Until recently the Shingi-Shingon 新義真言 lineages have been another neglected tradition of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. These Shingi lineages trace their emergence to Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban 興教大師覚鑒 (1095–1143 C.E.), a major figure in the development of Shingon doctrine and practice in the first half of the twelfth century. He was active during the period of Japanese history referred to as “the era of rule by retired sovereigns” (inseiki 北政期). Retired Emperor Toba 鳥羽院, his beloved consort Bifukumon’in 美福門院, and Taikenmon’in 待賢門院, the consort of the late retired Emperor Shirakawa 白川院, were strong and generous supporters of Kakuban and his vision of reviving Shingon doctrinal studies on Mt. Kōya 高野山, the monastic meditation and training center established by Kōbō Daishi Kūkai 弘法大師空海 (774–835) in the ninth century.

Japanese scholarship has noted that following the esoteric textual and ritual transmissions of Kūkai and Dengyō Daishi Saichō 伝教大師最澄 (765–822), there was a marked difference in emphasis between the Shingon inheritors of Kūkai and Saichō’s Tendai 天台 successors.¹ For several centuries the Shingon masters’ main efforts centered on ritual and yogic practice (jisō 事相), in contrast to the Tendai esoteric masters, who actively reflected on the doctrinal aspects (kyōsō 教相) of esoteric practice as well. A traditional Shingon explanation for this difference has been that, from the outset, Kūkai’s transmission was

¹ As discussed in other articles in this volume, Kūkai’s primary focus was on the esoteric transmission he had received during his study sojourn in China from the esoteric master Huigu 惠果 of Qinglong si 青龍寺 in the Tang-era capital Chang’an. This centered on the two scriptural texts of the Mahāvairocana sūtra (MVS) and the Vajraśekhara or Tattvasamgraha sūtra (STTS; for a discussion of these sūtra cycles, see Kiyota 1978, 22–24; 1982, 26; and Giebel 2001, 5–15). Saichō, on the other hand, had traveled to China at the same time as Kūkai to study the Tiantai 天台 tradition with its emphasis on the Lotus Sūtra. In the last month and a half of his studies, Saichō was fortuitously able to receive instruction from the esoteric master Shunxiao 順曉 of Longxing si 龍興寺 in Yue province 越州.
ritually, iconographically, and doctrinally such a well-developed and sophisticated system that there was less need to elaborate on what the founder had articulated; but Tendai masters had to return to China to fill in the gaps left by Saichō’s incomplete transmission. Detractors of this interpretation from the Tendai side, on the other hand, have ridiculed Kūkai’s followers for not being up to the task of building on their progenitor’s foundation.

However, in early Heian society, aristocrats eagerly sought after esoteric rituals for their protection and prosperity. Monks with esoteric training who were capable of successfully performing such rituals were at a premium. Esoteric specialists provided ritual performances for the growing number of “private” temples built by members of the imperial family and aristocracy. Of course, these specialists received stipends for their efforts.

This demand by the elite extended to temples dominated by Shin-gon lineages, such as Tōji 東寺, Ninnaji 仁和寺, Daigoji 醍醐寺, and Kongōbuji 金剛峰寺 (Mt. Kōya), among others. Each center developed its own style or variation of ritual performances and their transmissions. Lineages and sub-lineages proliferated over time as “successful” variations gained recognition. These transmissions were recorded much like genealogical records, for example the Yataku kechimyakushū 野沢血脈集 or the Yataku kechimyaku kunshū 野沢血脈捃拾.

The esoteric transmissions were divided into two main lineage streams: the Hirosawa-ryū 広沢流 and the Ono-ryū 小野流, both taken from place names in the region of the Heian capital 平安京. However, by the Insei period (1086–1121), the Hirosawa and Ono lineages had each developed six major sub-lineages. During the Kamakura period (1185–1333) the Hirosawa expanded to nine sub-lineages, while the Ono developed twenty-seven. Eventually, there were over seventy sub-lineages subsumed under the Hirosawa and Ono “parent” lines. The two branches and their sub-lineages developed as esoteric masters introduced variations based on their individual ritual and

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2 There were many purposes for which these rituals were performed, including good health; long life; safe childbirth; prosperity; social and court advancement; good harvests; rain; and protection from misfortune, ill-omens, calamities, and enemies, both natural and supernatural (Hayami 1987).