On Kūkai’s “Mysteriously Arranged Mind”

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“Mysteriously arranged mind” (秘密莊嚴心), the tenth abode in Kūkai’s works Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron and Hizō hōyaku, represents the state of awakening of the Shingon practitioner. In this last abode, Kūkai attempts to indicate the ground common of all varieties of mind. He refers to it as a return to the primordial state of one’s mind (自心源底), which manifests in the form of an infinite number of the four kinds of maṇḍalas and the four wisdom seals. He then introduces the way of Shingon practice as a distinguishing feature of the tenth abode. Kūkai gives the reader a glimpse of the meaning of the yogic process of “mystical identification” (samaya) through the correspondences he forms in the text, such as the establishment of relationships between Sanskrit syllables and various teachings. Based on this relation, he generalizes his esoteric view on other teachings introduced in the previous abodes.

Kūkai’s tenfold model is textually based primarily on the Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhisūtra and Putixi lun (菩提心論) of the Vajraśekhara tradition. Particularly, the tenth abode of Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron has a special emphasis on the chapter Intercorrespondence with the Result of the Hundred Letters (百字果相應品) from the Mahāvairocanasūtra, whereas the tenth stage of Hizō hōyaku extensively quotes the part on “bodhicitta of esoteric samādhi” (三摩地の菩提心) of Putixi lun.

The tenth abode has a qualitatively distinct place within the model of the ten abodes, whilst at the same time it is also related to the eighth and ninth abodes. Each of these three abodes reveals another important aspect of “knowing one’s own mind as it really is” (如実知自心). All three are considered to be related to the attainment of the state of the sixth fearlessness (一切法自性平等無畏), the last step in the process of the realization of emptiness and the establishment of fully developed bodhicitta. This paper will summarize some of the distinguishing features of the tenth abode, such as the concepts of samaya and esoteric samādhi. At first, I will focus on Kūkai’s unique synthetical approach, which is most
clearly visible in the text of the tenth abode in *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron*.

1. Synthetical approach in relation to the mind and other teachings

1.1. Central to the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* is the question and answer, “What is bodhi? It is to know one’s own mind as it really is.” This phrase is also the central topic of *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron*, which Kūkai interprets from two perspectives:

This one phrase encompasses infinite meanings. Vertically, it expresses depth of [the mind] in ten layers, Horizontally, it indicates a vast number of meanings, equal to the number of grains of sand. ¹)

In order to elaborate the vertical approach that enables him to establish the model of ten stages, Kūkai uses the idea of the “evolving of the mind” (心綱生), which appears in the first chapter of the *Mahāvairocanasūtra*. This emphasis on the vertical approach is the primary focus of *Hizō hōyaku*. In relation to the horizontal approach, prominent in *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron*, Kūkai uses other chapters of the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* related to yogic practice. In the text of the tenth abode, he frequently refers to the chapter Intercorrespondence with the Result of the Hundred Letters, quoting it no less than five times. Based on this chapter, the tenth abode is defined as the state of infinite body and mind, which is qualitatively different from the previous abodes. Kūkai states:

The two vehicles of ‘the [five] aggregates only’ and of ‘eradication of karma’ know only six [kinds of] consciousness. The teachings of ‘others as object’ and ‘realizing the mind’ both indicate only eight minds, ‘The one way’ and ‘transcending no [self nature]’ both know only nine [kinds of] consciousness. *Shimohoyen lun* (釋摩詞行論) explains ten consciousnesses and the king [of sūtras] *Mahāvairocanasūtra* explains infinite minds, consciousnesses, infinite bodies, and so on. To know this utmost of the body and mind [in this way] means to realize ‘the mysteriously arranged abode’ (秘密草薈之住處). ²)

The paragraph of the *Mahāvairocanasūtra*, which Kūkai interprets as the horizontal approach to understanding of “knowing one’s own mind as it is” reads:

‘Next one seeks the state of complete enlightenment. By knowing that minds are infinite, one knows that bodies are infinite. By knowing that bodies are infinite, one knows that wisdom is infinite. By knowing that wisdom is infinite, one knows that sentient beings are infinite. By knowing that sentient beings are infinite, one knows that space is infinite.’ This is the horizontal meaning. ³)

The *Mahāvairocanasūtra* actually doesn’t explain a quantitatively infinite number of consciousnesses or an infinite number of minds but it does refer to a qualitatively infinite state of mind, body, wisdom, and so on that occurs as a result of complete awakening. There-
fore, Kūkai synthesizes the two-dimensional vertical approach that differentiates between the number of various kinds of consciousnesses, and the horizontal approach of a single infinite consciousness, thereby creating a new dimension called “the mysteriously arranged abode.” In this way, the last abode encompasses all ten kinds of consciousness, whilst at the same time maintaining its own infinity. In relation to the definition of the mind of the tenth abode, this method of combining qualitatively different aspects may be interpreted as Kūkai’s synthetical approach.

1.2. Another aspect of the synthetical approach apparent in the text of the tenth abode relates to Kūkai’s final interpretation of various teachings. It is based on establishing a mystical correspondence between Sanskrit syllables and various teachings, again theoretically placed in the context of the chapter of *Intercorrespondence with the Result of the Hundred Letters*. This chapter, namely, refers to the attainment of bodhi, attained through the recitation and meditation on the “mantra which shines everywhere with one hundred light rays” (百光遍照真言), which is the syllable *Am*. All knowledge (on various infinities) emanates from the mantra itself. Kūkai quotes the beginning of the chapter related to entering into the state of three *samaya*, which is the core of the Shingon teaching. It says:

If one enters ‘the stage of the great wisdom initiation’ of the enlightened world-honored one, he will himself realize and abide in the state of three *samaya*. 4)

Kūkai doesn’t specifically mention the syllable *Am*, but instead uses this context to introduce the mantra teachings on the basis of the twenty-nine Sanskrit syllable gates (二十九の字門) from the second chapter of the *Mahāvairocanasūtra*. 5) In this way, he identifies the attainment of bodhi with the knowledge of the twenty-nine syllables. The list of the twenty-nine syllable gates in the *Mahāvairocanasūtra* indicates that the total of all the syllables and words arising from them cannot be ascertained (*anupalabdha*), as they all ultimately come from the syllable *a*, which represents original non-arising. The sūtra states:

What is the Shingon (mantra) teaching? The teaching (gate) of the syllable ‘a’, because all phenomena are originary unarisen (*anutpāda*). The teaching of the syllable ‘ka’, because activity of all phenomena (kārya) cannot be ascertained. The teaching of the syllable ‘kha’, because all phenomena, such as space, cannot be ascertained. … The teaching of the syllable ‘sa’ (satya), because no truth can be ascertained in all phenomena. The teaching of the syllable ‘ha’ (*hetu*), because the causes cannot be ascertained in all phenomena. 6)

Within the context of the ten abodes, syllables are very important for Kūkai, as he identifies them with different Buddhist teachings. For example, in the text of the seventh abode,
Kūkai correlates the syllable Ma with great emptiness, the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, and the teaching of Sanlun (三論). In the same way, these twenty-nine syllables represent entrances to different teachings (dharmaparyāyas). Kūkai mentions twelve transformations (十二轉) of each syllable out of which the four syllables (the first two and the last two) always indicate the initial mind of awakening (発心), the stage(s) of practice (行), the realization of bodhi (證) and the entrance to Buddhahood (入), respectively. For Kūkai, although any teachings based on words and their combinations, are unobtainable and empty, they can nonetheless heal certain illnesses and bring a practitioner to Buddhahood. In the latter part of the text, Kūkai refers to the possible combinations of syllables, which lead to a number exceeding ten thousand. This suggests that whatever number of syllable combinations exist, they all form the samādhi and dhāraṇī gates of deities, and manifest various exoteric and esoteric teachings. With such reasoning, Kūkai expands his approach, developed in previous abodes, to reveal that all the teachings are essentially and practically equal.

Kūkai assigns to the mind of the tenth abode, particularly to its expression in the form of dharmamāṇḍala, the knowledge of the twenty-nine syllables and their implications in relation to the other teachings. Although through the samādhis of different deities Shingon teaching embraces other Buddhist teachings, it distinguishes itself from all others by replacing common language with the language of mantras. Similar to that described in 1.1, but now in a different context, Kūkai’s synthetical approach builds up the tenth abode in such a way that it encompasses all other teachings, maintaining at the same time its own qualitatively different dimension. Samaya, esoteric samādhi and the practice of the three mysterious activities (三密行) are the key words for the tenth abode.

2. Esoteric samādhi and the state of samaya

Kūkai defines the infinite body and mind attained at “the mysterious inexhaustibly arranged abode” (秘密無盡莊嚴之住處) in terms of the four kinds of maṇḍalas.

Mahāvairocaranāsūtra clarifies the realm of such infinite bodies of four kinds of maṇḍala and benefits of Buddha’s teaching. This is mysteriously arranged, inexhaustible realm.

Seeing the world and one’s own existence in terms of maṇḍalas represents a cognitive change appearing for the practitioner of this esoteric method. It is a result of replacing the old static identity with a dynamic changing of roles, which, within the context of the
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Shingon teaching, corresponds to an identification with maṇḍala deities. This process of perceiving oneself and other practitioners of any time, as the only deities that could ever existed, takes place in “this very body” (即身), after all obstructions have been removed, to the great astonishment of the practitioner himself. 11)

In Sokushin jōbutsu gi, Kūkai explains that awakening in “this very body” is possible because of the principle of the interconnectedness of all bodies, specifically, Buddha bodies and the bodies of sentient beings, illustrated by the simile of Indra’s net. Within this context, Kūkai introduces the “mantra of nonobstruction of three equals”, which is actually the vīdyā called “entry into the Buddhas’ samaya” (入佛三昧耶持明) that is quoted in the second chapter of the Mahāvairocanasūtra:

“Asame trisame samaye svāhā”. 12)

As one of the explanations of trisame, Kūkai mentions equality of the mind, Buddhas, and sentient beings. This identity of the three is essential for theoretical and practical aspects of Kūkai’s teaching. One of the sources for this premise is the Huayan view that “mind, Buddhas and sentient beings, these three are without distinction” (心仏及眾生是三無差別). 13) The mantra “entry into the Buddhas’ samaya” stands as the representative mantra for the whole system of esoteric practice. Kūkai mentions it in the tenth abode as well. If one can concentrate on it, one can immediately realize identity with the Buddha.

The state of samaya is often translated into Chinese as “equality” (平等) 14), but actually it has a wider meaning. More profoundly, it refers to the method of “mystical identification” of the practitioner with a reality based on some concrete thing or image. It refers to the process of reaching a state of unity and has a similar meaning to the term yoga. 15) The esoteric method described in the Mahāvairocanasūtra is based on the process of samaya, which is, for the purpose of relating to it, divided into three aspects, as samaya of the body, speech and mind. The name of the tenth abode “mysteriously arranged mind” is based on Śubhākarasimha’s interpretation of the state of the “inexhaustible adorned treasury of the samaya of the body, speech and mind” (身語意平等無尽莊嚴藏) displayed by Buddha in front of his audience before exposing the teaching of the Mahāvairocanasūtra. “Arranged” (莊嚴) refers to the samaya of the three mysterious activities (三密) of the body, speech and mind of the practitioner, which come into intercorrespondence (相応) or “perfect alignment” with the three mysterious activities of the deity in the esoteric samādhi. After realization of identity based on the process of samaya, there is no longer a search for an
ideal state. When one is in the state of alignment with one’s original mind, all things come to be in the perfect position just as they are. This refers to the “mysteriously arranged mind”, which is actually the practical and ultimate realization of “knowing one’s own mind as it really is” (如実知自心).

Kūkai’s understanding of samaya is very close to the meaning of “esoteric samādhi” and specifically refers to the term “nyūga ganyū” (入我入), a phrase he coined by himself. The whole of the tenth stage of Hīzō hōyaku is a quotation on esoteric samādhi found in Putixi lun. Through the realization of samādhis of different deities, all of the principles and teachings of the previous abodes are actualized in the tenth abode.

3. Conclusion

Kūkai’s method of combining elements of a different nature and thereby obtaining an outcome of a new quality was considered in relation to his approach to the mind of the tenth abode and to his view on other teachings. This synthetical approach comprises in itself a mystical aspect as it calls for certain degree of understanding of the experiential reality that is beyond the descriptive realm of the words. If one does not understand the fact that Kūkai points to the non-dualistic experience at the tenth abode as the result of Shingon practice, then his mystical approach, visible in various examples in the text of the tenth abode may sometimes seem to be oversimplified or even illogical. I find it is necessary to outline Kūkai’s way of reasoning, which I have termed his “synthetical approach”, in order to understand his perspective as written from an esoteric point of view. The actual state of “the mysteriously arranged mind” is the state of practicing samādhi, which is the reason why the concise text of Hīzō hōyaku quotes the respective part of Putixi lun in its entirety. For Kūkai, samādhi refers to the state of trisamaya, the concept brought to attention in Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron. Through the process of experiencing the realization of emptiness at the eighth abode, thereby opening the place for the manifestation of suchness at the ninth abode, and finally experiencing the mystical process of samaya at the tenth abode, one can attain the dynamic position in the four kinds of mandalas, which characterizes the state of “awakening in this very body”.

1) Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron, Teihon kōbō daishi zenshū (定本弘法大師全集 2. 秘密曼荼羅十住心論) (hereafter abbreviated as TZ.) 2, Kōyasan 1993, pp.307-308.
2) TZ.2, p.308.
3) Ibid. Quotation is from T.18, p.40b.
4) Ibid.
6) T18:10ab. TZ.2,pp.310-312.
7) In a similar way, he relates the syllable Sa to the “truth of all dharmas” and to the teaching of Tiantai. Ka is related to Huayan teaching, and A to Faxiang teaching. TZ.2, pp.238, 257, 271, 295.
8) TZ.2, p.310.
9) TZ.2, p.323.
10) TZ.2, p.311.
11) One of the characterizations of the state of samaya is astonishment. See fn. 14.
12) TZ. 3, p.28.
14) Subhākarasiripha refers to the four meanings of the word samaya – equality (平等), vows (本誓), eliminating obstacles (除障) and astonishment (驚覚). He also states that the gateway of samaya (平等法門) is the main meaning of the Mahāvairocanasūtra, T18:583a.

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