperor Daigo (885–930, r. 897–930) of a secret initiation he would have received from the Dragon woman living in the pond of the Shinsen'en 神泉苑 garden of the imperial palace compound.¹⁹ Modern scholars think that the *Reikiki* was written by (a) Shingon priest(s) connected to the Ise Shrines (Itō Satoshi 伊藤聡 in *Shintō jiten* 神道事典, p. 590d). This attribution, however, is not completely convincing, given the numerous Tendai esoteric elements present in the text. There is no clear information either on the date and

¹⁴ The oldest one begins with the chapter “*Reikiki* of the Two Shrines of Ise”; the second version begins with “*Reikiki* of heaven and earth” (fourth fascicle in the previous version); copies of the third version do not seem to have a fixed order.

¹⁵ The first modern Japanese version of the first six fascicles of the *Reikiki*, a monumental work based on most extant manuscripts of the text, has been published in 2001 (see SHINBUTSU SHŪGO KENYŪKAI, eds., 2001).

¹⁶ *Reikiki*, printed edition of 1672 (Kanbun 寛文 12): see ITO 2000b, p. 81.

¹⁷ Jōshun 貞舜, *Tendai myōmoku ruijū shō* 天台名目類聚抄, quoted in ITO 2000b, p. 81.

¹⁸ Shōgei, *Reikiki shishō*, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Reikiki*, at the end of fasc. 5 “Tenshō Kōtaijin chinza shidai 天照皇太神鎮座次第”; see SHINBUTSU SHŪGO KENYŪKAI, eds., 2001, p. 293.

place of composition. The text is quoted in Watarai Ieyuki’s 度会家行 *Ruiju jingi hongen* 類聚神祇本源 of 1320, and therefore must have already been in existence by then. On the basis of sources cited in the *Reikiki* and ideas present in it, scholars consider it as a late Kamakura text. Wata Hidenori 和多秀乘, in particular, places its composition between the Kōan 弘安 era (1278–1288) and 1320 (*Heibonsha Daihyakka jiten* 平凡社大百科事典, vol. 15: 860). As for the place of composition, MURAYAMA suggests that it was authored by a priest related to Ise’s Outer Shrine, but there is no solid evidence for that (1974, p. 344).

All the apocryphal attributions I mentioned suggest a close connection, already established at the level of authorship and rationale for composition, between the *Reikiki*, esoteric Buddhist doctrines, and imperial protocols concerning the kami. The status of the kami is in fact one of the major conceptual foci of the text, but the *Reikiki* itself is not a philosophical treatise; rather, it is a sort of ritual manual.²⁰ The themes addressed in the various chapters are quite common in medieval combinatory literature. They range from cosmology (especially cosmogonic theories and the place of Japan in the universe), to theology (the status and role of the kami),²¹ soteriology (a theory and practice of salvation with many *hongaku* 本覺 [original enlightenment] elements), the role of authority, in particular the emperor, and issues related to the representation of the sacred. The way in which these themes are treated, however, is quite peculiar, and in some cases without equivalent in any other extant text. This fact, together with the peculiarity of the iconography, is perhaps an indication of the essentially experimental nature of the *Reikiki*.

The peculiarity of the *Reikiki* shows in several aspects. The most striking one is perhaps its obscure wording; most of it is actually written/read in two different languages that often say quite different things. For example, the term *zokutai* 俗体 (“profane body”) written in Chinese characters is glossed in *katakana* as *makoto no sugata* マコトノスガタ (“true aspect”). This is probably functional to several agendas: to give the text more symbolic value by its obscurity and initiatory quality; to

²⁰ The rituals associated with the *Reikiki* will be addressed below.

²¹ For example, the two main divine protagonists of the *Reikiki* are two unusual deities, Shiki Daibontennō 尸大梵天王 and Kōmyō Daibontennō 光明大梵天王, who are considered to be the original form of the two main deities of Ise, Tenshō daijin, and Toyouke no mikoto. As Ogawa Toyoo has indicated, Shiki Daibontennō (literally, Heavenly King Fire Mahābrahmā) and Kōmyō Daibontennō (literally, Heavenly King Light Mahābrahmā), originate in the *Lotus Sutra*, where fire and light are simply two attributes of Brahmā. The *Reikiki* interprets these two attributes as referring to two different deities—or, rather, to two different aspects of the same nondual entity, in line with dominant doctrines of its age: see OGAWA 1997, p. 149. Still other deities that appear in the text are completely unknown, and not explained in detail.

mark it off from other Shinto discourses that were developing at the time; and also, to exploit explicitly the possibilities of language in order to point to higher initiatory principles. The structure of the text is quite loose: there is a general lack of discursive and thematic coherence, and the same subjects are discussed over several fascicles. The *Reikiki* appears to be a collection of a wide range of writings and documents: cosmogonic accounts, charts of lineages, deity names, myths and narratives of various kinds (often only referred to, not recounted in full), ritual instructions, esoteric Buddhist doctrines, etc. These are associated following a logic that is not very clear; its fragmented nature gives the text a strangely postmodern flavor. More importantly, the text has a clear ritual significance, as I will discuss in the next two sections.

The Ritual and Mythical Dimensions of the Reikiki

At this point, let us take a look at the twelfth fascicle of the *Reikiki*, which medieval commentators indicated, as we have seen, as the core of the entire text and the origin of Buddhist initiation rites on kami issues. (In the translation, the phrases in curly brackets render glossed *katakana* readings of the characters.)

The *Reikiki* of the Representation of the Three Worlds {Manifestation of the Otherworldly Deities}

The heavenly king Radiance Mahābrahmā, the original sovereign of the world of Sahā, descended metamorphosing his true aspect {profane body} bringing down only his original soul/jewel {mirror}. Since the time of the creation of heaven and earth, that is, the time in which clear matter was defined as heaven and turbid matter was defined as earth, when the pure stuff was placed up and the impure stuff was placed down, since up and down were defined, there has been ignorance and enlightenment, there has been discrimination, the two concepts of being and nonbeing have been established, the absolute and unconditioned way has been forgotten and the luminous absolute nature has been lost. Desiring to make the beings realize this, the king Brahmā, accompanied by his thirty-six²² attendant kami, have descended to the world of Sahā; they have walked along the road, beating their bowls,²³ ringing their mirrors,²⁴ making their voices heard, and making

²² After the interpretation of *Reikiki shishō*.

²³ The *Reikiki shishō* reads this terms as “cymbals” (p. 30).

²⁴ The *Reikiki seisakushō* reads this as “bells” (p. 163). The *Reikiki shishō* identifies in this passage the beginning of initiation (*kanjō*) in this world (p. 30). It is possible that the simi-

things known. (The passage above is quoted from the *Hōzanki*.)

The eternal preaching of heavenly king Mahābrahmā:
Essential formula:²⁵ given first to the man: *Vajradhātu vaṃ*
Essential formula: given to the woman afterwards
Heavenly king Mahābrahmā calls this “Mahāvairocana of the Vajra realm.”

Essential formula: chant *vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hṛīḥ aḥ*
This is the mantric seed of the single mind of sentient beings,
the sacred spell of the nondualism of buddhas and sentient beings.

The formula expressing the fact that names represent the essence of things: *Vaṃ A vaṃ raṃ haṃ khaṃ*

The heavenly king Fire Mahābrahmā, the original sovereign of the world of Sahā, descended metamorphosing his true aspect {profane body}, bringing down only his original soul/jewel {mirror}. Accompanied by thirty-two Brahmā attendants, he descended metamorphosing, entered the Dragon Palace²⁶ and transmitted the Dharma of his mind.

When he descended from heaven he transmitted this essential formula: *a vi ra hūṃ khaṃ* first transmitted to the woman.
Essential formula: *a ā aṃ aḥ āṃḥ* subsequently transmitted to the man.

Heavenly king Mahābrahmā calls this “Mahāvairocana of the Womb realm.”

When it (he?) is defined (settled?), chant *a va ra ha kha*. The formula expressing the fact that names represent the essence of things: *a ra pa ca na*

In this way, the encounter and union of the two elements (*ryōbu*) constitute the eternally abiding and unchanging sublime body. One cannot define what comes first and what comes after, the two elements cannot be distinguished. This is the sublime and incomprehensible operation of nondualism, the kami altar representing the identity of three thousand and one. (The above passage is quoted from the *Amefudashō* 天札鈔.)

Medieval commentators looked at this chapter of the *Reikiki* to find clues on the origin and the meaning of the entire text. Ryōhen wrote

larity in shape between cymbals and mirrors, and the importance of the latter for the rituals based on this text, generated a slippage between the two terms.

²⁵ The text has an expression roughly equivalent to “entering sentence”; the *Reikiki shishō* interprets this as “sentence going into the most essentials.” I have followed this indication.

²⁶ After *Reikiki shishō* and *Reikiki seisakushō*.

in the *Jindaikan shikenmon*:

The matters of the age of the gods had been forgotten and no one knew them any longer. Even the emperors, who kept the three sacred regalia and handed them down from one generation to the other, did not know their meaning. One day the Engi 延喜 emperor [Daigo] asked representatives of all Buddhist schools in the kingdom, but even they did not know. In particular, there was a one-page text, but its meaning was unknown. The emperor, saddened, one day prayed to the buddhas and the kami [to answer his questions], and from the pond of the Shinsen'en imperial garden a woman dressed in blue emerged and taught him. She was an emissary of Tenshō daijin 天照大神 (Amaterasu). The text in question was the twelfth fascicle of the *Reikiki* entitled *Amefuda no maki* 天札巻.

(Quoted in OGAWA 1997, p. 155)

This mysterious woman told the emperor: “You revere Buddhism, therefore it’s good for you to learn about the *jindō* [i.e., the realm of the kami] according to the writings of the patriarchs who have spread Buddhism in Japan” (OGAWA 1997, p. 155).

The *Reikiki kikigaki* 麗氣記聞書, a collection of notes taken by Raishun 頼春 (n. d.) at lectures given by Ryōhen, gives us some additional information:

The origin of this text [*Reikiki*] is as follows. One day during the reign of the sixtieth human sovereign, Emperor Daigo, a beautiful woman emerged from the pond in the Shinsen'en garden and went to the Palace, and explained the deep meanings of the *jindō* and the customs of Japan. [...] Then, she transmitted to the emperor the most profound and secret Dharma, the so-called *Amefuda no maki*. That chapter should not be transmitted lightly even to the noblest lantern of the Dharma. Only one disciple should receive this initiation.

(*Reikiki kikigaki*, p. 213)

Here we find an interesting variant of the dragon girl parable in the *Lotus Sutra*, with the important difference that in our case the female dragon addresses the emperor of Japan about his country’s customs and about the *jindō*—the realm of the kami. In this version of the *Reikiki* origin narrative, the emperor was not prompted to ask for divine help in order to understand the heavenly talisman he had found, as in the previous story. In this case, the talisman is a sacred text given to the emperor by the dragon woman after she initiated him, and therefore it acts as a double of the jewel/relic (in the original story in the *Lotus Sutra*) as a powerful religious tool.

As convincingly argued by Ogawa, chapter 12 of the *Reikiki* describes the imaginary origin of *shintō kanjō* (OGAWA 1997, p. 154). As we can see from the above legendary accounts, the original receiver of this ritual was Emperor Daigo; the content of the ritual was constituted by truths and customs about Japan and the kami; as a sign of completion, the emperor received a sacred talisman imbued with the power of the kami.²⁷ The final part of the chapter, in particular, is meant to reproduce the various phases of the initiation ritual marked by the series of mantras and related visualizations.²⁸

Reiki Kanjō

Let us now turn our attention to the *Reiki kanjō*. There appear to have been several different procedures for this rite, and so it is difficult to identify a unified model. The oldest source reporting the performance of *Reiki kanjō* is a transmission document (*injin* 印信) entitled “Nisho Kōtaijingū Reiki kanjō injin 二所皇太神宮麗氣灌頂印信” preserved at the Shinpuku-ji 真福寺 temple in Nagoya. It says that on the 21st day of the fifth month of 1353 (Bunna 文和 2) priest Gikai 儀海 of Chūshōinryū 中性院流 transmitted it to Yūe 宥恵, the resident priest of Takahata Fudō 高幡不動 in Musashi province 武蔵国.²⁹ The next oldest source is the *Reiki seisakushō*, written before 1389 (Kōō 康応 1); a note at the end of the book suggests that it was given to the initiated during the *Reiki kanjō* as a commentary to the *Reikiki*. The same text also contains the initiation certificate and the ritual procedures, from which it is possible to have an idea of the *Reiki kanjō* around the Nanbokuchō period (*Reiki seisakushō*, pp. 153–54).

What follows is a reconstruction of the ritual on the basis of the previous document.

1. Preparation of the setting:

- 1a. The main image (*honzon* 本尊) is put into place; it was probably a painted image of the sacred sword (*riken* 利劍) hung on the wall;

²⁷ The reference to Emperor Daigo is significant, since he ordered the compilation of the *Ritual Procedures of the Engi era* (*Engishiki* 延喜式) that codified all ritual protocols at court. Perhaps, medieval authors thought that Daigo succeeded in that endeavor thanks to the wisdom he had received from his supernatural visitor.

²⁸ A legendary account of the first occurrence of the *Reiki kanjō* to Emperor Daigo can also be found in an initiation document titled “Nisho kōtai jingū Reiki himitsu kanjō injin 二所皇太神宮麗氣秘密灌頂印信” (in ABE 2000, pp. 84–85), probably dating back to the early fourteenth century (IŌ 2000a, pp. 135–36).

²⁹ *Ryōbu shintō shū*, pp. 477–79. A later version appears in ABE, 2000, pp. 84–85. See also IŌ 2000b, p. 83.

- 1b. The incense burner and the offerings are put into place;
 1c. Master and disciple take their respective places on specially prepared mats, and bow to each other twice.

2. Performance:

2a. The master (*ajari* 阿闍梨) raises his right hand and the disciple his left hand and together they form the seal of the outer five-pronged *vajra*; they chant the formulae of the Vajra and the Womb realms, i.e., respectively, *vajradhātu vaṃ* and *a vi ra hūṃ khāṃ*.

2a'. Master and disciple bow to each other twice, and repeat the previous operation but inverting their hands (the master uses his right hand, the disciple his left). Ryōhen's *Reikiki kiki-gaki* indicates that in this segment master and disciple exchange their seats; the *Seisakushō* does not specify this detail.

2b. The master raises his right hand and the disciple his left hand and together they form the seal of no-place nondualism; they chant the mantric seeds of the five buddhas of the Vajra realm (*vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hṛīḥ aḥ*) and the five transformations of the letter A representing the Womb realm (*a ā am aḥ āṃḥ*).

2b'. Master and disciple bow to each other twice, and repeat the previous operation but inverting their hands (the master uses his right hand, the disciple his left hand).

3. Final procedures (not described).

As we can see from the above account, the *Reiki kanjō* is essentially a variant of esoteric *kanjō* rites. The main deity (*honzon*) of the ritual was probably a hanging scroll representing the sacred sword eliminating afflictions and showing the true principle of the universe (*ri* 理). The peculiarity of the ritual consists in the fact that master and disciple form mudras together hand in hand. As ITŌ Satoshi suggests, that was probably a representation of the union of *yin* and *yang* principles (2000b, p. 84), a theme that permeates the *Reikiki*, and Ryōbu shintō texts and rituals in general.

In this context, the disciple first assumes the role of the female, and then of the male, to indicate the realization of the religious process. We can see in this sexual aspect a manifestation of a more general metaphor of medieval esoteric Buddhism, namely, the fact that enlightenment was described as “turning from a woman into a man” (*hennyō nanshi* 變女男子). This metaphor did not only apply to women, but was a more general image of soteriologic transformation.³⁰

³⁰ It should also be noted, however, that initiates to many Buddhist rites in medieval Japan were often young boys (*chigo* 稚兒) with feminine make up, and in many cases sexual imagery was not purely metaphorical. On this subject, see FAURE 1998, especially pp. 241–78.

Perhaps the most complete discussion of the content of initiation to the *Reikiki* has been left to us by the Jōdo-Shingon monk Shōgei in his *Reikiki shishō*. His commentary is rather impenetrable to the non-initiated reader, but it serves well to illustrate the flavor of medieval esoteric Buddhist speculation on kami matters. We can reconstruct the narrative frame underlying Shōgei's ritual in the following way.

This initiation is a replica of the dragon woman's transmission to Emperor Daigo, which as we have seen concerned a heavenly talisman related to the creation of the universe (and Japan in particular) and the maintenance of the sacred order of the cosmos. This transmission, as the chapter of the *Reikiki* translated above makes clear, was also related to the gods who descended to the earth in order to awaken human beings to the reason for their suffering: it is due to the original creation that produced differentiation, discrimination, and rebirth.

The two series of mantras in the twelfth fascicle of the *Reikiki*, which are at the center of this initiation ritual, represent the two principles that structure the universe: male and female, principle (*ri* 理) and wisdom (*chi* 智), the Vajra and the Womb mandala. In the first series, the Vajra mandala (together with humanity and the cosmic principle), represented by the first mantra, *vajradhātu vaṃ*, is the starting place of this soteriologic process. The second mantra, *vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hṛīḥ aḥ*, indicates the kind of enlightenment associated with the Vajra mandala, that is, the pure and undefiled mind pervading the Dharmadhātu in the form of the five wisdoms (*gochi* 五智) associated with the five central buddhas of the mandala. The third mantra, *vaṃ a vaṃ raṃ haṃ khaṃ*, indicates, in contrast, the materiality of Mahāvairocana. The implication is that the initiate is embodying both mind and body of Mahāvairocana in the Vajra realm. This stage represents the original enlightenment, the innate possibility to realize that one is a buddha.

With the second series of mantras, we are now in the Womb mandala. The five elements represented by the first mantra indicate the initiate's possession of the material body of Mahāvairocana. The second mantra indicates the soteriologic process to become a buddha culminating with the realized Mahāvairocana. The final mantra sanctions the final attainment.

Let us now look more closely at Shōgei's interpretation.³¹

The first mantra, *vajradhātu vaṃ*, is taught first to the man and then to the woman. Since women did not take part in such initiations, "man" and "woman" in the text refer to, respectively, master and disciple. Their relationship was often expressed metaphorically in sexual

³¹ The following paragraphs are based on Shōgei, *Reikiki shishō*, pp. 30–32. See also OGAWA 1997, p. 154.

and gendered terms. The formula means: Vajra (*vajra*) realm (*dhātu*) Mahāvairocana (*vam*), that is, the modality of the cosmic Buddha in the Vajra realm. In other words, the mantra represents the Vajra realm, that is, the cosmic principle (*ri*) and the male principle.

The next mantra, *vam hūm trāḥ hṛīḥ aḥ*, represents the state of enlightenment associated with the Vajra realm. The mantra stands for the five buddhas (respectively, Mahāvairocana, Akśobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, Śākyamuni), the five directions (center, east, south, west, north), and other correlative series based on them. The expression “This is the mantric seed of sentient beings’ single mind” refers to the transformation of the mental apparatus from discriminative machinery into a clear and undifferentiated pure mirror usually referred to as the five wisdoms (*gochi*). According to esoteric Buddhism, in fact, enlightenment (that is, the acquisition of the five wisdoms) consists precisely in such a transformation of ordinary consciousness that is supposed to occur during the ritual.³²

In our case, this transformation is produced by a set of mantras. In particular, *aḥ* represents the transformation of the five sensory consciousnesses into the wisdom allowing for the perfection of all deeds (*jōshosachi* 成所作智); *hṛīḥ* indicates the transformation of the sixth consciousness (*ishiki* 意識) into the wisdom of appreciating individual particularities within the undifferentiated totality (*myōkanzatchi* 妙觀察智); *trāḥ* indicates the transformation of the seventh consciousness (*manashiki* 末那識) into the wisdom of the undifferentiated identity of subject and object (*byōdōshōchi* 平等性智); *hūm* stands for the transformation of the eighth consciousness (*arayashiki* 阿頼耶識) into the wisdom reflecting all things as a perfect mirror (*daienkyōchi* 大円鏡智); finally, *vam* represents the ninth consciousness (*amarashiki* 菴摩羅識). Because of its particular status, *amarashiki* is not subject to transformations, but constitutes the nondual and signless mandala of the Dharma-world or, in another terms, the wisdom of the original nature of the Dharmadhātu (*hokkai taishō chi* 法界体性智). This is why these five syllables are defined as the mantric seed of sentient beings’ single mind: they represent the uni-

³² The human mental apparatus is constituted by five sensory consciousnesses (eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-consciousness) that elaborate raw perceptual data captured by each sense organ while experiencing their respective objectual fields. The data from the sensory consciousnesses are elaborated and unified by a sixth consciousness, the intellect (*ishiki*), also in charge of structuring the immaterial field of thinkable entities. The intellect is, in turn, supported by a seventh consciousness (*manashiki*), which constitutes the center of self-awareness. The eighth consciousness is called *arayashiki* (Sk. *ālāya-vijñāna*); it is the deposit of all experiential and intellectual seeds that concur in creating the universe as we perceive it. Finally, this whole apparatus rests on a ninth consciousness (*amarashiki*, Sk. *amara-vijñāna*), the undefiled place of the pure *bodhi*-mind, the absolute innate mind of the Dharma-principle.

versal, pure and undefiled mind pervading the Dharmadhātu (both sentient beings and buddhas) in the form of the five wisdoms.

Shōgei then moves on to explain the sentence “The formula expressing the fact that names represent the essence of things,” and addresses an important issue concerning the esoteric Buddhist philosophy of language. He argues that among the three linguistic dharmas (names, sentences, and letters), names (*myō* 名) indicate directly the essence of the things they designate: “It is like saying willow tree or cherry tree [to refer to them].” In contrast, “sentences (*ku* 句) articulate the distinct features of things. For instance, when one says ‘The willow tree is green’ one means something different from the color red; when one says ‘the flower is red’ one indicates something different from the color green.” Finally, “letters (*mon* 文) are the characters that constitute words and sentences.”³³

The third mantra, *vaṃ a vaṃ raṃ haṃ khaṃ*, is interpreted as indicating Mahāvairocana (the initial *vaṃ*) and the five elements (respectively, earth, fire, water, wind, and space, represented by the following five syllables) constituting his material body.

The next set of formulae is related to the female principle of the universe: the Womb realm and wisdom. Accordingly, they should be transmitted to the woman first. *A vi ra hūṃ khaṃ* is an alternative representation of the five elements. *A ā aṃ aḥ āṃḥ* represent, in order, the four stages toward becoming a buddha (respectively, arousing the desire for enlightenment [*bodhicitta*], performing religious practices, attaining enlightenment, and entering *nirvāṇa*), culminating with Mahāvairocana’s mystic syllable *āṃḥ*. In other words, a reference to the material body of the universe is followed by a simulation of the soteriologic process culminating with the realized Buddha. The final formula, again “representing the essence of things,” indicates still another modality of Mahāvairocana.³⁴

Shōgei concludes his explanation by saying that all the above represents “the descent of the Tathāgata of the Two Realms into the Two Shrines [of Ise]” (*Reikiki shishō*, p. 31). However, he adds, “there are four levels of meaning to this matter” (*Reikiki shishō*, p. 31), referring to the semantic structure of esoteric Buddhism.

³³ On the philosophy of language of esoteric Buddhism, see Fabio Rambelli, “Buddhist Semiotics,” lectures 1 and 2 (<http://www.semioticon.com>).

³⁴ Actually, the *Reikiki shishō* has a different formula here than the text I used for my translation. Instead of *a ra pa ca na*, Shōgei has *a vi ra hūṃ khaṃ* (p. 31)—perhaps an indication that the sequence of the formulae was not strictly codified, and what mattered most was, rather than the actual formulae, the overall “meaning” of the ritual.

The original record (*honki* 本記) reports only the superficial meaning: as referring to the three fundamental entities heaven, earth, and man. The *Reikiki* presents two levels, the superficial and the secret, when it says that the traces of the descent from heaven refer to Vairocana and his retinue. [...] Next, the secret and the more secret combined are indicated by the mantric seed of the single mind. The more secret and the most secret combined refer to the order of transmission of the mantras. Therefore, we can say that the *Reikiki* presents all the four levels. However, the meaning of the most secret level is to be found outside of the present commentary: [the final sentence of the chapter beginning with] “In this way, the encounter and union of the two elements” refers to the secret meaning of the *Yugi* 瑜祈 [*kyō* 經]. (*Reikiki shishō*, p. 31)³⁵

Here, Shōgei is suggesting that the general intellectual content of the secret transmission is articulated on the basis of the four levels of meaning that are typical of the esoteric Buddhist episteme. On the first level, the world is constituted by three entities—heaven, earth, and man; heaven descended on earth as the kami of Ise Shrines. The second level indicates that the kami in Ise are actually Mahāvairocana and his retinue; they preached a mantra to the human beings. The third level indicates that that mantra is the seed of the single mind, that is, the formula *vaṃ hūṃ trāḥ hrīḥ ah*. The final level pertains to the transmission of the mantra; its meaning is to be found outside the *Reikiki* in the initiation to the *Yugikyō* (*yugi kanjō*).³⁶

The above is a brief account of the knowledge that was necessary in order to receive the initiation to the *Reikiki*—which, as we have seen, was considered at the origin of *shintō kanjō*—as described by Shōgei between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. From the extant documents it is not clear whether this knowledge was transmitted during the initiation ritual, or whether the ritual just sanctioned the previous transmission of this initiatory knowledge.

As Itō Satoshi indicates, however, the *Reiki kanjō* became more and more complex during the Muromachi period, with the development of three, four or even five stages of further and deeper initiations.³⁷ The main object of worship (*honzon*) also changed: in some cases the *Reikiki* (the text) itself was used as the main object of the cult,³⁸ in

³⁵ Here the term *yugi* refers to the *Yugikyō* (full title *Kongōbu rōkaku issai yuga yugi kyō*, in T 18 no. 867), one of the main sources of medieval Shingon esoteric initiation rituals with strong sexual connotations.

³⁶ On *yugi kanjō*, see MDJ pp. 2207b–2208b.

³⁷ See Iro 2000a, p. 84.

³⁸ See for example the *Jingūgata shinbutsu itchi shō* 神宮方神仏一致抄, quoted in Iro 2000a,

other cases it was a body of a kami (*shintai* 神体) in the form of a snake (according to some *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 theories, the real forms of kami are actually snakes).³⁹

An example of Muromachi period *Reiki kanjō* is given in the colophon (*okugaki* 奥書き) of Ryōhen’s *Jindaikan shūkenmon* (p. 593). In brief, it says that from the 19th to the 27th of the sixth month of 1424 (Ōei 応永 31) Ryōhen lectured on the *Nihon shoki*; subsequently he performed a *Reiki kanjō* and lectured on the *Reikiki*. On the 17th of the tenth month of the same year, he transmitted the *injin* of the *Ame-fuda no maki*. Ryōhen’s transmission was in five stages (see also ITŌ 2000b, pp. 84–85). For Ryōhen, the *Nihon shoki* and the *Reikiki* had to be transmitted as one set. Five years before, in 1419 he had performed the same lectures and ritual transmissions. At that time, he lectured on the *Nihon shoki* from the 21st and from the 29th day of the second month, then, he lectured on the *Reikiki* from the 8th day of the third month. Notes from those lectures still survive as, respectively, *Nihon shoki kikigaki* 日本書紀聞書 and *Reiki kikigaki* 麗記聞書. On that occasion he also performed the secret transmission of the *Ame-fuda no maki*; the procedures are recorded in the *Reiki kikigaki* (pp. 264–66). He divided the ritual into two segments, related respectively to the Outer Shrine and the Inner Shrine of Ise; accordingly, there were in the ceremonial hall two seats each for master and disciple. He explicitly says that the various mantras are initiatory certificates (*injin*) from the heavenly talisman. The mantras are divided into two sets that constitute the oral transmissions of the Outer and the Inner Shrines (p. 264). He does not give his interpretation of the actual content of these transmissions, but presents instead a diagram of the two sessions (performed twice each, once oriented to the north and once to the south) of the oral initiation (p. 265). The sequence was like the one we have seen before according to the *Seisakushō*; the only difference is, as I mentioned before, that the second time master and disciple switched places.

In a still later example, the *Reiki kanjō* is presented as a section of the *Nihon shoki kanjō* 日本書紀灌頂 performed by *shintō ajari* Gyōkei 行慶 for his disciple Gyōyo 行与 in 1513 (Eishō 永正 10). A very important set of documents (procedures, formulae, images, lineage diagrams, etc.) concerning that *kanjō* is preserved at Ninna-ji 仁和寺 in Kyoto. On the basis of the summary provided by ITŌ (2000b, p. 85), the *Nihongi kanjō* ritual was performed in the following way:

p. 84; see also HARA 2001.

³⁹ See for instance the illustration of *Reiki honzon* in used in a *Nihon shoki kanjō* of 1513 (Eishō 10), “*Nihongi shiryō*” in ABE 2000, p. 18. On the idea that the snake was the original form of the kami, see TEEUWEN 2000.

Fifty or one hundred days of preliminary religious practices
(*kegyō* 加行)

Rite of the Outer ceremonial hall (*gedōjō* 外道場)

Rite of the Inner ceremonial hall (*naidōjō* 内道場).

In the Inner ceremonial hall there is a large altar (*daidan* 大壇) and a small altar (*shōdan* 小壇); there is also a *Reiki* altar. The main transmission ritual takes place by the small altar. First, the *ajari* enters the hall, prepares the altars, and calls in the initiate. The initiate enters the hall with his eyes covered and throws the flower on the mandala placed on the large altar in order to establish a karmic tie with one of its deities. Then, the cloth covering his eyes is removed, and the initiate proceeds to the small altar. There, after the purification with incense and aspersion of holy water, a series of rituals takes place, such as the enthronement ceremony, the transmission of the three sacred regalia, the *Dainihongi kanjō* 大日本紀灌頂, the mudras and mantras of the three sacred regalia, and the transmission of the ten sacred treasures. After that, the *Reiki kanjō* is performed. It consists in the transmission of three sets of mudras and mantras and of mudras and mantras of the three imperial regalia and the ten sacred treasures.⁴⁰

Another example of late *Reiki kanjō*, as a segment of a larger initiation ritual, is given in the *Miwaryū shintō kanjō juyoshiki* 三輪流神道灌頂授与式. In this case, the *Reiki* altar was placed near the altar of perfect enlightenment (*shōgakudan*). As we have already seen, in this case the *Reiki kanjō* formed a pair with the initiation ritual to the secret meaning of the myth of the heavenly cavern (*iwato no daiji* 岩戸ノ大事). This *Reiki kanjō* represented Ise's Outer Shrine, the Suki hall in the Daijōsai, and the external appearance of the spirit of the kami as based on the three imperial regalia (the sword in particular). As such, it was also directly related to the rites taking place at the altar of perfect enlightenment.

The main deities (*honzon*) were Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音, Fudō Myōō 不動明王, and Aizen Myōō 愛染明王, all represented by a jewel. The jewel encompasses a complex symbolism, described by the ritual procedures in the following way. Nyoirin Kannon is the trace (*suijaku*) of Tenshō daijin, represented by the mirror; Fudō Myōō is the *suijaku* of Ame no koyane no mikoto 天兒屋命, represented by the sword; Aizen Myōō is *suijaku* of Takemikazuchi no mikoto 武甕槌神, represented by bow and arrows (in this case, the bow is probably identified with the curved jewel [*magatama* 勾玉]). The three regalia, symbolizing

⁴⁰ For a description of this specific *Reiki kanjō*, see Itō Satoshi, "Shintō injin," in ABE 2000, pp. 134-35.

the three pairs of Buddhist deities and kami, are envisioned as subspecies of the most important sacred object, i.e., the combination of Buddha relics (*busshari* 仏舍利) and the wish-fulfilling jewel (*cintamāni*). The present text says that the Buddha relics (e.g., the jewel) is the original form (*honji*) of Kunitokotachi no mikoto 国常立尊, the primordial creator deity in the *Nihon shoki* mythology. As all three gods can be traced back to this first ancestor, all sacred objects can be reduced to the jewel, which is also a representation of the cosmos before the separation of heaven and earth.

The *Miwaryū jingi kanjō* describes the *Reiki kanjō* as the transmission of Tenshō daijin’s mind, which is none other than the mind of Mahāvairocana in both Vajra and Womb realms. In this respect, the secret meaning of the myth of the heavenly cavern (*Iwato no daijī*) is the realization that Tenshō daijin’s mind is already within the initiate. The third and final set of rites, the one without mantras and mudras, represents the perfect identity of the initiate with the deity. We can see that by the Edo period the *Reiki kanjō* had lost both its autonomy and its symbolic importance, and had become a mere segment in a more complex set of rituals of which it no longer constituted the central part.

Transmission Lineages

Let us now shift our attention to the transmission lineages of the *Reiki kanjō*. For example, the *Reiki seisakushō* reports the following chart (p. 153):

Tenshō daijin → five generations of earthly gods → Emperor
Jinmu 神武 → all subsequent emperors → Emperor Daigo →
Kōbō Daishi

It appears that even before Emperor Daigo wrote down the *Reikiki*, according to the traditional attribution, the mudras and mantras of *Reiki kanjō* were being transmitted from one generation of gods and sovereigns to the other.

There exists another transmission lineage (*kechimyaku* 血脈) of the *Reiki kanjō*. Dated 1513 (Eishō 10), it is known as the “transmission through the Three Countries” (*sangoku sōjō* 三国相承) across India, China, and Japan (“*Reiki kanjō kechimyaku* 麗記灌頂血脈,” in ABE 2000, p. 84):

Mahāvairocana → Vajrasattva → Nāgārjuna → Nāgabodhi →
Vajrabodhi → Amoghavajra (Shanwuwei) → Huiguo → Kōbō
Daishi → Shinga 真雅 → (a list of other priests) → Gyōkei →
Gyōyo → Raiyū 頼宥 → Jisshin 実心

This chart was handed down by the Kōkyō section 宏教方 of Hojuin branch 保寿院流 of the Hirosawa 広沢 lineage of the Shingon school, and many copies of it exist. In this case, the *Reiki kanjō* follows the transmission of the teaching concerning the Vajra realm according to the Shingon school. The *Reikiki* was thus treated as an esoteric Buddhist scripture.

However, a very different transmission chart has also been found. It comes from a collection of initiatory documents of the Goryū lineage. Its peculiarity lies in describing the transmission of the *Reikiki* as a combination of that of esoteric Buddhism and of the *Nihon shoki*. An abbreviated rendering is presented in Figure 1 (“Kechimyaku zu 血脈図,” in ITŌ 2000b, pp. 86–87).

This chart, based on the *kechimyaku* of the Ono-ryū 小野流, the other main ritual tradition of the Shingon establishment, presents the interesting case of a mutual transmission between Kūkai and Emperor Saga. The transmission of esoteric Buddhism across the Three Countries from Mahāvairocana through Kūkai, and the transmission of the *Nihon shoki* in Japan from the primordial god Kunitokotachi to the current emperors, intersect in Kūkai and Emperor Saga and subsequently proceed again along separate paths, those of the emperors and of the Shingon clergy. This combinatory chart represents well both *honji suijaku* religious discourse and the political theology of the interdependence of imperial establishment and Buddhist institutions (*ōbō buppō* 王法仏法). In this context, Kūkai and Emperor Saga were considered as the human links between these two different discourses. As Ryōhen reports in his *Nihon shoki shikenmon*, when Kūkai and Saichō taught Emperor Saga the mudras and mantras they had learned in China, they realized that they were exactly the same as those taught in the *Nihon shoki*. Then, the *kannushi* 神主 of Hirano 平野 transmitted to Saichō and Kūkai the mudras and mantras of the kami (*shintō inmyō* 神道印明)—an event that is traditionally considered to be at the origin of Shingon and Tendai *Nihon shoki kanjō* (quoted in Ryōhen’s *Nihon shoki shi kenmon*; see also HARA 1998).

Conclusion

So far, we have seen the developments of *shintō kanjō* from their inception in the Kamakura period to the time of maximum diffusion during the Edo period. I have suggested that these rituals began as a way to transmit specialized knowledge on kami-related matters within a cultural context, that of medieval Japan, which was heavily influenced by esoteric Buddhist doctrines and practices. These rituals are one of the most interesting phenomena of so-called Ryōbu shintō. Even a

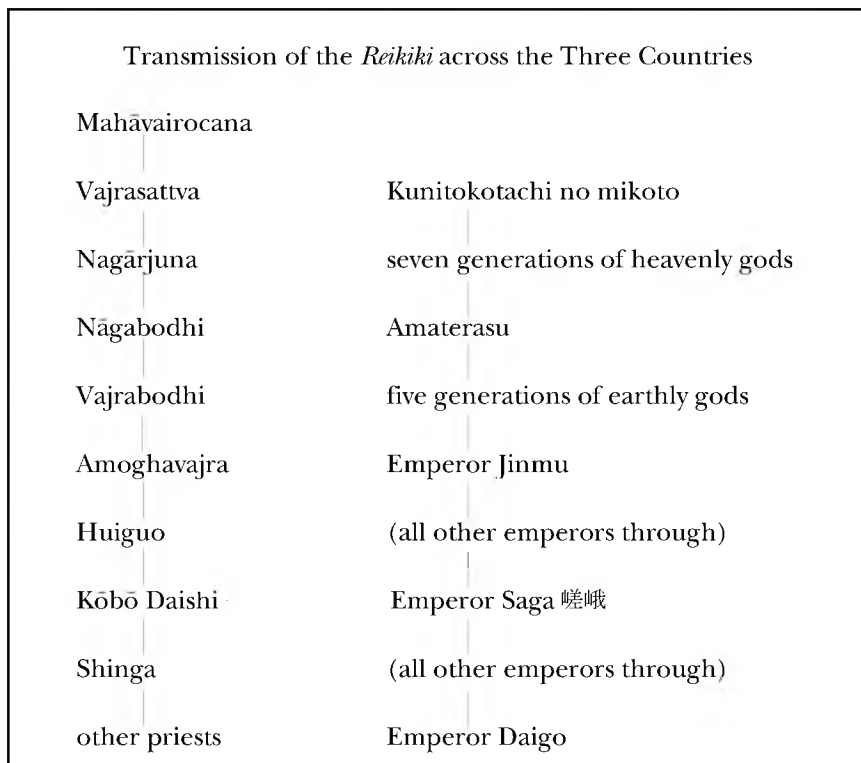


Figure 1

cursorily look at the extant material suggests that this tradition, despite its unquestionable medieval origin and flavor, really flourished during the Tokugawa period. On the basis of a preliminary investigation of the colophons of Miwa documents, we can identify at least three major waves of diffusion of Shinto texts and rituals associated with Shingon temples: the first in the early seventeenth century, the second in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the third, by far the most intensive, during the first half of the nineteenth century. This discursive realm began to collapse in the late Edo period, when the efforts of Yoshida priests and Kokugaku 国学 activists gradually undermined the social and intellectual grounds of Buddhist-inspired kami cults. The final blow came with the anti-Buddhist persecutions during the early stages of the Meiji Restoration, which targeted most violently the most widespread manifestations of combinatory religiosity. Today, it appears that *shintō kanjō* are still occasionally performed on Mt. Kōya, but they do not play any active religious role. These initiation rituals are now relics from a distant past and a different culture.

This situation explains the obscurity in which these rituals are still

shrouded. For example, it is not clear what was actually transmitted during *shintō kanjō*: Is a form of salvation provided by texts such as the *Nihon shoki* or the *Reikiki*? Is the secret meaning of certain texts according to some specific lineage given? If so, is the meaning given for portions of texts or for entire texts or for both? More importantly, it is also not clear who actually were the recipients of such initiations and why they felt the need to perform them. We have several names of Buddhist priests who participated in *shintō kanjō*, but little or nothing is known about them, and especially about their motives. Were these people related to shrines affiliated with Buddhist institutions? Were they looking for an alternative soteriology? Were they simply interested in kami myths? Or was their interest more related to identity issues such as the nature and specificity of Japan, as is indicated by the rituals' emphasis on the sacredness of the realm?⁴¹ We also do not know whether *shintō kanjō* was performed for laypersons. Some texts, such as *Miwaryū shintō genryū shū*, seem to suggest that they were intended not only for the Buddhist clergy, but also for commoners. That is certainly a possibility. After all, many Buddhist rituals dealing with kami-related matters were conceived for laypersons, such as the Miwa rites for professionals and housewives (see RAMBELLI, forthcoming b). However, we do not know the extent of the diffusion of Buddhist rituals of this kind, and especially, their recipients and their motives.

The symbolic and ideological content of these rituals also deserves further analysis. As we have seen, Buddhist priests took pains to study non-Buddhist texts and went through initiation rituals that were often very complicated, time-consuming, and presumably quite expensive. Through those rituals, the initiates became equal with the emperor: they acquired the three sacred regalia that symbolize the emperor's legitimacy. Furthermore, they also became identical with a "Shinto" deity, thus creating a new soteriology that replaced the usual idea of "becoming a buddha" (*jōbutsu* 成佛) with a form of "becoming a kami"; all this was related to an awareness of the specificity of Japan as a sacred place. This was undoubtedly a practical development of *honji suijaku* discourse that requires more attention.

What is particularly striking in *shintō kanjō* is the imperial imagery that pervades them, and the idea that a form of secret knowledge, that was originally intended only for the emperor, was now available to at least some Buddhist priests who had no connection with the imperial clan and no intention to exercise political power. It would be wrong to interpret such imperial imagery as an indication of the symbolic and

⁴¹ On the discourse on Japan's sacredness (*shinkoku shisō* 神国思想), see KURODA 1996; RAMBELLI 1996; RAMBELLI (forthcoming a).

emotional importance of the emperor in medieval and early-modern society. On the contrary, the fact that even people of non-aristocratic origin could have access to the imperial regalia and to the very secrets of the imperium—e.g., the political theology underlying the status of the Japanese sovereign—suggests that the emperor was at the time probably nothing more than a mythological figure and not a real person endowed with specific powers.

The fact that the recipients of these rituals were (primarily?) Buddhist priests, for whom these rituals were something additional to their normal training, points to an interest in forms of symbolic and religious imagery outside the standard Buddhist curriculum. This could be read as an indication of either a decrease in Buddhism's symbolic power, or vice versa as an increase in Buddhism's power to encompass newly arising symbolic formations. Either way, these rituals gave legitimacy to developing Shinto discourses concerning the sacredness of Japan and the sacred foundations of social order and ideology. Especially during the Muromachi period, a time of social change and unrest, the study of texts and the performance of rituals related to the core of the imperium appear as attempts to control social instability and cultural change in a ritual and metaphysical way, by people such as mid-ranking priests who were gradually losing their autonomy to regional feudal lords or larger religious institutions—people whose world was falling apart and who were looking for metaphysical reasons to believe that that was not true. But this is not the only possible explanation. These rituals and the secret knowledge they transmitted could also have been used by the initiated as a way to better interact in the new social, ideological, and cultural climate, by providing regional feudal lords, household chiefs, leaders of professional guilds, and intellectuals with the essential know-how of the metaphysical functioning of power. This is probably what happened during the Edo period. What is common to both interpretations, however, is a diffusion of imperial prerogatives and knowledge, and the consequent empowerment of commoners. In other words, and in spite of contemporary appearances, late medieval and early-modern Shinto ideas and practices had a transgressive component, represented by their endeavor to eliminate distinctions and barriers separating sacred and profane, gods and human beings, commoners and the emperor. Perhaps here lies one of the deep reasons for the appeal of late medieval and early-modern Shinto discourses (or, at least, some of them). In any case, a social history of *shintō kanjō* has yet to be attempted. We will only know how true the above speculations are after we find more information about the larger social and ideological contexts of these rituals.

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