

## The Cave and The Womb World

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### THE CAVE AND THE WOMB WORLD

This paper attempts to delineate the different significance of a contemporary Japanese rite for women and men. It tries to show how women and men experience the rite uniquely because the symbolism of the ritual interacts in vastly different ways with their separate and differing psychological structures. One of the conclusions reached in this investigation is that the meaning of ritual frequently must be explained in terms of the gender of the participants.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first is given a description of the rite of ascending the cave at the Oku no In peak of the Ōmine-san Shugendō site. The second section considers the history of this rite and the nexus of religious ideas it invokes. The third section focuses on the central psychological motif of the ritual, a return to the womb, and shows how the psychological significance of this motif differs for women and men. A fourth section presents the conclusions reached in this attempt to depict the meanings of the ritual.

This essay concerns the ritual ascent of Ōmine-san, a sacred mountain in Nara Prefecture. Ōmine is an important site for Shugendō, the cult of sacred mountains. Actually, Ōmine is the name not of a single mountain, but of a chain

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of mountains stretching from Kumano to Yoshino. In this area there are seventy-five *nabiki*, traditional sites designated for the practice of asceticism by the *yamabushi* ("mountain ascetics"). That half of the Ōmine area centering on Kumano is identified with the Womb World, while the Yoshino half is identified with the Diamond World. This mapping of the mandala of esoteric Buddhism onto actual geography is a loose set of correspondences; it is not that each of the many compartments of the mandala is linked to specific spots in the Ōmine territory. In these mountains there are more than sixty caves, and legend has it that the founder of Shugendō, En no Gyōja, practiced asceticism in the dank recesses of one of them for three years. This cave, which cannot be positively identified with any of the sixty caves, is believed to have been a three-tiered cavern in which the first level represented the Pure Land, the second the Womb World, and the third the Diamond World (Miyake 1978, pp.80-93).

H. Byron Earhart summarizes the *yamabushi*'s inspiration for performing asceticism in the mountains as the belief that "one can become a Buddha or equal to a Buddha by practice of mountain retreats combined with rituals" (Earhart 1970, p.2). Caves acquired a special importance for the *yamabushi* as places where it is possible to absorb the maximum spiritual power of the mountain and the deities who dwell there. Orikuchi holds that ascetics chose winter for their cave rites because of winter's close connection with motifs of purification. Purifying themselves of pollution, they entered the grottos in a state maximally capable of imbibing new powers. Miyake adds that since the *kami* are believed to pass the winter in the mountains in a state of semi-hibernation, if the *yamabushi* performs asceticism in the caves in that season, he may absorb the powers of the *kami* (Miyake 1978, pp.115-118).

Loosely affiliated with Shugendō orders are a number of informal confraternities (*kō*, *kōsha*), dedicated to the annual ascent of Japan's numerous sacred mountains. These societies host a pilgrimage for all members to the mountain

revered by the particular group once a year, and members ascend its peaks in the established order of worshiping at many small shrines along the route. Male members wear yamabushi attire or a white *happi* coat over white trousers, and women generally adopt the latter style. Usually men and women are separated along the route of march as well as in sleeping and dining facilities in those *kō* which have both female and male members. Through arrangements with the mountain's principal temple, the confraternity may sponsor group ritual within temple precincts or be assisted in ritual by temple personnel, including priests and acolytes. In June of 1982 I participated in the annual ascent of Ōmine-san with the Tsuruhashi Yamanashi-kō, a Japanese-led confraternity, which is based in Osaka and includes many members of the Korean minority in Japan.

This assembly of the Yamanashi-kō lasted two days and included roughly one hundred sixty persons, of whom about fifty-five (34 percent) were Koreans, forty-five women and ten men. There were ninety-five Japanese men and ten Japanese women. The *kō*'s leadership is entirely Japanese. Its eldest member is a Korean woman of seventy-one who ascended the mountain for the eighteenth consecutive occasion that year. Most of the female Korean members were making their second or third trip, and all reported that they had entered the *kō* through the recommendation of a Korean friend, usually an associate from one of many Korean temples in the Osaka area. No one can remember when or in what circumstances Koreans first joined the Yamanashi-kō beyond the recollection that their participation was notable even before World War II.

The entire group assembled at Osaka's Tennōji station at 6:30 a.m. and boarded a specially reserved train. From the beginning seating arrangements were made by the Japanese leadership to separate Koreans from Japanese. The train arrived at the foot of the mountain around 8:30 a.m., and from there we boarded buses. In principle the rules of mountain worship prescribe complete separation of men and women from this point on, but this desideratum conflicted

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with that of maintaining a separation between Koreans and Japanese. The solution finally reached was to put all the Koreans and myself in one bus, and to treat as equivalent for the purpose of ascending to the Ryūsenji temple Japanese men, Japanese women, and Korean men.

The Korean women discussed this blatant discrimination against them rather heatedly and surmised that the Japanese women were at the bottom of it, not wanting to come near noisy garlic eaters. The same explanation arose again when it was discovered that Korean women were to be housed in a smaller, less attractive inn than the Japanese women, who were treated as honorary males and housed with the men.

After lunch at the inn, the men departed to climb the main peak, while both Korean women and Japanese women set out for a lower peak, the Oku no In. Women are not allowed to climb the main peak. With the wife of the Japanese leader of the confraternity at the head, all the women walked to the trailhead, stopping to offer incense and candles at Shinto shrines along the way. In these devotional acts as well as in attire and decorum, the Korean women followed Japanese practice entirely. In spite of the energetic use of Shinto to colonize their homeland prior to 1945, they bowed piously and clapped before the shrines. Similarly, they also accepted the Japanese practice of barring women from the main peak, lest the foul pollution of a female body offend the mountain deity.

In the view of the Japanese leadership, the main object of female participation in the confraternity is to have them climb to the Oku no In, there to ascend a vertical shaft cave. Legend has it that this is the cave where the legendary founder of Japanese mountain worship, En no Gyōja, practiced austerities for three years.

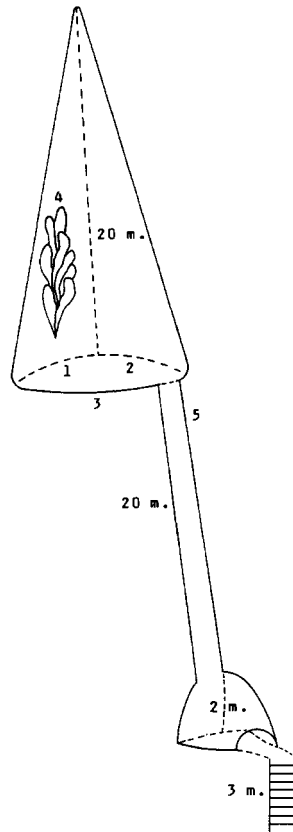
To reach the opening of the cave, a gaping hole high up in the rock wall, one climbs for about two hours along the steep path, finally entering the mouth by a swinging steel ladder. When all fifty-five women had struggled up to the cave opening, we were led in recitation of the Heart

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Sutra by two acolytes from Ryūsenji; one of them led the way into the cave.

Climbing ten feet or so to reach the entrance, it is necessary to crawl through a narrow, muddy passageway into the first chamber. Here one is suddenly enveloped in icy air. This chamber is the opening to a vertical shaft of perhaps twenty meters, which is ascended by climbing horizontal steel bars pinned to the rock. The passageway is only large enough for one person to pass at a time, and a single misstep on the rusty bars would bring all crashing down in a helpless crush. Sensing the danger, the women stuck candles into crevices in the rock and cried out the Japanese pilgrims' proclamation of repentance, "Rokkon shōjō!" ("Purify the six roots!"), as they inched up the shaft. Fear and claustrophobia held all in their grip as freezing, putrid drops falling from the recesses above evoked startled cries. Finally we squeezed our way out of the shaft and into the second chamber of the cave (Figure 1). Now twenty meters above the first

Fig. 1: Cutaway view of Oku no In cave



1. Altar for 8 Naga Kings
2. Altar for Acala
3. Altar for En no Gyōja
4. Stalactite representing 8 Naga Kings
5. Shaft ascended by bars

chamber, the second had the shape of a tetrahedron, with a small altar at each wall of the triangular base. These enshrined Acala, En no Gyōja, and the Eight Naga Kings.

Above the latter altar on the cave wall, a massive stalactite of fantastic, undulating shape represented the Naga Kings. Pitch-black except for votive candles, the chamber rose to a pinnacle some twenty meters or so above us. At the very top was a pinhole of light. Inside the air was frigid as all the women set fistfuls of incense and candles alight on the altars. Soon the sweet smoke was almost overpowering as all fifty-five women crowded into the triangular cavern no more than ten feet on a side. We recited the Heart sutra before the altar of Acala, then climbed down the tunnel and out into the light again.

Much has been written on Shugendō's rites of rebirth, achieved by climbing into mountains defined as a cosmic mandala, the Womb World (*Garbhakosa dhātu*) of esoteric Buddhism, there to undertake difficult austerities. (See, for example, Swanson 1981). For the male ascetic, the focus is upon re-emergence from this womb, "reborn" in the sense of being newly endowed with esoteric knowledge and powers. The rite of ascending into the cave at Oku no In partakes of this motif of a return to the womb, of clawing one's way into its deepest recesses to return to the original source of all life, to acquire knowledge and wisdom. The darkness and the intermittent ablutions by the secretions of the rock add a perceptual reality that tremendously heightens the visceral dimension of the experience. In the case of women participants, however, there is a self-referential quality that is alien to males.

The ritual ascent of the Oku no In cave performed by the women of the Tsuruhashi Yamanashi-kō is a much abbreviated version of a rite which in former times would have been performed by male ascetics as part of a longer series of rites ranging over the seventy-five *nabiki* of the Ōmine-san area. In order to fully understand the significance of the ascent of the cave, it is necessary to examine

the context of the rites and the ideas on which they are based. That consideration is the task of the next section.

#### THE NEXUS OF RELIGIOUS IDEAS

This section traces the history of religious ideas associated with the rites under consideration here. Those ideas have to do most importantly with sacred mountains and the religious powers and other benefits believed to be available through spiritual training in the mountains. Studies of Japanese religions have often remarked on the importance of sacred mountains for all branches of Japanese religions: Buddhism and Shinto as well as Shugendō. It is well known that the most important motifs are (1) the mountain as the dwelling place of divinities and ancestors; (2) the mountain as the other world; (3) the mountain as the source of agricultural fertility; (4) in Shugendō, the mountain as the geographical representation of sacred geography—as the Diamond World and the Womb World. In outlining these central ideas here, this paper makes no pretense of novelty, but instead seeks only to put these well-known facts before the reader as part of the context of the rituals examined here. We may review the most important facts concisely.

Mountains are regarded as the abode of divinities and ancestors. That this is so may be seen in folk rites in which at Bon people ascend a mountain to greet the ancestors and escort them back to their homes for the period of time they are believed to return to the human world to be with their descendants. Numerous tales attest to a meeting with divinities in the mountains, and all of Japan's sacred mountains have on their slopes small shrines dedicated to numerous kami and Buddhist figures (Hori 1968, pp.141-179).

That the mountains are regarded as the Other World given visible, geographical form is evidenced by such phenomena as the Sai no Kawara, on Osorezan in Aomori Prefecture. This naturally desolate place, a treeless expanse of gravel and stones atop a mountain, is believed to represent the riverbed where children who have died

must spend their days uselessly piling up stones, only to have them swept away again. Their only consolation is the merciful Bodhisattva Jizō (Ksitigarbha), who ministers to them out of compassion. There are numerous other examples of rites and beliefs which show that the mountains are regarded as the other world (Hori 1968, pp.170-174).

The *yama no kami*, often understood to be a female deity, is the best example of the way in which the mountains are regarded as the source of agricultural fertility. The mountain god is transported in some parts of Japan to the fields in the plains in the spring, there to become the *ta no kami*, or the kami of the rice fields. This coincides with spring rains, running down to the fields from the mountains with their melting snows, thus bringing life to the world of plants (Hori 1968, pp.150-151).

Buddhist esotericism has identified specific mountains with the Womb World and the Diamond World, congruent with the mandala of the same names. Direct experience of the non-difference or unity of the two is equated with a realization of emptiness. Such a realization is the key factor in attaining Buddhahood in this life: *sokushin jō-butsum*. The esoteric practitioner is to enter into the world of the mandala first through initiation, progressing through its separate houses. In so doing he absorbs into himself the qualities of the separate figures of the mandala in their characteristic forms, various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Identifying himself perfectly with these aspects of emptiness, he progresses towards a full realization at an experiential level of this truth beyond reason (Tajima 1959, p.3).

These four motifs concerning sacred mountains are part of the background of religious ideas informing the performance of ritual at Ōmine-san. It is to the history of those ideas in that more specific context that we turn next.

**Asian cave rites.** Cave rites of a generally Buddhist coloration are known throughout Asia. To say that they



partake of the motif of rebirth is true in a general way, but it is necessary to qualify that statement considerably if we wish to articulate correctly a Buddhist interpretation of these rites.

In the case of Buddhist rites, one cannot assume that rites in caves have as their goal a simple repetition of the birth process. This is so because birth is not unambiguously a "good thing" in the Buddhist world of thought. Birth is yet another beginning of the whole round of karma, attachment, suffering, death, and endless repetitions of this series. This being the case, in Buddhist rites we must inquire more closely as to the precise character and intent of any given ritual.

Francois Bizot examines Buddhist cave rites in Cambodia and shows that rites of rebirth in caves effect a symbolic reconstitution of the initiate as a New Man, who henceforth need not experience death. These rites at "la grotte de la naissance" (*raan prasut*) are performed by groups of lay Buddhists and include also a more esoteric component for monks. Similar rites of rebirth from caves are reported from several other Cambodian cave sites. They consist in symbolically making a new body by means of a return to the womb. The period of tellurian incubation aims at giving the initiate new powers (Bizot 1980).

The lay pilgrimage to this Cavern of Rebirth at Phnom Sampau in Battambang begins with making offerings for the monks' rainy season retreat. On this occasion pilgrims experience collective trance. The woman of the sponsoring household kneels to receive the tutelary deity of the region, the "Lady of the Perfumed Hair," a figure central to the myth of origin of the cave which is the pilgrims' destination. The possession occurs, and with that the Lady of the Perfumed Hair is present in the body of the medium. Her main responsibility is to confer a blessing of safety upon the taxi drivers who will convey the pilgrims to the mouth of the cave. Arriving there after a colorful procession, the pilgrims are led into the cave by an old monk, a "master," (*acary*), who "opens the road" for them by casting

water to the four directions (Bizot 1980, pp.230-236).

The cave is a labyrinth of chambers and passageways. Before a Buddha statue enshrined inside the cavern, the master admonishes the pilgrims to be mindful of the gravity of their next action: entering the "golden door" of the mother's womb. He reveals to his charges the syllables A RAHAM, which they must chant ceaselessly. Passing through several chambers, they eventually arrive at one where a lustrous stalactite hangs above a pool of clear water. The master explains that they are now in the center of the womb, where the embryo sucks water from the mother, clasping the "umbilical cord," the stalactite. The calcineous rock in pastel colors glistening with moisture gives a sense of the body's interior as the master washes the face of each pilgrim in the pool. They light incense and recite prayers as a prelude to meditation. After silent meditation in the cave for about an hour, the pilgrims emerge. The mater proclaims:

We have entered this cave and acquired great merit, because it is the womb of the August Mother (*garbh brah mata*). The orifice is the Golden Door. Entering it to practice ascesis, we have returned to the maternal womb. Thus we have been born anew. Repent for having sullied the August Mother! (Bizot 1980, pp.237-239).

Besides pilgrims' rites, some Cambodian monks enter these caves to soak their faces in "the amniotic well" and to clasp the "umbilical cord" poised above the pool. They practice visualization meditations in which they cause an image of the Buddha seated upon the throne of illumination to appear. The meditator suppresses the breath and forces it down into his body. These practices are unrelated to the motif of the return to the womb per se. Instead, the meditator hopes to recapture the conditions of the embryo *in utero*, but without symbolically repeating the birth process. Instead, these practices refer more specifically to the process of gestation. Gestation is represented in breathing

exercises, the specific moments of which are correlated with steps in the creation of the world (Bizot 1980, pp.240-242).

Creation texts speak of fashioning a personalized embodiment of Dhamma, on the model of the Purusa myth. The text begins with an invocation of Buddha. As the Body's parts are enumerated, they are correlated to the creation of water, earth, fire, wind, and ether, the Five Elements. At the instigation of a deity called Brah Kev, the figure Buddhagun created primal waters, land, and virtues. Concentrating on the letters BUDDHA YA of Dhamma, he created a primal man, with powers of speech, sight, and hearing, but lacking a conscience. Further stages in the creation of the Dhamma-Being parallel the development of the fetus. Here the candidate is transformed, first by a symbolic substitution of organs and viscera which are those of the primal being. Further, he is imbued with new qualities (*gun*) which cause him to transcend the human condition (Bizot 1980, pp.224-228).

Thus in retreating to caves for meditations upon the gestation of the human embryo, the meditator creates himself as Dhamma-Being. This autogenesis is the transformation he seeks in the Womb Cave. Far from a simple motif of rebirth, the meditator seeks the extinction of thirst for sensual objects which can only be attained through a ritual death and reconstitution. Thus the aim is not rebirth as such, but to take possession of a new body, to pass from a mortal to an immortal existence, thus breaking the chain of mundane births and deaths (Bizot 1980, pp.256-257).

The significance of Buddhist cave rites seems likely to involve something more complicated than the word rebirth alone implies. The Cambodian rites just examined illustrate well the complex interplay of mythic motifs and doctrinal concerns which preclude unambiguous approval of yet another birth. In Shugendō, the most immediate point of reference for the ascent of the Oku no In cave, we find a similar complexity. The main focus of Shugendō ritual is the mountains themselves. To unearth their doctrinal con-

tent, it is necessary to refer to the doctrines, rites, and concepts of esoteric Buddhism, which inspire Shugendō's initiatory rites. Let us examine three components of the system: the *abhiseka* ceremony, the Womb World mandala, and the idea of attaining Buddhahood in this existence.

We will begin with a consideration of the Womb World mandala, more properly speaking, the Mākarunāgarbhamandala (Japanese: *daizōkai mandara*). The word *mandala* has the meaning of a circle, that which is circular, a disk, a halo, a group, and in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, Taishō No. 848 (Japanese: *Dainichikyō*), the specifically esoteric meaning of that which gives life to all Buddhas, something which causes one to be born. The Shingon school recognizes several types of mandala, which Kūkai understood as complementary representations. The purpose of utilizing mandala of elements (*daimandara*), of attributes (*sammaya mandara*), mandala in relief or free-standing sculpture (*karma mandala*), or letter symbols (*bija mandara*) is the realization of Buddhahood in this life: *sokushin jōbutsu*. It is to be understood that such a realization takes place through grades of initiation in *abhiseka* (Japanese: *kanjō*) (Tajima 1959, p.33-41).

The Womb World mandala illustrates the doctrines of the *Dainichikyō*, and its use is paired with that of the Diamond World mandala, which illustrates the doctrines of the *Sarva-tathāgatatattvasamgraha-sūtra* (Taishō No. 865), abbreviated in Japanese as the *Kongōchōgyō*, the second great sutra of the Shingon school. Together one speaks of the paired mandala as the *ryōbu mandara* and of the paired scriptures as the *ryōbu daikyō*. The principal doctrine of the *Dainichikyō* is that all the virtues of Dainichi (Mahāvairocana) are inherent in us and in all sentient beings. The Womb World mandala represents the perspective of the beings destined to attain Buddhahood, whereas the Diamond World mandala represents the perspective of the Buddha (Tajima 1959, p.47).

The meaning of the Womb World mandala is explained through a double metaphor of a lotus and the womb. The

process by which meditation upon the Womb World mandala causes the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*; Japanese: *bodaishin*) to arise is explained through comparison to a fecund womb which nurtures the aspiration. The development of this aspiration is likened to the progress of the lotus from seed to full bloom or to the gestation and eventual birth of a human embryo. The end result is the attainment of Buddhahood in this life (Tajima 1959, pp.47, 55).

These ideas are appropriated by Shugendō when it designates a sacred mountain as a representation of the Womb or Diamond World. In the ritual with which we are concerned here, the Oku no In cave is understood as a representation of the Womb World. Thus to practice asceticism in the mountains is to enter the Womb World with the intent of so transforming oneself as to attain Buddhahood in this life.

Since the aim is to be transformed into a Buddha, it is necessary to traverse the "Ten Worlds." These are explained as ten kinds of asceticism (*shugyō*). Although the full set of ten rites is rarely performed nowadays, it is appropriate to specify them in order to locate the provenance of the Oku no In rites more exactly (Miyake 1978, p.140).

In Shugendō, each of the ten worlds enumerated in Buddhism on the basis of Chih-I's system is paired with a ritual propelling the initiate closer to the goal of attaining Buddhahood in this life.<sup>1</sup> The first world is hell, *jigoku*. In this stage the initiate performs the rite called *tokozume*. He visualizes himself as Dainichi. Cutting himself in five places, he assigns one syllable of Dainichi's mantra to each cut. In the second world, that of the *preta*, or "hungry ghosts," the initiate repents (*zange*). In full prostrations before the leader, the *sendatsu*, he confesses his sins. The third world is the world of beasts (*chikushō*). Here, in a rite called *gobyō*, a rope is tied to the initiate's hands, and

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1. The order of ritual is described differently in different ritual manuals, but the following description gives a basic outline of the system.

he is hoisted off the ground to weigh his sins.

In the fourth world of the *asura*, the initiate practices *mizudachi*, abstinence from drinking water or washing the head. The fifth world is the human realm (*nin-gen*), and here the initiate performs a rite called *aka*. The initiate draws water and brings special wood to the *sendatsu*. The *sendatsu* exchanges the initiate's headgear for the *yama-bushi*'s characteristic black pill box hat, the *tokin*, and washes the hands and face of the initiate. The *sendatsu* also teaches the initiate the secret letters of *Dainichi*. In the sixth, or heavenly realm, (*ten*), the initiates engage in *sumō* and wrestle with each other.

In the seventh world of the *Sravaka* (*shōmon*), the initiates dance with fans in either hand, in a rite called *ennen*. The eighth world is that of the *Pratyekya* Buddhas (*dokkaku*). Here the initiates undergo the rite of *kogi*, wherein each takes a black and white piece of wood in hand and places them on the altar before the *sendatsu*. Later these are ceremonially burned in a *goma* ceremony, and this symbolizes the funeral of the initiate, extinguishing the passions. The ninth realm is that of the *Bodhisattvas* (*bosatsu*), and here the initiate practices abstinence from cereals for seven days in order to transform the body for the final rite.

The tenth world is that of the Buddhas (*butsu*), and the rite is *abhiseka*, (*kanjō*). After preparatory rites of repentance, the initiates' heads are sprinkled with water, and they are taught mantra and mudra. Here they attain certain proof of their attainment of *sokushin jōbutsu*, Buddhahood in this existence (Miyake 1978, p.140).

Thus *Shugendō* appropriates to its ritual framework the idea of the Womb World mandala, mapping it onto actual geographical sites, there symbolically to enact a transversing of the ten worlds, ending in the attainment of Buddhahood in this life. That final attainment is ritually enacted in the *kanjō* rite. This rite has Indian origins and takes place there upon a mandala specially constructed for the purpose over a period of seven days. In the *Guhyatantra*

(Taishō No. 897) the manner of constructing that mandala and of conducting the *abhiseka* ceremony is explained.

Both the enthronement of kings and the consecration of disciple by master take place before this altar set out upon the earth. On the first day the master, having asked for the protection of the earth gods, works the earth to the consistency of powder to remove stones and debris. The earth is mixed with cow dung and urine which have never before touched the earth. On the second day the site is consecrated by burying in it precious objects. On the third day twenty-four vases of flowers are arranged, and the placement of various divinities is determined. On the fourth day the site is purified by aspersion, and sandalwood powder is poured to sketch the mandala of nine great Buddhas. On the fifth day the mantra of Acala is recited to rid the site of all obstacles and to bless the earth. On the sixth day the master blesses the disciple to allow him to enter the mandala. Finally, on the seventh day, the master invokes all the divinities of the earth and carries out the anointing of the disciple. Following the ceremony, the mandala is destroyed (Tajima 1959, pp.45-47).

Kūkai's idea of attaining Buddhahood in this very existence is the culmination of his thought. Apparently Kūkai reached the conclusion that such an attainment is possible in his mid-forties, when he wrote the *Sokushin jōbutsu-gi* ("Attaining enlightenment in this very Existence"; Hakeda 1972, p.87). To explain why this attainment is possible, it is necessary to review Kūkai's understanding of Mahāvairocana. His most innovative proposition equates Mahāvairocana with the Dharmakaya. Kūkai reworked the traditional theory of the three bodies of Buddha (*trikaya*), adding a fourth element. Each of the four is in fact a form of the Dharmakaya, and in addition to absorbing the distinctions of the traditional theory into the Dharmakaya, asserts that the Dharmakaya in Emanation (*toru hosshin*) underlies the existence of sentient beings in sub-human realms. This being the case, Dharmakaya (Mahāvairocana) pervades all existence and is not separate from any single existence

(Hakeda 1972, pp.82-83).

Another way of considering Mahāvairocana is as the unification of Wisdom (symbolized by the *vajra*) and Principle (symbolized by the lotus). The unity of Wisdom and Principle constitutes inherent enlightenment (*honnō hongaku*). If Mahāvairocana pervades all existences and is also originally enlightened, then it must be that all beings share this quality. That is why it is possible for all sentient beings to attain enlightenment. They have the seed already within them. The problem is one of germinating the seed. Kūkai explains how this is possible in his famous two stanzas that are the core of the *Sokushin jōbutsu-gi*. Of these lines the first and third are the most important (Hakeda 1972, pp.85-87).

(1) *Rokudai wa muge ni shite tsune ni yuga nari.* [The six Great Elements are interfused and are in a state of eternal *samadhi*].

(3) *Sammitsu kaji sureba sokushitsu ni arawaru.* [When I sanctify myself by the three mysteries, the Three Mysteries in me are revealed].<sup>2</sup>

The first line consists of two propositions. First, Mahāvairocana consists of the six elements earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness. In other words, Mahāvairocana is the totality of all physical and mental elements. These elements are constantly changing and are inextricably interrelated. Second, Mahāvairocana or the Six Great Elements are in a constant state of *yuga*, or *samadhi*. Thus any being desiring to unite with Mahāvairocana should practice meditation, thereby reaching harmony with the Dharmakaya through *samadhi* (Hakeda 1972, pp.88-90).

The third line of Kūkai's stanza explains esoteric practice. The Three Mysteries are the Body, Speech, and Mind of Mahāvairocana. When the Three Mysteries of

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2. This translation is quite literal. For another interpretation, see Hakeda 1972, p.88. Also see Tajima 1959, p.248.



Mahāvairocana are aligned with the body, speech, and mind of a being through meditation, there will be a mystic fusing of Mahāvairocana and that being through *kaji*, which Kūkai explains thus:

[*Kaji*] indicates great compassion on the part of the Tathagata and faith (*shinjin*) on the part of sentient beings. The compassion of the Buddha pouring forth on the heart of sentient beings, like the rays of the sun on water, is called *ka* (adding), and the heart of sentient beings which keeps hold of the compassion of the Buddha, as water retains the rays of the sun, is called *ji* (retaining) (Hakeda 1972, p.92).

The full permeating by Mahāvairocana of the being causes the Three Mysteries of the Dharmakaya to be fully manifest in the being, a state of enlightenment in this very existence.

While this discussion has adopted the perspective of the being seeking to attain the enlightened state, other viewpoints are possible. Kūkai expresses one such in the following poem, which brings us closer again to the perspective of Shugendō:

The Three Mysteries pervade the entire Universe,  
Adoring gloriously the mandala of infinite space.  
Being painted by brushes of mountains, by ink of  
oceans,  
Heaven and earth are the bindings of a sutra revealing  
the Truth  
Reflected in a dot are all things in the universe;  
Contained in the data of senses and mind is the sacred  
book.  
It is open or closed depending on how we look at it.  
Both His silence and His eloquence make incisive  
tongues numb....  
The sun and the moon shine forth in space and on the  
water,  
Undisturbed by gales in the atmosphere.  
Both good and evil are relative in His preaching

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The notion of I and thou will be erased and lost.  
When the sea of our mind becomes serene through  
samadhi and insight,  
He reveals himself unconditionally as water overflows.  
(Hakeda 1972, p.91).

#### MEANINGS OF THE RITUAL

The ritual ascent of the Oku no In cave is divided into five parts: (1) climbing the path, (2) entering the mouth, (3) climbing the shaft, (4) offerings and sutra recitation inside the second chamber, and (5) the descent.

Climbing the path up the mountain marks a separation from the mundane world. It also constitutes an entry into the territory presided over by the yama no kami, a mountainous terrain invoking all the associations of the sacred mountain described above. The second stage, entering the mouth, can begin only after recitation of the Heart Sutra as a preliminary purification. Entering the mouth is returning to the womb as tomb; at this stage it is the negative aspect of a symbolic death that is central. Having left the human sphere, the participant enters the mandala. Climbing the shaft marks a period of liminality, a pilgrimage into the mountain's deepest recesses. This passage is purificatory and is punctuated by the repentance proclaimed in chanting, "Rokkon shōjō!" In esoteric terms, this ascent of the shaft is the pilgrim's passage through the halls of the mandala. Finally to arrive at the second chamber is to penetrate to the core of the mountain's source of power, whether that potency be viewed as the generative powers of animal and plant fertility, or whether from a Shugendō perspective the mountain is regarded chiefly as a place to gain spiritual powers. Seen as mandala, the cave's second chamber is the center of the Womb World, occupied by Dainichi (Mahāvairocana). The descent ends in the reincorporation of the pilgrim into the human world, newly endowed with the powers whose center she has reached.

The fourth stage, the rites of the second chamber, are the heart of the pilgrimage. In Buddhist esoteric terms, to

enter the second chamber is to be united with Dainichi, and this constitutes the attainment of Buddhahood in this very existence. Further, because En no Gyōja, Acala, and the eight Nagas are enshrined there, the ascetic incorporates their powers as well. Recitation of the Heart Sutra captures for the pilgrim the essence of the *prajna paramita*: the perfection of wisdom. From the Shugendō perspective, entering the second chamber completes the telescoped passage through the ten worlds. This is the real destination of the entire pilgrimage, and here most of all the powerful associations of the mountain are concentrated. The fire in the womb created by pilgrims' incense and candles is not only an offering to the deities enshrined there but a furnace which forges the devotees, steaming, smoking, and baking into them the powers they have come to acquire. Thus the rites of the second chamber seal the pilgrimage, locking its symbolic gains into the pilgrim.

From this discussion of the symbolism of this ritual, it should be clear that in psychological terms its principal motif is that of a return to the womb. It is the task of this section to show why the significance of this rite differs for women and men. It is different in that it invokes different history of religions' categories for women and men. This difference in turn derives from the different interaction of the symbolism of the rite with the psychology of women and men. In order to show why different histories of religions' motifs are called into play, it is first necessary to take up the question of the rite's interaction with psychological structure.

One of the most important topics in current feminist scholarship concerns the differing psychic structures of women and men. The most sophisticated statement of the claim is that by Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978). Chodorow shows that the social organization of gender produces "asymmetrical personality structures in daughters and sons." To recapitulate her complicated theory briefly, it is that the mother-daughter relationship universally is characterized by continuity and

complementarity. The daughter does not need to make so firm a break with her mother in order to achieve her own individuation and maturity. Her maturation will take place mostly within the world of women, and she need not renounce mother so completely as a primary object of love as must her brothers. Boys, on the other hand, must make a clear break from the mother in order to achieve a self-identification as males through bonding with the father. They must separate from the world of women only later to take women as their primary objects of love after achieving a basic identification as male.

One of the primary goals of forming a relation of love and affection is to recapture the complete acceptance the infant enjoys from its mother. The longing to experience acceptance entirely free of the criticism and competition characteristic of the public world is a basic aim of both women and men. The "urge to merge" has as its prototype the unity of mother and fetus *in utero*. However, this common drive is experienced differently by women and men, because of the difference of gender.

For the male, the motif of a return to the womb is a coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), becoming whole by uniting with the opposite sexual principle. The self is completed by merging with something totally unlike itself, which is at the same time the source of its very existence. Thus time return to the mother results in the acquisition of power fundamentally alien to the male. The matter is different in the case of women. The motif of *coincidentia oppositorum* is not operative. Instead, the motif is one of a return to the source, uniting with the source of one's own sexual principle instead of merging with the opposite. The power to be gained from such an exercise is not alien to one's own nature, but represents a recapture of its origin and fullest expression. The devotee is not the opposite of that source, but a microcosm of it.

The male's experience of *coincidentia oppositorum* differs further because of the nature of the process of his own individuation in childhood. Chodorow sums up a full

exposition of the subject in this way:

Infantile development of the self is experienced in opposition to the mother, as primary caretaker, who becomes the other. Because boys are of opposite gender from their mothers, they especially feel a need to differentiate and yet find differentiation problematic. The boy comes to define his self more in opposition than through a sense of his wholeness or continuity. He becomes the self and experiences his mother as the other. The process also extends to his trying to dominate the mother in order to ensure his sense of self. Such domination begins with mother as the object, extends to women, and is then generalized to include the experience of all others as objects rather than subjects (Lorber et al. 1981, pp.502-503).

Although many elements of this theory of asymmetric patterns of psychic structure in women and men are yet to be clarified, the theory as a whole promises to reveal the origins in psychic life of motifs we as historians of religions have long recognized in religious phenomena. As always, the female side of the formulation is much less clear. A break with mother must be made, but in the case of men this break must be made in order to achieve self-identification as male. In the female case the primary bond with mother already accomplishes the gender identification. Thus the break with mother is not required in order to establish gender identification. Recently Adrienne Rich has written that the break with the world of women is required of women to satisfy what she calls "compulsory heterosexuality." This is a requirement of society, not of psychological development. While this suggestion is a powerful one, it remains highly speculative (Rich 1980).

However, this much seems clear: if the male's break with the mother is crucial to his gender identification, but the female's is not, then any subsequent, symbolic return to the womb must also hold a different sort of significance for women and men. Both return to their primary and

strongest love. Both aim for an uncritical, total acceptance. But whereas the adult male makes a return to the mother after a sharp break which has been the focus of his gender identification, the female's return is of a different kind. It may be that explorations of the symbolism of such rites of return to the womb as the ascent of the Oku no In cave can shed light on these psychic phenomena.

When women struggle into this womb-cave, are gripped in its vagina, and squeeze through its cervix into the crevices of a penumbral uterus, they celebrate a principle already inherent in their own sexual nature. Whereas men unite themselves with a principle opposite to their own being (*coincidentia oppositorum*), women return to the power of which they themselves already represent the full flower, complete in itself. They immerse themselves in female power, absorb its atmosphere and essences, taking into themselves more of the power that is already theirs. Instead of completing their own being through unification with the opposite sexual principle, women symbolically return to the original source of all female power, from which in psychological terms they have never been separated. In this respect, the significance of the Oku no In rite differs radically for women and men.

Viewed psychologically, the principal motif operating for the female pilgrim is reunion of mother and daughter. The pilgrim is the daughter and the womb-cave is the mother. Such a reunion finds mythic embodiment in Demeter and Persephone (Kore). Jung has remarked on the differing significance for women and men of the Kore figure, and he says further:

Kore...is generally a double...i.e., a mother and a maiden, which is to say that she appears now as the one, and now as the other (Jung and Kerényi 1949, pp.157-158).

The identity of the pilgrim and the mother is the secret of the womb cave. This is the esoteric knowledge gained from the rite on the psychological level. As Jung says:

We could therefore say that every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forward into her daughter. This participation and intermingling give rise to that peculiar uncertainty as regards *time*: a woman lives earlier as a daughter, later as a mother. The conscious experience of these ties produces the feeling that her life is spread out over generations—the first step towards the immediate experience and conviction of being outside time, which brings with it a feeling of *immortality*. The individual's life is elevated into a type, indeed it becomes the archetype of woman's fate (*sic*) in general. This leads to a restoration or *apocatastasis* of the lives of her ancestors, who now, through the bridge of the momentary individual, pass down into the generations of the future. An experience of this kind gives the individual a place and a meaning in the life of the generations, so that all unnecessary obstacles are cleared out of the way of the life-stream that is to flow through her (Jung and Kerenyi 1949, p.162).

The Oku no In rite refers to a reunion of mother and daughter, and to the mystical identity of the two. It is of course gender that unites them, but more specifically it is their ability to give birth, the characteristic that distinguishes them from men. It is in giving birth that the daughter becomes the mother, and hence it is highly appropriate and in keeping with the symbolic logic of the rite that it take place in a womb-cave.

Within Japanese mythology, the most relevant mythologem is Amaterasu's concealment in the Ama no Iwato, the Heavenly Rock Cave. Her concealment causes light and order to vanish from the world, and it is her re-emergence that causes light and order again to rule over darkness and chaos. However, more important, Amaterasu enters the cave a Kore, a maiden, and emerges the unchallenged ruler of the High Fields of Heaven. It was in the cave that her

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transformation occurred. The fact that transformation in the myth and in the Oku no In cave rite takes place without male intervention is true to the motif of the female's return to the source. As Jung says of the Elusinean Mysteries, "Demeter-Kore exists on the plane of mother-daughter experience which is alien to man and shuts him out" (Jung and Kerényi 1949, p.177).

### CONCLUSION

The problem examined in this paper is one of finding language to articulate differences in the religious experience of women and men. It is imperative to the history of religions that that language grow out of our discipline and be fully integrated to its central aims. A language for describing women's religious experience evolved solely for the purpose of describing something about women while remaining unrelated to other issues in the study of religion would be counterproductive. We must not rest content with terms and concepts for describing women's religious experiences which simply confirm existing stereotypes about women, thereby perpetuating the sidelined, marked status we have so long "enjoyed."

What is wanted is language which is suitable for describing the particulars of female experience but which is also linked to a discipline's methodological issues in a broader way. For example, the distinction between the public and private realms of society first articulated by feminist scholars was primarily developed in order to understand women's issues, but it has proved to hold immense utility in the study of society generally (Rodaldo 1974). It describes a dichotomy operative in the lives of both women and men. To know and be able to apply this conceptual distinction deepens our sensitivity to a vast range of sociological and anthropological questions, whether or not the immediate focus is a "woman's issue." To be unaware of the public-private distinction is to pass over a universally important dichotomy in human society and experience. Thus it cannot be ignored or trivialized.



If our goal is to understand the meaning of religious phenomena, we cannot assume, for example, that a rite has a single, unvarying meaning. Meaning is qualified and modulated by interaction between the participants and the phenomenon's public symbolism. Without reducing the problem to a purely individual matter, when we recognize that women and men have vastly different psychic structures, we are forced to take these into account in order to reach an accurate understanding of the meaning to participants of the phenomenon in question.

The task of articulating the meaning of a rite is not successfully completed by a recapitulation of its public symbolism. Often that recapitulation is in fact a difficult and complex task, requiring the historian of religions to trace historically the full context of a rite presently preserved only in fragments. Yet no matter how complete is our tracing of the nexus of ideas in which a rite or other religious phenomenon is situated, we have not yet uncovered its meaning until we consider real participants and the way that ritual achieves its transformative power through interacting with the psychic structures they bring to their participation in ritual. If in turn that psychological structure is significantly different for women and men, it becomes necessary to take account of that difference in our statements about the meaning of the phenomenon in question. Obviously, it would not be acceptable simply to present the meaning of a rite for males or females separately as "the" meaning. This being the case, the development of a language for talking accurately about women's religious experience is a task incumbent upon the discipline as a whole, not only upon those of us who happen to be women.

History of religions has long recognized the importance of the coincidentia oppositorum motif. Since Eliade's exposition of it, the idea has been usefully appropriated by many others, not only in our discipline, but in other branches of study as well. The term has become standard usage for religious phenomena in which one element finds

its completion by uniting with its opposite. The present investigation suggests that rites experienced by men as *coincidentia oppositorum* are not always experienced as such by women. Thus the meaning of such a rite for female participants is not *coincidentia oppositorum*, but becomes something else. At present we have no common, agreed-upon language with which to name women's return to the source. It is of course true that history of religions has, again thanks to Eliade, recognized the importance in initiatory ritual of a symbolic return to the conditions of creation. This motif clearly is operative for both women and men in the rites of ascending the Oku no In cave. However, pointing to that motif is not a sufficient exposition of the rite's significance for female participants. Within the common framework of an "eternal return," men experience *coincidentia oppositorum*, and women experience a return to the source as a vehicle for completing their own being.

This essay has employed the phrase return to the source to describe the particular experience of women in a rite experienced differently by men. The phrase is potentially useful in pointing to a general type of religious experience, a motif perhaps as general and widespread as *coincidentia oppositorum*, and as important for men as women. In our vast inventory of rites glorifying male power and energy, we will find the same motif operative. Without attempting to list all possible candidates, two such rites that come immediately to mind are Mithraic rites of slaying the bull and male Shaivite ritual. Were this suggestion to prove useful, then the motif of a return to the source would have proved its utility in grasping the meaning of a type of religious experience had by both women and men. The facts surrounding the genesis of the term are in a sense irrelevant, just as it is relatively unimportant for us to recall Eliade's first use of the term *coincidentia oppositorum*. The more important thing is the general applicability and utility of both terms.

## Glossary

Bon 盆	rokkon shōjō 六根清淨
En no Gyōja 役行者	Ryūsenji 龍泉寺
happi 法被	Sai no kawara 賽の河原
kaji 加持	sendatsu 先達
kami 神	Shugendō 修験道
kō 講	shugyō 修行
kōsha 講社	sokushin jōbutsu 即身成仏
Kūkai 空海	Ta no kami 田の神
nabiki なびき	Yamabushi 山伏
Oku no In 奥の院	zange (sange) 懺悔

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