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Kūkai as an Enlightened Transculturalist: Reweaving Cultural Threads from the Universal Womb in This Life¹

Abstract

Transculturality presupposes an existential crisis even at one's so-called zenith of success. It summons its bearer to dare take a vertical fall into a wormhole whereby any excess materiality validating one's identity becomes undone. In fact, in the aftermath of this very bodily constraint, one can arrive at an evolutionarily critical threshold of clarity towards liberation. No longer measurable by convention, this realm is at once simple and profound as nature itself.

That Kūkai 空海 (a.k.a. Kōbo Daishi), the 9th-century Japanese Buddhist monk, invented the Japanese syllabary *hiragana* remains an academic debate to this day, and may remain so as long as we continue to cling discursively onto this horizontality. However, in this essay, the author contends that the answer to this puzzle may be revealed to us when we recognize him as a transculturalist-in-the-making, owing not only to the unique sets of situations he had encountered both at home and abroad in his time, but more importantly how he responded to

¹ This essay is an experimental arrangement of thought images emerged during her life experiences, observations, and reflections in gratitude to those others who have journeyed with her letting its secret reveal itself gradually beyond our human assumptions.

them. That is, when we regard “his invention” beyond its simplistic renderings of Japanese phonemes, they begin to reveal themselves as a natural byproduct of his primary search—the threshold of the original transmission of Esoteric Buddhism. It suggests that the path of his spiritual quest, which also questions the health of one’s culture, is inherently intertwined with semantics. Publicly he had envisioned that his new government should help Japan re-orient itself as an authentic culture rather than to continue emulating the prestigious foreign Tang model. Personally he was in search of a method which would help one to attain enlightenment as Kūkai had thought would be possible in this very life. Yet, his transcultural journey would lead him to the sacred linguistic realm. Accordingly, the author is not hesitant to assume that Kūkai, as a transculturalist, may have chosen anonymity. That is, if he had indeed sown the seed of sustainability for Japanese culture among his people linguistically through the *kana* syllabary and ritually through the *dharma* operative embodied by its emperors, it was enough for Kūkai that his legacy should live on namelessly. In this sense, the Zen *koan* message uttered by Linji Yixuan, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him,” fits how Kūkai lived.

Thus posited, this essay will elucidate Kūkai’s transcultural footing leading up to “his” invention of *kana* syllabary. It will rely on the language of phenomenology, which emerged in the early 20th-century West at the developing phase of the East-West cultural intercourse. Unlike the discursive Cartesian approach to categorize the East as “mysterious,” it allows its bearer to use the Western language while empowering him/her to elucidate the “structural invisible” inherent in the Eastern rhetoric as a powerful ontological partner, however ambiguously.

The much-suppressed bodily existence, which has nonetheless surfaced as expressions of the dark “otherness” now joins the mind as an egalitarian co-catalyst. Together they will help unravel the truth’s operative at its dynamic nexus. A transculturalist is the truth’s sustainer, like a seed fire keeper of old. In this spirit the essay celebrates a trans-chronologically realized moment of multiple transcultural experiences whose time has come. It honors the primordial operative, which when allowed to presence itself inter-subjectively to our consciousness, reverberates at the nature-human threshold. The final tribute paid to the 10th-century Japanese male writer Ki no Tsurayuki’s work *Tosa Diary* is not only a direct response to Kūkai’s lingua-cultural legacy, but also an indirect one to his original inquiry—Could one become enlightened in this very life?

Keywords: *hiragana/kana*, operative, *suchness*, co-origination, inter-subjective, *dharma*.

“Travel wide then deep.”

My Uncle Seiji

Introduction

It is not unusual for one to experience a transculturally induced existential crisis, which could force one to make an arduous journey of inquiry—not so much of ideology per se but of methodology par excellence. The latter transcends the divisiveness of the former. While at first it appears to be a philosophical path at some level of complexity, individuals in search of self-liberation seem to find themselves more intimately in touch with the bodily origin. In fact, it is this very constraint which summons its bearer to an entry through a gate towards an evolutionarily critical threshold. “Evolutionarily critical” because it is the tipping point whereby an ontic sleepwalker is given a chance to become aware of his/her archetypal body cells’ summoning the mind to slow down and pace itself with them intersubjectively as one like a double helix. From this point of awareness away from the linear progression, one can find oneself falling on a vertical passage, or what the string physicist Michio Kaku calls a “wormhole,” which “at times opens up” towards yet another dimension parallel to the conventional plane (Kaku, 1994, p. 12). In this realm things are no longer measurable by the worldly standard of linearity. This hyper-dimension is at once simple and profound as nature itself. It’s a dynamic sphere of reverberation where one’s body and mind at once become awakened from both within and without. It is where one can re-harness life with ontological clarity emanating from one’s original one-cell-ness, as it were.

The 9th-century Japanese monk Kūkai 空海 (a.k.a. Kōbo Daishi, 774-835) was born at one of the most critical moments in Japanese cultural history. The first twenty years of his youth coincided with the climactic phase of Sinification, marking Japan’s eclipsing its technical perfection of the borrowed culture of China of high sophistication. For young Kūkai, it meant to conduct himself as an exemplary *junzi* 君子 based on the Confucian ethical code. Yet he perceived this ideal as dysfunctional not only for himself as an individual but also as one who could satisfactorily embody the essence of his native culture. He had a premonition that Japanese government based on the Confucian template called *ritsuryō* 律令 was heading culturally in a wrong direction and thus needed to find a dynamic alternative in time for the installation of a new ruling order in the successive Heian period. This crisis forced Kūkai to leave his country to investigate its possible point of deviation from the right path of transmission. He found it necessary to do so in order for Japan to reclaim

and sustain the health of its originary cultural ethos from within. It needed its own voice. For him it meant to seek an alternative method without having to keep up with the hierarchically generated formula foreign to the Japanese people before the Sinification. For Kūkai, emulating an example of other's is important as a phase, but meeting its existential death is also necessary in order for its offspring to be able to pair the best of both entities in their respective authenticity. In this way, Kūkai's desire to isolate himself from Confucianism was neither a preferential nor a prejudicial rejection; it was an evolutionarily necessary step towards a greater reunion in another realm by transcending all dualities. His transcultural journey, hence taking place in the manifest of a Buddhist monk in search of Esoteric Buddhism, not only allowed him to at once experience the working of the languages of Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese, but also carried him to the very primordial confluence where the "letter, voice and reality" simultaneously reverberated dharmically as true word, or *shingon* 真言, as he would eventually call it in his esoteric practice. With the Dharmakaya, or the source of *dharma*, in situ, Kūkai felt confident to return to Japan to teach its people to reweave all these three sustainably from this common needle's eye.

That Kūkai invented the Japanese syllabic alphabet *hiragana* still remains an academic debate. Yet that he appears to have trodden a path uniquely transcultural should be taken as a hint that such a worldly reputation may have been irrelevant to him anyway. By earthly standards, he could be considered worthy of an honored place in Japanese history. But because he was transculturally enlightened, he might have chosen anonymity, realizing that "his invention" could potentially serve as a vehicle for liberating his fellow Japanese people not only lingua-culturally but also spiritually while uniting them with those of other lingua-cultural origins. In this way Kūkai, as one selfless earthly manifestation from the undifferentiated co-origination, lived an exemplary life of a true *bodhisattva*—to help fellow sentient beings free themselves from bondages of suffering—transculturally. Willing to do so namelessly on his part makes sense.

Thusly posited, this essay will nonetheless elucidate Kūkai's transcultural footing leading up to "his" invention of the *kana* syllabary. It integrates elements of phenomenology, which the author considers critical for providing a universal method and language transcending discursively structured global ideals. Moreover, by showcasing Ki no Tsurayuki's work *Tosa Diary*, in which the *kana* syllabary was used as a man in the disguise of a woman, the readers are invited to appreciate Kūkai's transculturally inspired lingua-cultural legacy—the original perennial seed of *dharma* he had been searching to scatter on Japanese soil to be cultivated sustainably long after his name is forgotten.

Distinction between a Globalist and a Transculturalist

Today we live in a globally charged environment. Yet socioeconomically we still operate largely from a lingua-culturally hierarchal template. In his book *Out of Weakness*, Andrew Bard Schmookler argues that the hierarchy of power is a ramified product of civilization, which emerged when two hunter-gatherers were forced to merge into one, at the expense of one group dominating the other (Schmookler, 1988, p. 311). As a result we have created a competitive base for survival in the world where the potential success of a have-not is measured by one's submitting to playing games according to the already established structural visible—the rules of the have. The norm is to reach unprecedented qualitative and quantitative ideals by possessing and transforming otherwise dynamically mutable natural resources into human uses. Accordingly even in the realm of education, global recognition is placed on one's technical expertise, with which one is able to “critically” analyze and validate the product in question using a monolithic lens prescribed by its dominant player. Quoting Martin Heidegger, Schmookler points out that the great temptation “to rely on European ways of representation and their concepts ... is reinforced by a process [called] the complete Europeanization of the earth and of man” (Schmookler, 1988 p. 15). The irony lies in the fact that when we applaud an exchange student from an underdeveloped world as a success at a higher institution, we are often not only incognizant of his/her having undergone rigorous conformation to the Western rhetoric to do so, but also of his/her potential existential struggle towards an ontological path, by re-rooting him/herself lingua-culturally to his/her own in order to be able to transcend non-dualistically. It is this lens we need to re-examine before our diverse population all find ourselves ironically blinded by the same old prescription.

Recognizing the above problem, Schmookler nonetheless posits his optimism in human nature, which he sees as the beholder of the “old truths” (Schmookler, 1988, p. 311). By “old truths” he points directionally inward towards the primordial seat of our archetypal psyche. It is also what Nishida calls “*basho*”場所, or *topos*, as explained by Robert Wilkinson in his work *Nishida and Western Philosophy*. “In Nishida's view, it is meaningless to speak of merely formal truths; judgment is constituted by content, and content is its foundation. This content is not isolated subject or predicate, but unity which conjoins the two or, better, the unity prior to distinction” (Nishida, 1970 p. 145). This “prior to distinction” is the *topos* where the

“old truths” co-originate. The philosopher and Buddhist scholar David E. Shaner echoes Schmookler when he mentions the importance of asking questions.

The chasing/questioning is more important than reaching a definite answer because the so called “definite” or certain answer may not be true for all time in all places. Only the critical questioning and constant re-examination of our beliefs allows us to temporarily posit new answers which more satisfactorily explain a wider range of phenomena. (...) One can describe this procedure as a reflexive process because the analysis is turned back toward an investigation of legitimacy of the discipline’s axioms upon which all subsequently derived theorems are based. (...) Without accurate premises or axioms, the derived theorems and hypotheses are sure to falter in their ability to predict our experience (Shaner, 1985, p. 13).

What makes one question anything? When one questions, what is one questioning that seems to have begun to become, as the phenomenologist David Abram puts it, one’s own visceral “systematic imbalance” (Abram, 1996, p. 7)? Abram’s own question wants to investigate the source of the “perceptual shift” where “nature (...) has become simply a stock of ‘resources’ for human civilizations” (Abram, 1996, p. 28). According to Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson’s book *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures*, the climatic deterioration during the Pleistocene period is blamed for the unprecedented growth in cranial sizes especially in mammals and humans (Boyd & Richerson, 2005, p. 68). Though there is no room in this essay to elaborate on the complexity of this subject, this fact alone suggests organisms’ innate response to adversity by developing “cognitive mechanisms that were favored in building more complex cognitions [using] information-rich, innate decision-making abilities, individual learning, social leaning (...) (Boyd & Richerson, 2005, p. 66). The experience of crisis causes a spatio-temporal step-back literally from its very process, causing its subject to objectify “it” as other, in this case, nature. Spatially the subject finds him/herself “here” as opposed to “there,” while temporarily “now” (where s/he is suffering) becomes bifurcated into the “past” (where the crisis occurred) and “future” (where s/he pictures him/self transitioning). I argue that due to this spatio-temporal separation from the here-and-now unity, humans sought two ways to cope with the present crisis: 1) cling onto the “better” past “there”, or; 2) move on to the future “there” of possibilities. Hence by perceiving nature as a source of infinite possibilities, the race to get “there” both in time and space became humanity’s greatest preoccupation ever since, at the expense of abusing “other,” both animate and inanimate.

However, the very moment when one finds oneself no longer pointing one’s index finger straight to “other” across a distance but U-turning it on

oneself asking about the whence of the “perceptual shift,” one is beginning to have what Abram calls an “internal conversation” (Abram, 1996, p. 25). Thusly oriented, the humbled self, not only as a body-mind whole, but also as a relative “other,” is made aware of each other for a possible mutual presence primordially at this *topos* for a renewed and evolutionarily more sustainable footing together.

In Jean-Paul Sartre’s novel *La Nausée* the protagonist Antoine Raquentin experiences life’s excess *ad nauseam* (*superflu*), marking his existential crisis. As a biographer he manipulates words to reconstruct the life of another not even he himself has undergone. Readers find him return to his study. There in growing angst he quips through meaninglessly. His ontic life reaches the point of absurdity not even another one of his technical expertise tricks could resolve. The decaying of his excessively linear prognosis is imminent. The vertical gravitational pull becomes more visceral. He must arrest his being from keeping going forward onto an illusory path. Raquentin pauses. He lets go of his mind to fold inward toward the bodily center—into the “wormhole.” The ego dissolves:

Something is beginning in order to end: adventure does not let itself be drawn out; it only makes sense when dead. I am drawn, irrevocably, towards this death which is perhaps mine as well (Sartre, 2007, p. 37). ... I looked anxiously around me: the present, nothing but the present. Furniture light and solid, rooted in its present, a table, a bed, a closet with a mirror—and me. The true nature of the present revealed itself: it was what exists... (Sartre, 2007, pp. 95–96).

According to Shaner, experiencing without “the self nor any specific noematic focus” is the first order of body mind awareness because here the being is no longer “without a privileged position within the horizon” (Shaner, 1985, pp. 80–81). The surmounting anguish forces Raquentin to curve his discursive linear projection and to ride on an arc created by the right tension emerging from the negotiating horizontal and vertical forces at their mutual confluence—axis. The table turns; his body now rejects the sounds of choices of word as not that which he could claim as authentic. He feels an urge to carry himself away from it—*s’ecarter*—if not to a nihilistic end, to the transcultural path. The latter demands the process of mourning one’s own existential death, allowing one to face nature again in our genuine self so that we may evolve more sustainably with it in chiasm. Kūkai, too, is met by his own struggle.

In his book *The Weaving of Mantra* Abé Ryuichi cites a critical piece of Kūkai’s writing (*Seireishu*, fsc. 7, KZ 3:476) in which we learn that by the time he decided to travel to China in 804, he had already found himself fallen into the “wormhole.” As mentioned earlier by the physicist Kaku, Kūkai was

unable to return to the worldly realm; he could only move forward vertically following an arc towards the parallel universe:

Since my awakening of Buddha Dharma, I, Kūkai, was striving to return to the home of originally enlightened mind. However, I was in the midst of a labyrinth and had lost my way back. Standing at a loss at the crossroads, there was many a time when I cried. With the kind guidance of the Buddhas, I then discovered this secret gate of Dharma. However, as soon as I opened its scroll to read its lines, my mind was dark again. It was at this time that I vowed to travel to China to study it (Abé, 1999, p. 106).

Like Raquentin, before letting himself slip into the wormhole, Kūkai caught himself over-milling *ad nauseum* the *ritsuryo* system at the zenith of the Japanese emulation of the Chinese Confucian model, as pointed out by Abé below:

... Kūkai introduced Esoteric Buddhism to Japan at the apogee of the *ritsuryo* state, when the ancient Japanese regime solidified its power by the promotion of Confucianism as the ideological orthodoxy of the state and through the strict imposition of *ritsuryo* rules. This timing of events meant that the *ritsuryo* system significantly preconditioned Kūkai's activities at every stage of his life (Abé, 1999, pp. 386–387).

Intriguing to note here is that at this time, Kūkai was leading a kind of double-standard life, reminding me of my grandmother's puzzling comment, "The edge of one side is already the edge of the other." It suggests that increasingly overlapping edges of dualities, when twisted by the centripetal force, merge subliminally into the axiom of non-duality. It is a chance Kūkai took as a transculturalist-in-the-making in order for a critical directional change to materialize. In the following situations, enumerated by Abe, we can detect Kukai's sublimation into an enigmatic being:

... when he was a student of Confucian disciplines at the State College, when he was an official representative of Japan on a diplomatic mission to China, studying Buddhism for the sake of his nation, but also even at the end of his career. (...) At the same time Kūkai seemed to have maintained throughout his career an opposition to the manner in which Buddhism was integrated within the *ritsuryo* system. His transformation from a cadre of the Confucian intelligentsia to an illegal, privately ordained Buddhist mendicant; his introduction of a new type of Buddhism from China, an introduction that refused to conform to the structure of Buddhist school that had been allowed to exist in Japan; and his bold attempt to reduce the religious authority of emperor to a level below that of the clergy... (Abé, 1999, p. 387).

Subsequently, the hierarchy Kūkai would develop for his Esoteric Buddhism was not based on dogma or “doctrinal superiority” but, as Shaner phrases it, “on careful examination and thorough reflection on the phenomena that appeared in the course of Kūkai’s own self-cultivation” (Shaner, Nagamoto, & Yuasa, 1989, p. 174). In fact, he was literally treading in flesh the threshold of all dualities, purifying in his own person all that which share the common source while humoring the world. As long as the world continued with its ontic mode, he continued to make his effort in bringing this kind of balance throughout his life. The phenomenologist David Michael Levin expounds on this subtle point in his book *The Body’s Recollection of Being: Phenomenological Psychology and the Deconstruction of Nihilism*:

Release is a question not of separation, but of the achievement, *in one’s lifetime, i.e., prior* to the time of death, of a transfiguration of our embodiment: a transfiguration whereby the flesh of the body and the spirit of the soul have finally achieved a relationship of harmony, integration, and non-duality (Levin, 1985, p. 183).

In essence, being in the world but not of it and maintaining what Heidegger calls “an ontologically attuned pre-understanding of the presencing of Being as such” (Levin, 1985, p. 78), or in this case, *dharma*, Kūkai learned to live as a sublimating catalyst to bring everyone closer to the “old truths,” to cite Schmookler’s phrase earlier. His own questioning of the discursive approach used in contemporary Buddhism put him on the reflexive path to re-orient himself anew from the original seat of *dharma* via first order bodymind awareness (Shaner, 1985, p. 107). In their book *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, Yuasa and Kasulis reveal a similar view. Kūkai’s quest was to find the true self who was no longer trapped into thinking as “a being-in-this-world” trying to endlessly fulfill its desires. He wanted to find the original ground of being beyond such confinement (Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987, p. 135). His only subsequent way out of this existential gridlock was to carry himself away from the very foreign textuality, which he had mastered as second nature like a tattoo, albeit only skin-deep.

The intentional letting go of one’s invested ego during the phase of cultural assimilation to attain a certain height of technical mastery causes much bodily angst. Such an investment of energy as blood, sweat and tears, has strangely defined our cultural values. Kūkai felt strangely displaced (*dépayé*) in his own country. But to be able to meet the dynamically pristine Being, or the operative of *dharma*, the excess had to be exfoliated, as it were, hence the Zen *koan*, “What was your original face before you were born?” Listening to his body, Kūkai decided to get off the *ritsuryō* recitation treadmill and embark a reflexive journey to China in order to discover the

source of the first order of the bodymind awareness practiced by Esoteric Buddhism. Little did he know that this search would involve him in yet other unexpected layers of bodily challenge.

To begin with, the ever-changing sea current while crossing the Sea of Japan to China changed the course of the ship Kūkai was on. He arrived in Fujo (Fu-chou) far from the capital of Chang-An, where the members of the second ship, including the Tendai founder Saichō, often quoted as Kūkai's rival, found themselves well situated. Yet to the awakened transculturalist-in-the-making this fact did not seem to bother him. Instead he turned this inconvenient reality into a lingua-cultural opportunity. That is, to directly troubleshoot with local officials in order to obtain special written permission in Chinese for a transfer to his original destination Chang-An. Even in waiting, his exploration into the heart of Esoteric Buddhism would begin with an extensive scriptural translation of the *Mahāvairocana Sutra* from Sanskrit to Chinese under both the Indian Tripitaka teacher Prajna and the Chinese abbot Hui-Kuo. Immersed daily in such a somato-linguistically heightened sphere of experience, Kūkai could presence himself more primordially to his ever-exfoliated consciousness. In other words, faced by unseen situations in a foreign country, where neither the former convention, much less his own native Japanese ways, made sense, Kūkai was willing to undergo his bodily struggle to find semantically appropriate expressions in order to cope with the tasks at hand. This may have forced him to curve vertically away from the tangential projection of global competition towards the *omphalous* region of his being. From the depth of this non-discursive threshold, Kūkai was able to penetrate the globally competitive two-dimensionality into the realm of clarity, where all dualities oscillate into one.

Kūkai's Transcultural Journey beyond the Existential Crisis

Transculturality is a dynamically liberating way of being sustainably in this world yet not of it. "The phenomenological reduction does not detach one from the world but refocuses upon the world as it is primordially experienced before the ontological status of the world, as exemplified by subject/object phraseology, is affirmed or denied" (Shaner, 1985, p. 39). It is an experientially induced holistic path of enlightenment realizable in this very life as intuited by Kūkai in his youth.

Shaner attributes the "first order bodymind awareness" (rather than the second or the third order where the single or multiple noetic vector/s project itself/themselves intentionally towards a noematic focus) as the

reflexively attainable “place.” It is here that Truth is said to presence itself primordially to consciousness. As such, all dualities return to their “neutralized” [intersubjective] mode as their centers merge mutually into one, from which their ends radiate to form the circumference. At this merging thus emerged, the reflexing practitioner is able to slip into the realm of undifferentiated co-origination. Kūkai’s search for this “place” as the very wellspring of Esoteric Buddhism put him not only on a reflexive path spiritually but also linguistically. That he had to do this experientially meant to physically immerse his very body in the sonic vibration of the primordial words coming into existence. To this end, he had to deconstruct his contemporary Buddhism based on a discursive system, which was lingua-culturally removed twice (Japanese and Chinese) from its Indic origin. Accordingly in his transcultural journey, he discovered the “place” where the nature-based lingua-cultural takeoff point of Japanese culture would juxtapose with those of India, China, and Korea. Kūkai’s own deliberate removal of his physical self from what he had perceived as a mis-aculturated home ground was to investigate the source of its earlier influence in the foreign country (China).

No longer trapped in thinking as “a being-in-this-world” trying to endlessly fulfill its physical desires by outdoing others, he began his quest to find the original ground of being beyond such confinement (Yuasa & Kasulis, 1987, p. 135). In doing so, it serendipitously put him on the very reflexive path not only back to their common but also primary source—India. The complex yet critical under-workings of transculturality lie in this paradoxical passage, which leads all in the primordial nature-human soup, as it were. Otherwise, what logic lies in one’s leaving one’s home country to go to a foreign country to fix one’s problem at home without being suspected as a spy for an intellectual property so as to outdo “other” from a global perspective? Kūkai’s quest for Truth was focused on a universal methodology honoring nature to uncategorically liberate all sentient beings, who are otherwise trapped in a matrix designed to usurp “other,” including, ironically, themselves. Heidegger’s quote from his *Introduction to Metaphysics* summarizes the power behind Kūkai’s questioning which led to his leap of faith:

With this leap the question arrives at its own *ground*. We call such a leap, which opens up its own *source*, the original source or origin [*Ur-sprung*], the finding of one’s own ground (Heidegger, 1961, p. 5).

In his book *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism*, Shaner references Edmund Husserl stating that “one philosophical tradition may be meaningfully described to another by articulating the formal structure

of experience at the root of both traditions ... by explor[ing] reflexibly the common denominators of the structure of experience itself in order to reconstruct first their shared axioms and second the value and significance they attach to those axioms” (Shaner, 1985, p. 11). It is at the concurring vertical surge of these [horizontal] axioms of experience that the structural invisible operatives are laid bare as “the phenomenological *epoché* or reduction of the natural standpoint” (Shaner, 1985, p. 14). For Shaner, “the phenomenologist becomes closer to the world [rather than disconnecting from it] as it is directly or pre-reflectively experienced. The world is neither affirmed nor denied. The world is seen as it is given, via ‘pure experience’ (*Erlebnis*), for consciousness” (Shaner, 1985, p. 15). From this fearless point one’s leap of faith into infinite directions is made possible.

Even early on, Kūkai’s penchant to question the lack of authenticity in the human preoccupation with formalization is detected. For example, not only did Kūkai daydream in his Confucian studies classes at the university in Nara but also acted upon his angst by exiling himself in the mountains far away from the capital, not to mention his eventual withdrawal from the college because it [nature] “made it impossible for him to continue his life as an elite student in the capital” (Abé, 1999, p. 75). As Husserl indicates, by immersing himself in nature, “... a rigorous phenomenological description of eidetic essences will allow one to see the world not necessarily as it really is, but as it is the only way which one can know it—as it is presented to consciousness” (Shaner, 1985, p. 19). This is why one’s return to nature is critical, for it is here that both nature and the nature within the self (human nature) are given their chance to be reunited, re-attuned and re-acquainted (presenced) *in its suchness* (primordially) to consciousness. Here the accumulated layers of culturally contextualized denseness are made to dissolve to its mere essence in transience. According to the phenomenologist David Michael Levin, this is “the melodic arc (*arché*) of leaping in its rejoicing, I believe we can prepare ourselves for a new experience of the primordial ground” (Levin, 1985, p. 312). Little did one know that Kūkai had been practicing the arc from within.

According to Shaner, Kūkai believed that *Sokushin jobutsu* 即身成佛, or “This very body attain in Buddha” is possible “[i]f a practitioner is able to cultivate the proper action [that] involves a keen awareness of that which is already present,” namely our body and mind (Shaner, 1985, p. 75). As such he understood it to be a question of the right practice rather than a mere intellectual debate. For Kūkai, making one’s homage to nature is critical because it is where the Dharmakaya, or the *dharma* operative, is best realized as *arché*. Interesting to note is that having amassed the necessary experiences and information on Esoteric Buddhism in China,

not only did he return to Japan against the imperial order of his 20-year stay in China, but also took advantage of his consequential punishment by Emperor Heizei of exile on Mt. Dazaifu in Kyūshū to immerse himself in the most fitting space—nature. The “original enlightenment” happened in nature (Shaner, 1985, p. 77). It is where nature and human nature could merge themselves into one as the “innermost spiritual experience” (Shaner, 1985, p. 70). It is an occasion for human nature both to dwell in nature within and in enchantment without. If our sensory data are synthesized cognitively into an utterance, then the *chiasmic* operative by which this inter-subjective process occurs, must “exist without being separated” from it and the experience (Shaner, 1985, p. 83). Each of the *noeme* may manifest in different degrees but the sum is always the same. It is what Kūkai understood to be true word, therefore sustainable methodologically through practice of centering such as *mantra*, *mandala*, and *mudra*. For him, the center is at once “voice, letter, and reality,” as he thus titles one of his books (Abé, 1999, p. 130). That is, during his esoteric practice, he found himself at the very primordial seat from which all life’s vibrations emerged as the sound /a/ (voice), the letter A (in Sanskrit), or the first voice of the child at birth upon this earth. It is also the first sound of the seed mantra *AUM*. It is here, at what Shaner calls “the first order bodymind awareness” or “transcendental bridge,” that the self and “other” are primordially given anew to consciousness, not accessible by “the third order techniques of discursive reasoning” (Shaner, 1985, pp. 189–192). Shaner’s choice of metaphor fits well here since one can simultaneously view two different sides of the constantly changing body of water below from the middle keystone position of the bridge. It is equivalent to the axial intersection of horizontality and verticality. The sound evokes the reality, or experience, the phenomenological world in primordially given form without thetified positings (Shaner, 1985, p. 89). Like the 5-7-5 syllable *haiku* poetry, its brevity only allows the poet to capture a moment in its bare *suchness*, using only nouns and verbs, without any room left for human editing.

If /a/ is said to be the mother of all sounds, then *Dharmakaya* is the womb, or the beholder of the universal acoustics. *Mantra* have the power to “induce” one into a primordial neutral experience because the recitation of sounds shares the dynamic quality of the first order bodymind awareness by breaking the discursive 2nd and 3rd orders. Based on my own experience, etymological deconstruction of Chinese/Japanese *hanzi/kanji* constructs also has the power of inducing one’s primordial experience of returning to the undifferentiated co-origination point of all things (Shaner, 1985, p. 89). Attaining a childlike mind is to “begin its experiential encounter with the phenomenal world in a neutral manner” (Shaner, 1985, p. 104)

by reducing its form into essence. It had been my practice to introduce Japanese language to a group of novices by having them chant the Japanese vowels to “neutralize” all languages in a darkened classroom mimicking a collective acoustic womb. The results had been positive in that these students seemed to transition into both oral and *hiragana* scripts with much greater ease than those without the experience. For example, while Romanization may at first appear to conveniently aide the novice’s transition from, say, English (L1) to Japanese (L2), their preconditioned acoustic association with it discourages them from making a clean transition to L2 both physically and emotionally. As a result they end up becoming increasingly dependent on translations and grammatical explanations, creating a great disconnect between body and mind. By contrast, through the womb acoustics method, the high level of their first order bodymind awareness through reverberation rendered itself more holistically in their subsequent linguistic development. Undergoing the L1 deconstruction and L2 reconstruction acoustically as a group may have lessened the potential anxiety that may have been triggered when the L2 was perceived from the L1 acoustic order, creating the body-mind separation. As Shaner explains, “Thetically neutral positings” are a “paradigmatic mode of awareness,” therefore impossible to transmit via the language of discursive reasoning (2nd and 3rd orders). Here “*dharma* must be experienced directly prior to thetic ontological positings” (Shaner, 1985, p. 103). Furthermore in my own practice of East Asian calligraphy, this notion indicates precisely the moment when the brush pauses at a point making it possible to move to any infinite number of directions from there. The same can be said of the point shoes in ballet dancing. For example, Richard McDonald’s sculptures of dancers are dynamic because they capture this precise moment of potential genesis. In this realm, as most phenomenologists agree, the seeing and seen become indistinguishable. Similarly, here Nyōrai, or Dharmakaya, or the bodymind ground is presented amid the complete horizon “circumscribed by the periphery.” The poetic language is said to evoke first order bodymind awareness” (Shaner, 1985, pp. 106–107). Phenomenology in essence presupposes dynamic chiasm as the method. “It is through the phenomenal world that the Dharmakaya expounds the *dharma* (*hossin seppō*)” (Shaner, 1985, p. 109). And it is the seed operative of this very *dharma* Kūkai had hoped to experience firsthand that he considered worthy of transmission in Japan.

The “Old Truth” Operative at the Tip of the Tongue and Brush

As a privileged child of aristocracy, Kūkai received all the conventional education at the height of Japan’s emulating the Chinese cultural model and did so masterfully. However, sensing that the Japanese government might forever fall into the foreign rhetorical mold of the Confucian *ritsuryō* system, upon its reaching an apex of emulation, Kūkai took paradoxically a very critical step that would change the course of Japan’s cultural evolution. Abé writes thusly regarding this matter:

Spatially Kūkai needed to choose Nara, rather than the Heian imperial ground Kyoto, in order to “build (...) an alliance with the Nara Buddhist establishment—rather than founding his own “sect”—that made possible the swift dissemination of Esoteric Buddhism in the early Heian Buddhist community (Abé, 1999, p. 387).

Becoming an authority of his own sect was not part of his holistic agenda. Instead he chose to become a servant to his people and humanity. At the same time, he took a linguistic measure to distinguish himself from Nara Buddhism. Thus continues Abé:

The sectarian reading of Kūkai’s texts (...) has pictured Kūkai’s Buddhism as utterly distinct from that of the Nara monasteries and from their ritual services performed for the state and the emperor, and as a result seems to have fallen short of grasping the major impact Kūkai’s innovative textual production had on the technology of writing and discourse formation in early Heian society (Abé, 1999, p. 390).

Here, Abé attributes one political and two linguistic preconditions to suggest Kūkai’s influential role in the development of the Japanese *kana*: 1. the parallel developments in the popularity of writing in Japanese and the dissolution of the Confucian *ritsuryō* state; 2. a mechanism had to be established that made possible the transition from the Chinese “man’yōgana scripts to a Japanese script system”; 3. “a theoretical basis had to be developed for legitimizing writing in the native phonetic script rather than with Chinese hieroglyphic characters” (Abé, 1999, pp. 390–391). Because Kūkai had embodied the semantic and aesthetic values of Chinese characters, he took enormous care in transforming them into a syllabic alphabet by at once deconstructing the Han characters cursively, then transforming them as a mere honeycomb of the originary 45 Japanese sounds. Based on my experience as a practitioner of Far Eastern calligraphy, it is critical to note that in the structural visible of the *kana* scripts, the presencing of the structural *invisible* is implied. This is due to the fact that the aqueous

visibility of the former on the rice paper is inherently co-dependent on the continuous flow of *qi* in the air even when the brush leaves it. In this sense each *kana* script is capable of retaining the semantic essence of its original character as a whole, however enigmatically. In this sense a transculturalist's exercising mindfulness of being inclusive, owing to his/her axial position of the body and mind in order to transcend both cultures, becomes an organic part of his/her being.

It seems clear that Kūkai's own reflexive search for Esoteric Buddhism's first order of bodymind awareness led to his serendipitous discovery of the "true word" (*shingon* 真言), the very name he chose to call his esoteric practice involving meditation, *mudra*, *mantra*, and *mandala*. According to Abé, "The word *dharani*, which derives from the Sanskrit verb root *dhr*, meaning to hold, keep, maintain, can roughly be translated as 'that by which to sustain something'" (Abé, 1999, p. 5). Important to note is the somatic production of the sound /dr/ which hides that "something". The/d/, which is the vocalized /t/, is centrally positioned with the tip of the tongue resting on the palatal ceiling. In deep meditation, the mendicant's tip of the tongue is said to be in this unfettered position like the frozen summits of the Himalayas. Being aligned thusly, one is connected to the *Dharmakaya*, or the Emptiness. The subsequent sound /r/ then is a slippage from this *noeud* towards a differentiation. Linguistically it is called a "liquid consonant." In the spring, when the sun warms the ice, where does one hear the sound of the first drip of "ice riding on its melting?" to paraphrase Robert Frost, who describes the language of poetry in his *Essay*, 1939 (Frost, 1939). From this liquid flows sonorously the original wisdom in myriad forms.

Critical is the fact that Kūkai's ability to reach this primordial bodymind threshold of linguistic emergence may not have been possible had he not, in the first place, carried himself somatically away from (*s'écarter de*) his existential crisis faced at home in Japan at the zenith of its assimilation of the borrowed Chinese culture. The latter came, undoubtedly, with exegetical instructions for technical correctness on the former's behalf. As indicated before, Kūkai's decision to leave Japan in search of the source of Esoteric Buddhism happened precisely at the height of the technical perfection of Chinese Confucianism epitomized by the *ritsuryo* system 律令制, which, Kūkai observed, had enabled the Japanese emperors to textually misconstrue their political power "mandated by the heaven" (Abé, 1999, pp. 70–73). Thanks to his discovery of the roots of Esoteric Buddhism, he was able to not only satisfy his ontological curiosity, but also to lay a *dharmic* foundation, called *abhiseka* rites, for emperors to rule without letting them become ethically derailed (Abé, 1999, p. 135). In brief, Kūkai intuited his own personal crisis mirroring a potential downfall of his nation's governing

body, which was perched precariously on the foreign blueprint based on the Confucian code of hierarchy. It suggests that he felt a deep urge to re-root his nation both linguistically and culturally on a more universally firm ground common to his emperor as well as his people, while honoring the esoteric source of Buddhism, India, and its transmitter China. For him, by bringing all of us to the pristine bodymind nexus of lingua-cultural spring source, far beneath the blueprint, both the state and its people could proceed to flow together as a nation more meaningfully than to continue an ontic path of perfecting through imitation the Chinese way as a socioeconomic means to an end. Understanding this point is essential for quietly appreciating, if not publicly acknowledging, not only Kūkai's linguistic and spiritual contribution to Japanese culture, but also that such a path, which necessarily took him to the primordial axiom of the bodymind oneness, allowed him to transcend all diverse earthly manifestations. Abé's account of Kūkai's journey to and within China describes how he resourcefully used his time petitioning to be included in the state-sponsored translation of Esoteric Buddhist scripts, in particular, *Mahavairocana Sutra*, in Indian and Central Asian languages at the Hsi-ming monastery in the capital Ch'ang-an by transcending the inconvenience of being detoured far from the original destination by the condition of maritime navigation (Abé, 1999, p. 114). In retrospect, one wonders if the unexpected circumstances that demanded all his effort to demonstrate his troubleshooting in the second language under the pressure of a time constraint may have been part of the transcultural alignment in progress in the wormhole toward the parallel dimension he was about to enter.

In Japan scholars still debate on the rightful authorship of the *iroha* poem. Sung almost like the ABC song, this mantra has been passed on through generations among Japanese. Using all 45 Japanese *kana* syllables only once, its verses poetically convey the profound Buddhist message of the *dharma*. That they continue to exist as an inalienable part of the Japanese archetypal psyche amongst its people is a testimony enough that its anonymous author had cared about honoring the common source of the language, culture and ethos—nature.

Among the most powerful influences Kūkai received at His-ming monastery was certain aspects of the priest named Yuan-chao 円照 (fl. 785-804), who earlier helped the Indian Buddhist priest "Prajna's translation of the *Mahayana Six Pramita Sutra* in 788 and *Avatamsaka Sutra* in 798" (Abé, 1999, p. 117). Prajna was one of the visiting Tripitaka masters from Kashmir translating Esoteric Buddhist scriptures at His-ming ssu under the auspices of Emperor Te-tsung (Abé, 1999, pp. 116–117). As "the first Japanese pilgrim to bring Yuan-chao's *Chen-yuan Catalogue* to Japan," Kūkai was

able to delve not only into the linguistic cognitive process done earlier by Amoghavajra but also his biographical information, which provided him with his lineage, critical to tracking back the source of Esoteric Buddhism (Abé, 1999, p. 118). In this way, Yuan-chao contributed enormously to spiritual translation embedded in both pronunciation and meaning in each Sanskrit sound. Moreover, by this time Kūkai was functioning lingua-culturally from a tri-lingual vision—Japanese, Chinese and Sanskrit. Although Sanskrit constituted a significant part of Kūkai’s training, his exposure to Brahmanical philosophical systems popular in Southern India may have held some secret in Kūkai’s transcultural evolvment (Abé, 1999, p. 119). Abé’s comment that “Kūkai seemed to have needed a different teacher” beyond his Indian masters (Abé, 1999, p. 119) suggests the degrees of seriousness for him to experience firsthand the critical manner with which the transmission of the Esoteric practice from India to China was handled. His auspicious occasion to meet the Chinese master Hui-kuo would give him a sense of closure to his first impetus as to why he had come to China.

The last but not the least was Kūkai’s encounter with Hui-kuo, the aging *dharma* master of the Esoteric Buddhist ritual *abhiseka*. This sage dwelled in an old mountain monastery. Having intuited Kūkai’s coming and the approaching of his own death, Hui-kuo initiated Kūkai by performing an *abhiseka*, which consisted of *mantras*, Sanskrit hymns, *mudras* and visualization of sacred symbols, to carry Amoghavajra’s esoteric *dharma* teachings to Japan. In this yogic system of the *Mahavairocana Sutra*, Kūkai’s nameless primordial being was able to presence as such to the cleansed consciousness (Abé, 1999, pp. 120–123). In this acoustic threshold of transmission, the master Hui-kuo and his disciple were able to bathe in the untainted water of the archetypal *dharma* of old. Kūkai records the experience thusly: “It was just like pouring water from one vase into another” (Abé, 1999, pp. 127–128).

We can refer what Kūkai experienced during the ritual of *abhiseka* to Gaston Bachelard’s sonic reverberation, transcending “the sentimental resonances” of the horizontal world and the vertical “repercussions” which “invite us to give greater depth to our existence” (Bachelard, 1958, p. xxii). Kūkai found himself at what Bachelard calls “the poetic image place,” which “places us at the origin of the speaking being.” Thus writes Kūkai:

Vibrating in each other’s echoes are the five great elements
 That give rise to languages unique to each of the ten realms
 All in the six sense-fields are letters, the letters
 Of the Dharmakaya, which is reality (KZ 1:524)(Abé, 1999, p. 278)

Here Kūkai seems to equate the Dharmakaya to what Abé calls the “primary topos of differentiation,” or “the heart of language’s signifying practices” that occurs when individual patterns become manifest giving rise to names, or language. This *topos* is *basho*, as referenced by Nishida. As such, “the rise of signs from differentiation is coterminous with the formation of a cosmos—the procreative process that I shall refer to as ‘semiogenetic’” (Abé, 1999, p. 279). According to Abé, “Only after writing, and then speech, does there arise reality, the object of signs.” It is “through articulation that the illegible Dharmakaya ... transforms itself into the legible world-text” (Abé, 1999, pp. 282–283). Letters may lead one to a referent, but only in the voice can five elements vibrate ontologically in width and depth depending upon the beholder. Kūkai seems ahead of his time in stating:

All sorts of names (signs) originate from Dharmakaya. They all issue forth from it (him) and become the languages circulating in the world. The language that is aware of this truth is called the true word (*shingon*) and other languages that are not conscious of their source are called illusory words (*mogo*) (Abé, 1999, p. 283).

Kūkai’s transcultural vision understood this structurally invisible *operative* better than anyone else. For him, it was the *Dharmakaya* empowerment, which must be practiced in order for one to be able to penetrate into it. It is the realm where one’s Buddha mind, ego mind and animality all transfuse into Nothingness. In Abé’s words, “Enlightenment has no form except the form of empty space” (Abé, 1999, p. 131). It escapes the philosophical grid, which can trap us in battles of dualities. It is the womb from which flow all sounds as *mudras*, *mantras* and *mandalas* (Abé, 1999, p. 130). “Affinity between mantra and mandala relates directly to the second metaphor, that of the womb...[or] the Mahavairocana’s compassion, in which the cosmic Buddha nurtures the seed of Buddhahood, the enlightened mind of sentient beings” (Abé, 1999, p. 138). Thus by turning philosophy into a ritual, symbols become a vehicle, which we ride to return to the “old truths” without being preached by analyses. Abram echoes Abé and Schmookler regarding this point, “Every poet is aware of this primordial depth in language, whereby particular sensations are invoked by the sounds themselves, and whereby the shape, rhythm, and texture of particular phrases conjure the expressive texture of particular phenomena” (Abram, 1996, p. 145). That Kūkai was chosen by Hui-kuo’s followers to compose an epitaph at the latter’s death is cosmically a powerful testimony of his meeting with this master at such a critical moment. Hui-kuo’s death signaled in Kūkai his readiness to depart for Japan “on the twenty-second day of the tenth month of the same year Daido (806)” (Abé, 1999, p. 127),

albeit at the expense of offending the emperor's schedule; the latter had ordered him to stay in China for twenty years.

That given, if the *iroha* poem was written using 45 letters, each carrying one sound, for a *mantra*-like mnemonics, it seems to have come into exactly what Kūkai had been looking for both methodologically and in form. In essence it mimics the womb-like Dharmakaya from which for Japanese words can differentiate themselves based on the bearer's inter-subjective experience with the world (Abé, 1999, p. 391). After viewing meta-linguistically from his own argument that “phonetic *alph-beth* ... no longer refers us to any sensible phenomenon out in the world, or even to the name of such phenomenon (as with the rebus), but solely to a gesture to be made by the human mouth,” Abram questions, “Or does it?” His subsequent deconstruction of the early Semitic *alph-beth* letters, in particular, *Aleph*, reveals that the sound not only means “ox” but also the letter resembling an upside down A mimics “an ox's head with horns.” Hence he states, “These traces of sensible nature linger in the new script only as vestigial holdovers from the old—they are no longer necessary participants in the transfer of linguistic knowledge” (Abram, 1996, p. 101). In this way, “While the Semitic name had served as a reminder of the worldly origin of the letter, the Greek name served only to designate the human-made letter itself” (Abram, 1996, p. 102). This is another significant point of the “perceptual shift” that occurred in the beginning of Western literacy. But like the Semitic *alph-beth*, each letter of the *kana* is derived by cursively abstracting a certain Chinese ideograph while retaining the acoustic element of the word. For example, the letter あ, or /a/ is derived cursively from the ideograph 安 meaning “relief.” Etymologically it consists of two radicals 宀 signifying “roof” and 女 “woman,” respectively. Hence the idea of “relief” or “peace” is implied with the presence of a woman at home, who keeps the house in order. Bachelard conveys this image effectively:

... A house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from the inside; it is as though it were new inside. ... Through housewifely care a house recovers not so much its originality as its origin. And what a great life it would be if, every morning, every object in the house could be made anew by our hands, could “issue” from our hands (Bachelard, 1958, pp. 68–69).

What human does not sigh, inadvertently utter the sound “Ahh...” as we return to our original selves upon entering into the familiar premise with a roof above to protect us from the harsh elements outside and the quintessence of nature embodied in a woman in metamorphosis? Thusly derived, every letter of the *hiragana* carries the essence of its archetypal reality. In this sense the sum of the *qi* operating in any given *hiragana* remains unchanged

from that which originated in China. Moreover, by having them find their own place in the *iroha* poem, like each jigsaw puzzle piece in its own place on behalf of the whole, all the sounds native to the Japanese language are allowed to oscillate in reverberation, merging now and then with each other and emerging into words familiar to its speakers.

I Ro Ha Ni Ho He To
 Chi Ri NU Ru Wo
 Wa Ka Yo Ta Re So
 Tsu Ne Na Ra Mu
 U Yi No O Ku Ya ma
 Ke Fu Ko E Te
 A Sa Ki Yu Me Mi Shi
 Ye Hi Mo Se Su

Although its scent still lingers on
 The form of a flower has scattered away
 For whom will the glory
 Of this world remain unchanged?
 Arriving today at the yonder side
 Of the deep mountains of the evanescent existence
 We shall never allow ourselves to drift away
 Intoxicated, in the world of shallow dreams
 (Translation by Abé, 1999, p. 393)

In this vein the practice of Chinese calligraphy, as a methodologically powerful way to bring one's first order of bodymind awareness, may have played a significant role in helping Kūkai recognize the honored place of both Chinese and Japanese writing. For its process is capable of making one aware of the simultaneous presence of the expressed and unexpressed in each breath passing from the body's core. As Abé states, even in absence, the seals of the Dharmakaya's wisdom of differentiation are implied (Abé, 1999, p. 287). Did Kūkai realize this?

The *Dharmic* Operative in Far Eastern Calligraphy

To an extent, the art of Far Eastern calligraphy is a visual presentation reflecting the artist's certain disciplined techniques and aesthetic penchant combined. Moreover, because calligraphy necessarily involves writing, its function is primarily viewed as a vehicle of communication whose viewer is invited to appreciate the author's excellent penmanship. However, in reality calligraphy is more than that. As a holistic practice, it offers its practitioner a kind of experience akin to a dancing movement. The practitioner will soon

learn that s/he must not underestimate the structurally invisible *yin* energy working intimately with the structurally visible *yang* energy when brushing a Chinese character singly or in series. Holding a brush upright parallel to the bodily spine, both the brush and the practitioner are made to become aware of their further alignment with the center of the cosmos. The point of the brush is like that of a ballet dancer's shoe point; it is capable of turning itself around on its axis or leaning towards any infinite points along the circumference to create a horizontal, vertical, curved, angled, slash, looped, etc., movement with which to animate the script(s) at work. Doing so allows the practitioner to somatically intuit the "right" tension in determining the depth of the black *sumi* ink, the right pressure of the brushing, the critical timing to shift the direction of the brush, etc. That Kūkai has been noted to have reached a high level of accomplishment in this art not only implies that he had attained the deep bodymind awareness of a visual language emerging at the aqueous brush point, but also that such a language hence delivered from one's *omphalos* center must contain the *dharmic* truth from the Dharmakaya, the source. But going along with Abés advice, I don't feel prohibited to lay another reason in support of Kūkai as a good candidate for the author of the *kana*, and for that matter, the *iroha* poem. If *kana* is derived from the process of cursively abstracting the structurally more rigid Chinese ideographs *kanji*, it goes without saying, experientially speaking, that the full essence of the *kanji* can only be carried on to the more elegant *kana* by the dynamic *shinshintoisu* 心身統一bodymind movement in unity using the calligraphy brush. In fact Kūkai selectively used *kanji* as *man'yogana* to transliterate more accurately from Sanskrit using Siddham script as a guide. That he was able to compare the alphabetic script of Siddham and hieroglyphic counterpart of Chinese as well as the monosyllabic sonority of Chinese and polysyllabic counterpart of Japanese may have been critical in Kūkai's coming up with the most appropriate form of writing for Japanese (Abé, 1999, pp. 394–395). Unlike the rigid seal prints, with the advent of calligraphy, which marries fire and water at the flexible brush point, both the masculine and feminine essences appear and disappear beyond the three-dimensional surface of the rice paper as if its practitioner is co-creating with the universe namelessly.

The perception that *kana* scripting is more feminine may come from its invisible bleeding of the *yin* energy in the air from a fast moving brush revealing its inherent connection to the visible *yang* structure on the surface of rice paper. As Abé points out, "It may be recalled that in his language theory, Kūkai frequently interpreted *mantra* through the lens of feminine symbols (...) In this sense, the semiological affinity between *mantra* and *kana* may have been linked to the role *kana* script played in legitimizing

women's share in the technology of writing and in giving rise to the great tradition of feminine literature, developments that coincided with the decline of the age of state craftism in the mid-Heian period" (Abé, 1999, p. 397). Furthermore, Kūkai thinks that each letter "is replete with reality." In other words, by not mindfully acknowledging it when speaking or writing it, we live in delusion (Abé, 1999, p. 295). As long as the debate on whether or not to credit Kūkai as the author of the Japanese *kana* syllabary and/or *iroha* poem remains within the discursive wall, the academia may never be able to penetrate the secret of the structurally invisible operative at work. The two are both sides of the same coin.

It goes without saying that Kūkai's spirit of the way of the brush is no different from his reflexive approach to journeying back transculturally to the ancient beginning of Buddhism from which to begin anew with the feminine element and sustaining the health of the original seed dharmically. Those who find it will know not only how to cultivate it within but also how to disperse it to all other sentient beings. That it took Kūkai an experientially rigorous cross-lingua-cultural undertaking to reach his enlightenment does not mean that its gate is opened to a certain few. Being open to immersing oneself in others' water takes one's whole being to separate itself physically from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Once there, finding oneself unable to function normally by the dictate of the familiar ways, one will be forced to yield one's mind to the body (senses). It is here that we are forced to return to the first bodymind order, or do as the natives do.

Kana Therapy for Ki no Tsurayuki

For a transculturalist, life's excess uprooted from reality not only appears illusory (*maya*) but also signals one of the causes of all suffering. Since youth, Kūkai had been questioning the discursively accumulated "denseness" in the practice of his contemporary Buddhism and academia. Nearly two hundred years after the official cultural transmission of China to Japan in the mid-6th century, the latter form of erudition seemed to artificially thrive in pursuit of perfectly assimilating the acquired prototypes of Chinese classicism. Kūkai's existential crisis *ad nauseam* did not differ greatly from that of Raquentin. Intuiting his increasing disconnect between his body and mind, he became alarmed by the seemingly diligent yet ineffective meditation practice promising attainment of the "original enlightenment." As such it would force him to physically carry himself away from (*s'écarter*) his familiar territory of Japan to immerse himself spatio-temporarily in another dimension—China—in 804. Critical to note here is that Kūkai did not simplistically reject Chinese Buddhism *per se*. Instead he decided

to examine its esoteric origin in India prior to its transmission to China. It implies verily that Kūkai was determined to experientially familiarize himself with the pre-lingual universal axiom, *dharmā*, for all sentient beings before he could allow himself to proceed with the cultivation of Esoteric Buddhism from this seed upon his return to Japanese soil.

As testimonials to Kūkai's intention to embed the *dharmic* seed in his lingua-cultural endeavor, a literary movement would surface prolifically during the latter Heian period two centuries after the invention of the *kana* syllabary. Women began to take their brush to express themselves in their native Japanese using *kana* against the contemporary social taboo reserved only for men of aristocratic or ecclesiastic status. The visually elegant cursive hand of *kana* was seen as effeminate against the bold construct of the *kanji* script, whose rhetoric still bore the mark of Confucian erudition. Such prolific female writers as Murasaki Shikibu and Seishō Nagon became the forerunners in the literary movement of the period thanks to the advent of the *kana* scripts. That the former happens to be the world's first female novelist is little known. Her work *The Tale of Genji* is a classic comparable to *The Ramayana of Valmiki* of the Indic traditions and *Romeo and Juliet* of the West. More importantly, thanks to *kana*, the vibrations of the native Japanese voice could reawaken the seed of their beings among its speakers beyond the technicality and sophistication associated with one's mastery of the Chinese language alone. In this vein, mentioning a particular work of the 10th-century male imperial court writer Ki no Tsuruyuki here may be appropriate. It may further illuminate how the native "voice" embedded in the right kind of "letter" is capable of releasing the "reality" as "true words" (*shingon*) to its bearer, hence healing its beholder.

Ki no Tsurayuki (872-945) is perhaps best known as one of the imperial compilers of the poetry collection *Kokinshū*, for which he wrote the preface in *kana*. As a poet himself, he was responsible for developing the styles and imagery of the poetic form called *waka*. The latter would eventually evolve into the quintessential Japanese *haiku* poetry several centuries later. His accomplished knowledge of Chinese may have helped him become appointed as the governor of Tosa Province, but his intimate experience with the sound of his native language using *kana* scripts may have sent him on the transcultural path. *Tosa Nikki* is a poignant account written in *kana* of his return journey from Tosa to Kyōto upon the arrival of a new governor in his place. Though his name was not attached to the work, it is now common knowledge that it may be a clandestine work by Ki no Tsurayuki. Clearly the voice is feminine. Thusly it starts: "Diaries are things written by men. Nevertheless I am writing one to see what a woman can do" (Keene, 1955, p. 82).

The narrator appears to be a female attendant. Not only is this a significant achievement stylistically on the part of the author, but transculturally so. That is, by playing the role of a woman, Ki no Tsurayuki removes himself from and transcends the horizontal worldly plane of dualities vertically in order to re-root himself at the axis of all dualities—maleness-femaleness, aristocrats-commoners, adults-children, sacred-profane, etc. Furthermore, by quoting people from different walks of life who came aboard the boat, such as a child with a pure wonderment of nature, boatmen immersed in the coarseness of the world, and the governor himself who was in mourning, not only could “she” express her own emotions freely on his behalf but also help expose various human behaviors in response to nature en route. Ki no Tsurayuki lost his daughter during his governorship. It pained him deeply to leave her remains in Tosa. However bittersweetly, he finds solace within himself upon seeing a young pine seedling among the overgrown and neglected yard of his old home. Reflexively nature stripped the unnecessary *alpha*-male construct imposed by his contemporary society. Doing so thusly, he experienced an emotional freefall by submitting himself to the feminine bodily voice, operative, within. As a result his cleansed primordial consciousness could meet the original wholeness, again namelessly.

At this point one can appreciate that the *kana* was invented not as a utilitarian tool to represent a set of sounds made by Japanese speakers. Rather its existence holds yet to be discovered truths in the unfathomable depth of its weave. But the message here is that by being willing to return to the culturally transcendental sound of /a/ cyclically, we can live sustainably close to the root of all truths *ad infinitum* from this axiom, our universal womb of all sentient beings.

Conclusion

Simply put, Kūkai’s transcultural journey was not all about him. Even at the time of his dissent from the Confucian *ritsuryō* system, he produced a kind of religio-philosophical fiction called *Roko shiki* experimentally as an antithesis to Confucian education, believing that “power to express one’s inner experience was the fundamental reason for a literary work to exist, and one certainly more compelling than maintaining the government bureaucracy” (Abé, 1999, p. 105). That Ki no Tsurayuki was able to live up to his true self by curving his ego as a man, much less of a high social rank, so that he could reconnect with the ghost of his child daughter at the most primordially honest level of communication using *kana*, is a powerful testimony to Kūkai’s claim that the truth exists simultaneously in the “voice, letter and reality.” After all, no matter how much Ki no Tsurayuki was

praised publicly as a man of erudition, not even in eloquent Chinese could he have reached his child as intimately as those fatherly voices reverberating out of *kana*.

Today in this globally savvy Japan, foreign jargons transcribed in yet another set of *kana* scripts, called *katakana*, sweep across the popular media. Like the *ritsuryo* system of Kūkai's time, Japan has gone beyond emulating the West. Yet, when one hears Japanese men still referring to their elderly mothers endearingly as *o-fukuro*, or “Thy honorable bag,” one can only imagine it written in *hiragana* so as to render a woman's voice they may remember having heard as a fetus growing inside nature's most intimate reality called the “womb.”

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Kūkai jako oświecony myśliciel transkulturowy: ponowne tkanie w tym życiu kulturowych nici z uniwersalnego źródła

Fakt wymyślenia japońskiego sylabariusza *hiragana* przez japońskiego mnicha buddyjskiego Kūkaia 空海 (lub też Kōbo Daishi) do dziś pozostaje przedmiotem akademickich debat i może nim pozostać tak długo, jak długo będziemy dyskursywnie trzymać się horyzontalnej wizji rzeczywistości. W eseju autorka twierdzi, że aby znaleźć odpowiedź na tę łamiącą główkę należy uznać Kūkaia za osobę dochodzącą do transkulturowości (transculturalist-in-the-making). Mnich zawdzięcza to wyjątkowym sytuacjom, które napotkał w domu i za granicą, ale także, co ważniejsze, sposobowi, w jaki na nie zareagował. Kiedy zaczniemy postrzegać „jego wynalazek” jako coś więcej niż uproszczone przedstawienia japońskich fonemów, ujawni się on jako naturalny produkt uboczny pierwotnych poszukiwań Kūkaia – droga do oryginalnego przekazu buddyzmu ezoterycznego. Sugeruje to, że ścieżka jego duchowego poszukiwania, która kwestionuje również kondycję własnej kultury, jest z natury rzeczy połączona z semantyką. Publicznie Kūkai zakładał, że nowy rząd powinien pomóc Japonii skierować się ku autentycznej kulturze zamiast kontynuować naśladownictwo prestiżowego modelu zagranicznego epoki Tang. Osobiście szukał metody, która pomogłaby jednostce osiągnąć oświecenie, które według niego było możliwe jeszcze w tym życiu. W konsekwencji, transkulturowa wyprawa Kūkaia doprowadziła go do świętego królestwa języka. W związku z tym autorka nie waha się twierdzić, że Kūkai, jako myśliciel transkulturowy, mógł wybrać anonimowość. Mnichowi wystarczyło zasianie ziarna trwałości japońskiej kultury, językowo poprzez sylabariusz *kana* i rytualnie poprzez działanie *dharmy* wcielonej w cesarzy, a jego dziedzictwo mogło pozostać bezimienne. Do tego, jak żył Kūkai pasują słowa wypowiedziane przez Linji Yixuan w koanie Zen: „Jeśli spotkasz Buddę na drodze, zabij go”.

Esaj jest próbą wyjaśnienia transkulturowych podstaw Kūkaia, które doprowadziły do powstania sylabariusza *kana*. Całość opiera się na języku fenomenologii, który pojawił się na początku XX wieku na Zachodzie, w fazie rozwoju stosunków kulturalnych Wschód-Zachód. W przeciwieństwie do dyskursywnego podejścia kartezjańskiego, które kategoryzuje Wschód jako „tajemniczy”, fenomenologia pozwala na używanie języka zachodniego, dając możliwość wyjaśnienia „strukturalnie niewidzialne-

go”, które tkwi we wschodniej retoryce – potężnym, choć niejednoznacznym partnerze ontologicznym.

Mocno stłumiona egzystencja fizyczna, która mimo wszystko pojawiła się jako wyraz ciemnej „inności”, teraz łączy się z umysłem jako egalitarny współ-katalizator. Razem pomogą rozwikłać działanie prawdy w jej dynamicznym związku. Myśliciel transkulturowy jest filarem prawdy, jak stary strażnik ognia. W tym duchu esej świętuje trans-chronologicznie zrealizowany moment wielu transkulturowych doświadczeń, których czas właśnie nadszedł. Honoruje on pierwotny czynnik, który, gdy pozwałam mu ujawnić się intersubiektywnie naszej świadomości, rozbrzmiewa na styku człowieka z naturą. Hołd złożony książce „Pamiętnik z Tosy” Kino Tsu-rayukiego, japońskiego pisarza z X wieku, jest nie tylko bezpośrednią odpowiedzią na dziedzictwo językowo-kulturowe Kūkai, ale także pośrednio odpowiedzią na jego pierwotne dociekania – czy można doznać oświecenia w tym życiu?

Słowa kluczowe: hiragana/kana, operator, takość, współ-powstawanie, inter-subiektywność, dharm.

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