

CHAPTER VI

MYSTERIES OF SPEECH AND BREATH

Introduction

Composed around 1223, The *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* 祕密念佛抄 (*Compendium on the Secret Contemplation of Buddha*) is comprised of three fascicles and provides a synthetic engagement with a diverse range of approaches to the practice of the *nenbutsu* 念佛 (C. *nianfo*), the relationship between this world and the Pure Land *Sukhāvātī* 極樂淨土 (C. *Jile jingtu*, J. *Gokuraku jōdo*), and the nature of the Buddha *Amitābha* 阿彌陀如來.¹³³⁷ This chapter is intended to serve as both a philosophical introduction to Dōhan’s Pure Land thought, and an introduction to the text as a whole. In this chapter I argue that Dōhan’s seemingly “post-modern”¹³³⁸ vision of the *nenbutsu* is not only a *himitsu* (or “Esoteric”) perspective, but is in fact

¹³³⁷ The names *Amida Nyorai* 阿彌陀如來 (C. *Amituo Rulai*) and other names *Amitāyus Tathāgata* 無量壽如來 (C. *Muryoju Nyorai*, J. *Muryōju Nyorai*) and *Amitābha Tathāgata* 無量光如來 (C. *Wulianguang Rulai*, J. *Muryōkō Nyorai*) are used interchangeably in East Asia, and are commonly referred to in English scholarship as simply *Amitābha*.

¹³³⁸ In suggesting that there is something “post-modern” about Dōhan’s perspective on the *nenbutsu*, I am making a conscientious and informed analogy, drawing upon the works of scholars like, Jin Y. Park, *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist Postmodern Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Elaboration on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sūtra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), both of whom present a compelling approach to the study of premodern Buddhist texts and traditions, wherein the Buddhist approach to difference, ambiguity, contradiction, and ethics is placed in meaningful dialogue with the post-modern “canon” of contemporary humanistic academia. Rather than simply making facile claims about the “post-modernity” of Buddhism, these scholars take seriously the ethical and philosophical contributions and challenges posed by premodern Buddhist scholars as voices relevant to the contemporary scholastic world.

a *kenmitsu nenbutsu* 顯密念佛, an approach to the *nenbutsu* that seeks to account for a diverse range of “revealed” and “hidden” meanings of the *nenbutsu*. Moreover, I argue that philosophical investigation into this “exo/esoteric” logic may establish an approach to engaging religious diversity and ethics that moves beyond the extremes of both universalism and exclusivism while also promoting dialogue and debate, allowing multiple and distinct perspectives to stand without being rejected or necessarily subsumed within a singular rubric.

Dōhan employed the *Compendium* to promote a vision of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice centered upon his conception of the mantra practitioner 眞言行人 (J. *shingon gyōnin*) and devotion to the cult of Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師信仰 (J. *Kōbō daishi shinkō*). In addition, Dōhan draws upon insights gained from examining the works of Shandao 善導 (613-681) and other Chinese Pure Land thinkers, Zhiyi 智顓 (538-597), Yuanzhao 元照 (1048-1116) and other Chinese Tiantai 天台 masters, Annen 安然 (841-915?) and other Japanese Tendai Mikkyō 天台密教 (aka, Taimitsu 台密) masters, Kakuban 覺鑠 (1095-1143), Jōhen 靜遍 (1165–1223), Jippan 實範 (d. 1144) and other Shingon Mikkyō 眞言密教 (aka, Tōmitsu 東密) masters. In this way, Dōhan’s engagement with the *nenbutsu* fundamentally confounds the sectarian taxonomic approach so common in the study of premodern East Asian Buddhism.

On the one hand, the *Compendium* affirms the perspective that all Buddhas are but expressions of the fundamental ultimate reality, the Dharmakāya 法身 (C. *fashen*, J. *hōsshin*), as represented and conceived anthropomorphically as the one universal Buddha Mahāvairocana 大日如來,¹³³⁹ and that all Buddha Lands are but dimensions of the Pure Land of Mahāvairocana, the *mitsugon jōdo* 密嚴淨土, or “Pure Land of Mystical Splendor.” On the other hand, beginning

¹³³⁹ C. Dari Rulai, J. Dainichi Nyorai.

with an exegesis of the three- and five-syllable *nenbutsu*-mantra *A-mi-ta* and *Namu-A-mi-ta-Buḥ* (which is constructed in a mandalic form) written in the Sanskrit script known as Siddham 悉曇 (J. *Shittan*), Dōhan goes on to locate the potency of *nenbutsu* as arising from the mystery of speech 口密 (J. *kumitsu*) as the very body-mind 色心 (J. *shikishin*) of sentient beings. Therein, the *nenbutsu* is understood to be the mystical union of the organs of speech (throat, tongue, lips = body), and breath (both physical breath and/as the so-called “breath of life” = mind).

Balancing the Shingon universalizing (or totalizing) vision of Buddhist practice with an emphasis on the impetus for awakening not in an elite *gnosis*, but in something inherent to the human condition (speech and breath). In other words, rather than simply replicating a common Buddhist interpretive strategy that subsumes (and thus negates) diversity in favor of a single unified vision of the Buddhist universe, the “secret” of Dōhan’s *nenbutsu* is the conceptualization of a discursive space wherein the binaries between buddha/being, awakening/illusion, self/other, and the Pure Land/*sahā* stand together in a productive tension. Based in this view, the heterogeneous perspectives on the efficacy of the *nenbutsu* are understood to stand *as they are*, all the while also abiding in a unified and interconnected relationship premised on one shared experience: life itself.

This chapter, the sixth and final chapter of this dissertation, is divided into four parts. Part I provides an analysis of the title of the text, and a basic summary of the key concepts presented in the *Compendium*. Part II analyzes key passages from the first fascicle of the *Compendium* to argue that Dōhan’s approach to the *nenbutsu* purposely subverts the reader’s expectations through a variety of exegetical strategies (comparison, conflation, inversion, “selective” quotation, etc.) to present a vision of the *nenbutsu* that, while promoting a particular polemical perspective, is nevertheless oriented toward a vision of Buddhist diversity that allows

multiple (perhaps irreconcilable) perspectives to stand together *as they are*. Building upon Part II, Part III presents an exploratory philosophical investigation into some of the possible implications of Dōhan’s thought, focusing in particular upon Dōhan’s use of the metaphorical relationship between speech and breath, the question of ethics and religious diversity, and Buddhist universalism and exclusivism. Part IV considers a number of possible avenues for future research, in particular, an “esoteric” reading of the thought of Shinran 親鸞(1173-1263) and the potential for further inquiry into the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* 華嚴經 (T. 278),¹³⁴⁰ as a productive avenue for engaging “Esoteric Pure Land” dimensions of East Asian Buddhism.

Chapter VI

Part I

“The Compendium on the Secret Contemplation of Buddha”

Some scholars have viewed the *Compendium* as an example of “syncretism” between Esoteric Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, while others have viewed the text as merely an articulation of the Shingon School’s own orthodox view on *nenbutsu* practice. It is the view of this author, however, that both of these perspectives are too narrow. In fact, it should by now be clear that in Dōhan’s time, the various ordination and practice lineages were deeply interwoven and highly competitive in a politico-monastic culture wherein it was essential to master multiple areas 兼學 (J. *kengaku*) of ritual and doctrinal knowledge. In this “*kengaku-kenmitsu*” context, knowledge was passed down via secret oral transmissions 口傳 (J. *kuden*), wherein the human condition was revealed to possess an inherent awakening 本覺 (J. *hongaku*), and that even

¹³⁴⁰ T. 278, C. *Huayan jing*, J. *Kegon kyō*.

simple meditative or “Esoteric” rites could be employed to accrue this worldly benefits 現世利益 (J. *gense ryaku*), purify one’s karma, and attain rebirth in the Pure Land of a Buddha.

In this context, Esoteric Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism functioned not as two “kinds” of Buddhism, but two often overlapping areas of concern within a kaleidoscopic Buddhist environment. Moreover, as demonstrated in Part I of this dissertation (Chapters I-III), Mahā/Vajrayāna Buddhist doctrinal and ritual systems always-already included Pure Land aspiration, and many Pure Land aspirants in East Asia sought the skills of those who had mastered “Esoteric” ritual knowledge. When the *Compendium* is read within this context, rather than from the contemporary taxonomic-sectarian perspective, it may be recognized as but one node in a broader Mahā/Vajrayāna net, revealing but one approach to the diversity of *nenbutsu* perspectives in early-medieval Japanese Buddhism.

There are several printed versions of the *Compendium*, but according to the *Nihon Bukkyō tenseki daijiten* 日本仏教典籍大辞典,¹³⁴¹ while it is not clear whether or not an original version is still in existence, manuscript versions 寫本 (J. *shahon*) may be found in the archives of Hōjō-in 寶城院 temple on Kōyasan dating from 1606 (Keichō 11), as well as printed editions 刊本 (J. *kanpon*) dating from 1645 (Shōhō 正保 2, *the first printed edition), 1686 (Jōkyō 貞享 3), and 1907 (Meiji 明治 40).

At present, the most authoritative edited *kanbun* 漢文, Classical Chinese, edition of the first fascicle is Takeuchi Kōzen 武内 孝善, “Dōhan cho, ‘Himitsu nenbutsu shō,’ honbun kōtei (ichi) 「道範著『秘密念仏抄』本文校訂(一)」,” *Kōyasan daigaku ronsō* 高野山大学論叢 20 (1985): 13-71, which was edited based on the Jimyō-in 持明院 edition, dating from the

¹³⁴¹ NBTD, 446.

Muromachi Period 室町時代 (1392-1573), 1548 (Tenmon 天文 17), and the Hōjō-in (1606) versions. This *kanbun* edition was used to produce a Classical Japanese (J. *kakikudashi* 書き下し) version by the *Himitsu nenbutsu shō kenkyūkai* 秘密念仏抄研究会, ed., “Dōhan cho ‘Himitsu nenbutsu shō’ no kenkyū—honbun kōtei to kaki kudashi gochū 道範著 ‘秘密念仏抄’ の研究--本文校訂と書き下し・語註.” *Buzan gakuhō* 豊山学報 39 (1996): 105-131. Both Takeuchi and the Buzan-ha edition note the existence of a (partial?) early edition entitled *Amidajō* 阿彌陀帖 dating from 1391 (Meitoku 明德 2). However, this edition is identified by the Buzan-ha *Himitsu nenbutsu shō kenkyūkai* as belonging to Hōbodai-in 寶菩提院, while Takeuchi identifies it as being held at Tōji Kanchi-in 東寺觀智院. More investigation is required on this matter.

Other versions may be found at the Eizan bunko archive 叡山文庫, dating from 1616 (Genwa 元和 2). The *Kokusho sōmoku-roku* 国書総目録, vol. 6, indicates that numerous editions dating from early and mid-Tokugawa may be found in the archives of Ryūkyō University 龍谷大学, Ōtani University 大谷大学, Kōyasan University 高野山大学, Taishō University 大正大学, Tōyō University 東洋大学, etc. One possible future area of inquiry will be into the matter of why exactly so many versions of this text exist from this period.

More recently published versions may also be found in: *Dai Nippon Bukkyō zenshō* 大日本佛教全書 (DNBZ) 70:51-82, *Zoku jōdoshū zenshō* 續浄土宗全書 (ZJZ), 15:79-110, and *Shingonshū anjin zensho* 真言宗安心全書 (SAZ), 2:225-266. Among these, the SAZ edition has been recognized as most authoritative, as evidenced by its usage as the base text by the *Buzan-ha kenkyūkai*. For the translation that follows this chapter, I have employed the versions produced

by Takeuchi, the Buzan-ha, SAZ, and DNBZ/ZJZ (which appear to be very close, or identical), but have largely followed the SAZ. In the future, I hope that this work will form the basis for future investigation into the other variant manuscripts, which I hope to use to eventually produce a critical edition of the entire work, noting all variant portions and passages, of which there are far too many to be accounted for in the space allotted for this dissertation.

The *Compendium*'s three fascicles are divided into a number of subsections. Below I have provided brief descriptions of each subsection so that the reader may acquire a general picture of the work as a whole, before reading the translation of the first fascicle in Part III.¹³⁴² The *Compendium* is composed in a question/answer 問答 (*J. mondō*) format, with Dōhan engaging a hypothetical interlocutor. As the head of major temples on Kōyasan, it is possible that Dōhan employed this writing style in his work training students in debate contests on Kōyasan, and as examined in the previous chapter, many of his extant works were clearly composed for an educational context. Judging from the range of sources Dōhan draws upon, he was clearly well acquainted with the major texts now often associated with the Shingon tradition, as well as those of other systems including Tiantai/Tendai and *Avatamsaka*. It is reasonable to speculate that his students would have received a similarly broad education in addition to a quite possibly Amitābha centric focus upon the works of Kūkai and the practice of Esoteric ritual.

An Analysis of the Title

It is common in traditional Buddhist scriptural commentaries to begin by explaining the inner and outer meaning of the title of a text. This approach has been *adapted* here in order to exemplify the ways in which the subject and object of academic inquiry participate in a mutually

¹³⁴² SAZ 2:226-266.

influential conversation. The *Compendium* has been preserved in numerous manuscripts, some bearing the title *Himitsu nenbutsu shō* (Compendium on the Secret Buddha Contemplation) or, *Himitsu-shū nenbutsu shō* (Compendium on the Buddha Contemplation of the Secret Teaching/Lineage).¹³⁴³ By examining the semantic range of meanings present in these two titles, this introduction to the text will suggest that it is possible that Dōhan intended the title to inform the reader (the reader who is in on the “secret”) of the basic intent of the text: to reveal that even the purportedly “shallow,” or literalist, interpretation of the *nenbutsu* is itself an expression of the “deepest” interpretation, and that the initial stage of aspiration for Buddhahood is equal to the final attainment of liberation.

***Himitsu* 秘密**

Himitsu (C. *mimi*), often translated as “secret,” inner, hidden, profound, mysterious, etc., may be found throughout the East Asian Buddhist corpus as a translation of the Sanskrit term *guhya*, which may be taken to mean “to be covered or concealed or hidden or kept secret, concealable, private, secret, mysterious, mystical.”¹³⁴⁴ *Guhya* was translated into Chinese as internal 内, subtle 妙, deep or profound 深, dark 陰, inner 奧, secret 秘密, hidden 隱密, etc.¹³⁴⁵ As noted in Chapter II, there is nothing inherently Tantric, about the use of the term *himitsu*. For example, the *Lotus Sūtra* 妙法蓮華經 (T. 262), *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* 大般涅槃經 (T. 374),

¹³⁴³ SAZ edition uses the term *shū*. The Hō version is *Himitsushū nenbutsu shō*, but the Ji and Shō editions lack the term *shū*, Takeuchi, 106, ft. 1-2. I am following Takeuchi in using the title *Himitsu nenbutsu shō*.

¹³⁴⁴ “Guhya” Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (2008 revision), last modified October 20, 2014, <http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/index.html>.

¹³⁴⁵ BJ 431.

the *Dazhidulun* 大智度論 (T. 1509),¹³⁴⁶ and many other texts use the term *himitsu* consistently to indicate not only the general tendency within Buddhism to differentiate between superficial and profound teachings, but in many instances, *himitsu* is synonymous with the Mahāyāna itself, as the highest (“secret”) teaching of the Buddha. The *himitsu* is therefore the Dharma as understood from the perspective of Buddhas and high-ranking Bodhisattvas, and of course, those who claim to speak for the Buddhas. As a result, the term *himitsu* was commonly used to refer simply to the superiority and authority of one’s own lineage or exegetical tradition.¹³⁴⁷

The *Mikkyō Daijiten* 密教大辭典, the massive dictionary of the Shingon School, notes the prevalence of the term “*himitsu*” across Buddhist literature, but focuses on the ritual and doctrinal teachings of Kūkai. However, in listing Annen and Kūkai’s various definitions of *himitsu*, the compilers of this dictionary, like Dōhan himself, were seeking to argue for, on the one hand, a privileged position of access to the “secret” teachings, and on the other hand, acknowledging that *himitsu* discourse emerges within a broader exo/esoteric Mahāyāna discursive context. These two approaches are indeed not mutually exclusive.¹³⁴⁸ *Himitsu*, therefore, possesses a range of meanings, not simply reducible to one sectarian lineage or institution.

¹³⁴⁶ *Mochizuki Bukkyō daijiten* 望月仏教大辭典 (MBD), 4330: ...法華經第五如来寿量品「如来秘密神通力」.... 大般涅槃經大二「何等をか名づけて秘密の蔵となす、猶ほ伊字の三点の如し」.... 大智度論第四「仏法に二在り、一には秘密、二には顕示なり。顕示の中に」.

¹³⁴⁷ This issue was explored in greater detail in Chapter II, Introduction and Part I. See also Chapter I, Part III, and Chapter III, Part II.

¹³⁴⁸ MD, 1868-1869.

Himitsu-shū 秘密宗

The term *himitsu-shū*,¹³⁴⁹ is a relatively common synonym for *mikkyō*, or “Esoteric” Buddhism. In an often cited line in Yixing’s 一行 (683-727) *Dapiluzhena chengfo jingshu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏 (T. 1796), the *mimizong* 秘密宗 is said to allow one to shorten the path to Buddhahood, transcending limitless *kalpas*. Several Shingon exegetes following Kūkai’s tradition, including Saisen 濟暹 (1025-1115), Kakuban 覺鑊 (1095-1143), and Raiyu 賴瑜 (1226–1304) cite this text.¹³⁵⁰ While it would be tempting to assert that the *himitsu-shū* was simply a synonym for Esoteric Buddhism, by paying close attention to how it is used in the contexts in which it appears, it seems rather to signify something more subtle.

The *himitsu-shū* appears to be a term used to signify that a given teaching renders the early stage of the bodhisattva path equal to the final stage, or the potential for the teachings of the Buddha (the truths realized by Buddhas and the highest Bodhisattvas) to render the “lowest” stage equal to the highest. Ōshika Shinnō 大鹿真央 has suggested that a similar notion, *shoji sokugoku* 初地即極, the idea that the first stage is none other than the final stage, was a central feature of Dōhan’s doctrinal thought more broadly.¹³⁵¹ Based on this, and the numerous passages that implicitly and explicitly make this point throughout the *Compendium*, I would like to suggest that the title of Dōhan’s text may in fact inform us of its primary objective: to teach monks that the simple chanting of the *nenbutsu*, at its most basic, is itself inherently powerful,

¹³⁴⁹ MD, 1870.

¹³⁵⁰ 依常途解釋。是菩薩從發心以來。經一大阿僧祇劫。方證如是寂然界。今秘密宗。但度此一重妄執。即是超一阿僧祇劫。行者未過此劫。與辟支佛位齊時。名為極無言說處。爾時心滯無為法相。若失方便。多墮二乘地證小涅槃。然以菩提心勢力。還能發起悲願。從此以後三乘徑路始分。然所觀人法俱空。與成實諸宗未甚懸絕。猶約偏真之理。作此平等觀耳。故以三乘上中下出世間心。合論一僧祇劫。至第二僧祇。乃與二乘異也。(T. 1796, 602a01-a10); See also: Kakuban’s, *Shingonshū sokushinjōbutsu gishō* 真言宗即身成佛義章 (T. 2511, 79.3b15-17), and Raiyū’s *Taizō nyūzōnyūri shō* 胎藏入理鈔 (T. 2534, 79.148b14-23).

¹³⁵¹ Ōshika Shinnō 大鹿 真央, “Tōmitsu ni okeru shoji sokugokusetsu no tenkai 東密における初地即極説の展開,” *Tōyō no shisō to shūkyō* 東洋の思想と宗教 29 (2012): 71-89.

and equal to the highest teachings of the Buddha. It is therefore possible that this particular connotation was intended by Dōhan if, in fact, this phrase originally appeared in the title. Due to this doubt, however, I have not included it in my English translation of the title.

Shū 宗

The term *shū* has been examined in numerous places throughout this dissertation, therefore, I will simply reiterate that rather than indicating a “sect” or religious group 教團 (J. *kyōdan*), the term seems to carry the connotation of an area of study or concentration, or essence or lineage, which may overlap with, and often work in conjunction with others. This was especially true for the many traditions and institutions of medieval Japan.¹³⁵² The polemical implication of its (possible) usage here should be clear. Dōhan is suggesting that the practitioner of the mantra path is able to grasp a dimension of the nature of the *nenbutsu* that might be lost on others. Rather than promoting a distinct “kind” of *nenbutsu*, however, Dōhan appears to be suggesting that the mantra practitioner is capable of perceiving something deeper in the nature of *nenbutsu* practice than one who simply studies quotidian doctrine.

Dōhan often critiques those whom he seems to perceive as the “scholarly oxen” of Zhiyi’s doctrinal exegetical line, an area of study that Dōhan appears to have been very well acquainted. In this way, I find a certain harmony with Nietzsche’s criticism of the “scholarly oxen” of his day who studied Greek philology, but were uninterested in putting the Greek lifestyle into practice, balancing Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of the human condition. Indeed, the scholarly lifestyle poses certain problems and pitfalls that intellectuals of various traditions have struggled with. Following the career of Kakuban, a strong emphasis on the union

¹³⁵² Tanaka Hisao 田中久夫, *Kamakura Bukkyō* 鎌倉仏教 (Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko 講談社学術文庫, 2009 [reprint, 1980]), 14.

of practice and scholarship emerged in the Kōyasan Shingon tradition.¹³⁵³ By Dōhan’s time, it appears that there was an emphasis placed on the importance of the body in (or *as*) the ritual arena. Rather than simply studying doctrine and ritual, performance and enactment were absolutely necessary. As a great scholar and ritual master, Dōhan’s view on “Buddha Contemplation” (*nenbutsu*) is a critique of those who focus their energies on the surface level, or literal interpretation of the sūtras 顯教 (J. *kengyō*), without experiencing first-hand the inner meaning 密教 (J. *mikkyō*) of the teachings through practice.

***Nenbutsu* 念佛**

The term *nenbutsu*, at its most basic, means “buddha contemplation,” but in East Asia came to signify the vocal recitation of the name of the Buddha Amitābha, “*Namu Amida Butsu* 南無阿彌陀佛.” For Dōhan, the *nenbutsu* possesses an expanded semantic range to include mantra/*dhāraṇī*,¹³⁵⁴ the act of speech, the organs of speech, the breath that renders both speech and life itself possible, the compassionate activity of the Buddha (Amitābha/Mahāvairocana) in the world, and ultimately, the very mind that seeks (and always-already possess/attains) awakening. For Dōhan, the true or “secret” *nenbutsu* encompasses all aspects of the universe (classical Buddhist cosmology), the human condition (virtues and defilements), and fundamentally undergirds all forms of practice.

¹³⁵³ See Chapter III, Parts II and IV, and Chapter V, Part II.

¹³⁵⁴ Though many scholars argue about the best way to differentiate between mantra and *dhāraṇī*, Dōhan and others do not seem to clearly differentiate between the two, viewing them instead as virtually synonymous technologies of the mystery of speech.

Shō 抄

The term *shō* may be translated as compendium, excerpts, extracts, notes, collection, etc., and may be thought of as a synthetic genre wherein the author employs the words of others to arrive at a new idea. *Shō*, here translated as “compendium,” at times may remind one of a dissertation. In addition to quotes and passages designed to support and amplify the force of an argument (as well as “borrow” the prestige of the authority being quoted), there is a certain ambiguity between when a quote or passage is intended to convey the source text’s author’s words and intent, or the those of the compiler (or dissertator?). In some instances, the voices of the author of the text being quoted and the compiler begin to blur, and it may become difficult to disentangle whose voice is truly being projected. Throughout writing this dissertation I drew upon many sources from many traditional and contemporary scholars of the East Asian Buddhist tradition in order to support my argument, in some ways similar to Dōhan. Indeed, in the process of writing, not only is the voice of author and quoted authority blurred, but the voice of subject and object of inquiry too become blurred. Perhaps one of the most important ways that Dōhan has influenced me is through the genre of *shō*. As I have endeavored to follow Dōhan’s threads, ultimately confronting with the whole of the East Asian Mahā/Vajrayāna tradition, I have found that each node of the net reflects every other node, myself included.

Fascicle One

1.1 The Matter of the Name 名號事

Dōhan begins the *Compendium* by asking a rhetorical question: Why is it that virtually all monks in the present age rely upon the *nenbutsu*? His answer is outlined mainly in the first fascicle, and elaborated on in the second and third. Beginning with a four-fold secret explication

四重秘釋 (J. *shijū hissaku*) in which he examines four basic conceptions of the nature of the Buddha Amitābha, Dōhan suggests that ultimately the true nature of the Buddha Amitābha, as well as the *nenbutsu* and the Pure Land, is revealed in the body-mind of beings, and that the originally non-arising Buddha mind is itself the very heart of beings.

Following this declaration, Dōhan draws upon Jippan’s *Byōchū shugyōki* 病中修行記¹³⁵⁵ in which the three letters of the name *A-mi-ta* are employed to both explicate the Contemplation of the Letter A 阿字觀 (J. *ajikan*), a central practice in medieval and contemporary *mikkyō* and the Shingon-shū, as well as the *Amida-santai-setsu* 阿彌陀三諦說, which both Sueki and Stone have noted as an important interpretive strategy for *hongaku* 本覺, original enlightenment thought, and “Esoteric Pure Land” thought in early medieval Japan. This exegetical tool uses the three syllables of the name of the Buddha to explain the relationship between the “three truths”: *kū* 空, *ke* 假, *chū* 中, or emptiness, provisionality, and the middle. Dōhan’s presentation emphasizes not the “*A*” which corresponds to emptiness, nor the “*Mi*” which corresponds to the synthesis of provisionality and emptiness, the so-called “middle path,” but rather, the “*Ta*” syllable, which corresponds to provisionality and the *nirmāṇakāya* 應身 (C. *yingshen*, J. *ōjin*), or embodied “response” manifestation of the Buddha. In this way, Dōhan begins his presentation of the *nenbutsu* by arguing that the simplest and most basic teaching, and the Buddha which one may actually physically encounter, is equal, and perhaps superior, to that which is commonly assumed to be the most profound.¹³⁵⁶ Throughout the text, Dōhan continually collapses binaries and undermines the reader’s expectations.

¹³⁵⁵ SAZ 2.

¹³⁵⁶ SAZ 2:226-231.

Next, Dōhan examines a five-syllable version of the *nenbutsu* in which each syllable, arranged in the form of a seed syllable mandala with *Namu* in the center, and *A-Mi-Ta-Buḥ*, in the four directions, *A* in the southern position, and progressing clockwise. Drawing comparisons between the five Buddhas, and the five forms of wisdom, Dōhan argues that the five hindrances of the human condition are themselves at their core, paths to the highest corresponding form of wisdom. In this way, the most basic (or, “base”) mode of human consciousness and behavior may itself be recognized as ultimately oriented toward, and not wholly separate from, a deeper wisdom.¹³⁵⁷

1.2 The Matter of Calling the Name and the Primordial Vow 稱名本願事

In this section, Dōhan declares that the reason the Buddha Amitābha chose the *nenbutsu* as the object of his primal vow is because Amitābha (again drawing upon the *santaisetsu*) is the central Buddha, between mind and body, manifesting as the middle way of the mystery of speech. As such, Speech/Amitābha/Sukhāvati abides in productive tension between Body/Śākyamuni/*Sahā* and Mind/Mahāvairocana/*Mitsugon jōdo*, encompassing both, but seemingly not necessarily reducible to either.¹³⁵⁸ This idea is revisited at the beginning of the second fascicle.

1.3 The Matter of the Buddha Contemplation Samādhi 念佛三昧事

Drawing upon Tendai and *Avataṃsaka* conceptions of Buddhas and Buddha bodies, Dōhan examines the *nenbutsu samādhi* 念佛三昧 (J. *nenbutsu sanmai*), an important form of contemplation designed by Zhiyi, and disseminated widely throughout Japanese mountain

¹³⁵⁷ SAZ 2:231-235.

¹³⁵⁸ SAZ 2:235.

monastic centers, as examined in Chapters III and IV. This form of practice begins with a 90 day period of chanting and/or contemplation, at the end of which, the practitioner realizes non-duality with the Buddha Amitābha. By Dōhan’s time, the *nenbutsu samādhi* had developed for three hundred years as part of the traditional Japanese Tendai curriculum that also included *mikkyō*, and eventually produced several other kinds of *nenbutsu* practice that became popular among mountain monastic centers throughout Japan. As a result, by Dōhan’s time, the *nenbutsu samādhi* was not the exclusive property of the “Tendai School,” and it had emerged as a major “tantric” practice (See: Chapter III, Part III). In presenting the *nenbutsu samādhi*, Dōhan argues that the speech of the Buddha permeates all corners of the universe like wind. That wind is life, and because life is conscious, this wind-life itself is the act of contemplation. Ultimately, because the *nenbutsu samādhi* is the contemplation of the act of speech, it is necessarily the contemplation of the embodiment of Amitābha as breath-life.¹³⁵⁹

1.4 The Matter of the Ten [Moments of Buddha Mindfulness] 十念事

The “ten moments of Buddha mindfulness” is a reference to the vow of Amitābha in the *Sukhāvāṭīvyūha-sūtra*, where it states that beings who *nen* the Buddha even ten times will certainly attain Buddhahood.¹³⁶⁰ This is a very well-known passage, and in East Asia debates arose regarding whether or not these ten were essential, whether they were vocal utterances, whether they were mental events, etc. Here, however, Dōhan is employing the ten thought moments to examine the idea that Buddhahood is a state arrived at after a set progression. The ten thought moments are one, the ever present now. Again, employing the idea of the ten bodhisattva stages, Dōhan argues that there is neither high nor low, and that the first stage, the

¹³⁵⁹ SAS 2:235-237.

¹³⁶⁰ The ten thought moments are discussed in the *Sukhāvāṭīvyūha-sūtra* 佛說無量壽經 (T. 360, 268a26-28) and *Contemplation Sūtra* 佛說觀無量壽經 (T. 365, 346a18-20).

first moment of Buddha contemplation, the most basic level of attainment, is the highest. This appears to be drawing upon *Avatamsaka* readings of the bodhisattva stages, but more research is required on this point.¹³⁶¹

Fascicle Two

2.1 The Matter of the Lotus Samādhi 蓮華三昧事

At the outset of the second fascicle, Dōhan declares that the Buddha Amitābha is the lord of the lotus division of the mandala, and that he is in fact the heart-lotus 心蓮 (J. *shinren*) of all sentient beings. In Shingon meditation, many contemplative practices are carried out upon a perfectly clear and bright moon disk 月輪 (J. *gachirin*), visualized at one's heart, which emerges from a blossoming lotus. Because the physical body is the locus of awakening, this “metaphorical” heart-lotus, possessing eight petals like the central lotus of the Womb World Mandala 胎藏界曼荼羅 (J. Taizōkai mandara), is conflated with the physical heart which, according to traditional medical theory was said to resemble a closed lotus blossom, possessing eight petals. In other words, the “heart” of awakening and the physical organ that pumps blood through the body, are revealed to be the same thing, the feature of the human condition that sustains life. Dōhan notes that the heart lotus of the man is said to point up, and the heart lotus of the woman points down. More investigation into the nature of gender and gendered language in medieval Shingon would be an extremely productive area for future research.

In this section, Dōhan employs Yogācāra 法相 (C. Faxiang, J. Hossō) concepts to consider the nature of consciousness as fundamentally pure. This section reiterates the notion that Amitābha abides in a central position between Śākyamuni and Mahāvairocana, and his

¹³⁶¹ SAZ 2:237-238.

Sukhāvātī Pure Land between Mitsugon Pure Land as the unified cosmos and the Sahā realm, thus encompassing them all. Moreover, Amitābha is also revealed to be the lord of the act of speech and breath, and embodied in the element of wind that renders life, breath, and speech possible. In addition, at the close of this section, Dōhan states that all rivers return to the great ocean, just as the manifold practices are all based in a fundamental Buddha nature.¹³⁶² This idea is restated below

2.2 The Matter of the Great Compassion Samādhi 大悲三昧事

In this section, Dōhan suggests that the gate of the Buddha Amitābha is also known as the Great Compassion Samādhi. The in and out breath of the practitioner are one with the compassion of the Buddha’s speech and breath, which permeate the ten directions, opening the heart-lotus of beings. Ultimately, Dōhan adds, the mind, the Buddha, and beings are non-differentiated.¹³⁶³

2.3 The Matter of the Characters for the Name of Sukhāvātī 極樂名字事

Here, Dōhan revisits his critique of the simplistic literal interpretations of the sūtras, which might contend that Amitābha/Amitāyus (the Buddha of Limitless Life and Light) possesses a limited lifespan, or is limited to a single place the Pure Land far away. For Dōhan, the Pure Land Sukhāvātī, translated into Sino-Japanese as 極樂 (C. Jile, J. Gokuraku), literally meaning “ultimate bliss,” refers to the “bliss” of awakening, and rather than this being limited to a particular western corner of the universe, it is omnipresent in all Buddha realms. Dōhan draws parallels between Sukhāvātī and the Lotus repository of the *Avatamsaka* tradition (which he

¹³⁶² SAZ 2:238-245.

¹³⁶³ SAZ 2:245-246.

equates to the Womb Realm Mandala) and Tuṣita 兜率天 (C. Doushuo Tian, J. Tosotsu Ten), and Mitsugon (which he equates to the Vajra Realm Mandala 金剛界曼荼羅). Just as the Lotus and Womb mandalas are said to be non-dual, as are body and mind, *ri* and *chi* (principle and wisdom), and so on, so too are the realms of attainment non-dual with the very heart of beings. Beings may perceive divisions, but they are provisional.¹³⁶⁴

2.4 The Matter of the Western Direction 西方事

The Pure Land is traditionally associated with the Western direction, which is commonly associated with autumn, love, desire, and compassion. Dōhan here employs a series of correspondences alternating between the different cardinal directions so as to explicate the relationality between the inner meaning of Sukhāvātī to other features of the realms of Buddhist wisdom and attainment. Here, and throughout, Dōhan employs the *Contemplation Sūtra* 觀無量壽經 (T. 365),¹³⁶⁵ and Yogācāra concepts.¹³⁶⁶

2.5 The Matter of the Innumerable [Buddha] Lands 十万億土事

Considering the vast Buddhist cosmology, wherein the universe (or, rather, “multi-verse”) is composed of an infinite number of Buddha realms in all ten directions, Dōhan suggests, however, that rather than imagining them to abide far away, this infinite cosmology is revealed to abide within the very bodies of beings themselves. Here, and in other places, Dōhan seems to be drawing upon an assumed *Avatamsaka* based vision of the interpenetrating nature of reality—unity in diversity, diversity in unity. In other words, while Dōhan does not deny the existence of

¹³⁶⁴ SAZ 2:246-247.

¹³⁶⁵ T. 365, C. *Guanwuliangshou jing*, J. *Kanmuryōju kyō*.

¹³⁶⁶ SAZ 2:247-248.

this vast cosmos, he seems to emphasize the possibility of accessing all of it through the very body-mind of beings.¹³⁶⁷

2.6 The Matter of the Forty-eight Vows 四十八願事

Here, Dōhan considers the idea that Amitābha created his Pure Land by way of the accomplishment of forty-eight vows. Drawing upon Nāgārjuna's *Shimoheyanlun* 釋摩訶衍論 (T. 1668), which, as discussed in the previous chapter, was highly influential upon Kūkai, Dōhan intimates that the forty-eight vows are in fact virtues of the mind. Dōhan here regards Nāgārjuna as a devotee of the Buddha Amitābha.¹³⁶⁸ This was a common assertion in East Asia, as the Pure Land schools came to regard Nāgārjuna as a Pure Land patriarch.

2.7 The Matter of the Sixteen Contemplation 十六想觀事

The *Sūtra of the Contemplation of the Buddha of Infinite Life* is one of the most popular texts in East Asia, and is regarded as one of the three Pure Land sutras by the Pure Land schools. This text outlines a series of sixteen steps for contemplating the Pure Land. Here, Dōhan reinscribes these steps as the sixteen great Bodhisattvas, and uses Shingon theories of the five elements, Yogācāra nine consciousnesses, the various components of the dual mandala system, and other strategies to suggest that at the completion of these Pure Land contemplations, one realizes the light of Amitābha as radiating from within oneself.¹³⁶⁹

¹³⁶⁷ SAZ 2:248.

¹³⁶⁸ SAZ 2:249.

¹³⁶⁹ SAZ 2:249-250.

2.8 The Matter of [The Buddha] Coming and Greeting [one at Death] 来迎事

In medieval Japan, a variety of deathbed practices were undertaken in order to attain a vision of the Buddha coming to greet one at the moment of death, or *raigō* 来迎. Dōhan begins this section by suggesting that the *raigō* that beings perceive at the moment of death is in fact the Buddha's light, always-already present, reflecting in the heart of beings. This section is reminiscent of Chan theories of sudden awakening as well as Tendai theories of original enlightenment. That which is perceived as a *raigō* 来迎, a celestial retinue arriving to take one to a faraway land, is here said to be the realization of the Buddhahood always-already abiding at the heart of beings.¹³⁷⁰

2.9 The Matter of the Twenty-Five Bodhisattvas 二十五菩薩事

Building upon the previous section on the *raigō*, Dōhan states that Amitābha possesses five wisdoms, which each possess five wisdoms, which he interprets as the five Buddhas of the mandala and their attendant Bodhisattvas of the four directions (5x5). The twenty-five Bodhisattvas said to accompany Amitābha's descent from the Pure Land at the moment of death are further employed to envision the six realms, the six modes of envisioning Avalokiteśvara, etc.¹³⁷¹

2.10 The Matter of the Sahā realm revealing Avalokiteśvara and Sukhāvātī to be Named as Limitless Life 娑婆示現觀世音極樂稱為無量壽之事

Elaborating on the preceding discussion of the various forms of Avalokiteśvara, Dōhan explores the relationship between the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the Buddha of Limitless

¹³⁷⁰ SAZ 2:250.

¹³⁷¹ SAZ 2:250-251.

Life, and suggests that of the vocal act of *nenbutsu* recitation within Sahā is connected with the fundamental vow of the Buddha.¹³⁷²

Fascicle Three

3.1 The Matter of the Nine Level Lotus Dias 九品蓮台事

Here, Dōhan differentiates between the revealed and inner meaning of the nine levels of the Pure Land, which is reminiscent of the end of fascicle one. Again, suggesting that while hierarchies may appear to exist, and while the Buddhist path may appear to some to take innumerable *kalpās*, in fact, as realized by the practitioner of mantra, there is no hierarchy, and the initial level of attainment is equal to the highest. Moreover, rather than casting off of the body, the mantra path emphasizes the nature of awakening as a bodily act. Dōhan also notes that while some Pure Land thinkers may exclude those who commit the five evil acts from rebirth, the *Dazhidulun* states that the *dhāraṇī piṭaka* 陀羅尼藏 (C. *duoluoni-zang*, J. *darani-zō*) alone may expunge the sins of the five evil acts. In this way, the *himitsu nenbutsu* is revealed to be the highest technology of the “Secret Piṭaka” 祕密藏 (C. *mimi-zang*, J. *himitsu-zō*), the highest teaching of the Mahāyāna. As the reader may recall, in Chapter II it was noted that there is often a sense of ambiguity between *mikkyō* (“as such”) and the diverse genres of *dhāraṇī* literature and the highly polemical concept of a Secret Piṭaka. Here, Dōhan appears to be conflating them all as essentially indicating the highest teaching of the Mahāyāna.¹³⁷³ This issue deserves further attention.

¹³⁷² SAZ 2:251.

¹³⁷³ SAZ 2:252-253.

3.2 The Matter of Exclusive Practice and Incessant Practice 專修無間修事

Drawing upon Shandao and Eikan's perspectives on constant recitation, Dōhan suggests that the very in and out breath that sustains beings' life is the true form of constant *nenbutsu* recitation. The breath is said to be the embodiment of Amitābha's name. If the Buddha truly embraces all beings, Dōhan argues, then the activity of the Buddha cannot be limited to the conscious ritual act of chanting (speech), but must necessarily pervade one's life (breath).¹³⁷⁴

3.3 The Matter of the Common Manner of Ritual Compartment 尋常行儀事

This rather lengthy passage begins with an explicit critique of the distinction between the Pure Land path and the Path of Sages. Moreover, Dōhan rejects the proposition that the *nenbutsu* should be practiced to the exclusion of all other practices. While it remains difficult to determine whether or not Dōhan is directly criticizing Hōnen, or others who were inclined towards more exclusivistic forms of practice, this passage does seem to confirm the suspicion of some scholars that Dōhan's intent in writing this text was done in order to respond to certain excesses present in the growing Pure Land "movement."

Here, Dōhan argues for the utility in orienting one's various practices, around the single practice of the *nenbutsu* and the single Buddha Amitābha, drawing upon the *Dhāraṇīsamgrahasūtra* 陀羅尼集經 (T. 901).¹³⁷⁵ Dōhan's vision of the ideal practitioner of mantra may be divided into the ten contemplative gates 十種觀門 (J. *jisshu kanmon*) and six kinds of auxiliary practice 六種助行 (J. *rokushu jogyō*).

One, through the limitless heart, the *shingon gyōnin* acquires the ability to turn all things into the practice of Dharma because one's own mind is itself Buddha. In this way, the idea of

¹³⁷⁴ SAZ 2:253-255.

¹³⁷⁵ T. 901, C. *Tuoluoni jijing*, J. *Darani jikkyō*.

choosing a single practice and limiting one's Buddhist practice to that act would make no sense, because everything can be Buddhist practice. Two, through the contemplation of equanimity 平等觀 (J. *byōdōkan*), the practitioner is able to see that their body-mind is non-dual with their object of devotion, which is itself equal to all Buddhas. In this way, the grandeur of the Buddhist vision of the cosmos is said to reside concretely in this very body. Three, the dual-mandala system allows the practitioner to realize the non-duality of a variety of supposed dualities: body/mind, man/woman, heaven/earth, etc. A note on this section discusses the attainment of *samādhi* in a dream, and the realization that mantra is but the breath of the object of devotion. Four, is the contemplation of the *gorin* 五輪, or five *chakras* (which can refer to the elements of earth 地, water 水, fire 火, wind 風, and ether 空; or the top of the head 頂輪, the face 面輪, heart 胸輪, stomach 腹輪, and knees 膝輪). Five, is the contemplation of the *gachirin* 月輪, or moon disc. Six, is the contemplation of A, said to ultimately signify the non-arising of all dharmas. Seven, is the counting of breath with contemplation/chanting of a single syllable, *A*, *Hriḥ*, etc. Here Dōhan makes an explicit reference to the practice of *zazen* 坐禪 (C. *zuochan*). Eight, is the cultivation of the inner *homa* 護摩 (J. *goma*) fire ritual. Nine, is the contemplation of the attainment of awakening in this very body. Ten, is the contemplation of the ten illusions arising from dependent origination 十緣生 (J. *jūenshō*), which Dōhan draws from the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* 大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經 (T. 848).¹³⁷⁶ These ten levels represent the pure bodhi mind, and the mantra yoga path of visualization and contemplation.

The six auxiliary practices are as follows: One, the practice of the precepts; two, *kaji* 加持 (empowerment) and contemplation; three, preaching to the beings who have taken

¹³⁷⁶ 眞言門修菩薩行諸菩薩。深修觀察十緣生句。當於眞言行通達作證。云何爲十。謂如幻。陽焰。夢。影。乾闥婆城。響。水月。浮泡。虛空華。旋火輪。(T. 848, 3c11-14).

unfortunate rebirth as well as gods and spirits of Nippon-koku 日本國, such as Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神; four, is the cultivation of gratitude for encountering the Dharma (Here, Dōhan notes in particular, the importance of cultivating gratitude for the line of Ācārya's who transmitted the secret teachings, and the various teachers who transmitted the *ken* and *mitsu* teachings.); six is the vow to remain within *saṃsāra* for the benefit of beings, and to teach the secret teachings. This is followed by a passage in praise of Kōbō Daishi Kūkai.

As mentioned in Chapter IV, Dōhan's *Compendium* is the first appearance of the *hōgō* 寶號 of Kūkai: Namu Daishi Henjō Kongō 南無大師遍照金剛 (Praise the Great Teacher, the Universally Illuminating Vajra), which is essentially a Kūkai *nenbutsu* that later Kōyasan ecclesiasts employed to supplement, and later supplant, the Amitābha *nenbutsu*. For Dōhan, however, they are employed together in the cultivation of faith.

Dōhan then argues that for the literalists (*kengyō*), the cultivation of faith is merely for beginners. However, according to Dōhan, the secret teaching reveals that the beginner's mind of faith is itself sudden awakening. This section concludes with Dōhan suggesting that despite all the diversity of approaches to the Dharma, they are all fundamentally arising from the character A, and the *upāya* 方便 (C. *fangbian*, J. *hōben*) of the Buddha.¹³⁷⁷

3.4 The Matter of Using One's Mind upon the Moment of Death 臨終用心事

The *Compendium* (SAZ edition) concludes with a discussion of deathbed ritual in which one is instructed in a variety of Amitābha and Kōbō Daishi oriented practices (mudra, mantra, mandalic visualizations, and ritual altars), etc. Here, one is instructed in the cultivation of reverence for Kōbō Daishi as a path to rebirth in the Pure Land Sukhāvātī. As should be clear by

¹³⁷⁷ SAZ 2:255-263.

now, this is not an anomaly in medieval Japan, and across Mahāyāna literature, one of the most common ways to indicate the potency of a particular practice or object of devotion was to promote it as a path to post-mortem rebirth in Sukhāvātī. The Medicine Buddha, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and here, Kōbō Daishi, have at various times been said to lead to Pure Land rebirth in Sukhāvātī. However, in the opinion of some scholars, it appears that this section may have been added on later, and may not be original to the text.¹³⁷⁸

In the SAZ edition colophon to this text, edited in 1907 (Meiji 明治 40), it states that this text is intended to delineate shallow and deep, slow and fast, superlative and lower means by which Pure Land rebirth is attained. Here, the term *kenmitsu nenbutsu* is used. I would like to suggest that the term *kenmitsu nenbutsu*, suggesting an engagement with *nenbutsu* theories across a broad range, is the “secret” meaning of the term *himitsu nenbutsu*.

Different manuscripts often contain notes at the end of each fascicle. The four manuscripts consulted for the translation of Fascicle I, contain four different endings, with excerpts, notes, or elaborations appended to the end of each fascicle. The following do not appear in the SAZ edition, but may be found in the DNBZ version. By comparing these shorter sections/additions to other texts written by Dōhan, I believe we will be able to find other pieces that may have appeared in earlier editions of this text.

¹³⁷⁸ SAZ 2:263-266.