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RIVERSIDE

Vessels of Illumination:  
The Ritual Transformation of Space, Sound and Vision at  
the Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple

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in

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The Thesis of Christian Jaramillo Valdez is approved:

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## Introduction:

“Practice!” the minister repeats with a swift gesture across the temple, “this is practice!” Despite his elderly appearance, the vigor of Bishop Yuju Matsumoto’s words affirms the invigorating force of the goma (護摩) fire ceremony he had just completed for the congregation of Kōyasan Beikoku Betsu-in (Kōyasan American Branch Temple, (高野山米国別院). Nestled in the heart of Little Tokyo, the Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple offers a monthly observance of the goma ritual for the benefit of members and visitors alike (figs. 1-2).<sup>1</sup> The somatic practice of the goma ceremony employs a technically sophisticated material culture that utilizes the communal cultivation of various movements (mudrās), chants (mantras), and visualizations (mandalas) in order to grant the practitioner’s wishes and empower them to realize enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> Since its construction in 1940, the Kōyasan Branch Temple has faithfully served the Shingon Buddhist congregation of Little Tokyo as a site of material, cultural and spiritual nourishment.<sup>3</sup> Here, on the last Sunday of every month, temple members and strangers alike are invited to transform their body, speech and mind through the “powerful, energizing” practice of the goma fire ceremony.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abbot Yūsei Arai and Shingon Buddhist International Institute, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism: A Handbook for Followers: Kōyasan Shingon Buddhism* (Fresno: Shingon Buddhist International Institute, 1997), 173-174. This supplemental handbook is sold by Kōyasan Los Angeles.

<sup>2</sup> Richard K. Payne, “Ritual Syntax and Cognitive Theory,” *Pacific World* 3, no. 6 (2004): 212. In the Shingon practice, enlightenment is defined by one’s recognition of their own inherent buddhahood in this immediate lifetime. Payne documents the technical proficiency inherent to the performance of the goma practices he witnessed. The objects, chants and spaces observed in the goma ceremony are arranged and employed with dexterity and precision and must be used accurately in order to engage their full potential during ritual.

<sup>3</sup> Grant Moran, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission: 100th Anniversary*, (Los Angeles, CA: Kōyasan Beikoku Betsu-in, 2012), 33. This photographic history book documents the evolution of the Shingon community in Los Angeles up until the 100th anniversary of the Shingon Los Angeles Mission in 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Emeritus Taisen Miyata, “Forward,” in *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, ix.

The congregation of Kōyasan Los Angeles practices a particular sect of esoteric Buddhism known as Shingon (真言), or true word, that developed in Japan over twelve-hundred years ago.<sup>5</sup> Although diverse esoteric Buddhist practices have developed across India, China and Tibet, they all share the belief that enlightenment is possible in one's immediate lifetime.<sup>6</sup> While many Buddhist rituals and scriptures had been introduced to the archipelago in the sixth century, the historical development of the Shingon practice is considered Japan's first widespread systemization of an organized esoteric Buddhist practice.<sup>7</sup> The eventual imperial patronage and promulgation of an esoteric school of Buddhism in the nascent country can be attributed to the efforts of the priest Kūkai (空海, 774-835)—known fondly throughout Japan as Kōbō Daishi (Great Master Who Spread the Dharma 弘法大師).<sup>8</sup> In addition to his proselytization of the Buddhist dharma Kūkai was also responsible for many lasting cultural achievements, including the establishment of a temple complex atop Mount Kōya (高野山) in present

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<sup>5</sup> See: Richard K. Payne, "Homa: Tantric Fire Ritual," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, (Oxford University Press, 2016), 10; Madhavi Kolhatkar and Musashi Tachikawa, "Buddhist Fire Ritual in Japan," *Senri Ethnological Reports* 105, (2012): 34; Kūkai, "Kūkai's Sokushin-Jōbutsu-gi (Principle of Attaining Buddhahood with the Present Body)," trans. Hisao Inagaki, *Asia Minor: A British Journal of Far Eastern Studies*, 17, no. 2 (1972): 190–215. The practice of esoteric buddhism can be loosely categorized by the extensive ritual use of visual and sonic technology in order to somatically transform the body.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2003): 71. Historically, traditional schools of Buddhism taught that enlightenment was only achievable after many lifetimes of spiritual development.

<sup>7</sup> Taikō Yamasaki, Yasuyoshi Morimoto, and David Kidd, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 23. Early Japanese Buddhism was especially praised for its magical benefits and did not yet represent a unified doctrine of teachings but rather a loose collection of spells and rituals for the benefit of the court and the nation. Kūkai's interpretation of esoteric scriptures led to the development of a unified practice with a complete cosmology that embedded itself in the nascent medieval history of the country known today as Japan.

<sup>8</sup> Ryūichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1999), 65. Esoteric teachings were often cited as heretical when compared to the more conservative approaches towards enlightenment employed by the Nara clergy of the early Heian period (794-1192). Abe attributes Kūkai's success to his creation of an esoteric buddhist discourse that enhanced the existing scholarship of the Nara clergy while also reinforcing the supremacy of the Esoteric teachings of Shingon.

day Wakayama Prefecture (fig. 3).<sup>9</sup> Although many diverse forms of the Shingon practice would develop outside of the traditions on Mount Kōya, it continues to serve as a leading site for the practice of Shingon Buddhism through a vast network of branch temples in Japan, America, Brazil, Canada and Thailand.<sup>10</sup> The practices experienced at Kōyasan Los Angeles can be traced directly to Mount Kōya's head temple, Kongōbu-ji (金剛峯寺), who's leadership initiated the Shingon Mission to America in 1909 and authorized the Los Angeles Shingon community as the Kōyasan American Branch Temple in 1935.<sup>11</sup>

In this thesis I argue that the architecture and implements of the Kōyasan Los Angeles Temple, as publicly employed in the goma ceremony's ritual movements, acoustic production and immersive imagery, calibrates the somatic experience of the practitioner in order to recall the realization of enlightenment within the human body. Rather than focusing on the temple priests' administration of the goma ritual, attention will be drawn towards the intrapersonal practice of the individual during the ceremony. The careful cultivation of the temple space evokes a somatic abstraction of enlightenment that asserts the functionalist nature of Shingon Buddhist material culture in its transformation of the practitioner's body, speech and mind.

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<sup>9</sup> Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 70-71. Kūkai is credited with the development of many significant artistic, architectural, and linguistic developments, including the introduction of the kana syllabary and the first public schools available to the peasant class.

<sup>10</sup> Kōyasan Shingon Mission, *Do You Know About... Shingon Buddhism* (Wakayama, Japan: Kongōbu-ji Headquarters), 5. This brief folded pamphlet is one of the many informational documents available to practitioners at Kōyasan Los Angeles. While some are written and printed by temple administrators, other pamphlets, such as the one cited here, are created and imported by the head Kōyasan temple, Kongōbu-ji.

<sup>11</sup> Grant Moran, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, 8, 22. Kongōbu-ji leadership was also responsible for initializing the mission of priest Shutai Aoyama to Los Angeles in 1909, so that he could spread the dharma amongst Japanese immigrants in California. Aoyama is credited with founding the Los Angeles Shingon mission that eventually became the Kōyasan Los Angeles temple today.

Taking the layperson's experience of the Shingon practice as a point of departure, this thesis explores the use of architecture and ritual implements during the goma ceremony in order to observe how an abstraction such as enlightenment is made materially accessible within Kōyasan Los Angeles. Although one's participation in the goma ritual is defined as an intrapersonal practice, the ceremony's public availability attests to the community driven policies of temple leadership. In both practice and presentation, the rituals performed at Kōyasan Los Angeles sway between visible and invisible modes of participation, delimiting the public's ability to access certain features of the rite. The title of "esotericism" associated with the Shingon practice has led credence to the notion that the tradition eschews non-initiates. On the contrary, non-initiates are encouraged to participate in Shingon ritual, but it is made known that the innermost teachings are reserved for initiatory students only. Although Shingon ritual is made publicly available at both Mount Kōya and Kōyasan Los Angeles, no two temples are ever alike. In both ritual and day to day activities, temple leadership is allowed to make immense decisions at their own discretion. Therefore, while there are many continuities between the beliefs and practice at both Kōyasan Los Angeles and Mount Kōya, the architecture, rituals and policies observed in this paper are unique to the historical development of Kōyasan Los Angeles and the Japanese-Americans who founded it. The temple's public invitation to participate in rituals such as the goma ceremony provides scholars of Art History an opportunity to reorient the study of Shingon ritual objects towards their reciprocal relationship with living Buddhist communities.

Scholarship concerning the Shingon Buddhist tradition is not limited to but often explores the translation of sutras, the structure of ritual, the history and cosmological development of Shingon practices and the iconographic symbolism of material culture.<sup>12</sup> While there are many Japanese publications about the practice and history of the Shingon school and its material culture, scholarly writings in English are much fewer in number.<sup>13</sup> The expansion of scholarship on Shingon material culture and seminal doctrinal literature is in large part due to the early efforts of scholar-priests such as Yoshito S. Hakeda, who helped translate and provide commentary for many of Kūkai's seminal writings. Likewise Bishop Emeritus Taisen Miyata, of Kōyasan Los Angeles, has assisted in the translation of Shingon scriptures, rituals and commentary through both academic sources and local publications.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Priest Taiko Yamasaki provided an astoundingly detailed

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<sup>12</sup> See: Shozui Makoto Toganoo, "The Symbol-System of Shingon Buddhism," *The Claremont Graduate University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing* (7113742), 1971, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/22c4644b6ecd927aeec5ab153255f12d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>; Kūkai, *Kūkai: Major Works*; Minoru Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1978); Robert H. Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual," Ryūichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra*; Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*; Richard Karl Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan*; Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance*; Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Syntax and Cognitive Theory," *Pacific World* 3, no. 6 (2004): 195-228; Richard K. Payne, "4. Hiding in Plain Sight: The Invisibility of the Shingon Mission to the United States," in *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 103. English literature on the practice of the Shingon tradition tends to bias the iconographic examination of ritual structure and implements or "philological" pursuits, as cited by Toganoo. Modern scholarship and media lacks an emphasis on the analysis of the living practice and the modern implementation of material ritual objects.

<sup>13</sup> Richard K. Payne, "4. Hiding in Plain Sight," 103. Payne asserts that the history of the Shingon mission in Los Angeles, and more broadly America, has been made invisible by the Japanese-American desire to accommodate American religious culture. Scholarship on the life and writings of Kūkai and the Shingon practice is prolific in Japan, compared to English publications in the West.

<sup>14</sup> See: Bishop Emeritus Taisen Miyata, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, ix; Taisen Miyata, *The Goma Fire Ritual; Esoteric Texts*, trans. Taisen Miyata, Rolf W. Giebel and Minoru Kiyota, (California: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai America Inc., 2015); Taisen Miyata and Kūkai, *A Study of the Ritual mudrās in the Shingon Tradition and Their Symbolism: A Phenomenological Study on the Eighteen Ways of Esoteric Recitation in the Kōyasan Tradition* (Sacramento, 1998). Both Miyata and Hakeda have previously studied under teachers associated with Kōyasan Los Angeles including former Bishop Setsuya Takahashi. Additionally, Taisen Miyata has served twice as the Bishop of Kōyasan Los Angeles and he continues to assist in ceremonies at the time of this paper's development. In fact, Kōyasan Los Angeles can be found in the

explanation of Shingon practice and history in his 1988 book *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*.<sup>15</sup> The initiated knowledge available to these scholar-priests implied a living methodology that funneled their direct experience as clergymen into their writings. The works of these initiated scholars also indicate the gradual expansion of Shingon Buddhist literature into non-Japanese languages.<sup>16</sup> The historical development of Shingon literature available in English mirrors the growth of the Shingon practice in America during the twentieth century, including the establishment of Kōyasan Los Angeles.

Following this trend, modern academics have gradually continued to explore the medieval and modern expressions of Shingon practices. Scholars such as Minoru Kiyota, Richard K. Payne, Robert Sharf and Ryuichi Abe have contributed to the analysis of sutras, ritual practice and the general philology of the Shingon tradition.<sup>17</sup> These textual examinations of the Shingon tradition rely on the abundance of Japanese commentaries from the many variations of the historical Shingon practice, incorporating a historiographic methodology to their approach. Likewise, modern iconographic studies of Shingon material culture can be observed in the works of scholars such as E. Dale Saunders, Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis and most recently Cynthea Bogel.<sup>18</sup> However,

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acknowledgements and dedications of many Shingon texts for its hospitality and assistance in producing literature on the subject of the Shingon tradition.

<sup>15</sup> Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*.

<sup>16</sup> Richard K. Payne, "4. Hiding in Plain Sight," 101-103. The accommodating nature of Japanese-Immigrant Buddhism seeks not to assimilate but to make its practices available to Americans without repackaging their tradition to compete alongside modernity. This trend can be observed in the growth of Shingon literature available in English during the mid-twentieth century and the fact that it was stimulated by active clergymen.

<sup>17</sup> See: Minoru Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism*; Richard K. Payne, "Homa: Tantric Fire Ritual;" Robert H. Sharf, "Thinking through Shingon Ritual;" Ryūichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra*.

<sup>18</sup> E. Dale Saunders, *Mudrā: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960); Elizabeth Ten Grotenhui, *Japanese Mandalas*; Cynthea J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance*.

despite the growing availability of English literature, scholars continue to ignore the living relationship between Shingon ritual implements and architecture and the congregations that employ them. The lineage, materials, and historical context of Buddhist ritual objects in Art Historical research often overshadows the modern, animated transformation of these objects as reciprocity images. Current studies tend to discuss the Shingon tradition's historical contributions to medieval Japanese culture, the iconographic study of vibrantly painted mandalas, exquisite statuary and metallurgy or detailed ritual examinations.<sup>19</sup> When the ritual use of these sacred implements is mentioned, it is often limited to the medieval context and rarely, if ever, discusses their relationship with the living Shingon practice of the twenty-first century. Very little attention has been afforded to the Shingon lay person, and if they are discussed it is against the backdrop of immigration, assimilation and the construction of social identities.<sup>20</sup> Rather than solely focusing on the material culture in isolation from its ritual use, this paper investigates the transformational nature of Shingon ritual instruments and architecture through the modern perspective of their intended audience: the uninitiated lay person who strives towards enlightenment.

Due to the intrapersonal nature of the practices at Kōyasan Los Angeles, I have chosen to employ historiography, ethnography and formal analysis in order to research

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<sup>19</sup> See: Ryūichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra*; Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance*; Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Syntax and Cognitive Theory," 195-228; James H. Sanford, "Wind, Waters, Stupas, Mandalas: Fetal Buddhahood in Shingon," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 1/2 (1997): 1-38; Robert H. Sharf, "Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism," in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 151-197.

<sup>20</sup> See: Richard K. Payne, "Religion, Self-Help, Science: Three Economies of Western/ized Buddhism," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 20, (January 2019): 69-86; Richard K. Payne, "4. Hiding in Plain Sight," 101-122.

the implementation of architecture, ritual movement, chants and vision in awakening the Shingon practitioner to the truth of their original enlightenment. I have explored a variety of textual sources ranging from formal academic research to publications produced by local temples. In addition to researching and reading literature specific to the Shingon tradition, I have also immersed myself in monthly ritual activities at Kōyasan Los Angeles - due to their reliance on direct ritual experience as the most effective means of understanding their practice. Since November of 2023, I have attended goma monthly in addition to conducting field interviews with temple members and ministers. Combining these methodological approaches, this paper examines how the material, acoustical and spatial elements of the goma ceremony cultivates the participation of the temple laity, according to the Shingon practice of attaining enlightenment within the human body.

In an attempt to establish a theoretical framework for the exploration of space, sound and vision within the confines of Kōyasan Los Angeles, I will be building upon the concept of “architectural aurality” employed by Art Historian Bissera V. Pentcheva in her research of the Hagia Sophia’s acoustical phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> In her 2017 book, *Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium*, Pentcheva describes the acoustical reverberations produced within the Hagia Sophia as a sonic medium through which abstracted concepts such as the divine are made materially accessible through the combination of chant and architecture. Pentcheva acknowledges recent developments in the study of somatic experiences and the role they played in medieval religious practice, however her research

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<sup>21</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 5.

attempts to integrate a sonic dimension into the study of Art History.<sup>22</sup> The reflections of the worshiper's voices against the walls of the Hagia Sophia blend together and produce a "nonrepresentational image of God" that is activated by the congregation and, like a vessel, contained within the church.<sup>23</sup> Pentcheva employs the term aurality in order to describe the spatial, sonic and visual "performativity" of the Hagia Sophia that was transformed through the use of the Byzantine liturgy. In this sense, aurality refers to the experience of a complete somatic production within a dedicated space that cannot be accurately preserved and analyzed by future historians. Similarly, the use of architecture and ritual implements at Kōyasan Los Angeles mediates the movements, chants and visualizations of the congregation in order to communicate the nebulous experience of enlightenment. The concept of aurality provides a system of analysis that takes into account previously excluded ephemeral materials, such as time, sound and light, in the development of an Art Historical discourse that has historically prioritized vision above all other senses.<sup>24</sup> However, due to the political history and modern limitations of the Hagia Sophia, Pentcheva's research attempts to emulate an aurality that is no longer practiced.<sup>25</sup> This thesis, on the other hand, benefits from the fact that the aurality produced through ritual at Kōyasan Los Angeles can be experienced in the present. As described earlier the Shingon practice is not monolithic and varies both historically and regionally due to the variance between individual temples. However, the continued belief

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<sup>22</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, 6-8. Pentcheva directs readers to the works of Liz James, Nadine Schibille and Nicoletta Isar who previously pioneered sensual and somatic research on the Hagia Sophia.

<sup>23</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, 1. While there was enough liturgical evidence for Pentcheva to research what the practices at the Hagia Sophia may have been like, the current political regime in Turkey does not allow any form of Christian worship within the building - which has now been converted into a museum.

in an immediate and materially accessible enlightenment creates a historical link between the practices described by Kūkai and the rituals performed by the congregation of Kōyasan Los Angeles.

This thesis consists of six separate sections, although the final three are contextually related to each other. In the first section, I describe the purpose, practice and history of the goma ceremony, as observed at Kōyasan Los Angeles, in order to illustrate the sequence of the ritual. This section also includes a history of the temple's development and its role in the Japanese-American community of Los Angeles. The second section explores the architectural aurality of the physical temple arrangement and how it mediates the presence of the divine. The third section describes the public modes of participation available to laypeople during the goma ritual. The fourth, fifth and sixth sections of this paper explore the material culture of the goma ceremony by analyzing how the practitioner's body, speech and mind are ritually engaged by the transformation of space, sound and vision within the temple. This method of organization was chosen in order to reveal how the historical Shingon practice of the Three Mysteries of body, speech and mind (sanmitsu 三密) are expressed through the implementation of ritual tools within a modern temple space. However, the objects used in the ritual engagement of one's body, speech and mind are not unilateral and these categories often overlap in practice. Although I reference a few of the ways that body, speech and mind are materially engaged through ritual tools, each section features its own observable, object-based analysis. The fourth section explores the physical movements involved during the execution of the dedication service (ekō 回向) in order to explore how the

body is incorporated into the goma fire ceremony (fig. 4). This section will revolve around the material analysis of the Shingon Buddhist sistrum (shakujō 錫杖) (fig. 5). In order to analyze how the mystery of speech is manifested in practice, the fifth section explores the ritual transformation of the practitioner's mouth during the recitation of the goma ceremony's central mantra, the Immovable Wisdom King's Spell (Skt. Acala Vidyārāja Mantra, J. Fudō Myōō Shingon 不動明王真言). The sixth section investigates the mystery of mind through the analysis of the fire altar (goma dan 護摩壇) and the engagement provided by the hearth's visual presentation. Specifically, this section analyzes the construction of the vajra-hall (kongō-dōjō 金剛道場) that delineates the boundaries of the goma's fire (fig. 6). Finally, the paper concludes with a reflection on the transformative use of material culture in Shingon ritual and the ways in which the practitioner's agency empowers the aurality of the goma ceremony. In order to examine how the congregation at Kōyasan Los Angeles attunes their body, speech and mind with the experience of enlightenment this thesis explores key moments during the goma service where the practitioner is somatically connected with Shingon material culture.

### **The Aim of Shingon Ritual:**

Similar to other forms of so-called tantric Buddhism, the practice of Shingon ritual is rooted in the expectation that one can “attain enlightenment in this very body” (sokushin-jōbutsu 即身成仏).<sup>26</sup> In order to awaken that realization with technical precision, Shingon ritual calibrates a complete sensory environment that focuses one’s concentration through the conscious use of the Three Mysteries of body, speech and mind (sanmitsu 三密).<sup>27</sup> Practitioners at Kōyasan Los Angeles personify the nature of enlightenment through the worship of The Great Sun Buddha (Skt. Mahāvairocana, J. Dainichi Nyorai 大日如來) whose body, speech and mind manifests within all beings indiscriminately.<sup>28</sup> Shingon ritual, therefore, can be easily understood as the recreation of Mahāvairocana’s Three Mysteries through the practitioner’s performance of particular movements, chants and visualizations. As observed in the goma ceremony, the ritual employs chants, mudrās, drums, bells, fire, incense and immersive imagery in order to focus the practitioner’s concentration (nen 念) towards enlightenment. The rich material culture of the goma ceremony evokes the memory of the practitioner’s unity within the universal mind of Mahāvairocana through the somatic exertion of their concentration. This unification is described as meditative consciousness (Skt. samadhi, J. zanmai 三昧) wherein the practitioner’s body, speech and mind (sanmitsu) are merged with the body

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<sup>26</sup> Robert H. Sharf, “Thinking through Shingon Ritual,” 57. Tantra here refers broadly to those practices of Buddhism which ritually implement various technologies in the guidance of heightened meditative states.

<sup>27</sup> Inagaki, “Kūkai’s Sokushin-Jōbutsu-gi,” 190. Mahāvairocana’s universal compassion is expressed through his body, speech and mind. These core faculties represent the breadth of his activity and can be found within every expression of Mahāvairocana (including human beings).

<sup>28</sup> Kūkai, “Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence,” in *Kūkai: Major Works*, trans. Yoshitoko S. Hakeda (Columbia University Press: New York, 1972), 226.

speech and mind of Mahāvairocana’s eternal meditation.<sup>29</sup> Although Mahāvairocana is recognized as the singular essence of the universe, the Shingon tradition traces a vast cosmological program of bodhisattvas and nature deities that manifest from the reflection of his wisdom. The principal deity of any Shingon ritual or temple is known as the honzon (本尊) and the patron Buddha of Kōyasan Los Angeles is none other than Mahāvairocana.<sup>30</sup> During the goma, the fierce dharma protector known as the Immovable Wisdom King (Skt. Acala Vidyārāja, J. Fudō Myōō 不動明王) represents the rite’s principal deity through whom the ritual’s merits are derived and the practitioner’s mind guided. Inseparable from phenomena, both Mahāvairocana and Acala are acknowledged as an expression of the originally non-arising codependency (honpushō 本不生) that links all causes and effects. As an equal reflection of Mahāvairocana’s consciousness, the congregation of Kōyasan Los Angeles realizes their unadulterated nature through the ritual engagement of Shingon material culture.

As reiterated by Bishop Matsumoto, the principal aim of the Shingon practice is the remembrance of one’s original enlightenment through the use of somatic, ritual mindfulness. However the basis of this ritual practice is rooted in the mundane actions of one’s body, speech and mind and is not predicated by complicated ritual programs. The presence of Mahāvairocana is understood through the expression of the Three Mysteries.

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<sup>29</sup> Sharf, “Thinking through Shingon Ritual,” 70. Transliterated from the Sanskrit word *samadhi*, *zanmai* represents the Shingon understanding of a unified meditative state which bridges the gap between the perceived self and the perceived other. In the context of the goma, *samadhi* is understood as a primary goal in which the practitioner enters into a meditative union between themselves and the principal deity of the ritual, completely erasing any notions of self and other and thereby taking upon themselves the qualities of the chief deity in question.

<sup>30</sup> Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009), 50.

The Three Mysteries represent the universal actions, words, and consciousness of Mahāvairocana as the true body (hosshin 法身) that is equally expressed in every object of reality.<sup>31</sup> By practicing the Three Mysteries, through the performance of the goma, the practitioner can become a “Buddha in this very body” (sokushinjobtsu). The temple is simply a vessel for the somatic, intrapersonal engagement of the practitioner's bodily senses in order to reaffirm their unity with Mahāvairocana.

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<sup>31</sup> Abbot Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 38-40.

## **The History of the Goma Ritual at Kōyasan Los Angeles:**

Although the many variations of the goma ritual have historically been a central rite within the Shingon practice worldwide, it was not always conducted as frequently as it is today at Kōyasan Los Angeles. The earliest record of a goma ceremony conducted by Shingon Buddhists in Los Angeles is 1914, and it predates the foundation of the current temple by twenty-six years.<sup>32</sup> However it was not until 1968, at the request of visiting priest Rev. Ekan Ikeguchi, that the practice of the goma ceremony was instituted monthly at Kōyasan Los Angeles.<sup>33</sup> The addition of a publicly available goma ritual has been attributed to the temple's popularity amongst non-Buddhist visitors of Los Angeles.<sup>34</sup> In fact, current Bishop Yuju Matsumoto has previously mentioned that Ikeguchi, who was his teacher, specifically introduced the goma as a means of encouraging the spread of Buddhist teachings amongst Americans. Ikeguchi justified the efficacious power of the goma's transnational engagement amongst non-Buddhists during his completion of a world-wide tour administering the ceremony to various cultures.<sup>35</sup> Although the Shingon Mission of Los Angeles was originally founded in order to encourage the practice amongst first-generation Japanese immigrants, the rapidly changing demographics of Southern California has prompted current temple leadership to expand their services to encourage the participation of English speakers and Americans more broadly.<sup>36</sup>

Contemporary temple leadership, such as Bishop Matsumoto, have expressed their

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<sup>32</sup> Grant Moran, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Bishop Emeritus Taisen Miyata, "Forward," *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, ix.

<sup>34</sup> Miyata., ix.

<sup>35</sup> Ekan Ikeguchi, *Fire Ascetic: Ekan Ikeguchi: Photo Collection* (Osaka, Japan: Tohoshuppan, 1993). This Japanese publication was loaned to me by Bishop Matsumoto. Although written in Japanese, it is primarily a photo album displaying Rev. Ikeguchi's performance of the goma worldwide.

<sup>36</sup> Grant Moran, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, 1.

earnest desire to spread the dharma of the Shingon practice through effective public rituals such as the goma ceremony.<sup>37</sup>

The Shingon Mission of Los Angeles represents a pivotal force of both religious and cultural influence in the history of the Japanese-American community of Southern California. The historical progression from a primarily Japanese religious community to one that welcomes all interested persons traces the development that the living Shingon practice at Kōyasan Los Angeles has taken over the past century. The first incarnation of the Shingon Mission in America was founded in 1912 by Reverend Shutai Aoyama after he garnered the support of businessman Kiyotaro Nakano. Owner of the Miyako Hotel, Nakano offered to host the initial meetings of the newly established Daishi Kyōkai (Great Teacher's Church, 大師教会).<sup>38</sup> In 1913, after a brief residence at a building near Elysian Park, the Daishi Kyōkai was moved again to another building on Commercial Street. It was not until 1920 that the mission was established at a location on Central Avenue, where it would stay until the foundation of the Kōyasan temple at its current location in 1940.

Although many of the practitioners at Kōyasan Los Angeles today are not of Japanese descent, the congregation has historically been a community pillar for Japanese-Americans in Los Angeles and maintains that function today. Over the years, the Shingon Buddhist community of Los Angeles has been host to Japanese ambassadors,

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<sup>37</sup> Bishop Yuju Matsumoto, "Compared to My Flaming Thoughts, the Smoke of Mount Sakurajima is but a Wisp," *Kōyasan Jiho*, July, 2020, Issue no. 237.

<sup>38</sup> Grant Moran, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, 1-2. The hotel remains in operation today, and is located next to the temple's current address.

naval fleets, charity events, social programming and political rallies to name a few.<sup>39</sup> Despite maintaining an ethnically focused core of Japanese-Americans for the first seventy years of its development, the city-wide influence of their religious programs and social events emphasized their responsibility in managing a cross-cultural relationship with all of Los Angeles.<sup>40</sup> However, the enduring and adaptive legacy of the Shingon Buddhist community of Los Angeles is most evident in their adjustment to life in the detention camps authorized by Executive Order 9066. Issued in 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the order seized the property of anyone with Japanese ancestry on suspicion of treason and allowed the military to forcefully relocate them to camps as far as Utah and Arizona.<sup>41</sup> Newspapers, like many other necessary public functions, were organized and maintained by prisoners as a means of retaining some autonomy.<sup>42</sup> Despite losing access to their newly constructed temple, records indicate that Shingon services continued during their imprisonment and that temple members continued to maintain their community in any capacity.<sup>43</sup> At the same time the temple operated as a makeshift

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<sup>39</sup> See: "Beautify with cherry trees, Japan's Baruch advises L.A.," *Daily News*, June 17, 1950; "Bowron invited to Nisei Variety Show," *Daily News*, December 3, 1948; "Young Buddhists plan all-Japanese revue," *Daily News*, November 22, 1948; Leslie E. Claypool, "Added data and opinions on Congress candidates," *Daily News*, April 20, 1948; "L.A. Nihonmachi Sets Reception For 200 Soldiers," *New World Sun*, November 9, 1941.

<sup>40</sup> "Jewish Center to Sponsor Japanese Classical Movie," *New Japanese American News*, February 12, 1954, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SNB19540212-01.1.1&srpos=67&e=-----en--20--61-byDA-txt-txIN-%22ko%20asan%22+temple----->.

<sup>41</sup> Greg Robinson, "War Relocation Authority," *Densho Encyclopedia*, 2023, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/War%20Relocation%20Authority>.

<sup>42</sup> Library of Congress, "Japanese-American Internment Camp Newspapers, 1942 to 1946," <https://www.loc.gov/collections/japanese-american-internment-camp-newspapers/about-this-collection/#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20journalists%20from,Center%20in%20Inyo%20County%2C%20California>.

<sup>43</sup> See: "Sunday Church Activities," *The Minidoka Irrigator*, February 27, 1943, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103686577/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=0353a969&pg=341](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103686577/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=0353a969&pg=341); "Building Structures for School Begin in Poston One Unit," *Press Bulletin*, November 11, 1942, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103676737/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=f5f2f163&pg=8>. A newspaper from the detention camp in Poston, Arizona describes the work of architect Yosh

storage facility for property that would have otherwise been seized by the U.S. military.<sup>44</sup> The gradual release of Japanese-American inmates from the detention camps came to an end in 1945 as they returned to their former homes. Upon their liberation the temple also operated as a temporary hostel for those having trouble securing housing.<sup>45</sup> The religious maintenance of the Shingon community within the camps and the material preservation of their property outside the camps poetically illustrates not only the persistent spirit of the Shingon Buddhist community but also the physical presence of the temple site as a vessel for the preservation of the Shingon Mission in Los Angeles.

Amongst the many rituals found throughout the Shingon tradition none are more prevalent than the goma - a ceremony that traces its roots back to the ancient Vedic homa practice.<sup>46</sup> The homa was defined by the ritual offering of incense, oils, seeds and cloth in order to fulfill the mundane wishes of the practitioner. The rite has been adapted by various traditions since its inception in India. However, the Shingon goma has expanded its purpose beyond the ritual immolation of various offerings. Although the wish-fulfilling element is indispensable to the Shingon goma practice its principal aim, as expressed by Bishop Emeritus Taisen Miyata, is to “enhance the scope of one’s mind towards enlightenment” so that participants can experience realization within their own

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Hirose, who was responsible for the construction of Kōyasan Los Angeles. However, in the camps, Hirose shared his skills with his community by building classrooms.

<sup>44</sup> “Confer About Goods in Kōyasan Betsuin,” *The Rowher Outpost*, December 16, 1944, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103672280/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=c976e64c&pg=186](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103672280/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=c976e64c&pg=186).

<sup>45</sup> “Hostel Directory, Los Angeles Area,” *Manzanar Free Press*, July 14, 1945, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103674570/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=7a715305&pg=9](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/SC5103674570/GDSC?u=ucrivside&sid=bookmark-GDSC&xid=7a715305&pg=9).

<sup>46</sup> Richard K. Payne, “Homa: Tantric Fire Ritual,” 3-10. Payne introduces a wide series of examples covering the association of hearth offerings across Indo-European cultures. He also describes the first written emergence of the word homa by the Buddhist monk Bodhiruci (6th c.)

body.<sup>47</sup> Like many other Shingon practices, the goma ceremony accomplishes this goal by wielding somatic ritual tools intended to evoke that realization within the practitioner's immediate existence. However, the extent to which these instruments fulfill their function depends entirely on the practitioner's concentration. The purpose and merit of that concentration depends upon the variation of the Shingon goma ritual that is practiced. There are goma rituals for pacification (sokusai 息災), prosperity (zōyaku 増益), subjugation (chōbuku 調伏), loving-respect (keiai 敬愛), and invocation (kōshō 鈎召).<sup>48</sup> However, this thesis will focus solely on the practice of the pacification goma as observed at the Kōyasan Branch Temple of Los Angeles.<sup>49</sup> The essential focus of Shingon ceremonies, such as the goma, emphasizes the individual's responsibility to somatically awaken their originally enlightened minds through the implementation of ritual tools. The calibration and deployment of these instruments within the ritual space of Kōyasan Los Angeles enables a communal mode of worship that hones the individual's ability to practice Shingon Buddhism.

The monthly goma is the most practiced and available example of Shingon ritual at Kōyasan Los Angeles and it is held every last Sunday in addition to holidays and special events. While some services and events are open to temple members only the pacification goma is publicly available. The practice of the goma is advertised as one of Kōyasan Los Angeles's core public functions and is described by temple pamphlets as a

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<sup>47</sup> Taisen Miyata, *The Goma Fire Ritual* (Los Angeles: Kōyasan Buddhist Temple), 2. Written by Bishop Emeritus Taisen Miyata, *The Goma Fire Ritual* is a folded pamphlet featuring a fantastic image of a goma ceremony and a detailed explanation of the rite's various functions. Produced and published by Kōyasan Los Angeles, these pamphlets are freely available to temple visitors.

<sup>48</sup> Richard K. Payne, "Homa: Tantric Fire Ritual," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, (2016): 19.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Karl Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan: Feeding the Gods, the Shingon Fire Ritual* (Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1991), 60.

“blessing service” that “burns away suffering and removes the darkness of ignorance... [granting] absolution, prosperity and [the deliverance of] deceased ancestors.”<sup>50</sup> Although Bishop Matsumoto cites the use of four distinct types of goma services and the benefits therein, pacification is by far the most frequently practiced. This variation of the ritual is most easily identified by its use of a circular fire pit (ro 炉) whereas other forms correspond to different variations of the goma - such as triangle, square, and lotus-shaped (fig. 7). While there are various purported benefits to one's earnest participation in the goma its principal religious aim is the purging of one's misdeeds in order to access the peace of enlightenment here and now. The goma ritual and adjoining sermon last well over an hour and involve the practice of movements, chants and visualizations by both the clergy directing the process and the worshippers participating.<sup>51</sup> The practitioner's conscious engagement with the practices and objects of the goma ritual is a key component of its proclaimed ability to uncover the enlightened essence thought to belong to all people.

The ritual structure of the goma can be briefly described as the act of preparing, inviting and then hosting a feast for the chief deity of the service, Acala Vidyārāja, so that the priests and practitioners can merge their body, speech and mind with the presence,

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<sup>50</sup> Rev. Ryuzen Hayashi, *Kōyasan Buddhist Temple*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> The goma is typically celebrated according to the feast day of Acala Vidyārāja on the 28th of every month. However, in an attempt to meet the needs of the congregation it desires to accommodate, Kōyasan Los Angeles celebrates the goma on the last Sunday of the month in an effort to conform to American religious standards while avoiding any serious reconfiguration of the ritual. The desire to accommodate American religious culture tends towards the inclusion of sermons and weekly religious gatherings based on the Christian sabbath. The weekly Sunday service and accompanying sermons at Kōyasan Los Angeles are a testament to this trend.

words and thoughts of Acala.<sup>52</sup> This intrapersonal practice is calibrated through the careful integration of architecture and ritual implements in the production of movement sound and vision during the goma service.

Acala Vidyārāja is one of many deities represented as a manifestation of Mahāvairocana's unconditional existence. He functions as both a messenger of truth and a wrathful protector of those on the path. His iconographic qualities are described in a handbook for followers and an image of him can be found near the altar at Kōyasan Los Angeles (fig. 8).<sup>53</sup> The main identifying qualities of any icon associated with Acala are the flames that engulf him, the stone he sits upon, his blade, his noose, and his braid. The flames portray his violent compassion that illuminates innumerable beings and the stone he sits upon demonstrates his unwavering faith in the teachings of Mahāvairocana. His blade is said to cut through ignorance, his noose binds the passions of those who pursue the path of enlightenment and his braid demonstrates his commitment to serve all sentient beings. Ritual union with the presence of Acala purifies misdeeds, binds passions and severs ignorance in order to clear the way for the practitioner's own enlightened nature to emerge. Although Acala is the principal deity of the goma service there are no prominent visual depictions - aside from a small image of him hanging along the northeast wall of the temple. During the goma service at Kōyasan Los Angeles the fire of the hearth is the

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<sup>52</sup> Richard Karl Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan*, 88; Richard K. Payne, "Firmly Rooted: On Fudō Myōō's Origins." *The Pacific World* 4, (1988): 6-14; Abbot Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 53.

<sup>53</sup> Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 53. Due to the photography policy of the temple, I was not allowed to document any ritual activity inside the main hall. However, with their permission, I was told to refer to their online media for appropriate images. Hence, the lack of a figure detailing the location of Acala's portrait in the main hall.

central meditative visual.<sup>54</sup> Similar to the non-duality of the human condition and its simultaneous unity with the universal body (Skt. Dharmakāya, J. hosshin 法身) of Mahāvairocana, Shingon practitioners cite the non-dual relationship between the goma practitioner, the fire and the chief deity, Acala.<sup>55</sup> Former Bishop Taisen Miyata describes these complementary forces as the outer goma (gegoma 外護摩) and the inner goma (naigoma 内護摩). Respectively, the outer goma describes the physical transformation and unity of the practitioner and the chief deity, Acala, that enables the granting of boons and the qualities of the chief deity's disposition.<sup>56</sup> The inner goma describes the transformation of the practitioner's spirit in order to "burn" misleading thoughts and "sow" the seeds of realization.<sup>57</sup> The unification channeled through the practice of the goma rite is not exclusive to the priests leading the ceremony however the initiated information they have access to deepens their practice more efficiently. Rather, the lay person's perspective is often concerned with the physical practice of participating in the goma in order to realize their wishes, avert misfortune and purge negative karma.

The Shingon notion that the underlying, unadulterated essence of enlightenment is native to all beings necessitates a practice that is accessible to all people regardless of

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<sup>54</sup> No Shingon temple is alike. The lack of designated icons and images of Acala is due to the temple's interchangeable use of ritual space. Additionally, Mahāvairocana is the principal deity of Kōyasan Los Angeles therefore the altar was previously dedicated to revering him and his icons.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Karl Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan*, 60.

<sup>56</sup> Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 53. The reference image used here is borrowed from a handbook for followers. The immovable quality of Acala represents his unyielding compassion towards all sentient beings. His iconographic association with fire demonstrates the energy of his wrathful battle with demons and the ignorance of desire.

<sup>57</sup> Taisen Miyata, *The Goma Fire Ritual*, 2. This information from Bishop Miyata oddly enough contradicts previous information published by Richard K. Payne. The discrepancy is even more intriguing considering that Payne studied with Miyata. Payne cites the unification of the practitioner and chief deity as the naigoma and the ignition of one's inner realization as the gegoma, while Miyata writes the opposite.

their familiarity with Buddhist teachings. Ritual praxis (jisō 事相), such as the goma, rather than simple doctrinal study (kyōsō 教相) is prioritized by Shingon temples in order to communicate the experience of one's inner realization as effectively as possible.<sup>58</sup> The deployment of sensory ritual tools such as altars, bowls, bells, paintings, incense and chant guides the practitioner's concentration towards enlightenment. In fact, Bishop Matsumoto has emphasized many times over that the style of goma he has inherited from his master Ikeguchi is not ubiquitous across Shingon practices abroad. Matsumoto has explained that, more often than not, common examples of the goma are more calm and subdued. Whereas the style he practices not only encourages but demands that practitioners shout the chants with the full force of their lungs, in order to concentrate all their bodily energy towards enlightenment. The intensity of this practice is said to force the practitioner's spirit to concentrate in a manner that is more effective than relaxed variations of the goma ceremony. The development and popularity of the goma at Kōyasan Los Angeles reflects not only the public access they are willing to grant but also the history of the temple as a vessel for the proselytization of Shingon Buddhism abroad.

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<sup>58</sup> Kūkai and Yoshitoko S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 76.

### **Architectural Spaces at Kōyasan LA:**

The structure of Kōyasan Los Angeles varies greatly from that of traditional Japanese Shingon temples, subsequently creating an experience defined by the history of Japanese-American relations. The Kōyasan branch temple was partly designed as a cultural community center for the Japanese immigrant population of Los Angeles. The fluid use of space in Kōyasan Los Angeles led to the unique implementation of a dramatically raised altar not commonly found inside Shingon temples in Japan. The first level was constructed in order to double as a stage for performers, musicians, and even martial arts tournaments. The second level enabled the sanctification of a permanent altar. With the help of a large curtain obstructing any view of the altar's second level, the temple easily transformed into a dance hall, arena or movie theater.<sup>59</sup> The seamless transition between active ritual participation and casual community showcases is a testament to the flexibility of the Shingon practice and the equal veneration of cultural and religious community. The shared use of architecture and ritual implements found at Kōyasan Los Angeles utilizes diligent ritual practice and cultivated community integration in order to remind the practitioner of their originally unified existence with Mahāvairocana.

In order to understand how the goma ritual stimulates the experience of enlightenment within the Shingon practitioner, it will be helpful to briefly explore the physical layout of Kōyasan Los Angeles. The implements, architecture and

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<sup>59</sup> During a visit to the monthly "Tea with the Reverend" Matsumoto sensei reminisced the times when Kōyasan Los Angeles would transform into a movie theater.

ornamentation of the temple mediate the practitioners' movements and perceptions, shaping the channels of participation available to them during the goma service.

A narrow alleyway off of First Street leads to a small courtyard in the shade of the temple's main doors. Here, visitors are embraced by stone statues of animals, lanterns, monks, priests, bodhisattvas and buddhas (fig. 9). On the left lies the paper fortune slips (omikuji 御神籤) of the New Year's service and to the right of the entrance one can find a simple water fountain used for offerings (figs. 10-11).<sup>60</sup> Amongst the roots of a small garden, the Kōyasan temple courtyard's combination of foliage and statuary imparts a still and peaceful facade during one's entrance onto the temple grounds.

After ascending the main stairway and passing through a vestibule, attendees are immediately greeted by a spacious hall that is neatly adorned with painted images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (figs. 12-14). These painted icons offer a detailed glimpse into the pantheon of deities who occupy the Twofold Mandala (ryōbu mandala 両部曼荼羅), the visual manifestation of Shingon cosmology, that hangs above either side of the main altar (figs. 15-18).<sup>61</sup> Like many of the practices at Kōyasan Los Angeles the mandalas permeate both public and private perception and are not quite visible from the viewpoint of the congregation; yet neither are they fully hidden. Towards the left of the temple, at the back of the main room, is the entrance to the The Great Teacher's Hall (Daishi-dō 大

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<sup>60</sup> These are small paper fortunes distributed during the year's first goma service. Patrons have the option to leave the fortunes tied to a rack on the temple grounds. Bad fortunes can be left behind to negate them and good fortunes can be left behind to amplify them.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Ten Grotenhui, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 35-36. The twofold mandala is a dual expression of both the phenomenal material world and the adamantine wisdom world of Mahāvairocana. The interpenetration of these two opposing perspectives underlines the Shingon perspective that this material world is inherently included within the scope of Mahāvairocana's boundless compassion.

師堂) that is used to host small classes. The entrance to the Daishi-dō also houses an ancestral shrine filled with the ashes of former temple members, a statue of the Shingon patriarch Kōbō Daishi and a balcony seating area (fig. 19).

Beyond the balcony lies the main hall (hondō 本堂) with four rows of interlinking metal chairs forming the main seating area for a total occupancy of six-hundred practitioners (fig. 20). As visitors make their way towards their seats, the symmetry of the hall's architecture guides their eyes down the central nave towards the lavishly adorned altar at the west end of the temple.<sup>62</sup> The two-tiered, inner territory (naijin 内陣) is raised some four feet above the floor, lending its image to that of a stage rather than an altar (fig. 21). The first level functions as the dedicated practice space, while the second level enshrines a copious ecosystem of implements, images, instruments and scriptures used throughout the vast catalog of Shingon rituals. Onlookers are showered by an abundance of bejeweled ornaments, massive paintings, statues, lanterns, bells, drums, banners and offering bowls (fig. 22). As opposed to the two-tiered inner altar, the main space of the hall occupied by practitioners is called the outer territory (gejin 外陣).

Unlike Kōyasan Los Angeles, temple complexes in Japan tend to have more than one hall designated for different practices, such as a dedicated goma shrine. The Kōyasan temple of Los Angeles was not only built for the express purpose of religious worship but also shaped by the needs of the Japanese-American community it served. At Saifuku-ji (Temple of Conspicuous Blessings 最福寺) in Kagoshima prefecture, Head Priest Ekan

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<sup>62</sup> Rev. Ryuzen Hayashi, *Kōyasan Buddhist Temple: Buddhism for Everyday Living* (Los Angeles: Kōyasan Beikoku Betsuin).

Ikeguchi, sensei (master 先生) to Bishop Matsumoto, practices goma within the One-Million Marks Goma Hall (Hyakumanmai Goma-dō 百萬枚護摩堂) (fig. 23).<sup>63</sup> The goma hearth at Saifuku-ji sits atop an altar within the sanctum of the inner territory. However, their inner territory is dramatically closer to the ground and within the reach of practitioners. Ritual observers sit directly on the floor before the altar and are even allowed to offer their goma-sticks directly into the fire during the service, unlike the practice at Kōyasan Los Angeles. The historical establishment of Kōyasan Los Angeles as a dedicated space for Japanese immigrants, rather than a singular worship hall, expresses the accommodating flexibility of the Shingon practice and resulted in the construction of a uniquely Japanese-American Buddhist temple community.<sup>64</sup> In the case of Kōyasan Los Angeles, their founders understood that the congregation would not thrive in a foreign nation if it did not also cultivate an architectural space for the additional promotion of social and cultural values.

The intentional modeling of the temple and its many ritual implements achieves a dually aesthetic and functional effect that invites the viewer to imagine that the teachings they will experience in this space are the same as those they would receive directly from Mahāvairocana himself. The extravagant ornamentation and architecture of the altar is inspired by a passage from an esoteric Buddhist scripture known as the Great Way of

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<sup>63</sup> “About Saifukuji Temple” Saifukuji, Eboshiyama Saifukuji Temple, 2024, <https://www.saifukuji.or.jp/about-saifukuji>.

<sup>64</sup> See: Grant Moran, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission*, 43-50; “Jewish Center to Sponsor Japanese Classical Movie;” “Bowron invited to Nisei Variety Show.” Newspaper articles like these confirm the cross-cultural impact of the temple space as a place for the development and preservation of Japanese-American culture. Before and after the forced relocation of Japanese-Americans, the temple held community fundraisers, exhibitions of cultural property and social programs for Japanese-American youth. While the general public was welcome during many events and ceremonies, photo documentation of the Shingon Mission in Los Angeles reaffirms the overwhelmingly Japanese-American population of the temple.

Enjoyment (Skt. Prajñāpāramitānaya sūtra, J. Hannyarishukyō 般若履修經). Part of the scripture's introduction contains a description of Mahāvairocana's "auspicious, praiseworthy palace" from which he proclaims the eternal dharma of enlightenment to an infinite number of beings.<sup>65</sup> In an effort to express the divine aura of this palace, artistic renditions of "mani jewels... silk streamers, wind-bells [and] jeweled garlands" abound throughout the altar while the hanging dual mandalas express the presence of "eight billion bodhisattvas" who heed Mahāvairocana's teachings (fig. 24).<sup>66</sup>

Both pleasing and alluring to the eye, the architecture and ritual implements at Kōyasan Los Angeles are constructed as a microcosmic expression of the heavenly abode of their main deity, Mahāvairocana, in order to immerse the practitioner in the remembrance of their originally enlightened mind. The use of Shingon ritual at Kōyasan Los Angeles represents a living practice that adapts in order to meet the needs of the people it encounters, reflecting the Shingon doctrine of a universal, living Buddhahood. This method of adaptation, as seen in the availability of the goma ceremony, demonstrates Kōyasan Los Angeles's dedication in ensuring that their practice of "enlightenment within this lifetime" is maintained across cultures and generations through the continued use of ritually consecrated tools and architecture.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Yuju Matsumoto, *Shingon Buddhist Service* (Los Angeles: Kōyasan Beikoku Betsuin), 21.

<sup>66</sup> Matsumoto, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Kongōbu-ji Temple, *Kōyasan: The 1200th Anniversary Since the Foundation* (Wakayama-gen: Kongōbu-ji Temple, 2015), 4. Esoteric Buddhism is not hidden or inaccessible from the public. Rather, esoteric refers to the withholding and adaptation of certain teachings in order to meet the needs of those in different eras and cultures. The goma is typically celebrated according to the feast day of Fudō Myōō Shingon on the 28th of every month. However, in an attempt to meet the needs of the congregation it desires to accommodate, Kōyasan Los Angeles celebrates the goma on the last Sunday of the month in an effort to conform to American religious standards without any serious reconfiguration of the ritual.

### **Modes of Participation:**

The vital facilitation of clearing one's karmic misdeeds and granting their desires is endowed by the ritual's main act: the burning and offering of the congregation's goma-ki (goma-sticks 護摩木). These small, wooden sticks are made from the Japanese wax tree (haze no ki 黄櫨), sold for a modest donation of five dollars and ritually burned during the climax of the goma ritual (fig. 25). They are approximately one inch wide, eight inches long, and one-sixteenth of an inch thick. One end is slightly rounded at the edges while the other is shaped into a point. At the top of the stick is a red print of the seed-syllable (Skt. bija, J. shūji 種子) hāṃmāṃ (हं मं) that represents Acala, written in the Sanskrit script of Siddham (fig. 26).<sup>68</sup> Visitors are instructed to write their name, misdeeds and desires upon the stick before leaving them in a tray to be offered by the priests during the service. However, practitioners are not required to purchase goma-sticks in order to participate in the ceremony.

The individual act of writing on the goma-stick and its communal offering in ceremony is an example of the sensorial relationship found throughout the goma service between participant and priest, human and Buddha, body and temple. The goma stick offers an access point into the ceremony that empowers practitioner's with a direct line of communication between themselves and the rite's chief deity Acala. As the intentions written upon the goma-stick are burned, the resulting smoke carries their wishes towards

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<sup>68</sup> Dorothy Jean Sutton, "FUDŌ MYŌO'S INDEPENDENT CULT IN JAPAN: AN ANALYSIS OF ITS EVOLUTION AND VALUE," (Ohio State University, 2006), 11; Saroj Kumar Chaudhuri, "Siddham in China and Japan," *SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS*, no. 88 (1998); Robert H. Sharf, "Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism," 186. Seed-syllables are the sonic manifestation of particular deities and hold within their pronunciation all the merit of the Buddha or Bodhisattva. Bija Mandalas that replace iconographic representations of the deities with shūji are common examples of seed-syllables in practice.

the timeless palace of Mahāvairocana. The array of consecrated offerings made by the priests, including the goma-sticks, and their subsequent consumption by the goma fire exemplifies the phenomenal impermanence of the Shingon Buddhist doctrine and the transformation of seemingly material objects into powerful spiritual tools.

The initiated knowledge required to enable the practice of the goma ceremony for the congregation of Kōyasan Los Angeles affects the modes of ritual participation available. Although there are many chants, postures and images a practitioner may utilize during the goma practice, the ritual structure prioritizes the congregation's engagement during select moments in the service. Besides the recitation of daily prayers such as the *The Precious Name of Kōbō Daishi* (go-hōgō 御宝号) and the pressed-palm worship (gasshō raihai 合掌礼拝) the layperson's direct participation can be defined by four distinct events during the goma service. These are the recitation of *The Heart Sutra* (Skt. Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya, J. Hannya Shingyō 般若心經), the recitation of the Acala Vidyārāja Mantra, the completion of the sincerest dedication of merit (shishin ekō 至心廻向) and the creation of goma-sticks. Although three of these events are defined by the recitation of mantra, they also involve the ritual engagement of body and mind in accordance with the interconnected and overlapping practice of the Three Mysteries. These four events are the core means by which the layperson participates in the goma. Accordingly, this paper will examine the use of ritual implements during these segments of the goma ceremony in order to ascertain the aurality that is produced by the intrapersonal practice of the Three Mysteries at Kōyasan Los Angeles.

## The Mystery of Body:

In order to examine how the practice of the mystery of the body (shinmitsu 身密) is observed during the goma service I will first analyze the practice of the sincerest dedication of merit, or the shishin ekō, and the role of the Buddhist sistrum (shakujō) in ritual. The integration of the sistrum during the bodily practice of the goma rite at Kōyasan Los Angeles enables the physical exchange of positive merit between Acala, the fire, and the practitioner. In order to amplify this practice for the benefit of uninitiated laypersons who may not be as familiar with the service, ministers at Kōyasan Los Angeles employ the sistrum as a consecrated vehicle that physically bestows the practitioner with the energizing merit of the goma ceremony. Also known as a pewter staff, the Buddhist implement used at Kōyasan Los Angeles consists of a small wooden handle with a ringed-brass finial at the end (fig. 27). The pole is topped by a decorated ring that contains another shaft within itself. This inner shaft may either be stylized like a blade or a reliquary for the remains of Buddhist saints (Skt. Stūpa, J. sotoba 卒都婆).<sup>69</sup> The center ring atop the finial is adorned with two sets of smaller rings that make a distinctive jingle as the sistrum is shaken. Historically the sistrum can be found at the end of walking staffs, however the versions used in ritual are small enough to easily fit in the palm of the priest's hand.<sup>70</sup> In practicing the remembrance of original Buddhahood with

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<sup>69</sup> E. Dale Saunders, *Mudrā*, 168. Originally an architectural design for the remains of the historical Buddha, Tantric Buddhist texts developed the iconography of the stūpa into a microcosmic expression of the cosmology of the universe.

<sup>70</sup> Saunders, 179-181. Known as khakkhara in Sanskrit, the shakujō was originally employed by monks who had sworn silence, enabling them the ability to beg. It also served as a warning to small animals and insects who may be mistakenly trodden on during a monk's pilgrimages. The instrument has taken on many meanings in many traditions but it can be generalized as both a calling and an expelling implement with the power to accumulate merit.

total awareness of one's body, material objects such as the sistrum expand beyond the limitations of their perceived physical form. In recognizing one's original unity with the universal expressions of Mahāvairocana, the Shingon practice reveals the impermanent identities that human reason may weld to objects like the sistrum. Whereas, in reality, the sistrum is an equal expression of Mahāvairocana. Through the Shingon practice, the sistrum is no longer delimited as a historical relic or musical implement but rather a transformative vessel imbued with the fire of enlightenment for the salvation of all sentient beings. The practice of the goma ceremony transforms ritual objects into vessels capable of somatically communicating the practitioner's original unity with the whole of creation.

In this example, the congregation and the priests perform the sincerest dedication so that the merits of their freshly conducted practice may be shared with all sentient beings. The basis for this genuine act of compassion is grounded in the tradition's desire to remind all sentient beings of their eternal unity within the formless presence of Mahāvairocana. The ritual use of the sincerest dedication not only disperses the merit of the goma practice with the entire universe but also channels the merit of the initiated priests towards the attending practitioners. The positive merit generated by the priest's diligent practice of the goma is ritually transferred to the practitioner through the consecrated implementation of the Shingon sistrum. The role of the sistrum during the sincerest dedication is predicated upon the idea of proximity when engaging with the goma fire. Its ability to transfer merit effectively is primarily provided through its proximity to the goma hearth during the priest's offering of the goma-sticks (fig. 28).

The sistrum functions as both a musical offering and as an entry point into the universal expression of Mahāvairocana's body, speech and mind. Additionally, it is used during the climax of the goma ceremony as a means of modulating the speed and intensity of the ceremony's central mantra, the Acala Vidyārāja Mantra.<sup>71</sup> Due to the fact that the chant is repeated over one hundred times during a standard goma practice the volume and fervor of the congregation may wane as members reach the limits of their physical capacity. As such, the Bishop will begin to shake the sistrum during this time in order to increase the pace of the mantra and encourage its wholehearted recitation. As the head priest begins to ring the sistrum faster and faster, the ministers join in as well until the entire assembly of monks are vigorously chanting and shaking the implement. The sound generated by the beat of their movements causes the entire congregation to increase the volume and speed of their chanting. The direct effect that the sistrum exerts over the practice of the goma ceremony transforms its sound into an offering, modulates the intensity of the ritual and physically accumulates the goma's enlightening merit. Sound and the body that produce it are equal in merit as an offering for the chief deity of the goma ritual. The transformative nature of the sistrum in Shingon ritual practice demonstrates the interdependent nature of both living beings and material things in producing the universal body, speech and mind of Mahāvairocana.

Following the completion of the goma service and adjoining sermon, all the practitioners present are invited to stand in front of the altar. After introducing the mantra through the proclamation of the verse on opening a sutra (kaikyō-ge 開經) a priest begins

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<sup>71</sup> Similar to the offerings of food, incense and water, music (or more broadly sound) is considered a sacrament with which to honor the visitation of the honzon, Acala Vidyārāja.

to drum a large ceremonial drum (taiko 太鼓) in order to mark another recitation of the goma's central chant, the Acala Mantra (fig. 29). As the priests and congregation chant with great speed and fervor, the Bishop's assistants make their way through the crowd. Armed with a ceremonial sistrum made of brass and wood, each minister firmly taps the backs of the practitioners according to the rhythm of the mantra set by the Bishop's drumming. During the dedication each minister takes their turn completing a cycle of taps across the practitioner's back, beginning near the shoulders and making their way towards the lumbar of the spine (fig. 30). As the practitioners diligently focus their minds through the intensity of their chanting, often closing their eyes, each impact of the heavy brass implement can be felt ringing throughout their body. After each lay practitioner has received the brunt of every minister's sistrum, the dedication is completed, the Acala Mantra comes to a close and the service formally ends.

It is believed that by sincerely practicing the pacification goma with total concentration one may accumulate merit in order to extinguish misfortune and direct their mind towards original Buddhahood. However, in order to ensure that this merit may be shared with others, Shingon Buddhists practice dedication services and recite dedication mantras in order to expand the merits of their individual practice with all sentient beings. While the structure of the goma ritual prioritizes the proximity of initiated priests when engaging with the goma fire, services such as the sincerest dedication and the offering of goma-stick are designed to provide practitioners with a means of accessing the same

merits as the priests.<sup>72</sup> Bishop Yuju Matsumoto explains the practice of the dedication by citing the effect of proximity during the practice of the goma ceremony (fig. 31). The priests of Kōyasan Los Angeles believe that one's physical proximity to the fire, and the chief deity therein, affects the quantity and quality of merit available to practitioners. There is an acknowledgement of a literal "energy" that, through the power of Shingon ritual, radiates from the goma fire, accumulates within the sistrum and is absorbed by the practitioner.

The sincerest dedication of merit as practiced at Kōyasan Los Angeles is not originally a part of the goma's structure and was added at the behest of Bishop Yuju Matsumoto.<sup>73</sup> During this final blessing service, the role of the sistrum in materially conferring positive merit to the practitioner illustrates the transformational quality of Shingon ritual material. Ironically, these material objects are considered to be highly effective in communicating mistakenly abstract concepts such as enlightenment in this very body. During the sincerest dedication, the combination of chant and the sistrum's temporal exchange with the body of the practitioner manifests an aural presence of the divine that is both immediate and ungraspable.

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<sup>72</sup> Ritual acts such as the burning of goma-stick offers lay practitioners an opportunity to directly engage with the fire of the goma ceremony through the construction of a causal link embodied in the creation and offering of a materially transformed item.

<sup>73</sup> Richard K. Payne, "Ritual Syntax and Cognitive Theory," 195-228. Despite the rigid order of Shingon ritual, it is often modulated and modified according to the needs of individual temples. As long as the sequence of the ritual remains symmetrical, other rites may be inserted in between specific moments. This interplay between structure and accommodation reflects the esoteric belief in the adaptation of the teachings according to the needs of the students (within reason).

### **The Mystery of Speech:**

Following the mystery of the body, the next practice emphasizes the mystery of speech (kumitsu 口密). The Shingon goma practice aims to achieve enlightenment in this body and the practitioner's biological capacity to produce sound (with intention) is harnessed towards that goal in the chanting of the Acala Vidyārāja Mantra. The mantra is located on a letter-sized piece of cardstock found on the back of each chair (fig. 32). The paper also contains other common chants, such as *The Heart Sutra* and *The Precious Name of Kōbō Daishi*. The mantras are available in traditional kanji, hiragana and rōmaji characters. There are no English translations available on the page or in the main hall. In fact, whether practitioners can speak Sanskrit, Japanese, English, or none of the above, they may still ascertain the complete merit of the practice of speech without ever understanding the chant's literal meaning. The illuminating lifeforce shone amongst all the expressions of Mahāvairocana's compassionate body, speech and mind vibrates within and throughout the intentional chanting of mantra.<sup>74</sup> The recitation of the sound alone contains the merit of his eternal and ubiquitous existence. The practice of intentional chanting at Kōyasan Los Angeles attempts to produce a somatic transformation within the practitioner that is not predicated on meaning but rather the pure expression of sound.

Sound, like body and mind, is a universal expression of Mahāvairocana's all-pervasive life force that arises from the vibrations wrought between all things.<sup>75</sup> The

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<sup>74</sup> Kūkai and Yoshitoko S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 241. The root of all vibrations find themselves within the light of Mahāvairocana's dharma body. Because sounds, like all objects of reality, are defined by the difference between them, they share a common origin in the eternal impermanence of the universe as personified in Mahāvairocana.

<sup>75</sup> Kūkai and Yoshitoko S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 236.

mystery of speech is not predicated on understanding or the making of meaning but rather on the causal relationship formed between the practitioner's vocal exchange with the voice of Mahāvairocana and their own.

Of all the mantras practiced during the ceremony, the Acala Vidyārāja Mantra is the longest and most engaging. The practitioner's vigorous chanting during the climactic immolation of the goma-stick attunes their body and mind with that of Mahāvairocana by transforming their so-called "phenomenal" mouth into the adamantine mouth of the ritual's chief deity, Acala.<sup>76</sup> Although musical implements are commonly used in Shingon rituals such as the goma, the practice of speech relies on the human voice as an instrument capable of sonorously proclaiming its inherent unity with the voice of Mahāvairocana. This practice is not dependent upon skill or talent but rather on the meaningful recitation of mantra. The Acala Vidyārāja Mantra is considered the vocal, vibratory essence of Acala. In chanting the profound syllables that share his qualities, one transforms their body, speech and mind, through the power of Mahāvairocana's ubiquitous vibration, into the body, speech and mind of Acala Vidyārāja. On the following pages I've included the English translation and Japanese transliteration of the original Sanskrit mantra of Acala Vidyārāja.

NŌMAKU SANMANDA BAZARADAN SENDA MAKAROSHADA SOWATAYA

UN TARATA KAN MAN<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> According to the Shingon practice at Kōyasan Los Angeles, the mouth of the practitioner has and always will be one and the same with the mouth of Mahāvairocana.

<sup>77</sup> Kōyasan Shingon Shū, *Shingon Buddhist Service Book*, trans. Thomas Eijō Dreitlein (Sohonzan Kongobu-ji Kyogaku-bu, 2012), 37.

“Homage to the all-pervading Vajras! O Violent One of great wrath! Destroy!

hūṃ traṭ hāṃ māṃ”<sup>78</sup>

None of the three practices are truly separate from one another and they naturally intermingle during the goma service. As noted prior, the style of practice engaged at Kōyasan Los Angeles cultivates the full exertion of one's body, speech and mind so that the totality of one's concentration is focused towards enlightenment in the human body. The rhythm that the priest's set during the chanting of the Acala Vidyārāja Mantra emerges from the altar and engulfs the congregation within a deep, unified chorus. As the chant continues to move louder and faster, repeated over one-hundred times, the fire grows pregnant with the offerings of the congregation's goma-sticks (fig. 33). However, the intensity and speed of the chant can wane amongst the congregation. The goma practice requires significant energy if the practitioner attempts to maintain the volume, intensity and perseverance of the chant's full exercise, as observed in the priest's administration of the ceremony. The monks do not stop chanting until the final offerings towards the goma have been made. During my own experience of the goma, my voice became hoarse and my lips parched as I expelled all the air in my lungs in an attempt to match the energy of the priests. My diaphragm and stomach ached as I repeated the mantra and tried to maintain a steady volume throughout the service. The physical difficulty associated with the full exercise of the goma, as practiced by the priests at Kōyasan Los Angeles, promotes the focused attention of the practitioner on a singular

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<sup>78</sup> Abbot Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 52.

point. The somatic engagement of the sonic, visual and material culture of the Shingon practice aims to fix one's focus upon the goma with complete presence. The more physically involved the practitioner is, the harder it becomes for the mind to wander during the chant's recitation. The mantra's transformation of the mouth into a ritual implement, and the diligent attention of one's body and mind during the spell's recitation, enables immediate access to the universal gate of Mahāvairocana's eternal meditation.

The origins of the Shingon tradition, as expressed in the teachings of Kūkai, cites sound (shō 聲) or vibration as the “constitutive element” that is “produced through contact with the five great elements” of earth, fire, water, wind and space.<sup>79</sup> The invariable vibrations made through the interplay of the five material elements creates sound. When sounds are uttered they denote a name, or letter (ji 字) that inevitably distinguishes an object within reality (jissō 實相). This “generative process of differentiation,” coined by scholar Ryuichi Abe as “semigo-genetics,” constructs reality as a scripture that is made legible through the differences established between phenomena.<sup>80</sup> This narrative is not located within any space or time but is instead enacted at all times in all places. As equal expressions of Mahāvairocana's compassion, all objects in the universe are defined by their differences from each other, since they are fundamentally the same. When viewed from this cosmological perspective, these disparate objects produce the world-text that Kūkai referred to as “the preaching of the truth-body (hosshin seppō 法身說法).<sup>81</sup> Humanity, in an eternal exchange with the

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<sup>79</sup> Kūkai and Yoshitoko S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 234-240.

<sup>80</sup> Ryuichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra*, 279.

<sup>81</sup> Ana Laura Funes Maderey, “Voicing the Letter of One's Own Sound: Some Notes on the Role of Mantra in Kūkai's Philosophy of Language,” *Papers from the 2015 University of Tokyo-University of Hawai'i*

constituents of the universe, is but a letter in the cosmic text enabled through the preaching of Mahāvairocana's eternal meditation. When the practitioner can read the world-text as it is, they have realized their originally enlightened mind. The practice of the goma ritual within a dedicated temple space, such as Kōyasan Los Angeles, encases the narrative of the world-text within a ritual structure that is made manifest through the congregation's somatic participation.

The presence and practice of sound production is a sacred effort made during the goma ceremony in order to harmonize the vibration of one's speech with the preaching of Mahāvairocana's eternal dharma. The veneration of sound during the goma can be observed in the use of the sistrum, the drum, the pleasant clap (hakushō 拍掌), the pulling bell (inkin 引磬), the vajra-bell (kongō-rei 金剛鈴), the conch shell (hora 法螺) and above all the chanting of spells (Skt. mantra, J. shingon 真言) and sung praises (hōmyō 称名) (figs. 34-37). The diverse array of implements used in the offering of sound creates a wide variety of sonic textures, tones and dynamics throughout the duration of the goma. The primary presence of sound reaffirms the transformative power that the practice of speech and sonic production channels in the communication of the Shingon religious faith. The air that is enclosed within the temple walls becomes ritually transformed through the intermingling of voice, incense and smoke forming an iconic representation of Mahāvairocana that is at once fleeting and primary to the congregation that evokes his presence.

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*Summer Residential Institute in Comparative Philosophy*, (2016); Kūkai and Yoshitoko S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, 78.

Although this study has highlighted the presence and function of ritual implements in the process of inciting enlightenment within the Shingon practitioner, the impermanent nature of voice confounds any analysis that is predicated on the preservation and observance of material artifacts. When analyzing Shingon ritual chants, there is no physical record of the sound transpired. Although the impermanence of auditory vibrations is frustrating for an archivist, the Shingon practitioner lauds the passing of sound as an especially relevant reason for the importance of sonic practice. While digital and analog audio recordings of Shingon services could offer an avenue into sonic analysis, the essential aspect of the practice of speech would remain unobservable. The Shingon tradition espouses the intrapersonal transformation of the practitioner's mouth into a sonic waypoint amongst Mahāvairocana's endless expressions. A recording may offer a memory of the event for others, but it can not facilitate any meaningful understanding of a living Shingon practice because there is no active practitioner to engage with. Rather, the understanding of mantra in Shingon ritual is predicated on the individual's intentional vocalization of the sound and its aural manifestation within a ritual space such as Kōyasan Los Angeles. It is the physical use of the vocal cords and the body en masse that produces the merit associated with the enlightening, energizing function of the goma ceremony's somatic engagement with Shingon material culture.

### **The Mystery of Mind:**

The final practice of the Three Mysteries centers around the ritual use of the mind's ability to visualize (imitsu 意密) the teachings of the Shingon tradition in their symbolic forms. The goma ritual and the temple's arrangement construct a fantastic visual spectacle through the mediums of painting, statuary, architecture, and ritual altars in order to align the mindful meditation of the practitioner with that of Mahāvairocana. The ritual space of the goma ceremony, and the practitioner's limited access to it, are intentionally organized to visually communicate the nature of one's originally enlightened mind. It is believed that visual stimulation of the goma at Kōyasan Los Angeles will assist the practitioner in mentally channeling the presence of the rite's chief deity. The mystery of mind is engaged throughout one's participation in the ceremony, however the zenith of the goma ritual's immersive imagery is observed in the presentation of the vajra-posts (kongō-ketsu 金剛榎), altar rope (dansen 壇線) and gate (torii 鳥居) that encase the living flame of the goma altar (fig. 38).

The sanctity of the fire and the altar's implements requires laypeople to approach the hearth with patience, purity and an offering. In order to facilitate the practitioner's meaningful physical engagement with the goma ceremony, the congregation will approach the altar for incense offering while chanting *The Heart Sutra*. The positioning of the incense bowl along the temple's central axis creates an immersive optical diorama that embeds within the practitioner's mind a visual interpretation of their interpenetration with the fire and the chief deity.

The visual spectacle conferred by the goma altar is a microcosmic expression of the macrocosmic unity of the universe. One can practice mindful visualization through the mystery of mind by physically modeling the teachings of Mahāvairocana. Although the magnificent display observed upon the goma altar is physically inaccessible to anyone other than initiated priests, the congregation of Kōyasan Los Angeles ritually accesses proximity to the altar through the recitation of *The Heart Sutra* and the practice of offering incense (shōkō 焼香).<sup>82</sup> During the chanting of *The Heart Sutra*, practitioners bequeath the buddhas by facilitating a gift giving exchange with the chief deity of the rite, Acala Vidyārāja, through incense offering. Incense, like precious oils, plants, water, sound and light are essential offerings used to please the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Shingon practice.<sup>83</sup> However, the primary visual spectacle that facilitates this ritual exchange and stimulates the practitioner's mind is the perspective of their position along the temple's central axis during the practice of incense offering.

After the opening procession of the goma service, the chanting of *The Heart Sutra* will prompt practitioners to begin a procession towards the incense censer at the front of the temple. As they continue to chant *The Heart Sutra* and make their way to the censer, the edge of the hearth's slowly rising fire can be seen from behind the silhouette of the head priest's back (fig. 39). The censer is almost filled to the brim with the ash of previously burnt incense. Upon this mound of ash is placed a small coal. Next to the

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<sup>82</sup> Of all the Buddhist scriptures familiar to western audiences, the heart sutra enjoys particular popularity due to its employment by a multitude of Mahayana Buddhist schools. The sutra is believed to contain the most essential teachings of the Mahayana concept of emptiness, therefore it is popularly chanted as a means of transmitting the dharma.

<sup>83</sup> Abbot Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism: A Handbook for Followers*, 104-105.

censer lies a small plate holding a pile of purple cloud incense (shiunkō 紫雲香).

Grabbing a pinch, practitioners sprinkle it onto the coal, hold their hands in pressed-palm worship and offer a prayer to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of their choice (fig. 40).<sup>84</sup> A wonderfully rich and peppery smell is produced by the incense's unique blend of agarwood, sandalwood, clove, and spices. The presence of a live fire indoors, along with the familiar sound and smell of the flame's crackle, incites a primal sense of comfort. The twisting spurts of heat and light provide endless visualizations upon which the practitioner can meditate as they focus their mind on the flames of Mahāvairocana's eternal compassion. The smoke of the burnt goma-sticks physically permeates the temple hall, so that the desires of the congregation, the smell of the incense and the vibrations produced by their chants join together before ascending towards the heavens. As practitioners present their incense offerings, they are provided a glimpse into the construction of the goma altar that embodies the essence of Shingon ritual. Upon the altar there are four brass vajra-posts that uphold a braided rope made from alternating strands of white, black, green, yellow and red fibers. Each leg of the four vajra-posts stands approximately two feet above the goma altar. However, immediately in front of the head priest, between the foremost vajra-posts, there are two elongated posts that extend some three feet in the air. Together with the outstretched altar rope the assembly forms the shape of a gate that frames the seated head priest from the perspective of the layperson below. The altar rope travels across the perimeter of the vajra-posts and the gate, creating

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<sup>84</sup> Worshippers are free to make personal offerings and prayers prior to the goma ceremony through the act of incense offering, however the recitation of the *The Heart Sutra* is a dedicated time during the service for such offerings. Although a donation box is strategically placed before the censer, temple administration does not bar strangers from participating on account of a lack of money.

a closed loop around the hearth (fig. 41). From the perspective of the practitioner standing some six feet below the altar, the goma gate opens the way into the intimate sanctum of the inner territory wherein a golden statue of Mahāvairocana is enshrined (fig. 42). The visual presentation of the goma altar and the arrangement of the vajra-posts, altar rope and gate incites the internal realization of enlightenment by stimulating the inner visualization of the practitioner through the architectural aurality of Shingon ritual practice.

Through specific mantra and mudrā formulations, the head priest seals the flames within the goma altar through the erection of a vajra-hall. In his meditation he imagines adamantine vajra bolts that form an impenetrable defense around the hearth. This is done to prevent any demonic interference that may try and interrupt the ritual. Accordingly, the head priest must maintain access with the sealed hall and he does this through the maintenance of a gate. The gate is the ritual entrance into the vajra-hall and it is physically upheld by the vajra-post and altar rope. Just as the gate provides the head priest with an entrance into the sanctum of the goma's purifying flame, so too does the practice of the Three Mysteries open the gate of one's inner realization with the mind of Mahāvairocana. The ritual offering of incense along the temple's central nave reaffirms the functionality of Shingon artworks that are intended to facilitate enlightenment in this body. The location of the censer is perfectly centered along the median of the temple. While standing in front of the censer, the goma altar lies directly in front of the practitioner. Its location aligns the practitioner through an axis that travels from the incense censer, to the goma altar, through the fire and towards the most intimate sanctum

of the inner territory where the golden statue of Mahāvairocana resides (fig. 43). The physical correspondence of the practitioner's body and the optical recognition of their presence along this axis of empowerment elucidates yet again the overlapping implementation of the Three Mysteries in practice.

Although this section highlights optical expressions of Shingon precepts during the goma ritual, the practitioner's bodily presence within a designated space is still required. The effect of the goma altar's physical presentation would not be as effective if simply viewed through a photograph. The practitioner's presence along this meridian creates a strikingly material visualization that reflects the essence of original Buddhahood through the creation of a physical parallel to this abstract truth. The temple of Kōyasan Los Angeles calibrates the visual presentation of Shingon teachings by informing the movement of practitioners within a designated ritual space, activating the latent aurality of the temple. The visual presentation of a physical commonality between all things is expressed by the material axis of empowerment that strings together the fire, the practitioner, and the chief deity along the temple's central nave.

**Conclusion:**

The merit of the goma ritual is not necessarily derived from the practitioner's ability to understand what is going on contextually. Rather, it is the practice of complete and total engagement with the architecture and ritual implements of Kōyasan Los Angeles that invokes the illuminating presence of the goma's promised transformation. This effect is achieved through a sophisticated material culture that calibrates the body, speech and mind of the practicing congregation. The temporal effect of Shingon ritual bypasses conventional semantic language and instead transmits the profound understanding of becoming a Buddha in this body through total somatic integration. The architecture, altars and implements do not contain some pseudo-magical force that grants wishes to earnest believers. Rather, the conscious expression of one's body, speech and mind enables access to the grace of Mahāvairocana's realization through participation in the goma ceremony.

As a tradition that espouses desire as the root of all suffering, it seems antithetical to encourage the promulgation of ritual techniques like the goma that seek to affirm the human desires of safety and well-being. While the principal aim of Shingon Buddhism is the enlightenment of all sentient beings, the practice does not shy away from offering the laity a variety of amulets, talismans, and blessings that promise to alleviate their suffering in some way (figs. 44-46). From traffic safety to success in exams, expelling demons and burning away sins, there are various Shingon practices that seek to change the material world in some way. In true accord with the promise of enlightenment in this very body, the Shingon practice does not deny the worldly desires of human beings. In fact,

the Shingon practice recognizes that the fulfillment of human desire is commensurate with the desire of Mahāvairocana because they are fundamentally united in the vibration of his eternal preaching. This realization is taken to the logical extreme in the implementation of ritual tools and architecture during the Shingon goma service. The fundamental unity between all things, referred to as “the logic of similarity” by scholar Cynthia Bogel, provides Shingon practitioners with the ability to somatically transform any object into a direct line of communication with the body, speech and mind of Mahāvairocana.<sup>85</sup> Shingon practice places particular importance on the effects of material culture because the body is understood as a localized source of enlightenment that must be reactivated. The Shingon tradition reiterates the fundamental impermanence of illusory identities by acknowledging the corporeal reality of the practitioner’s body as an enlivening force in the ritual process. While the temple and the implements are considered conduits for the divine, they are inert when engaged half-heartedly by doubtful practitioners. It is the intrapersonal relationship of the practitioner and their practice that transforms these materials into vessels of enlightenment.

The public availability of the goma practice at Kōyasan Los Angeles provides scholars with an alternate method of studying religious art, one that equally incorporates temporal effects such as movement, sound, and light when discussing architectural spaces. Bissera V. Pentcheva has contributed immensely to the incorporation of soundscapes in the expansion of Art Historical discourse, however her study was unable to interface with a living example of the Byzantine tradition. The historical perseverance

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<sup>85</sup> Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance*, 6. The Shingon belief in a universal dharma body, expressed as Mahāvairocana, is described by Bogel as the “logic of similarity.” The fundamental emptiness of form meant that all objects in ritual are ontologically equal with those who use them.

of Kōyasan Los Angeles, an enduring Buddhist institution in downtown Los Angeles, has produced a uniquely Japanese-American experience that persists to this day. The welcoming, public attitude of the temple provides a rare opportunity for the further research of Shingon Buddhist developments in America. The ability to participate and observe the use of Shingon material culture in real time provides much needed contextualization for the functionality of religious artworks, both Buddhist and abroad.

The Shingon interpretation of reality as an all-inclusive body that expresses itself through the universal compassion of Mahāvairocana nullifies the need for semantic meaning in ritual.<sup>86</sup> It is not necessary for a practitioner to understand the semantics of every ritual utterance because the merit accumulated from Shingon practice is found in the mindful, bodily expression of that ritual, rather than contemplation of it. The nature of Shingon religious practice is thereby equally grounded in the individual's physical and spiritual capacity, rather than their mental cognition.

Accordingly, I was told by Bishop Matsumoto that unless I sat with the ministers atop the altar I would not be able to write effectively about the goma. Bishop Matsumoto kept his promise and invited me to watch the goma from a fresh perspective, hidden amongst the edge of the inner territory. I mention this experience not only because it allowed me to observe a perspective of the goma necessarily hidden from temple practitioners but because it demonstrates the state of the Shingon Los Angeles Mission in the twenty-first century: to accommodate as best they can the earnest desire of outsiders interested in the Shingon practice. In reorienting the study of Shingon Buddhism towards

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<sup>86</sup> Abbot Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 27.

the functional, active and living correspondence between Shingon ritual tools and the modern practitioners that empower them I hope to emphasize the transformative potential of temporal effects such as movement, sound and vision in the examination of ritual artwork. The material culture of the Shingon tradition is not merely an object separate from the practitioner's existence but rather a mirror that grants access to the same universal flame of Mahāvairocana's compassion shining within all beings.

Figures:



Fig. 1 Christian Valdez, Entrance of Kōyasan Los Angeles, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles



Fig. 2 Christian Valdez, Detail of a sign posted at the entrance of Kōyasan Los Angeles, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles

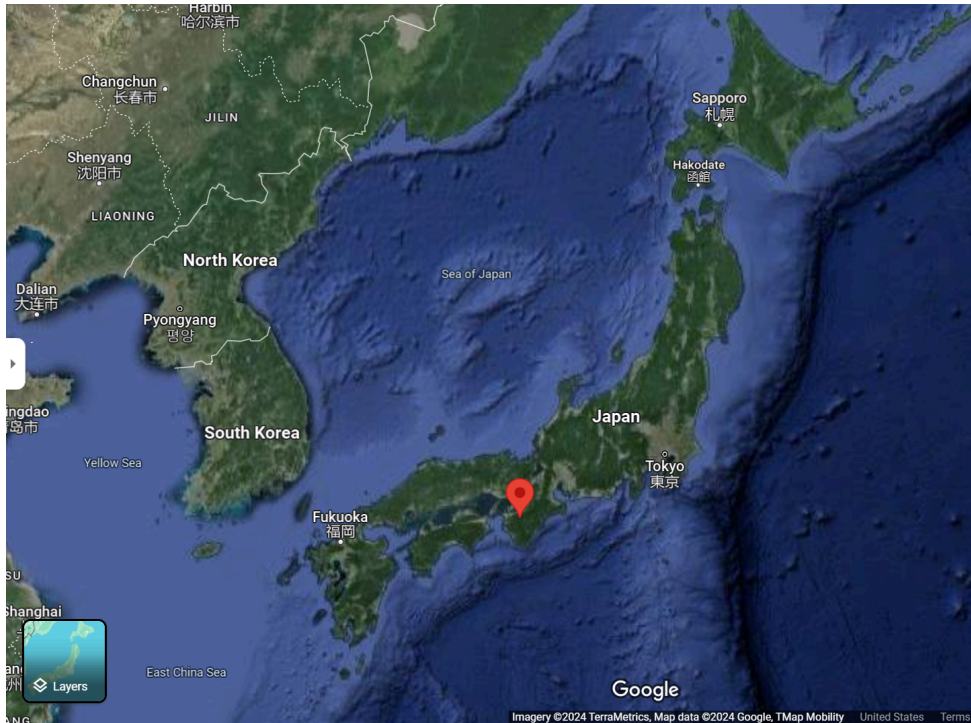


Fig. 3 Christian Valdez, Map of Japan, screenshot, 2024, Google Maps.



Fig. 4 Anonymous, Dedication Service, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 5 Anonymous, *Shakujō*, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 6 Anonymous, Detail of vajra-hall, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 7 Anonymous, Detail of goma hearth, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 8 Anonymous, Iconographic image of Acala Vidyārāja, ink on paper, 1997, Abbot Yūsei Arai, *Shingon Esoteric Buddhism*, 52.



Fig. 9 Noelle Yamagami, *Kōyasan Courtyard*, print photograph, 2012, Kōyasan Los Angeles, Kōyasan Beikoku Betsu-in, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission: 100th Anniversary* (2012), 257.



Fig. 10 Christian Valdez, *Omikuji*, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles



Fig. 11 Anonymous, Water offering to Jizō, digital download, 2017, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page

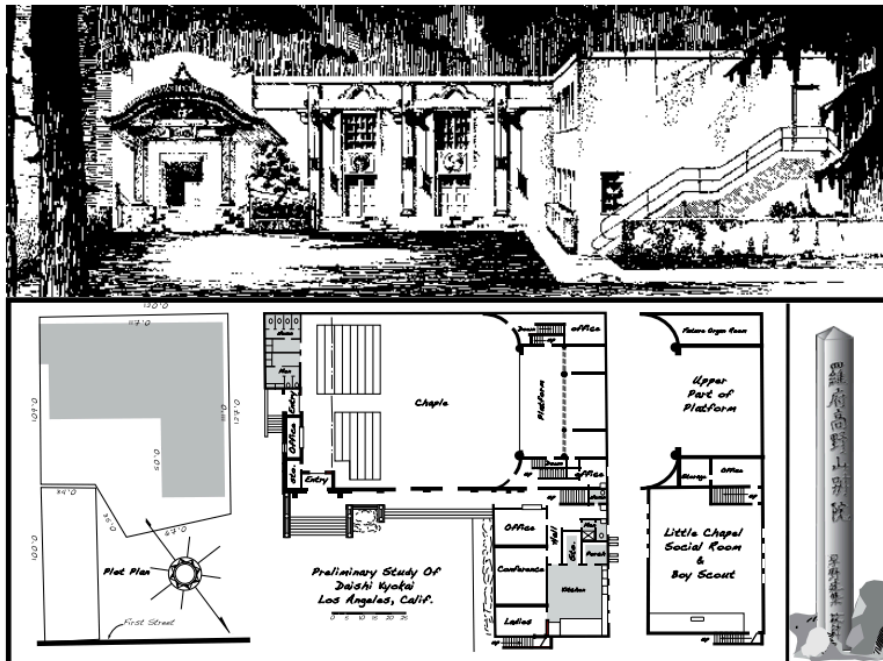


Fig. 12 Illustration and floor plan of the Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, print, 2012, Kōyasan Los Angeles, Kōyasan Beikoku Betsu-in, *Kōyasan Los Angeles Mission: 100th Anniversary* (2012), 23.



Fig. 13 Anonymous, View of the main hall, digital download, 2020, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 14 Anonymous, Detail of the deities from the altar's dual mandalas, digital download, 2016, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 15 Anonymous, View of the Diamond (Kongō) Mandala, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page

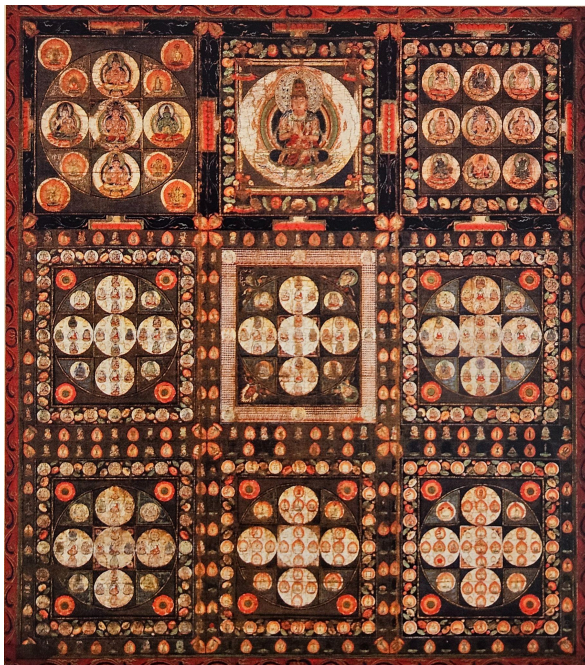


Fig. 16 Anonymous, *Sai'in mandara*, *Diamond World mandala*. Tōji (Kyōōgokokuji), Kyoto. Heian period, 859-80. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, H 183.6cm, W 164.2 cm, Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance*, 239.



Fig. 17 Anonymous, View of the Womb-world (Taizō-kai) Mandala, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 18 Anonymous, *Sai'in mandara*, *Womb maṇḍala*. Tōji (Kyōōgokokuji), Kyoto. Heian period, 859-80. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, H 183.5cm, W 163 cm, Cynthia J. Bogel, *With a Single Glance*, 239.



Fig. 19 Anonymous, View of the balcony, digital download, 2015, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 20 Anonymous, View of the hall, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 21 Anonymous, View of the main altar, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 22 Anonymous, Detailed view of the main altar, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 23 Anonymous, View of the goma hall, digital download, 2024, Kagoshima Prefecture, Eboshiyama Saifukuji Temple, <https://www.saifukuji.or.jp/>



Fig. 24 Anonymous, Closer detail of the main altar, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 25 Christian Valdez, *Goma-ki*, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles



Fig. 26 Christian Valdez, Detail of *goma-ki*, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles



Fig. 27 Anonymous, Detail of Shingon Buddhist sistrum, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 28 Anonymous, Sistrum in ritual, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 29 Anonymous, *Taiko*, digital download, 2017, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 30 Christian Valdez, Detail of a goma service from a livestream, digital screenshot, 2023, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 31 Anonymous, Detail of the goma fire and sistrum, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



BUS-SETSU MA-KA HAN-NYA HA-RA-MIT-TA-SHIN-GYO

般若心經

Kan-ji-zai-bo-sa-(tsu), gyo jin Han-nya-ha-ra-mit-ta ji, sho-ken go-un kai-ku, do is-sai ku-yaku.

Sha-ri-shi, shiki-fu-i-ku, ku-fu-i-shiki, shiki soku ze-ku, ku soku ze-shiki, ju so gyo shiki, yaku-bu nyo-ze.

Sha-ri-shi, ze sho-ho ku-so, fu-sho fu-metsu, fu-ku fu-jo, fu-zo fu-gen, ze-ko ku-chu, mu-shiki mu-ju-so-gyo-shiki, mu-gen-ni-bi-zet-shin-ni, mu-shiki-sho-ko-mi-soku-ho, mu-gen-kai nai-shi mu-i-shiki-kai mu-mu-myo, yaku mu-mu-myo-jin, nai-shi mu-ro-shi, yaku mu-ro-shi-jin, mu-ku-shu-metsu-do, mu-chi yaku mu-toku, i mu-sho-tok-ko, Bo-dai-sat-ta, e han-nya-ha-ra-mit-ta ko, shin mu-kei-ge, mu-kei-ge ko mu-u-ku-fu, on ri is-sai ten-do mu-so, ku-gyo ne-han.

San-ze sho-but-su, e han-nya-ha-ra mit-ta, ko-toku a-noku-ta-ra-sam-myaku-sam-bo-dai.

Ko-chi Han-nya-ha-ra-mit-ta, ze dai-jin-shu, ze dai-myo-shu, ze mu-jo-shu, ze mu-to-do-shu, no-jo is-sai-ku, shin-jitsu, fu-ko, ko setsu Han-nya-ha-ra-mit-ta-shu, soku set shu watsu:

Gya-te, gya-te, ha-ra-gya-te, hara-so-gya-te, bo-ji sowa-ka Han-nya-shin-gyo.

觀自在菩薩 行深般若波羅蜜多時 照見五蘊皆空  
度一切苦厄 色不異空 空不異色 色即是空 空即是色 受想行識 亦復如是 不生不滅 不垢不淨 舍利子 是諸法空相 無色聲香味觸法 無眼耳鼻舌身意 無意識界 無無明亦無無明盡 無眼界乃至無意識界 無無明亦無無明盡 乃至無老死亦無老死盡 無苦集滅道 無智亦無得 以無所得故 菩提薩埵 依般若波羅蜜多故 心無罣礙 無罣礙故 無有恐怖 遠離一切顛倒夢想 究竟涅槃 三世諸佛 依般若波羅蜜多故 得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提 故知般若波羅蜜多 是大神呪 是大明呪 是無上呪 是無等等呪 能除一切苦 真實不虛 故說般若波羅蜜多呪 即說呪曰 揭諦揭諦 波羅揭諦 波羅僧揭諦 菩提薩埵 般若心經

佛說摩訶般若波羅蜜多心經

不動明王真言  
FUDO MYOO  
SHINGON:

"Nōmaku sanmanda bāsara dan senda mākaroshāda sowataya un tara tākanman." (7, 21, or 108 times) ノーマク サンマンダ バーサラ ダン センダ マカロシヤダ ソワタヤ ウン タラ タカンマン

御宝号  
GO HO GO:

"Namu-Daishi Henjō-Kongō" (3 times) 南無大師遍照金剛

光明真言  
KOMYO SHINGON:

On abokya beiroshanō makabodara mani handoma jimbara harabari taya un. (3 times) オン アボキヤ ベイロシヤノー マカボダラ マニ ハンドマ ジムバラ ハラバリ タヤ ウン

廻向文  
EKOHMION:

Negawakuwa kono kudoku o motte, amaneku issai ni oyoboshi warera to shjō to mina tomo ni butudō o jōzen. (3 times)  
願くはこの功德をもってあまねく一切に及ぼしわれらと衆生とみなともに仏道をじょうぜん。

Fig. 32 Christian Valdez, Detail of common ritual mantras, digital photo, 2023, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles



Fig. 33 Anonymous, Detail of the goma fire, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 34 Anonymous, *Pleasing the Deities by Clapping*, photo, 1982, Madhavi Kolhatkar and Musashi Tachikawa, “Buddhist Fire Ritual in Japan,” 83.



Fig. 35 Anonymous, Image of the pulling-bell, digital download, 2019, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 36 Anonymous, Image of the vajra-bell, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 37 Anonymous, Image of a ceremonial conch, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 38 Anonymous, Detail of the altar rope, posts and gate, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 39 Anonymous, A practitioner's perspective during incense offering, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 40 Anonymous, A child performs an incense offering, digital download, 2017, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 41 Anonymous, Detail of the vajra hall's arrangement, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 42 Anonymous, Perspective of the chief image of Mahāvairoca, Los Angeles, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page



Fig. 43 Anonymous, Practitioners wait in line to offer incense, digital download, 2018, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Kōyasan Buddhist Temple Facebook page

Introduction of the *Beikoku Betsuin Omamori*

**Good Luck and Protection Omamori**  
This *omamori* protects against bad luck that may happen to you. The colors make no difference. Please choose the color of your liking.

**Absolute Victory Omamori**  
This is an *omamori* that guides you to victory at sporting events or success in business.

**Bond with Good Fortune - Red and White**  
This *omamori* is essentially to create a good match. It is not only for creating a good match between all genders, but it also provides you with good connections for all things positive such as finding a new job or residence.

**Warding off Misfortune Omamori**  
(vermillion / indigo blue)  
This *omamori* fights against any bad luck. Please keep this *omamori* for those who are having a bad luck year.

**Omamori for Traffic Safety**  
This *omamori* is for avoiding any accidents and injuries and offers you to safety and peace of mind.  
Please use this *omamori* for traffic safety, financial fortune and general good luck.

**Safe Birth Omamori**  
This *omamori* is primarily for pregnant women and prays for the health of the mother and child.

**Quick Recovery Omamori**  
This *omamori* is for recuperating from illness.


**Omamori for Health**  
This *omamori* is to ward off sickness and offers you health.

**Safe Trip Omamori**  
This *omamori* is for the safety and good fortune when going on a trip or journey.


**Success in studies Omamori**  
This is an *omamori* for those who endeavor to succeed in their studies.

**Prosperous Business Daikokuten Talisman**  
(Large size; middle size and regular size)  
This wooden talisman deals with profit brought on by *Daikokuten*, the God of fortune. Pray for prosperity in business and place the talisman in the company's altar or post it in a high area.  
There is also a paper talisman for prosperity in business (without *Daikokuten*).


For more *omamori* information, please visit our website.



KOYASAN BEIKOKU BETSUIN  
OF LOS ANGELES



OMAMORI  
GUIDE



KOYASAN BEIKOKU BETSUIN  
342 E 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012  
213-624-1267 Web: [www.koyasanbetsuin.org](http://www.koyasanbetsuin.org)

Fig. 44 Christian Valdez, Description of Shingon amulets, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles

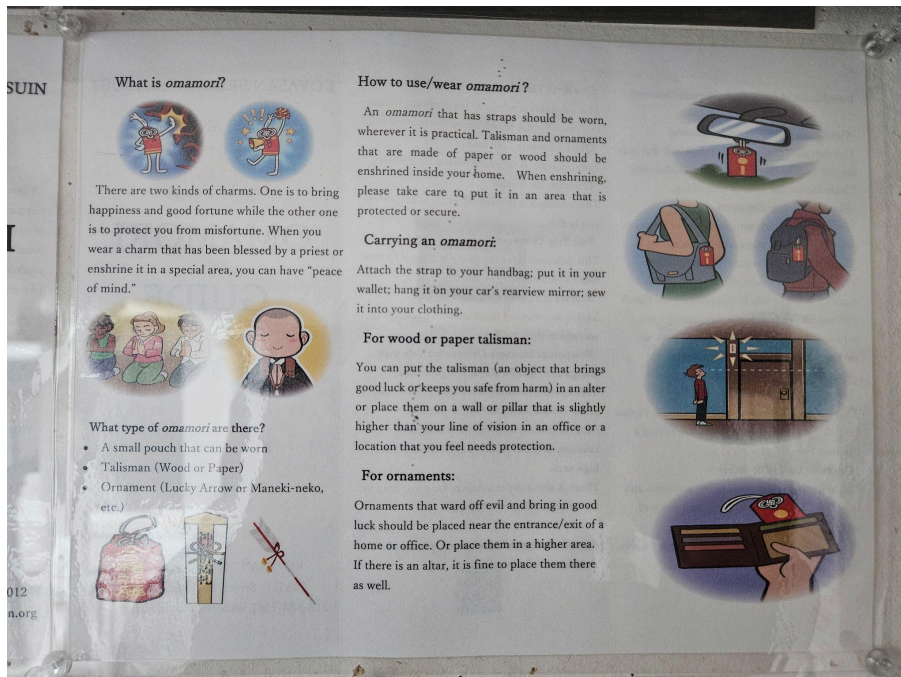


Fig. 45 Christian Valdez, Description of Shingon amulets, cont., digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles

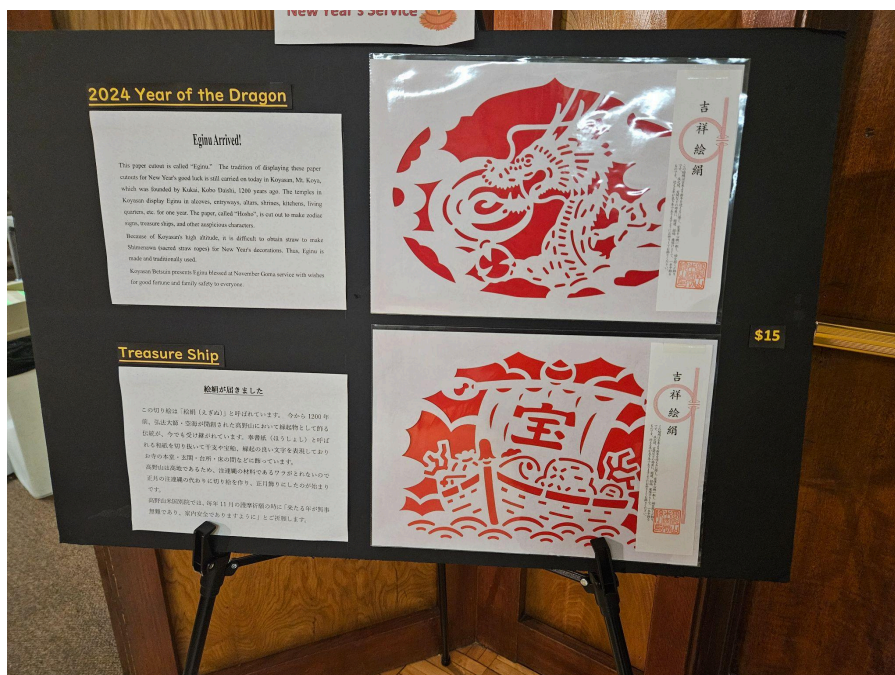


Fig. 46 Christian Valdez, Amulets dedicated to the year of the dragon, digital photo, 2024, Kōyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles

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