

CHAPTER IV

HEIAN BUDDHISM (794-1185), DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW DIMENSION

By the emergence of the Heian period, the evolution of Japanese Buddhism had arrived at a near standstill. True, there had been a brief flurry of academic activity during the late Nara which continued into the early Heian, but it was not enough to offset the general stagnation that had set in at the close of the Tempyō era. The renewed scholastic activity, primarily found in the Hossō sect, was merely a response to the Kōnin and Kammu reforms and renewed popularity of the Hossō sect in China; it was not a creative spark and destined to soon die out. This does not mean that the Six Nara Sects were not the possessors of a solid core of Buddhist philosophy vitally important for the basis of future growth, but they lacked dynamic and innovative leadership. The ability to respond to government pressure is quite different from the faculty to boldly initiate new directions. Success in the latter requires a certain genius and either a very keen sense of timing or luck to tap the right circumstances. If we compare the two men who ultimately succeeded in establishing new Heian directions, we might say that for Saichō, it was a case of idealistic good fortune, while for Kūkai, a careful timing of the appropriate historical moment.

A. TENDAI SHŪ, The Teaching of the Lotus

1. Saichō, the Founder

Saichō was born in 767 in the province of Ōmi of the Mitsuobi family, believed to have been originally immigrants from China. His father was so devoted to Buddhism that the family home was converted into a

temple, and by the time Saichō was twelve, he entered the *kokubunji* monastery of Ōmi, becoming a disciple of Gyōhyō. He received his first ordination at the age of fourteen and in 785, at nineteen received complete ordination as a monk at the Tōdaiji *kaidan*. Up to this point, his life appears to have been quite normal but approximately three months after his ordination, he went to live in a small hermitage on Mt. Hiei.

A great deal of speculation has been made regarding Saichō's reasons for this unusual action. Politically it was a very unsettled period and the Nara sects had not fully recovered from Dōkyō's influence. The Kōnin and Kammu reforms were in effect, and Emperor Kammu had just moved the capital to Nagaoka and embarked upon his ten year period of disasters. Perhaps Saichō was influenced by the general political instability or disillusioned by the formalism and corruption of the Six Sects. It is also quite probable that as a native of nearby Ōmi province, he was already acquainted with Mt. Hiei.

Little is known of the early history of Mt. Hiei, but from its mention in the biography of Fujiwara Muchimaro written by Enkei, and in a poem by Yōshun contained in the *Kaifūsō* compiled in 851, it appears that there once had been a temple on the mountain that already was deserted by the Heian period. It is very likely that Saichō was familiar with the site.

After spending some time in a small hut on the mountain, in 788 Saichō established the Hieizanji temple and carved an image of Yakushi, the healing Buddha, as the central image. Sometime during this period, Saichō began to study Tendai scriptures. As a devoutly religious idealist, he was undoubtedly impressed by Tendai practice as a welcome change from the somewhat sterile theology of the Six Sects. Each of the schools theoretically offered practical application of their philosophy, but the mood of the Nara sects was scholastic rather than devotional. The major practices were magical rites to improve the memory or expand the mind for study, and on occasion to impress the credulous aristocracy. These were not the type of daily devotional exercises contained in the writings of Chih-I, the founder of Chinese T'ien T'ai.

Saichō's isolation in his hermitage on Mt. Hiei did not prevent him

from making important court contacts. By this period the more idealistic monks living in such hermitages were viewed more favourably than their worldly counterparts in the cities. A *Naigubusō* (Imperial court priest) named Jukyō upon meeting Saichō, was impressed by his sincerity, and was subsequently influential in having Saichō appointed one of the ten court *Naigubusō* in 797.

In 802, Wake no Hiroyo, son of the famous Kiyomaro, the confidante of Emperor Kammu instrumental in the transfer of the capital, was requested by Emperor Kammu to arrange a Lotus Sutra Meeting at the Takaosanji (present Jingoji temple). More than ten leading priests from Nara were invited with Saichō the main speaker. As a result of this meeting, Saichō attracted the attention of the Emperor and was promised the opportunity to visit T'ang China in order to transmit T'ien T'ai teachings to Japan.

Accordingly, in the seventh month of the year 804, Saichō left the port of Matsuura in Hizen province aboard one of the four *kentōshi* ships that sailed for China. His contemporary Kūkai was aboard the first ship that arrived in Fukien province the tenth day of the eighth month. Saichō's second ship was slightly later, arriving at Ningpo on the first day of the ninth month; the other two ships failed to arrive. Kūkai immediately went to the capital Ch'ang-an, while Saichō proceeded to Mt. T'ien T'ai. The fact that he failed to visit Ch'ang-an while in China, later became a challenge leveled against Saichō by his enemies, to pose as 'a monk who sought the Dharma in China.'

At the time of Saichō's arrival, the T'ien T'ai sect had just completed an important revival under Chan-jan (711-82), the sixth patriarch of the school. Saichō studied briefly under two of Chan-jan's leading disciples: Tao-sui and Hsing-man. He also received instruction in meditation from Hsiu-jan. Just prior to his return to Japan, while awaiting a ship to embark, Saichō met Shun-hsia, Tantric master of the Lung-hsing temple and disciple of Śubhākarasiṃha, and was initiated into esoterism; a fortuitous incident that drastically changed the future direction of Japanese Tendai.

Finally, after nine and a half months in China, Saichō returned to

Japan having successfully gained spiritual sanction for the transmission of the T'ien T'ai school. He brought 450 volumes and 230 sections of Buddhist scriptures with him.

The Tendai sect that Saichō ultimately established in Japan was not an exact copy of Chinese T'ien T'ai; there were a substantial number of differences that increased with successive generations. To begin with, even prior to embarking for China, Saichō had studied Tendai doctrines and been influenced by the version of Tendai set forth by Ganjin and his disciples of the Ritsu sect. He had also been interested in Zen (Ch'an) meditation, acquired from Ganjin's disciples. These studies he continued while in China, adding to them, what became most indicative of the future direction of Japanese Tendai, a fascination with Tantrism (*Mikkyō*). Saichō's subsequent transmission has popularly been termed *Enmitsuzenkai*, referring to Lotus teaching, Mikkyō, Zen and Ritsu (or vinaya). These, in accompaniment with the Pure Land *nembutsu*, were to effect considerable differences in the direction of Japanese Tendai practice.

Another distinct difference between Saichō's version of Tendai and its Chinese parent, was in the realm of nationalism. Chinese T'ien T'ai tended to be universalist and quite apolitical in nature, but in Japan in keeping with the Nara heritage, the Tendai sect played an important role devoted to the protection of the nation. Although it did not have the rigid government restrictions the Six Nara Sects had been forced to endure, the Tendai clearly felt compelled to respond to a national obligation. In his *Kenkairon* (Treatise on Māhāyāna śīla), Saichō repeatedly wrote, 'for the sake of the nation chant the sutra, for the sake of the nation, lecture and expound the sutra.' He was also the first to use the stirring nationalistic phrase '*Dainipponkoku*' (Great Country of Japan). The ideal was to preserve and protect the nation and make it into a Buddhaland. Closely associated with this nationalism was an obvious respect for the indigenous deities. When we combine these characteristics with Saichō's belief in the ultimate ability of the *Lotus Sutra* to open the path to salvation during the impending *Mappō* (Degeneration of the

Dharma) period, it is easy to see the basis of the future Nichiren sect's inspiration.

Saichō also initiated certain institutional changes in his version of Tendai. Hitherto in China, the T'ien T'ai sect had been wholly an order of monks, but Saichō visualized a *bosatsu* (*bodhisattva*) sangha embracing both laity and monks; the emphasis of course, remained on the latter. Furthermore, he established two study areas on Mt. Hiei: one related to the thorough teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*, and the second, of equal importance, devoted to Tantric studies. Before entering either area for study, a monk had to receive the Māhāyāna śīla and make a vow not to leave the mountain for twelve years. This somewhat harsh regulation was to ensure that Tendai monks avoid the pitfalls of going out into the world without first having obtained adequate spiritual maturity. Initially it enabled Tendai to escape some of the problems of disunity their Shin-gon contemporaries experienced.

T'ien T'ai in China, which was already permeated with Hua-yen (Kegon) influence, had developed a very other-worldly atmosphere, quite divorced from the practical realities of Chinese society. This attitude was undoubtedly influenced by the concept of 'one equivalent to the many', shared by both schools. The Hua-yen idealistically emphasized Absolute Truth, while T'ien T'ai viewed the synthesis of the many into Ultimate Oneness, but both approaches inspired contemplation rather than social criticism. This aspect was not transmitted to Japanese Tendai. The keynote for Saichō was a spirit of reform, fighting the corruption of the Nara Sects and for the revolutionary establishment of a Māhāyāna *kaidan*. The reasons for this difference were related to the personality of the founder, Japanese social conditions, and the fact that Japan received the Buddhist scriptures in practically complete form. They had an overall view of the philosophical developments and could afford to be eclectic both in doctrine and attitudes.

Other minor Japanese Tendai innovations were in the style of chanting (*shōmyō*) and special pilgrimages in the mountain peaks (*kaihōgyō*), which inevitably led to an affinity with the Shugendō movement. Thus the

Tendai that Saichō transmitted had distinct differences that increased with the passing of time.

In the year 805, when Saichō returned to Japan, Emperor Kammu was critically ill and Saichō was invited to the palace. He held a *keka* (Rite of Repentance) and gained Imperial favour. As a result, the following New Year, the Tendai sect was officially granted its first two *nembun-dosha* (annual priests).¹ This in essence, signified the foundation of the sect in Japan. However, it began upon a rather ominous note—as a reward for service to the Emperor, a servitude to the government was implied as well as the taint of court worldliness.

By the third month of the year 805, Emperor Kammu died and Saichō lost his powerful patron and protector. Kammu was briefly succeeded by Emperor Heizei and in 809 Emperor Saga came to the throne. Eventually, Saichō was once again to find an Imperial patron in the latter, although his relations with court never again became as close as they had been during the days of Kammu.

During the ensuing years Saichō did establish a relationship with his contemporary Kūkai, founder of the Shingon sect. Beginning in 809, when Kūkai arrived at the Takaosanji in the vicinity of the capital, Saichō wrote requesting to borrow some of the rare esoteric texts Kūkai had brought to Japan. At the time Saichō was forty-two and already an established religious leader, while Kūkai, seven years his junior, was still relatively unknown. Saichō's request must have been exceedingly important to Kūkai, since it represented one of the first signs of recognition from the established religious community. The relationship that ensued developed upon mutual need and dissolved when that exigency no longer existed, since the personalities and ideals of the subjects were so disparate. Saichō was extremely idealistic, sensitive and introspective. Humble, as his first epistle to the inconnu Kūkai demonstrates, he was at the same time, adamant in his belief that the corruption of the Nara sects should be reformed. Kūkai, on the other hand, was supremely confident, ambitious, and skilled in the art of compromise. His philosophy, reflecting Shingon universalism, was to embrace all views and attitudes in the belief that ultimately his own concepts would triumph. To Saichō,

such willingness to compromise and work with the corrupt Nara Sects undoubtedly appeared insincere and hypocritical. But to Kūkai, Saichō's attempt to introduce Tendai, a sect that in China had antedated Nara Keron philosophy, must have appeared reactionary and Kūkai adamantly refused to accept Saichō's contention that Tendai philosophy and Shingon esoterism were identical. Tendai in China was in a state of decline, while esoteric philosophy represented the newest approach of the day. Kūkai was unwilling to compromise his views in this area.

The difference between Saichō and Kūkai represented a vast personal as well as ideological chasm. But this rather strange relationship did weather a turbulent eight years before it completely dissolved. The beginning of the end occurred on the 23rd day of the 11th month of the year 813, when Kūkai harshly refused Saichō's request to borrow the *Rishushakukyō*,² a rare esoteric text, stating that esoteric texts were to be passed on from Master to disciple rather than merely studied theoretically. His refusal demonstrated his intention of ending the relationship, for by this time, with the patronage of Emperor Saga and the religious recognition he had already gained, Kūkai had no further need to pretend friendship. But the relationship did draw on until the rather strange affair of Taihan in 816.

Taihan originally was a monk of the Gangōji temple in Nara, who decided to enter the Tendai sect after meeting Saichō. In subsequent years he became Saichō's most intimate disciple, although he did not display any particular brilliance. In the beginning of the year 810, when Saichō was suffering from ill health, he turned his affairs over to Taihan and early in 812, named Taihan as his successor. This move apparently upset the relationship since it aroused the jealousy of other monks and perhaps damaged some of the close friendships Taihan had already made on Mt. Hiei. As a result, during the sixth month of that year, unable to cope with the situation of Saichō's complete trust and the turbulent other undercurrents, Taihan abruptly quit Hiei leaving a message for Saichō to the effect that he could no longer tolerate his own corruption and sought a period of self-reflection. The astonished Saichō immediately wrote to Taihan imploring his return but to no avail. From the corres-

B. SHINGON SHŪ, Esoteric Buddhism

I. Kūkai, the Founder

Kūkai was born in the year 774 to the scholar-aristocratic family of Sacki in Sanuki province on the island of Shikoku. At the age of fifteen, under guidance of his maternal uncle, Atō Ōtari, tutor to the Crown Prince Iyo, he went to the capital (Nagaoka) to study Chinese poetry and Confucian classics. Three years later he entered the government university, enrolled in the elite course for bureaucrats and devoted himself

to the standard Confucian curriculum. What happened after that is something of a mystery, since for unknown reasons Kūkai suddenly abandoned his studies and turned to Buddhism.

It can be theorized that this is probably when he met Gonzō (758-827) of the Daianji and received from him the sacred *Kokūzōgumonjihō* (Mantra of Ākāśagarbha) practice, and became so fascinated by it that he abandoned all thoughts of a future bureaucratic career. In the introduction to his own work, the *Sangōshiki* (Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings), which he wrote at the age of twenty-four, Kūkai states that it was the encounter with this practice that changed his life, although he does not mention the name of the master that introduced him to it.¹² It is most likely that he avoided such mention because he was at the time a privately ordained priest (*shidosō*), which was not legally sanctioned.

Kūkai's attraction to Buddhism from the start was related to practice rather than theory and this predilection characterized his entire life. Although he later completed a masterly systematization of Shingon doctrine, theology occupied a second place in his interests and he inculcated this attitude in his disciples.

After his initial decision to abandon the university for Buddhism, Kūkai lived for a considerable period in the mountains engaged in practice. It is quite possible that he spent time with the *Jinen chishū* (Sect of Natural Wisdom), which advocated the practice of meditation in accompaniment with the *Kokūzōgumonjihō*, as well as visiting other centers of esoteric and Shugendō practice. During these travels, Kūkai encountered the *Dainichikyō* and came to the conclusion that this work epitomized all that he sought in Buddhism. In order to properly comprehend the esoteric text, he decided to find a Tantric master in China to instruct him.

There is no reliable biographical account of how Kūkai was selected to be on one of the *kentōshi* ships sailing to China in the year 804. It was a considerable honour to be selected and certain court contacts were required but it is not certain whether Kūkai had such contacts personally or through his rather illustrious relatives. In any event, he was selected

to sail on the first of the four ships in the company of the envoy to the T'ang court, Fujiwara Kadonomaro.

When he arrived in Ch'ang-an, after a period of search, Kūkai met the esoteric master Hui-kuo (746-805) of the Ch'ing-lung temple, who, according to legend, immediately upon encountering Kūkai claimed him as his long awaited disciple. Kūkai received his primary *abhiseka* initiation from the master and within three short months was deemed ready to receive the final *abhiseka*, and be ordained as a master of esoteric Buddhism. Shortly thereafter, Hui-kuo died and Kūkai, as his newest but foremost disciple, had the honour of writing the epitaph for his master's tomb.

At his late master's request, Kūkai returned to Japan in 806, to propagate the Dharma, despite the fact that his initial agreement with the Japanese government had been to spend twenty years as a student-scholar. When Kūkai did return after thirty months, he had successfully managed to become the eighth patriarch of esoteric Buddhism, learned Sanskrit, studied poetry, calligraphy and other minor arts. It had been a brief period of tremendous accomplishment.

When Kūkai returned to Japan, it was after the death of Emperor Kammu, and if he had enjoyed influence with the court prior to his departure, it no longer existed. The Tendai sect received two *nembundosha* in the year 806, but the Shingon sect had to wait until 835, the year of Kūkai's death to receive *nembundosha* and official recognition as a sect.

Immediately upon his return, Kūkai sent a report to the court (*Shōrai mokuroku*) listing the sutras and other items he had brought back to Japan with Takashina no Tōnari, a bureaucrat that he had met aboard ship. It took three years, until the end of Emperor Heizei's reign, before there was a reply. It was very difficult at that time for the court to assess the value of Kūkai's contribution, furthermore, Saichō was already recognized as an esoteric master and this sphere of activity was believed to be a prerogative of the Tendai sect. Another problem in evaluating the materials was due to the fact that the Tantric Buddhism Kūkai brought to Japan was so new even in China, that it was still theologically disorganized and unsystematized. Before a new sect could properly be

established, the material had to be classified and this Kūkai accomplished in the year 830 with his masterly *Jūjūshūron* (Ten Stages of the Development of Mind). Still another difficulty the court faced was the tone of the report Kūkai drafted. Coming from an unknown student-monk it displayed a confidence that could be considered brash; this also may have been a reason why they decided to allow him to wait in Kyūshū rather than summon him immediately to the capital.

Although the court might have hoped Kūkai would learn a lesson in humility by being apparently forgotten in Kyūshū, he managed to put the time to good use. This was a period when he began to systematize and arrange the materials he had brought with him, copy and study the sutras and also make plans how to propagate Shingon in Japan. When the time came to be called to the capital, Kūkai was prepared.

By the year 809, Emperor Heizei retired due to ill health and Emperor Saga came to the throne at the age of twenty-four. Later during that year, Kūkai received notice that he was to henceforth reside at the Takaosanji temple, near Kyōto. He was finally summoned to action. The following year during the ninth month the retired Emperor Heizei instigated a revolt and after it was quelled, Kūkai capitalized upon the situation by submitting a petition to the court suggesting that he be allowed to perform esoteric rituals for the peace of the nation, similar to those he had witnessed in T'ang China. This petition was evidently not accepted.

During his stay at the Takaosanji, Kūkai made close friends with Emperor Saga. On a number of occasions he donated scrolls of calligraphy to the court, an art that greatly interested the Emperor. At that time, Saga was one of the three great calligraphers of Japan, the other two being Kūkai and Tachibana Hayanari. It appears that Kūkai exerted a strong cultural influence upon the Emperor but this was confined to the areas of the Classics, Chinese poetry, Sanskrit and calligraphy; the Emperor did not share Kūkai's devotion to esoteric Buddhism. And despite his friendship with Kūkai, Saga attempted to maintain a policy of fairness towards all the Buddhist sects.

During the seventh month of the year 816, Kūkai received permission

from the Emperor to build a monastery on Mt. Kōya. The consecration ritual was held the fifth month of the year 819 and the Shintō deities Nifu Myōjin and Kōya Myōjin, as well as one hundred and twenty *kami* from throughout Japan, were invited to the ceremonies to become protectors of the mountain. The main temple was given the name Kongōbuji, after the *Kongōburōkaku issaiyugayugikyō*. This sutra in contrast to the *Dainichikyō* (source of the *Taizōkai mandara*) and *Kongōkyō* (*Kongōkai mandara*), expressed the non-duality of the two *mandaras*. As the symbolic name of the main temple, it represented Kūkai's ideal of uniting the Diamond and Womb realms upon the mountain.

The construction of the monastery was not an easy task and many buildings, including the great pagoda, were not finished during the lifetime of Kūkai. He was constantly plagued by financial problems, which eventually were passed on to his disciples. Another difficulty arose from the demands of his active life that did not permit him to personally remain on Mt. Kōya.

Emperor Saga retired in the year 823 at the age of thirty-nine, in order to devote himself to his cultural pursuits. He was succeeded by Emperor Junna, whose reign coincided with the most successful period of Kūkai's life. Just prior to Emperor Saga's retirement, Kūkai was notified that he would receive charge of the renowned Tōji temple, which had been begun by Emperor Kammu in 793, and now thirty years later was still under construction. This temple and its counterpart the Saiji, had been planned to follow the pattern of the great Tōdaiji and Saidaiji of the Nara capital and represented respectively, the eastern and western sectors of the new city. When Emperor Junna came to the throne he granted Kūkai permission to have fifty Shingon monks reside at the Tōji and henceforth made the temple belong solely to the Shingon sect. This restriction was unique at the time in Japanese Buddhism, since the great temples of Nara had housed many sects simultaneously and the government had not previously recognized any need for exclusivism. The same Imperial decree also contained the first mention of 'Shingon shū' in an official document, which finally offered the sect a measure of recognition as an independent institution, although they still had not been

granted *nembundoshā*. Kūkai made the Tōji temple the centre of the sect since Mt. Kōya was distant and far from complete. He also created a repository there to house the scriptures and tantric instruments brought from China, and put into practice a study plan for those who wished to enter the order.

During the drought of the spring of 824, Kūkai was requested by the court to perform a Tantric rain ritual. For his success, he was granted the honorary title of *Shōsōzu*.

In the year 828, Kūkai opened the first school in Japan to accept students from all stations of life. This was known as the Shugeishuchiin (School of Arts and Sciences). The curriculum consisted of Buddhist, Confucianist and Taoist studies with related topics. Not much is known regarding the success of the experiment but in 847, the Tōji temple finally sold it. The idea was noble but perhaps the period was still too aristocratic for such egalitarianism.

In 830, just five years prior to his death, Kūkai completed his greatest theological work, the ten volume *Jūjūshinron* (Ten Stages of the Development of Mind) in compliance with the request of Emperor Junna for a treatise on the essentials of the doctrine of each of the major sects of Buddhism. This work completed the systematization of Shingon doctrine. It later was summarized into a shorter form known as the *Hizō Hōyaku* (Precious Key to the Secret Treasury). Both of these works were based upon the essential Buddhist concept that the key to Enlightenment is the true recognition of one's own state of mind.

By 831, Kūkai was forced to resign from his official duties at the Tōji due to ill health and when his resignation was finally accepted by the Emperor, he went to Mt. Kōya with the intention of spending his remaining years there. But he still maintained Imperial influence and in 834 he received permission to establish a Shingon-in at Court and hold Tantric rituals from the 8th to the 14th of the first month of the year. The ritual, known as the *mishuhō*, which subsequently became annual, was for the peace of the nation and prosperity of the people as well as for a rich harvest of the five grains. It was similar to those held at the Tang court and to a certain degree reflected the realization of the ignored

petition Kūkai had submitted in 810. The date of this new year ritual is quite significant because it followed the official seven days of Shintō ritual for peace, prosperity and good harvest, beginning on New Year's day and served as a Buddhist counterpart. Kūkai himself participated in the services held in 835, just two months prior to his death.

Another of Kūkai's greatest achievements occurred the same month when the court finally granted permission for the Shingon sect to have three *nembundoshā*. At last, this meant proper official recognition of his sect.

Finally, at the age of sixty-two, on the 21st day of the third month of the year 835, Kūkai entered into what his followers were later to describe as eternal *samādhi* on Mt. Kōya. He was interred in the Eastern Peak of the mountain.

Kūkai's death brought to an end, one of the most dynamic careers of the Heian period. His dominating personality lived on in legend and eventually served as a unifying factor to revive the Shingon sect during the tenth century.

2. Historical Transmission

The origin of Tantric Buddhism, due to its esoteric nature is obscured in a vast wilderness as yet impenetrable. Certain aspects and rituals are most certainly derived from Vedic influence and the *dhāraṇī* (Jap. *darani*), mystical utterances utilized to 'preserve' or 'maintain' Buddhist teachings in capsulized form, became exceedingly influential during approximately the fourth century A.D. in India.

Philosophically, Tantric Buddhism was a natural outgrowth of Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda thought. Once the fallibility of reason was exposed and the role of human consciousness revealed as the pivot capable of tilting the world of ignorance into Enlightenment, the emphasis upon practice increased along with fresh explorations into the realm of consciousness. These new innovations led quite naturally to experimentation with the effects of sound, form and colour upon the consciousness, linked with faith. Mental transformation was induced by the 'gods of form' in the shape of divinities of every variety and type that could ap-