

was expanded to include questions on the complex doctrines of the Sanron and Hossō schools.⁴²

SAICHŌ

The Heian period was dominated by two schools, Tendai and Shingon, the former established by Saichō and the latter by Kūkai, two of the most important figures in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Although both Tendai and Shingon were originally introduced from China, they were transformed by their Japanese protagonists into uniquely Japanese schools of Buddhism.

Saichō was born in 767 in Furuchi-gō (part of the present-day Ōtsu city) in Ōmi Province.⁴³ At the age of eleven he “left his family” (*shukke*) to enter the Ōmi Kokubunji, where he came under the tutelage of Gyōhyō, the provincial bishop of Ōmi. Two years later Saichō received his *tokudo* (initiation as a *shami*, “novice”). His full ordination (*jukai*, “accepting the [250] precepts”) raising him to the status of monk (*sō*) took place at Tōdaiji in 785. Immediately thereafter Saichō moved to Mount Hiei, where he devoted himself to meditation, worship, and especially the study of scripture. His abrupt move to Hiei was in keeping with the practice of many monks of the time, who sought to purify themselves and perhaps even acquire supernatural powers by undergoing austerities in the mountains. In Saichō’s case, as the five vows he made at the time suggest, the move to Hiei reflected disenchantment with the corruption that was infecting the great monasteries of Nara.

Saichō probably first heard of Tendai from his master Gyōhyō, who had been a disciple of Tào-hsüan (Japanese, Dōsen), a learned Chinese monk who was said to have been versed in the doctrines of

⁴² *Ruijū kokushi, kan* 187, edict dated Enryaku 20 (801)/4/15, *KT*, vol. 6, p. 314.

⁴³ The earliest and most reliable source for the biography of Saichō is the *Eizan Daishi den* compiled by his disciple Ninchū and included in *DDZ*, vol. 5, *furoku*, pp. 1–48. Another important primary source providing valuable information regarding Saichō’s date and place of birth, family background, service as a novice, and various ordinations is the collection of ordination certificates included in the same volume on pp. 101–5. For critical modern biographies of the life of Saichō, see Paul Groner, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School* (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1984); Katsuno Ryūshin, *Hieizan to Kōyasan* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1959); Kiuchi Hiroshi, *Dengyō Daishi no shōgai to shisō, Regurusu bunko*, vol. 56 (Tokyo: Daisan bunmeisha, 1976); Nakao Shumpaku, *Dengyō Daishi Saichō no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata bunshōdō, 1987); Saeki Arika, *Dengyō Daishi den no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1992); Shioiri Ryōdō and Kiuchi Gyōdō eds., *Saichō*, vol. 2 of *Nihon meisō ronshū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1982); Tamura Kōyū, *Saichō, Jimbutsu sōsho*, vol. 193 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1988).

the Kegon, Ritsu, and Zen schools, in addition to those of Tendai.⁴⁴ It was only after Saichō had settled on Hiei, however, that he was able to acquire a set of the major Tendai treatises, which he then studied with great enthusiasm. Gradually a small group of followers, which included monks such as Gishin and Enchō who were destined to become major disciples, gathered around him. Official recognition of his learning came twelve years after his move to Hiei, when, in 797, he was named one of the ten court chaplains (*naigubu jū zenji*) whose responsibility was to pray for the well-being of the emperor. This appointment entitled his small temple on Hiei to receive a subsidy paid from the Ōmi tax revenues.

The following year Saichō invited ten monks from Nara to hear a series of lectures on the *Hokekyō* and two related sutras, which together constitute the basic scriptures of Tendai. These lectures, designed by Saichō to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Chih-i, the Chinese systematizer of Tendai, provided him with an opportunity to expound to the scholar-monks of Nara Tendai doctrine, which had been only briefly introduced by the *Vinaya* master Chien-chen (Japanese, Ganjin), who had arrived in Japan in 754 carrying the major treatises of this school.⁴⁵ Known as the *Hokke jikkō* (The Ten Lectures on the Lotus), these memorial lectures held annually on Hiei in the eleventh month subsequently became a major event on the Tendai calendar.

In 802, Emperor Kammu, who was troubled by the frequent wrangling between the Nara schools, particularly between Hossō and Sanron, ordered Wake no Hiroyo, the head of the state Academy (*Daigaku*) and eldest son of the loyalist Kiyomaro, and Hiroyo's brother, the renowned scholar Matsuna, to arrange for lectures on Tendai at the Wake clan temple Takaosanji (the predecessor to present-day Jingoji in Kyoto). Kammu promoted Tendai, apparently hoping to provide some common ground for a resolution of the disputes between the Sanron and Hossō schools, since Tendai teachings included the concept of progressive revelation, according to which each of the major groups of scriptures had its own place in a grand design devised by Śākyamuni Buddha to lead his followers to accept

44 Gyōnen (1240–1321), *Sangoku Buppō denzū engi, kan 2, BZ*, vol. 101, p. 115a. In the same work Gyōnen quotes the now lost *Tendai fuhō engi*, which is attributed to Saichō, as saying that the Chinese monks Tao-hsūan, Chien-chen, and Fa-chin all disseminated the Tendai teachings in Japan (pp. 126b–27a).

45 Genkai, *Tō Daiwajō tōsei den* (779), *BZ*, vol. 113, p. 120a.

the *Hokekyō* as his final and highest teaching.⁴⁶ Kammu's plan to use Tendai as a unifying ideology for Japanese Buddhism was not unreasonable since Chi-tsang and Tz'u-en, the two most prominent scholar-monks of the Chinese Sanron and Hossō schools respectively, had written major commentaries on the *Hokekyō*.

In the course of the Takaosanji lecture, in which Saichō played the leading role, Kammu expressed his desire to see Tendai established as a full-fledged Buddhist school in Japan. Saichō immediately responded, in a message relayed to the emperor by Hiroyo, that this could be accomplished only if a mission was sent to China to create a formal link with the Chinese patriarchate in the T'ien-t'ai mountains, where the school originated and maintained its head monastery. Without such a formal transmission of doctrine, Saichō insisted, Tendai would carry little authority in Japan. He also made clear to Kammu his own conviction that Tendai was inherently superior to both Sanron and Hossō because the latter two schools were based on treatises written by Indian scholiasts, whereas Tendai was rooted in the *Hokekyō*, a scripture preached by Śākyamuni Buddha himself. Saichō's proposal to undertake a mission to China was promptly accepted, and he was granted permission to make a short visit to the T'ien-t'ai mountains accompanied by his disciple Gishin, who was to serve as his interpreter.

Sailing on one of the four ships that transported the Japanese embassy to the T'ang court, Saichō arrived at Ming-chou (the present-day Ning-p'o) in the ninth month of 804. En route to the T'ien-t'ai mountains he stopped briefly at T'ai-chou (present-day Lin-hai), where he met Tao-sui, the then patriarch of the Chinese Tendai school. By the tenth month Saichō had reached T'ien-t'ai, where he visited the holy sites and had a chance to study Tendai doctrine at its source. A totally unexpected reward from his visit to T'ien-t'ai was an encounter with a monk named Hsiao-jan, who initiated him into the Gozu (Chinese, Niu-t'ou, "Ox Head") lineage of Zen (Chinese, Ch'an).⁴⁷ The following month Saichō returned to T'ai-chou for further instruction in Tendai doctrine from Tao-sui, and, in the third month of 805, on the eve of his return to the embarkation point of

46 For a brief account of Chih-i's classification of the major groups of sutras, see my "Imperial Patronage in T'ang Buddhism," in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 284–87.

47 In addition to the Gozu lineage of Zen, Saichō claimed to have received the transmission of the Northern School (Hokushū) through both Gyōhyō and Tao-hsüan. The latter had been a pupil of P'u-chi, the Dharma-heir to the famous (Northern) Sixth Patriarch, Shen-hsiu. See Saichō, *Naishō Buppō sōjō kechimiyaku fu*, *DDZ*, vol. 1, pp. 210–15.

Ming-chou, received from Tao-sui the *endonkai* (perfect and immediate precepts), which was a Tendai ordination based on the fifty-eight bodhisattva precepts (*bosatsukai*) taught in the *Bommōkyō*.

Upon learning after his arrival in Ming-chou that the embassy's departure for Japan was to be delayed, Saichō decided to use the extra time allowed him in China to visit Yüeh-chou (present-day Shao-hsing), where he hoped to find additional Tendai manuscripts and, perhaps, also to acquire texts belonging to the Mikkyō (Esoteric Buddhist) tradition. During his stay in Yüeh-chou, which occupied most of the fourth month of 805, Saichō managed to receive an esoteric initiation (*kanjō*, "sprinkling of consecrated water on the head") from one Shun-hsiao, who also provided him with many esoteric texts and several implements for use in esoteric rituals. In all, Saichō collected 120 manuscripts in T'ai-chou and 102 manuscripts in Yüeh-chou, most of the latter being Mikkyō works.⁴⁸

Saichō sailed from Ming-chou on an embassy ship in the fifth month and reached Kyushu in the middle of the sixth month. He was immediately summoned to the court, where he personally presented Kammu with the manuscripts and ritual implements that he had acquired in China. Not surprisingly, the emperor ordered that copies of the Tendai texts be distributed to each of the seven great monasteries of Nara. But what impressed Kammu, whose health was now failing, even more than the precious Tendai manuscripts was Saichō's newly acquired status as a practitioner of Mikkyō, in which interest had been steadily growing since Nara times because of its practical value for curing illnesses, preventing misfortunes, and producing various benefits. It might well have struck Saichō as ironic that the first service that Kammu ordered him to perform after his return to Japan was not related to Tendai, which he had gone to China specifically to study, but rather to the Mikkyō, which was at best only of secondary interest to him. By imperial decree a platform-altar for esoteric initiations (*kanjōdan*) was constructed at Takaosanji, where, in the ninth month of 805, Saichō performed for eight monks from Nara the first esoteric initiation rites ever held in Japan. Later the same month Saichō was summoned to the palace to conduct an esoteric ritual that would bring about the recovery of the ailing emperor.⁴⁹

48 For a list of the titles of the manuscripts acquired in T'ai-chou and Yüeh-chou, see *Dengyō Daishi shōrai Taishū roku* and *Dengyō Daishi shōrai Esshū roku*, both compiled by Saichō (*T*, vol. 55, pp. 1055a–58a and pp. 1058b–60b).

49 *Eizan Daishi den*, *DDZ*, vol. 5, *furoku*, pp. 21–24. Kammu's faith in the esoteric Buddhism transmitted by Saichō is attested in a proclamation issued by Kammu included in Saichō's *Kenkairon engi* (821), *DDZ*, vol. 1, pp. 283–84.

In the first month of 806, Saichō sent a petition to Kammu requesting that Tendai be formally accorded status as one of the recognized Buddhist schools.⁵⁰ To accomplish this, Saichō proposed that the traditional system of ordaining ten monks at the beginning of the new year to pray for the well-being of the nation be restructured and expanded to include representatives of each of the officially recognized schools.⁵¹ The Kegon, Tendai, and Ritsu schools were to be allocated two novices each; the Sanron, to which the Hīnayānist Jōjitsu school was attached, and the Hossō, to which the Hīnayānist Kusha school was appended, were to be assigned three novices each, for a total of twelve annual ordinands (*nembun dosha*). The government promptly accepted Saichō's proposal, which had won immediate backing from the hierarchy (*sōgō*), but stipulated that of the two ordinands allotted annually to the Tendai school only one should devote himself solely to the study of classical Tendai doctrine. The other candidate was to study and become a specialist in Mikkyō. Thus from its inception the Japanese Tendai school, unlike its Chinese parent, had Mikkyō as one of its major components. The reconciliation of Mikkyō with classical Tendai thought was to become one of the principal tasks for future generations of Tendai scholars.

With the death of Kammu in the third month of 806 Saichō lost a strong supporter. The new emperor, Heizei (reigned 806–9), seeking to reduce government expenditures, placed restrictions on the construction of new temples and the use of state revenues for religious purposes. Because of this new policy no Tendai monks were ordained until 810, when Heizei's successor, Saga, allowed eight Tendai novices to be tonsured at the court, thus compensating for Heizei's failure to honor Kammu's promise to Saichō. Saga's decision to carry out the ordinations created practical difficulties for Saichō, since one of the two annual Tendai ordinands had to be trained in Mikkyō, which Saichō himself had not had the opportunity to study properly in China. Another problem was that Saichō's library on Hiei was lacking many important Mikkyō texts. To acquire copies of these texts and also to supplement his obviously deficient knowledge of Mikkyō, Saichō turned to Kūkai, a monk seven years his junior, whose understanding of Mikkyō was without equal in Japan.

⁵⁰ For Saichō's proposal, the statement by the hierarchs, and the official response by the government, see *Kenkairon engi*, DDZ, vol. 1, pp. 292–96.

⁵¹ The practice of ordaining ten monks at the court on the last day of the year or at the beginning of the new year was begun in 696. See *Nihon shoki*, *kan* 30, Jitō 10 (696)/12/1, *NKBT*, vol. 68, p. 532, and Saichō's *Kenkairon* (819), *kan* 3, DDZ, vol. 1, p. 150.

Unlike Saichō, who went to China to study Tendai but by chance happened to encounter Mikkyō adepts who conferred on him low-level initiations, Kūkai visited China with the specific objective of mastering the doctrines and rituals of Mikkyō and received its highest initiations. Although both men sailed in the same flotilla, they traveled on different ships and probably became acquainted with each other only after their return to Japan. Saichō's ship, as we have noted, landed in Ming-chou, whereas the ship carrying Kūkai entered the port of Fu-chou, whence Kūkai proceeded in the entourage of the Japanese ambassador directly to Ch'ang-an, where he intensively studied Mikkyō for more than a year. When Kūkai returned to Kyushu in the tenth month of 806, he had in his possession a priceless collection of esoteric texts, ritual implements, paintings, and mandalas (graphic representations of various divinities, often portrayed through mystical symbols and arranged according to a pattern that emanates outward from a central point).⁵²

In the eighth month of 809, Saichō sent a disciple to Kūkai, who had taken up residence at Takaosanji a month earlier, bearing a letter requesting the loan of twelve esoteric texts. Over the next six years Saichō wrote almost thirty such letters, often signing them "your disciple Saichō," even though Kūkai was seven years his junior.⁵³ Although Saichō himself had received several esoteric initiations while in China and had performed such an initiation at Takaosanji in 805, he openly acknowledged Kūkai's superior understanding of Mikkyō. Toward the end of 812 Saichō visited Kūkai at Takaosanji to request the initiation based on the *kongōkai* (diamond realm) and *taizōkai* (embryo realm) mandalas, which are the two principal mandalas of the line of Mikkyō transmitted by Kūkai that subsequently came to be known in Japan as Shingon Mikkyō. Kūkai readily assented, but conferred on Saichō only a *kechien kanjō* (an initiation establishing a link), which is the most elementary of the various levels of initiation.⁵⁴ Despite Saichō's eminence as a Tendai monk, his previous esoteric initiations in China, and his subsequent

⁵² Kūkai's catalogue, the *Go-shōrai mokuroku* (*T*, vol. 55, pp. 1060a–66a) lists the titles of 216 works that he brought back to Japan.

⁵³ Saichō's letters to Kūkai are included in the *Rankei yuionshū*, Mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo, ed., *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, 3rd ed., revised and enlarged (*zōho*), 8 vols. (Kōyasan: Mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo, 1965–68), vol. 5, pp. 353–86.

⁵⁴ Although virtually all Shingon scholars hold that Saichō received only the introductory initiation, there is a tradition within the Tendai school, based on a letter Saichō's disciple Enchō wrote to Kūkai in 831, that Kūkai conferred an intermediate level ordination on Saichō. See my "Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan: The Neglected Tendai Tradition," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34, 1 (1974): 188.

self-study of esoteric texts, he was in Kūkai's eyes still an amateur in Mikkyō, a point that was driven home when Kūkai granted Saichō only the lowest level of initiation at a ceremony in which laymen also participated.

Saichō and Kūkai each viewed Mikkyō differently. For Saichō, Mikkyō and classical Tendai formed the two wings of the newly established Tendai school, a unique amalgam not found in China.⁵⁵ To Kūkai, however, Mikkyō was the ultimate teaching of Buddhism and fully constituted a school in its own right. It is not surprising, therefore, that the two men would inevitably part company. The first indication of serious difficulty was Kūkai's refusal, in 814, to lend Saichō an esoteric manuscript that he had requested. Kūkai sharply rebuked Saichō for trying to understand Mikkyō through texts alone, which, Kūkai asserted in a letter to Saichō, were no more than the "dregs of Buddhism." Truth, in other words, Mikkyō, could be transmitted only "from mind to mind." To teach Mikkyō without having received a proper transmission, Kūkai warned, was tantamount to "stealing the doctrine."⁵⁶ The relationship between Saichō and Kūkai ended on a bitter note in 816, when Saichō's disciple, Taihan, who at Saichō's urging had gone to study Mikkyō with Kūkai four years earlier, refused Saichō's request that he return to Hiei.

The break with Kūkai marked the end of Saichō's period of docility, as was indicated by his decision to circulate publicly his *Ehyō Tendai shū*, a polemical work written in 813 that sought to document the superiority of Tendai over all other schools. Once the rupture became final in 816, Saichō embarked on a tour of the Kanto region, where he laid the basis for a future Tendai stronghold by lecturing on the *Hokekyō*, establishing pagodas enshrining this sutra and proclaiming before large groups of rural people the Tendai/*Hokekyō* doctrine of One Vehicle (*ichijō*), namely, that the three traditional divisions of Buddhism known as the Three Vehicles (*sanjō*) were no more than an expedient device created by Śākyamuni, the historical Buddha, to lead people of different intellectual and spiritual capacities to the One Vehicle that will ultimately carry each and every sentient being to Buddhahood.

By publicly proclaiming the Tendai doctrine of universal enlightenment, Saichō openly challenged the influential and aristocratic Hossō

55 See, for example, Saichō's letter to Taihan (in *DDZ*, vol. 5, p. 469), written in 816, in which Saichō declares that the teachings of the *Hokekyō* and those of Shingon are equally true.

56 The letter is included in the anthology of Kūkai's writings entitled *Henjō hakki Seirei shū*, in *Sangō shūiki*, *Seirei shū*, vol. 71 of *NKBT*, pp. 442–50. The passage cited occurs on p. 447.

school, which took the opposite view – namely, that the doctrine of One Vehicle taught in the *Hokekyō* was merely an expedient teaching intended to encourage simpleminded people to put their faith in Buddhism and uphold its basic moral code. For the Hossō school, the ultimate teaching of Buddhism was to be found in the *Gejimmikkyō* (Sutra Explaining the Profound Doctrine), its principal scripture, which not only accepted the concept of three real, distinct vehicles, but also held that sentient beings were inherently divided into five groups (*goshō*), the lowest consisting of the luckless *mushō* (those lacking the Buddha-nature), who, strive as they might, were destined to wander eternally through the cycle of birth and death. Saichō's popular gospel of universal salvation was immediately denounced by the well-known Hossō scholar Tokuitsu, who likewise was active in the Kanto area. Over the next five years the two men produced a total of eight works in an effort to refute each other's positions.

Having severed relations with Kūkai and having become involved in a protracted doctrinal dispute with Tokuitsu, Saichō was now ready to dissociate himself completely from the traditional Buddhism that centered around the six Nara schools. It was Saichō's view, but not that of Chinese Tendai, that the *Shibunritsu* – the disciplinary code used in both China and Japan to ordain monks and nuns – was essentially a Hīnayānist work and hence not suitable for Mahāyānist ordinations. In the third month of 818 Saichō took the unprecedented step of formally renouncing the 250 precepts of the *Shibunritsu* that he had taken at the time of his ordination at Tōdaiji. Two months later Saichō requested approval from the throne for a set of six regulations that he had formulated and wished to make binding on all future Tendai ordinands.

Formally known as the *Tendai Hokke-shū nembun gakushō shiki* (Bylaws for the Annual Ordinands of the Tendai Hokke School), the new regulations had far-reaching implications for the future course of Japanese Buddhism.⁵⁷ Particularly significant were the following proposals: (1) The names of candidates for ordination should not be removed from family registers, as was the custom, but retained with the added notation “son of the Buddha” (*Busshi*). Under the prevailing law, when someone was accepted as a novice his name was deleted from the family register, which was under the control of the secular authorities, and entered into a clerical register (*sōseki*), which placed him directly under the supervision of the Nara hierarchs

57 The text is included in Saichō's *Sange gakushō shiki*, T, vol. 74, pp. 623c–24b.

(*sōgō*). (2) The *tokudo* (initiation as a novice) and *jukai* (full ordination as a monk) should take place in the same year. It had been the practice to receive the *tokudo* from a monk at one's "home temple" and the full ordination several years later from preceptors belonging to the Ritsu school at one of the three monasteries authorized to have ordination platforms (*kaidan*): Tōdaiji in Nara, Yakushiji in Shimotsuke, and Kanzeonji in Chikuzen. By linking the *jukai* with the *tokudo*, Saichō hoped to keep Tendai novices out of the hands of the Ritsu preceptors. (3) Ordinations should be based on the *Busshi kai* (precepts for sons of the Buddha), an ambiguous term coined by Saichō suggestive of the *bosatsukai* (bodhisattva precepts) in the *Bommōkyō*. (4) Newly ordained monks should be required to reside on Hiei for an uninterrupted period of twelve years. As Saichō was to point out later, only ten of the twenty-four annual ordinands selected between 807 and 818 remained on Hiei, the others having been "stolen" (his word) by the Hossō (six monks) and Shingon (one monk) schools or else having left for reasons of their own.⁵⁸ (5) Tendai monks, regardless of whether they specialized in esoteric rituals (*shanaō*) or traditional Chinese Tendai meditation (*shikangō*), should view the protection of the state (*gokoku*) as their primary concern. (6) Those monks who exhibit special talents after completing their twelve-year training period should be appointed to serve as proselytizers or provincial bishops. In addition to their religious tasks, these monks should also actively promote the public welfare by sponsoring the construction of irrigation ditches, the reclamation of farmland, the building of bridges, and other such projects.

The court forwarded Saichō's proposals to the Office of Hierarchs (*Sōgō-sho*), which did not comment on them, perhaps because Saichō's occasionally vague language left the hierarchs uncertain about how far he was prepared to go in establishing Tendai as a school completely independent of the established church. In the eighth month of 818, Saichō submitted to the court another document containing eight proposed bylaws regarding the administration of Hiei and the training of its monks.⁵⁹ Again, the Office of Hierarchs, to which the document was referred, remained silent.

Any doubts regarding Saichō's ultimate intentions were dispelled when, in the third month of 819, he presented a third set of bylaws

⁵⁸ For a list of the students, with notations indicating their reasons for leaving Hieizan and the names of the schools to which they defected, see Saichō, *Tendai Hokke-shū nembun tokudo gakushō myōchō*, *DDZ*, vol. 1, pp. 250–53.

⁵⁹ The document, entitled *Kanshō Tendai-shū nembun gakushō shiki*, is included in *Sange gakushō shiki*, p. 624b–c.

to the court for consideration. Reflecting his increasing impatience with the court's failure to act on his earlier proposals for a truly independent Tendai school that he believed had been sanctioned by his imperial patron Kammu, Saichō provocatively entitled his new set of regulations *Tendai Hokke-shū nembun dosha eshō kōdai shiki* (Bylaws for the Conversion of the Annual Ordinands of the Tendai Hokke School from Hīnayāna to Mahāyāna).⁶⁰ The three chief points made in this final set of new regulations were: (1) There are three categories of monasteries: (a) those exclusively Mahāyānist, (b) those exclusively Hīnayānist, and (c) those in which Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna coexist. Tendai ordinands and “those who converted to Mahāyāna,” that is, monks originally belonging to one of the Nara schools who had subsequently joined Tendai, should be required to spend twelve years on Hiei, which in Saichō's view would become the only truly Mahāyānist monastery in Japan. (2) There are two types of precepts: (a) the fifty-eight Mahāyānist ones of the *Bommōkyō* and (b) the 250 Hīnayānist ones of the *Shibunritsu*. (3) There are two types of ordinations: (a) the Mahāyānist one based on the *Kanfugengyō*, in which the Buddha and two bodhisattvas act as preceptors and (b) the Hīnayānist one based on the *Shibunritsu*, in which three senior monks serve as the preceptors. Tendai novices should, of course, receive the Mahāyānist type of ordination using Mahāyānist precepts.

This last set of proposals signaled the beginning of a reform unprecedented in the history of East Asian Buddhism. First, Saichō's insistence that Tendai monks live in an “exclusively Mahāyānist monastery” marked the emergence in Japan of the sectarian monastery, which subsequently became one of the hallmarks of Japanese Buddhism. Hōryūji, Daianji, Gangōji, and other large Nara monasteries each accommodated groups of monks belonging to different schools. It was only after the time of Saichō that the idea of an exclusive sectarian monastery or temple took root and became the norm.

Second, Saichō broke completely with previous East Asian Buddhist practice when he replaced the *Shibunritsu* precepts with those of the *Bommōkyō*. This latter set of precepts, which lays particular stress on the social responsibility of the individual, had been traditionally viewed as precepts intended primarily for the bodhisattva (*bosatsukai*), that is, precepts for laymen, which monks might also voluntarily choose to accept, as Saichō himself had done in China. Monks had always been minutely regulated in their monastic life by

⁶⁰ *Sange gakushō shiki, T*, vol. 74, pp. 624c–25b.

the 250 precepts of the *Shibunritsu*, which were thought to transcend such relativistic categories as Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna. By labeling as Hīnayānist the *Shibunritsu* precepts, which had hitherto formed the basis of all ordinations, Saichō was implying that there were no true Mahāyāna monks in Japan.

Third, Saichō repudiated the ordination system prevailing in East Asia when he categorized as Hīnayānist the traditional ordination ceremony in which three monks administer the precepts to the ordinands, as prescribed in the *Shibunritsu*. By proposing to substitute the *Kanfugengyō*, a sutra linked to the *Hokekyō* and particularly esteemed in Tendai, for the *Shibunritsu*, Saichō was creating an entirely new ordination system peculiar to Tendai, the practical effect of which was to make Tendai a completely independent school, no longer dependent on the Ritsu monasteries for the ordination of its clergy. To accomplish this, Saichō sought permission to establish his own ordination platform on Hiei, beyond the jurisdiction of the Nara hierarchs, where he could perform his own ordinations.⁶¹

Outraged by Saichō's third set of proposed bylaws for Tendai ordinands, the Office of Hierarchs sent a sharply worded memorial to Saga in the fifth month of 819 denouncing Saichō's views on precepts, ordination, and the training of monks and urged the government to reject Saichō's proposals. Saichō responded some ten months later with his famous *Kenkairon* (Treatise on the Precepts), which refuted in fifty-eight articles the arguments against him put forward by the hierarchs. Along with the *Kenkairon* he submitted another important work, the *Naishō Buppō sōjō kechimiyaku fu*, in which he sought to demonstrate that he – and hence the Japanese Tendai school – was the legitimate heir to four distinct traditions: (1) Tendai proper through his study in China under Tao-sui and Hsing-man; (2) Zen through his master Gyōhyō and the transmission that he received later in China from Hsiao-jan; (3) the Bodhisattva (that is, Mahāyānist) Precepts through the ordination he received at T'ien-t'ai shan based on the *Bommōkyō*; and (4) Mikkyō through the initiations by Shun-hsiao and Wei-hsiang.

The *Kenkairon* was forwarded by the court to the hierarchs, who

61 The full text of Saichō's petition to the throne for permission to conduct ordinations is given in *Eizan Daishi den*, DDZ, vol. 5, *furoku*, pp. 33–34. Although ninth-century records do not specifically report that he sought the approval of the emperor to build a *kaidan*, it is likely that he did so, since it had been the custom for ordinations to be performed on a *kaidan*. Saichō's biography in Kokan Shiren, *Genkō Shakusho* (1322), states unambiguously that in the third month of 819, Saichō requested permission for the construction of a *kaidan* (BZ, vol. 101, p. 149b).

declined to respond. In 821 Saichō presented the court with yet another work, the *Kenkairon engi*, defending the principle of independent Tendai ordinations, but again was met with silence from the hierarchs and consequently from the throne. Frustrated by his failure to get permission from the government to conduct his own ordinations, Saichō spent the final year of his life quietly managing the affairs of Hiei. In response to a personal appeal from one of Saichō's disciples, Emperor Saga on his own authority promoted Saichō to the highest ecclesiastical rank, *dai hōshii*, an honor that had already been granted to Saichō's junior, Kūkai, two years earlier. Less than four months later, on the fourth day of the sixth month of 822, Saichō died on Hiei, without having gained the permission he so fervently sought to construct a Tendai ordination hall. Seven days after Saichō's death, Saga, without consulting the hierarchs whose opposition was well known, agreed to a petition signed by four of Saichō's prominent lay supporters, including Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu, who was the Minister of the Right, and Yoshimine no Yasuyo, a son of Kammu and half brother of Saga, to allow ordinations on Hiei. The following year an imperial decree was issued granting the name Enryakuji to Saichō's monastery on Hiei in memory of Kammu whose reign was known as Enryaku. Two months later the first Tendai ordinands, fourteen in all, received the *Bommōkyō* precepts from Gishin, who had succeeded Saichō as abbot of Hiei. The long-awaited ordination hall (*kaidan'in*) was completed in 827 with a grant of 90,000 sheaves of rice to defray construction costs.⁶²

KŪKAI

Kūkai, the founder of the Japanese Shingon school, was born in 774 in Sanuki Province (present-day Kagawa Prefecture in Shikoku), where his family, surnamed Saeki, exercised considerable influence.⁶³ At the age of fourteen he was brought to the capital by his maternal uncle, Ato no Ōtari, who was the Confucian tutor to Prince Iyo, the third son of Emperor Kammu. After three years of intensive study of the Chinese classics under the tutelage of his uncle, Kūkai entered the state Academy with the intention of eventually establishing himself as a scholar of Chinese. Shortly thereafter, however,

⁶² *Denjutsu isshinkai mon, kan 2, DDZ*, vol. 1, pp. 588–90.

⁶³ For critical modern biographies, see Katsuno, *Hieiizan to Kōyasan*; Kushida Ryōkō, *Kūkai no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1981), and Watanabe Shōkō and Miyasaka Yūshō, *Shamon Kūkai, Chikuma sōsho*, vol. 84 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1967).

he encountered a monk who taught him the esoteric ritual known as *Kokūzō gumonjihō*, the purpose of which is to increase the powers of memory through incessant repetition of a mystical incantation.⁶⁴ After beginning the *gumonjihō*, Kūkai had some sort of deep religious experience, which led him to withdraw from the Academy and retreat to the mountains where he undertook austerities.

According to the traditional accounts dating from late Heian times, Kūkai entered Makiosanji in Izumi at the age of nineteen to start his training as a novice under Gonzō, an influential Sanron monk, and was ordained two years later at Tōdaiji.⁶⁵ However, in his first book, the *Sangō shūiki*, written in 797 when he was twenty-three, Kūkai gives no indication of being an ordained monk. On the contrary, it is apparent from the *Sangō shūiki*, a semiautobiographical work that seeks to demonstrate the superiority of Buddhism over Taoism and Confucianism, that Kūkai had an aversion to the formalistic and often corrupt Buddhism of the great monasteries. His sympathies clearly lay with the itinerant holy man (*hijiri*) who, although often lacking a proper ordination, spends his life searching for truth while bringing the word of the Buddha to the common people. In all likelihood such was the life led by Kūkai between 791 when he retreated to the mountains and 804, when, according to the *Shoku Nihon kōki* (compiled in 869), a more reliable source than the late Heian biographies, he first became a novice, presumably in order to be eligible for study in China.⁶⁶ His full ordination took place at Tōdaiji in the fourth month of the same year.⁶⁷

Virtually nothing definite is known about Kūkai's study of Mikkyō before his visit to China. The traditional biographies claim that Kūkai first learned of the *Dainichikyō*, one of the basic Mikkyō scriptures, in a dream.⁶⁸ After locating a copy of this text beneath a

64 Most biographies of Kūkai, dating from the end of the Heian period or later, identify the unnamed monk as Gonzō, a respected cleric who stood in the Sanron lineage. This view has been challenged by some contemporary scholars. For a summary of their arguments, see Shimode Sekiyo, "Kūkai to Shingon-shū," in *Nihon hen*, vol. 2 of Nakamura Hajime, Kasahara Kazuo, and Kanaoka Shūyū, eds., *Ajia Bukkyō shi* (Tokyo: Kōsei shuppansha, 1974), pp. 134–38, and Watanabe and Miyasaka, *Shamon Kūkai*, pp. 34–39.

65 See, for example, Kyōhan, *Daishi on-gyōjō shūki* (1089), in *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 8 (Tokyo: Keizai zasshisha, 1904), pp. 495–96, and Ken'i, *Kōbō Daishi go-den* (first half of the 12th century) in *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 8, p. 526.

66 *Shoku Nihon kōki* (869), *kan 4*, Jōwa 2 (835)/3/25, *KT*, vol. 3, p. 38.

67 *Zō Daisōjō Kūkai Wajō denki* (895), *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, *shukan*, p. 9.

68 The earliest reference to this well-known legend occurs in the *Go-yuigō* (*T*, vol. 77, p. 408c), which purports to have been written by Kūkai on his deathbed. Although it is no longer generally recognized as an authentic work of Kūkai's, it was accepted as such since Heian times and hence served as a source for many of the biographies of Kūkai.

pagoda at Kumedera in Yamato, these accounts relate, Kūkai resolved to travel to China, where he could receive proper instruction from Mikkyō masters regarding the meaning of this difficult scripture. Although the traditional biographies make Kūkai's encounter with the *Dainichikyō* appear miraculous, the simple fact is that esoteric texts were in use in Japan long before Kūkai's birth. By the end of the Nara period more than 130 such texts, including the *Dainichikyō* and the *Kongōchōkyō*, the other principal scripture of Shingon Mikkyō, had been brought to Japan.⁶⁹ More than one quarter of the 150 surviving images from the eighth century are representations of Mikkyō divinities, which is another indication of the inroads that Mikkyō had already made in Japan.⁷⁰ Although not yet recognized as an independent school in Nara times, iconographic and textual evidence shows that Mikkyō was widely known and practiced even before Kūkai undertook his journey to China.

We have no reliable information about how Kūkai managed to get permission from the Japanese government to study in China. Traveling in the company of the ambassador, Fujiwara no Kadonomaro, on whose behalf he drafted letters to the Chinese authorities, Kūkai reached Ch'ang-an at the end of 804. In the sixth month of 805 he was accepted as a disciple by Hui-kuo, who was recognized as the foremost master of esoteric Buddhism in China. According to Kūkai's account, Hui-kuo, who was then ailing, declared at their first encounter that he had been long awaiting the arrival of Kūkai, whom he formally designated as his successor.⁷¹ After receiving the initiations based on the *kongōkai* and *taizōkai* mandalas, Kūkai was granted the *dembō kanjō* (the initiation for transmitting the Dharma), which is the highest of the three levels of esoteric initiations and signifies that its recipient has become a *dembō ajari*, that is, an esoteric master (*ajari*) who is himself empowered to transmit the teachings. Before Hui-kuo's death in the twelfth month of 805 he passed on to Kūkai a reputed relic of the Buddha, various paintings, images, ritual implements, texts, and mandalas. Although Kūkai had originally planned to spend twenty years in China, he decided to return to Japan immediately after Hui-kuo's death so that he could disseminate the "orthodox" Mikkyō that he had learned from Hui-kuo.

Kūkai traveled back to Japan with the embassy of Takashina no

69 Ishida Mosaku, *Shakyō yori mitaru Nara-chō Bukkyō no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1930), p. 146.

70 Katsumata Shunkyō, *Mikkyō no Nihon-teki tenkai* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1970), p. 10.

71 *Go-shōrai mokuroku, T*, vol. 55, p. 1065b–c.

Tōnari, reaching Kyushu in the tenth month of 806. Through the ambassador he submitted to the court a catalogue of the precious esoteric manuscripts and religious objects that he had acquired in China, hoping to be summoned to the capital to transmit the Mikkyō teachings. Although later biographies claim that he moved to Makiosanji the following year, it is clear from earlier records that despite his unique training in China, no warm welcome awaited Kūkai in Kyoto.⁷² His exclusion from the capital was almost certainly due to political happenstance. In 807, one year after ascending the throne, Heizei sent his half-brother, Prince Iyo, into exile on suspicion of plotting mutiny, ultimately forcing him to commit suicide. Kūkai, through his uncle Ōtari, who had been Prince Iyo's tutor, had had a long-standing friendship with the Prince, which, no doubt tainted Kūkai in the eyes of Heizei.

Kūkai's fortunes abruptly changed when Saga became emperor in the fourth month of 809. The new emperor had a deep interest in Chinese culture, particularly literature, poetry, and calligraphy – areas in which Kūkai excelled. In the seventh month of 809, Saga invited Kūkai to take up residence in Takaosanji, where four years earlier Saichō had erected an altar for esoteric initiations (*kanjōdan*) at the behest of Saga's father, Kammu. A close relationship immediately developed between Saga and Kūkai through frequent exchanges of poetry and calligraphy. Saga, who was not especially concerned with religion, esteemed Kūkai primarily for his profound knowledge of Chinese culture. For Kūkai the strong personal bond with Saga provided entree to the court and aristocracy and gave him the opportunity to lay a solid foundation for Shingon Mikkyō.

Kūkai lost no time in trying to convince the court of the practical value of Shingon. In the wake of an unsuccessful coup to restore Retired Emperor Heizei to the throne in 810, Kūkai successfully petitioned Saga for permission to hold an esoteric rite at Takaosanji to ensure the tranquillity of the country, using the occasion to remind Saga of the prevailing Chinese custom of maintaining a permanent palace chapel (*naiōjō*) staffed by monks who were expert practitioners of esoteric ritual.⁷³ Kūkai's preeminence as a Mikkyō master

⁷² The three earliest biographies of Kūkai – the *Kūkai Sōzu den* attributed to his disciple Shinzei, the *Daisōzu Kūkai den* compiled by Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804–72) et al., and the *Zō Daisōjō Kūkai Wajō denki* – make no mention of Kūkai's whereabouts between his arrival in Tsukushi in Kyushu in 806 and his move to Kyoto in 809.

⁷³ Kūkai's petition, entitled *Kokke no on-tame ni shuhō sen to kou hyō* (A Memorial Requesting Buddhist Services for the Benefit of the Nation), is contained in the *Seirei shū*, kan 4, *NKBT*, vol. 71, pp. 228–30.

was acknowledged by everyone, including his future rival Saichō. When Kūkai acceded to Saichō's request in 812 to conduct *kongōkai* and *taizōkai* initiations, close to two hundred people flocked to Takaosanji to take part.⁷⁴ Among those receiving initiations from Kūkai were not only Saichō and his disciples, but also twenty-two monks from the major Nara monasteries, thirty-eight novices, and more than forty laymen, including the influential Wake brothers, Matsuna and Nakayo, who effectively controlled Takaosanji. In recognition of Kūkai's status as a Mikkyō master, Saichō instructed five of his leading disciples to remain with Kūkai until the following year so that they might receive the highest level of initiation, the *dembō kanjō*, from him. After receiving their esoteric initiations from Kūkai in the twelfth month of 812, the Wake brothers entrusted the administration of Takaosanji to Kūkai, allowing him to appoint his own disciples as the ranking temple officers (*sangō*). In 829 the Wake brothers formally vested Kūkai and his successors with irrevocable authority to manage Takaosanji, which had been made an officially sanctioned Shingon temple five years earlier.

At the very time that Saichō had embarked on a course of confrontation with the older schools, Kūkai, following a conciliatory policy, was winning acceptance for Shingon at the court and among the Nara hierarchs. In 816 Saga approved a request from Kūkai that he be given exclusive proprietary rights to Mount Kōya, on which he sought to establish a retreat for meditation and a monastery for the training of Shingon monks. Two years later Kūkai moved to Kōya, where two of his disciples were already laying foundations for the future Kongō-buji monastic complex. Despite his strong desire to remain on Kōya, Kūkai was summoned back to Kyoto in 819, his presence in the capital being deemed indispensable. Kūkai strengthened his links with Nara by establishing in 822 a hall for esoteric initiations (*kanjō dōjō*) within the precincts of Tōdaiji. This hall, later known as Shingon'in, which remained under the control of Shingon monks, played a key role in the dissemination of Mikkyō among the Nara clergy.

In the first month of 823, three months before his abdication, Saga ordered that Kūkai be put in charge of Tōji, the chief state-supported temple in Kyoto. Saga's successor, Junna, stipulated later in the same year that henceforth only Shingon monks would be permitted to reside at Tōji, fixing their number at fifty. In 824, Junna further decreed that control of Tōji would be permanently vested in Kūkai and monks of his lineage. The conversion of Tōji into an exclusive Shin-

⁷⁴ For a list of participants, see Kūkai's *Takao kanjō ki*, *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, vol. 3, pp. 620–29.

gon temple was a clear indication that Kūkai's Shingon Mikkyō had become the officially sanctioned religion of the court.

Unlike Saichō, who after 816 was continually at odds with the older schools, Kūkai always remained on good terms with the Nara clergy in the hope of persuading it to accept Shingon as a supersecarian system of esoteric ritual that would bring an infinite variety of benefits to both the individual and the state. Thus, while Saichō encountered stiff opposition in his efforts to build an independent ordination platform on Hiei, Kūkai succeeded in establishing a hall for Shingon services in the very heart of Nara. Even the Hossō scholar Gomyō, who as the ranking hierarch had denounced Saichō's proposal for an independent ordination platform, felt no contradiction in accepting an administrative position at Tōji after it was designated a Shingon temple. Nor was it unusual for Shingon monks to be named to the superintendency (*bettō*) of Tōdaiji, which was nominally a Kegon monastery. So completely had Kūkai succeeded in winning acceptance from the hierarchs that when he submitted to the throne in 830 his *Fūjūshin ron*, a treatise in which he proclaimed the superiority of Shingon over all other schools of Buddhism as well as over the secular philosophies, not a word of protest was heard from Nara.

Kūkai finally received permission to return to Kōya in 832. Two years later the court granted his petition to establish within the palace precincts a Shingon'in (Shingon Chapel), where an annual esoteric rite known as *go-shichinichi mi-shiho* was to be performed from the eighth to the fourteenth day of the first month by Shingon monks from Tōji. The purpose of the rite was to ensure the well-being of the emperor and the prosperity of the nation. In the first month of 835, the Shingon school was officially admitted to the annual ordinand (*nembun dosha*) system and was allotted a yearly quota of three state-supported novices, which exceeded by one the number allowed the Tendai school. The following month Kongōbuji was accorded the status of a recognized temple (*jōgakuji*). Thus by the time of Kūkai's death in the third month of 835, Shingon was firmly established within the imperial court, a position it was to hold until the first years of Meiji.

THE TENDAI SCHOOL AFTER SAICHŌ

Although the Tendai school gained independence from the Nara hierarchy when it was granted the right to conduct its own ordinations

in 822, it nevertheless fared poorly in the first decades after Saichō's death. By the 820s the Japanese aristocracy had become intoxicated with Mikkyō rituals, which were performed to achieve specific material or spiritual ends. Saichō's disciples and followers on Hiei had been completely overshadowed by Kūkai, who had established himself in Tōji, where he performed various esoteric rites commissioned by the government. The plight of the monks on Hiei after the death of Saichō was graphically illustrated in a letter sent in 825 by its lay superintendent (*zoku bettō*), Tomo no Kunimichi, to an official who was an influential patron of Hōryūji, requesting the latter to use his good offices to find a place for the "foodless monks of Hiei" at Hōryūji and Shitennōji so that they could continue to transmit the teachings of Tendai.⁷⁵

It was clear to the Hiei community that in order to enhance its standing with the aristocracy, which was more interested in the material rewards accruing from esoteric rites than in the lofty but impractical philosophy of classical Tendai, it would have to prove its competence in Mikkyō, which, as we have seen, had been viewed by Saichō as one of the two wings of the Japanese Tendai school. This need to acquire additional training in Mikkyō forced Enchō, one of Saichō's disciples and a future abbot of Enryakuji, to swallow his pride and appeal, in 831, to Kūkai for further instruction in the doctrines of Mikkyō, for which, he frankly admitted, he had as yet not been able to find a suitable teacher.⁷⁶ Obviously, such appeals were humiliating and, worse still, tended to confirm the view that Kūkai's Shingon school was the ultimate authority in matters of Mikkyō.

Ennin, Enchin, and Annen

In 835, Ennin, a relatively obscure monk who had become a disciple of Saichō in 808 at the age of fourteen, was granted permission to travel to China with Fujiwara no Tsunetsugu, the newly appointed envoy to the T'ang court. Although the purpose of Ennin's mission was ostensibly to visit T'ien-t'ai shan in order to receive further training in Tendai doctrine, it is apparent that Ennin planned from the outset to take advantage of his stay in China to learn as much as possible about Mikkyō.

After several false starts, the ship carrying Ennin arrived at Yang-

⁷⁵ *Denjutsu isshinkai mon, kan 2, DDZ*, vol. 1, pp. 592–93.

⁷⁶ Enchō's letter, which was also signed by nine other monks from Hiei, is included in *Chōya gunsai, kan 16, KT*, vol. 29A, pp. 397–98.