

## BUDDHISM OF THE HEIAN PERIOD

平安時代

794-1185

- name of the historical period derived from the name of the capital- Heian- City of Peace and Tranquility (present Kyôto)
- saw the establishment of two major sects, which set course for the Buddhism of later periods:  
TENDAI and SHINGON- their founders thus expressed the dissatisfaction with empty formalism of the Six Schools of Nara  
Saichô and Kûkai- hagiographical aspects begin to show in their biographies
  - proliferation of Tendai and Shingon esoteric rites- elevation of esoteric ritual practice
  - sponsored by noble families to conduct rituals for this-worldly aims
- new schools emerging in reaction against, and eventually displacing, decadent old schools of the Nara period
- Heian Buddhism also called ‘lived Buddhism’ in contrast to Nara period Buddhism; through descriptions in court diaries (*nikki*) about daily religious practice of the nobility.  
It consisted of: Buddhist observances, kami worship, yin-yang practices.
- in comparison with the preceding Nara Buddhism, we can observe a shift in the development of the Buddhist teachings (BUT only seen from a political perspective of emphasising this-worldly benefits; the trend was gradually moving to individual liberation and soteriological issues):
  - early Heian Buddhism- ‘state Buddhism’ (Tendai, Shingon)  
officially sponsored and concerned chiefly with protection of the emperor and the realm.
  - middle period Heian Buddhism- ‘aristocratic Buddhism’  
nobility raising in power and prestige and hence patronising esoteric masters to conduct rites for their health and prosperity (this-worldly aims)
  - late Heian period Buddhism- ‘popular Buddhism’ (development of the Pure Land Schools)

“The new Buddhist system that was formed around Saichô and Kûkai defined the Buddhism of the Heian and Kamakura periods.” (Nanzan Guide, p. 156)

“Japanese were moving rapidly from the purely receptive stage to making their own contributions to the doctrinal development of Buddhism.” (Bowring, p. 133)

### SAICHÔ AND TENDAI

- Tendai 天台 literally meaning ‘Heavenly Dias’; the name however derives from its Chinese predecessor T’ien T’ai (name of the central mountain temple of the school)
- The founder is Saichô 最澄 (767-822), posthumously known as Dengyô Daishi; studied in Nara and was ordained in Tôdaiji
- After his ordination, allegedly springing from his dissatisfaction with the corruption of the great monasteries in Nara, he left for the mountains in the vicinity of Kyôto near lake Biwa (northeast of the capital), Mount Hiei 比叡山 (Hieizan) ‘preferring the rigours of mountain ascetism to any advancement within the Buddhist hierarchy (Bowring, p. 115)
- Close relationship Kanmu tennô 桓武天皇 (737-806)
- Invited to deliver lectures on the Lotus Sûtra
- Decision to participate on a mission to China, voyage to the mainland- 804

- In China, Saichó received instruction in the T'ien T'ai doctrine, and an esoteric initiation;  
He was also successful in collecting and importing a great number of Chinese Buddhist texts to Japan
- Upon his return from China, he was regarded as a respected master of Buddhism invited to the bedridden emperor to conduct rituals for his well-being
- Return to Mt. Hiei, where he hoped to establish a religious centre with practice that differed from that of the Nara schools  
Mt Hiei later developed into a renowned educational centre for Buddhist monks- Genshin, Honen, Shinran, Nichiren, Dogen

### KÚKAI AND SHINGON

- Kúkai 空海 ( 774-834) posthumously known as Kóbó Daishi 弘法大師
- founder of Shingon 真言 (literally meaning 'true word'), but more importantly he was the formulator of a new mode of esoteric Buddhist ritual language
- underwent Confucian training in Japan, ventured to China to study Mahavairochana tantra- a ritual manual, Kúkai understood the need of a master when studying *mikkyó*
- Shingon presents itself (and Kúkai) in accord with the original tantric teachings as transmitted from Amoghavajra (Indian tantric master)
- Established an esoteric Buddhist temple complex- Kóyasan 高野山- SW of Nara; intentionally designed in the form of two mandalas with a large stúpa at the centre of each sacred area (5000 temples)

### 密教 *mikkyó*- esoteric Buddhism, tantrism

- Special use of language and images
  - Elevated ritual above philosophy
  - Need for a master to transmit the secret teachings to the disciple
  - With the use of rituals and sacred visualisation (guidance through mandala) one is able to attain Buddhahood in this very body *sokushin jóbutsu* 即身成仏
- => Buddhahood possible here and now  
=> esotericism is communicable through a master  
=> emphasis on ritual- by means of three teachings- *sanmitsu* 三密- three teachings- body, speech and mind (mudra, mantra and mandala)  
the *dháranis*- mantra- were not simply secret spells or incantations to avoid calamities or bring good health, they were the key to achieving Buddhahood
- Kúkai presented himself and his teaching as 'a new vehicle'- vajrayána, by which he made a marking distinction between esoteric *mikkyó* teachings and exoteric teachings; he advocated the uniqueness of his teachings, the *mikkyó*
  - 東寺 Tóji in Kyóto

### ISSUES OF THE TWO SCHOOLS

- Formation of sectarianism  
- based upon new ordination system- as proposed by Saichó  
*nenbu dosha* 年部度者- yearly ordinands  
- assigning a specific number of annual ordinands to each of the schools  
696- ten annual ordinands, without further specification  
cca 810, including Tendai: 12 ordinands: 3 for each Hossó and Sanron, 2 for each Kegan, Ritsu and Tendai

835- 15 ordinands, including additional 3 for Shingon  
=> *diferentiation into Schools, shú* as government thus officially recognised EIGHT schools of Japanese Buddhism (6 Schools of Nara Buddhism , Tendai and Shingon)

- Tendai tantrism- advocated from the times of Ennin (794-864)  
However, during his stay in China, we know of Saichó's early involvement with tantric ritual
- Saichó's Tendai is also known as 'enmitsuzenkai' 円密禅戒, a doctrine encompassing four ways of Buddhist practice.  
'en' 円- the Lotus Sútra teaching of One Vehicle,  
'mitsu' 密- esoteric teachings,  
'zen' 禅- Buddhist seated meditation, and  
'kai' 戒 - monastic precepts
- 815- breach between Saichó and Kúikai- thus:  
Tendai- presenting its teachings as "One Vehicle"  
Shingon- strictly advocating *mikkyó* 密教

#### THE LOTUS SÚTRA *Hokekyó* 法華經

- Its authorship is obscure, Chinese translation from Sanskrit date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> ct.
- Usage of extremely vivid language and images, parables and analogies (to illustrate the inadequacy of verbal language to transmit the essence of Buddhist teachings)- all designed to make the Sútra accessible
- Its text itself therefore regarded sacred- considered the embodiment of the Shakyamuni Buddha himself- copying, transcribing, painting, reading the Sútra are all activities that would bring one salvation -> the text became the most illustrated Sútra

1/ Shakyamuni was a moral being and a manifestation of the Eternal Buddha at the same time -> demonstrates his omnipresence

2/ 'Just as the Buddha's presence is extended throughout time, so the salvation of the Buddha extends to all beings' (de Barry)

⇒ SALVATION IS UNIVERSAL

Including WOMEN (chapter 12- the Dragon King Daughter)

3/ the Lotus Sútra encompasses all approaches to salvation in the ONE VEHICLE

- special emphasis on Mahayana Buddhism
- Lotus Sútra itself is an approach to salvation

'The highest truth is by nature a sovereign truth that stands above other teachings, and the One Vehicle is therefore supreme.' (de Barry)