The Buddhist sects founded during the Kamakura period constitute the dominant lines of Buddhist institutions down to the present day. In this setting Shinto tended to be overshadowed by Buddhism, but there was a great deal of interaction between Buddhism and Shinto, and Shinto in turn created theoretical arguments that formed the basis for a renewal of Shinto in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Taoism and Confucianism persevered more as implicit influences than as distinct traditions. Christianity first entered Japan in 1549 and enjoyed a brief popularity before it succumbed to political persecution. Taken as a whole, these additions and changes to the religion of the formative period can be seen as constituting the period of development and elaboration.

9

The Development of a Japanese Buddhism: Shingon and Tendai

The Heian period (794–1185) was a colorful time in the history of Japan. Chinese influence continued to dominate, but more important, a distinctive Japanese culture was flowering. In many ways Chinese culture was transformed along Japanese lines. Previously, the Japanese people tended to imitate Chinese models, especially in art; from the Heian period on, they had greater freedom to create truly Japanese forms. The writing system, which depended on Chinese ideographs, was modified so that it placed greater emphasis on Japanese phonetics. This gave the Japanese a lighter, freer means of expressing their emotions. The finest example of their new literature is the eleventh-century *Tale of Genji,* a noblewoman's tale of courtly love and sensitivity to the beauty of nature and the passing of the seasons.[1] Poetry and painting, too, developed more along Japanese lines and centered on the glittering life at court. In the countryside the emergence of the manorial system increasingly gave power to large landholders, including Shinto and Buddhist institutions. All these cultural developments are related to the emergence of new forms of Buddhism during the Heian period—new transmissions imported from China to Japan and drawn into closer contact with Japanese culture.

THE NEW BUDDHISM OF THE HEIAN PERIOD

Buddhism in the preceding Nara period centered almost exclusively around the capital, characterized by the large temples erected by (and for) the state; by the Confucian-based government bureaucracy that not only created a form of state Buddhism but also controlled it for state benefit; and by the six formal schools of Buddhist teaching. Nara Buddhism helped centralize the Japanese state and provide the rationale for the emperor as both "the supreme priest of the worship of Shinto gods and the patron protector of the Buddhist Dharma [teaching]."[2] The combined strength of this Buddhist establishment was so great, and its rationale for the state was so crucial, that even after the capital was moved to Kyoto, Nara Buddhism continued to play a major role in both the government and in culture.

The shift from Buddhism of Nara times to Heian times can be viewed from quite different perspectives. The standard picture of Buddhism in the Heian period has been drawn mainly by the Japanese priests and scholars who have specialized in the study of their individual Buddhist sects, from the perspective of the independent, large-scale temple organizations of recent and modern times. These writers also have viewed Heian Buddhism from the end result, or "success," of the Shingon and Tendai movements toward the latter part of Heian times, and their eventual growth into sect organizations. This picture has tended to overemphasize the disjunction between the "old Buddhism" of the six schools of Nara and the "new Buddhism" of Tendai and Shingon in Heian times, and has minimized the lengthy process of both competition and cooperation with "old Buddhism" that the leaders of these two new movements had to go through to advance their cause.

Recent scholarship has found the "sectarian" perspective of Buddhism too limiting and has focused instead on placing Buddhist developments within a general historical and cultural framework.[3] This newer reading of Tendai and Shingon sees them not as supplanting the six schools of Nara, but as working alongside them; from this viewpoint, the major contribution of the two new movements was not so much the founding of independent sects (which came later), but the creation of a new relationship between Buddhism, on the one hand, and the Japanese nation and Japanese culture, on the other hand.

During Nara times the budding Japanese state supported Buddhism by creating national temples and subsidizing priests for the performance of rituals. Some of these rituals were for the personal benefit of the imperial family (in instances such as sickness and childbirth); the families of the nobility also supported temples for these purposes and for rites honoring ancestors. But the most important rites were the reading of scriptures and ceremonies for the protection of the state—both at the capital and in provincial temples established and maintained by the state. In other words, the Confucian ideas and institutions of the state used Buddhism as a tool for its own purposes. The main significance for Buddhism in the transition from Nara to Heian times

was that eventually Shingon (and Tendai) succeeded in replacing "Confucianism with Buddhism as the ideology of the state."[4] The move of the capital from Nara to Kyoto was motivated, in part, by the moral decline of the priesthood at Nara and their interference in state matters, but the long-term effects of the rise of Shingon and Tendai during Heian times was the shift from Confucian control over Buddhism to a new Buddhist model of government.

The six philosophical schools of the Nara period served mainly as the religion of the capital, the nobility, and the monks. They were so concerned with Buddhism increasing their wealth and political power, rather than with propagating Buddhist teaching to the general population, that, viewed from the perspective of later Buddhist developments they are seen as corrupt, or at least as neglecting the mission of spreading the religious message of Buddhism to all social classes. These schools served at the pleasure of, and under the control of, the Confucian ideology and bureaucracy: "the primary goal of the state in promoting Buddhism was to have Buddhist priests and nuns also perform a magico-shamanistic function."[5] Therefore, it is only natural to expect that new movements would arise, with wider appeal and greater outreach. It is important to understand how the development and spread of Buddhism occurred, because it shaped the Heian period and influenced much of later Japanese religious history.

Politically, the Heian period was ushered in by the shift of the capital from Nara to Kyoto, which remained the imperial capital until 1868. It is thought that one reason for moving the capital from Nara was the political interference of the six schools of Nara Buddhism. One event highlighting the questionable state of Buddhism was the scandal of the Buddhist priest Dokyo (died 772) of the Hosso school. Dokyo gained the trust of Empress Koken (reigned 749–58) by healing her, and he may have become her lover, while he plotted (unsuccessfully) to become emperor. The move to Kyoto helped free the capital from the grip of Nara Buddhism and also helped create the possibility for the transformation of Buddhism.[6] Religiously, a major contribution of the Heian period is two new Buddhist movements, each of which originates with an outstanding religious leader. Shingon was begun by Kukai (774–835), known posthumously as Kobo Daishi. Tendai was initiated by Saicho (767–822), honored posthumously as Dengyo Daishi. (*Daishi* is an honorary term conferred by the emperor, meaning "great teacher"; Saicho was the first in Japanese history to receive the title.) For convenience, we refer to these two figures throughout their lifespans by their honorary titles, Kobo Daishi and Dengyo Daishi, even though these titles were conferred after they died.

The two movements and their creators share many features in common. Not only were they contemporaries, but also they went to China by imperial sanction at the same time in their quest of an authoritative Buddhism. Both were Buddhist priests who, dissatisfied with Nara Buddhism, traveled to China in search of the true Buddhism. Even more important, both seem to have been committed to the ideal of establishing a genuinely Japanese Buddhism. That is, they wanted to propagate a kind of Buddhism that would provide all the Japanese people with the teachings of Buddhism. We will also see some

important differences between the two developments. For example, the two leaders differed in their choice of forms of Buddhism in China and in their organization of the imported traditions upon their return to Japan.

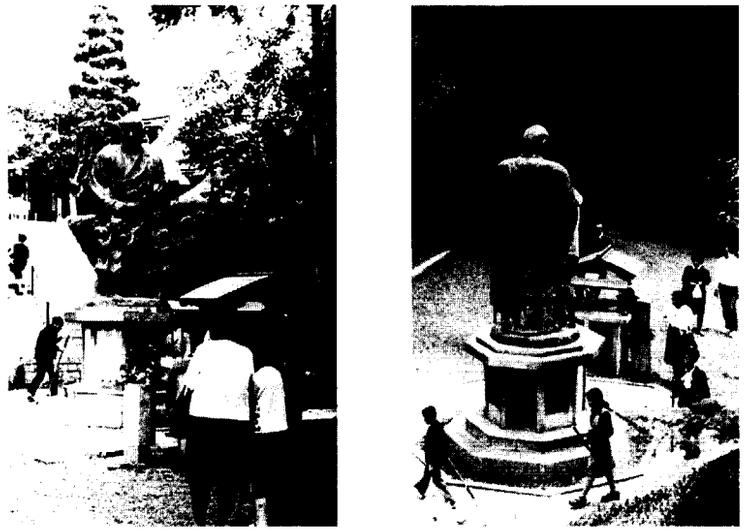
SHINGON: ESOTERIC BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

Kobo Daishi is one of the most illustrious figures in Japanese history. Within the history of Buddhism he has been credited with the founding of the Shingon sect. On the popular level, he is honored as the creator of the Japanese phonetic system of writing, and he still is venerated in many places he is supposed to have visited.[7] However, his historical and religious significance is best seen in his transmission of esoteric Buddhism from China to Japan. Esoteric Buddhism is a fascinating case of cultural interaction, illustrating how Japan has accepted incredibly diverse strands and incorporated them into the Japanese worldview: Kobo Daishi, a Japanese monk, received a complex Indian religious system in the setting of Chinese language and culture, and then transplanted it in Japan and reformulated it to become part and parcel of the Japanese spiritual heritage.[8]

The terminology of Buddhism is rather complex, and that of Shingon Buddhism is especially complicated because it is related to an elaborate symbolic and ritual system originating in India. Generally, the expression "esoteric Buddhism" refers to highly symbolic and even secret formulas and practices. More specifically, the phrase refers to the Buddhism arising out of the Tantric tradition of India from about the third to seventh centuries C.E.[9] The Tantric tradition, which influenced both Hinduism and Buddhism, takes its name from the Sanskrit word "*tantra,*" a group of writings emphasizing occult rituals to control the mind and body for the purpose of realizing ultimate truth. As one scholar has summed it up, "Esoteric Buddhism teaches the *ritual* realization of the identity of nirvana and samsara, of emptiness and the world of images, of the Buddha and of every person."[10]

The Tantric tradition emphasized unconventional practices, such as the use of mystic diagrams (*mandala*), mystic syllables (*mantra*), and elaborate meditation techniques (which for initiated students might involve symbolic union and even actual sexual union). Such practices were so extreme that Tantrism was sometimes viewed with disfavor by Hindus and Buddhists alike. Nevertheless, Tantric Buddhism developed a very rich iconographic, ritual, and meditative practice, especially in Tibet, where in combination with local practices it formed the major Buddhist tradition.

Tantric Buddhism also found its way directly from India to China, where it was known as Chen-yen (or Zhenyan), a translation into Chinese of the Sanskrit term "*mantra,*" or "true word." Esoteric Buddhism arrived later in China than other forms of Buddhism, so it did not have the time to become part of the Chinese tradition and to withstand the shock of government persecution like the relatively older Buddhist developments. But Chen-yen was flourishing when Kobo Daishi arrived in China, and he was able to learn



A statue of Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism, here shown as a protector of children. By borrowing a pilgrim's staff and circling Kobo Daishi's statue, a person acquires the same religious benefit as if he or she made a lengthy pilgrimage. (Kyoto, 1979)

tradition to Japan. In Japanese, "Chen-yen" is pronounced "Shingon." Thus Shingon is literally the True Word, meaning the practice of esoteric Buddhism, such as the invocation of "true words" (*mantra*) or mystic syllables. Within any religious tradition there may be tendencies to juxtapose the present, or phenomenal world, and an other or higher world; in the Tantric heritage in general, and especially in Shingon, there is a heightened sensitivity to and emphasis upon symbolic and ritual realization as the means to the highest reality or truth.

Various elements and practices of esoteric Buddhism (sometimes called "miscellaneous esoterism") had been known in Japan for some time; Kobo Daishi was attracted to this tradition and wanted to study it more completely. The imperial court was drawn to the esoteric rites, and it sent Kobo Daishi to China to learn and then return with this powerful ritual heritage. During Kobo Daishi's stay in China (804–6), he gained comprehensive knowledge of esoteric Buddhism and obtained crucial Buddhist scriptures (in Chinese translation) and ritual paraphernalia. He even studied the ancient Indian language Sanskrit. His return with the "pure" esoteric Buddhist tradition (in contrast to the prior "miscellaneous" esoterism) was a radically new contribution of Buddhism to Japan, one that was much more Indian in character than Chinese. Equally important is how Kobo Daishi nurtured and cultivated the transplanted tradition in the new "soil" of Japanese culture. He physically separated himself both from the old Buddhism of Nara and from the new capital in order to establish a monastery on the secluded mountain called "Koya." In part, Kobo Daishi imitated the mountain monasteries of China, but he also

the native Japanese heritage. Even though he established his monastery far from the capital, the esoteric doctrines—and especially the rites—soon were sought after by both laity and priests. He created a synthesis between esoteric Buddhism and the schools of Nara Buddhism, and thus enabled Buddhism to escape Confucian control and become the nation's prevailing ideology.

Shingon teaching divides Buddhism into the exoteric and the esoteric. Exoteric, or public, teachings of the historical Buddha (Sakyamuni) are not wrong but are lesser forms and a lower level of Buddhism. By contrast, esoteric, or secret, teachings have their source in the Mahavairocana Buddha (Dainichi, "Great Sun" in Japanese), a kind of cosmic Buddha who is also the ultimate source of the historical Buddha; the Mahavairocana Buddha revealed the highest truths of Buddhism in the *Mahavairocana Sutra* and other sutras. Only the Mahavairocana Buddha, the writings he revealed, and the elaborate rituals and mystical teachings he taught enable a person to draw upon this higher power. In effect, this Great Sun Buddha is the source of truth and the highest realization, because not only the historical Buddha but even the entire cosmos is an emanation of the Sun Buddha. This truth is to be realized not just with the mind's apprehension of this truth, but with the vocalization of the true words (*mantra*) and with the bodily gestures (*mudra*) that express symbolically the cosmic message. The most important teachings and practices of Shingon have been handed down orally from senior to junior priests, and only in recent decades are some of these secret matters being published.

The esoteric knowledge of Shingon reveals the higher unity in the Sun Buddha, which transcends the apparent dualities of the world. Ordinarily we experience life in terms of dualities such as male and female, dynamic and static. To the ordinary person, the dualities of the world appear hopelessly split, but the esoteric knowledge of Shingon reveals that there is a higher unity to all things within their original source in the Sun Buddha. All the doctrine, art, and ritual of Shingon is based on the premise of the Sun Buddha as the original source of the cosmos.

Kobo Daishi developed Shingon teaching in an attempt to "solve the paradox of human existence" as he experienced it. In his view, human beings must face the meaninglessness of life and the futility of human knowledge. This is seen in one of his writings:

> Unknowable, unknowable
> It is completely unknowable,
> About the Buddha and the non-Buddhists
> There are millions of scrolls;
> Dark, dark, it is very dark
> Of the Way that is spoken there are many paths.
> What is left
> When the copying and chanting of scriptures stop?
> No one knows, no one knows
> And I too do not know,
> Though they consider and speculate
> Even the wise do not know.[11]

Here Kobo Daishi emphasizes the critical predicament of people who do not (and cannot) know the meaning of existence, but he goes beyond this dark analysis of the human situation to pose a promising solution. Although human beings are faced with a meaningless existence and even though the exoteric teachings of Buddhism do not hold absolute assurance, nevertheless, there is hope. Shingon teaching, based on esoteric doctrine and practice, reveals the integration of humanity with the cosmic Buddha (or Sun Buddha). Shingon developed the Mahayana Buddhist notion that Buddha-nature is inherent in every person and, therefore, every person can become a Buddha (or enlightened person) during one's own life and can even become a Buddha within the limits of one's own physical body. This teaching is at the heart of Shingon doctrine and practice, and even if a layperson does not have access to the secret teachings, he or she may realize enlightenment through simple practices such as reciting *mantras*.

Shingon doctrine, because of its highly symbolic and esoteric character, is one of the most complex systems in all of Japanese Buddhism. It is easier for the average Japanese layperson (and for the Westerner) to appreciate the artistic expressions of Shingon than to comprehend its intricate doctrines. The dualities of the world are often expressed in two contrasting *mandala* (in Sanskrit, *mandara* in Japanese), or symbolic representations of the cosmos. The *mandala* usually feature a square border enclosing symmetrical patterns of squares within circles and circles within squares.[12] Literally hundreds of Buddhist divinities are located within the smaller circles and squares, each identified by its particular iconographic attributes and mystic gestures. (Sometimes the divinities are represented by the symbolic [Sanskrit] letters associated with them.) Such a *mandala* presents a panorama of the Buddhist cosmos. The *mandala* were used in Shingon ordination rites: a blindfolded priest threw a flower on the *mandala* and thereby became directly linked with the particular Buddhist divinity on which the flower fell. Monks also followed the practice of meditating upon the *mandala,* which united one's life with the higher cosmic truth.[13]

Even for the average person who did not perform the most difficult practices, merely to behold the splendor of the *mandala* was to be given a glimpse of the cosmic vision to which Shingon held the key. The same can be said of the fearful statues of Shingon, which to Western eyes may appear strange, even grotesque. These statues feature a menacing countenance, glaring eyes, sharp teeth, and a brandished weapon—some even have a girdle of skulls at the waist, and their feet are stamping on demons; but they are simply the malevolent side of various deities, the counterpart of the benevolent side. Shingon does not deny the existence of evil and violence but seeks first to comprehend the duality of the world and then to affirm the higher unity that transcends worldly duality. Although many people did not necessarily comprehend the full plan of the cosmic vision, they readily brought devotion and offerings to the awesome statues, apparently because of faith in their power to protect humans from demonic forces.

The practice of Shingon centers on the great ritual treasures Kobo Daishi brought back from China, both ritual paraphernalia and the actual liturgies for

performing the rituals. Within a few years, he and his followers were in demand for performing rites at court. Especially popular were rites for healing and for childbirth. Rather quickly such rites came to be practiced by all Buddhist priests as requests came from the court and nobility, and eventually from ordinary women and men. Perhaps the most fascinating of all Shingon rituals is the fire rite called "*goma,*" which is thought to be related to the Indian *homa,* or fire ritual. In the *goma* rite the priest builds up layers of wooden tablets on which prayers are written, and he then lights the wood while he chants. The symbolism of the rite is an expression of the Shingon view of the universe, burning defilements and purifying the self, and becoming transported by the wisdom of fire to the higher truth of Shingon. To sit in a dark temple, listening to the priest's chanting and watching the flames leap up, illuminating the gilded statues, elevates the viewer to another world.[14]

The quest for cosmic power in Shingon may seem alien to some forms of early Buddhism, but it was totally consistent with Tantric Buddhism. The Indian bent for elaborate iconography and complex symbolism in doctrine and ritual is expressed more within Shingon Buddhism than in any other form of Japanese Buddhism. In fact, Shingon is closer to the esoteric Buddhism of Tibet, with which it shares the common historical foundation of Tantric Buddhism, than to most other branches of Japanese Buddhism. However, the general principle that Buddhism provides power for solving immediate problems was accepted as soon as it reached Japanese shores, so Shingon shared the same principle and innovated only in providing "esoteric" means of Buddhist power.

The major contribution of Kobo Daishi was to bring to Japan the whole range of esoteric art, doctrine, and ritual in a systematic form, and to integrate Nara Buddhism and esoteric Buddhism in a comprehensive rationale for the state. For the aesthetically inclined, the artistic expressions and elaborate rituals of Shingon were overwhelming. For the intellectual, there was a comprehensive system explaining the nature of the world and criticizing all other philosophical systems. (Kobo Daishi developed a philosophy of religion that ranked all religions then known on a scale of ten levels; esoteric Buddhism occupied the highest level.) The devotionally minded could utilize the meditation, divinities, and ritual to achieve personal fulfillment and to experience the unity of Shingon's cosmic vision.

The magical formulas of Shingon provided easy access to cosmic power. So attractive were Shingon's dramatic aspects that they were quickly borrowed and used by other Buddhist schools and sects, and these aspects gradually filtered down to the ordinary people. The earlier precedent of relating and even equating Buddhist divinities and Shinto *kami* was emphasized by Kobo Daishi, reinforcing an important model for the interaction of Buddhism and Shinto. Shingon did not generate many new Buddhist sects in the fashion of Tendai, the other major Buddhist development in the Heian period. Nevertheless, even today Mount Koya is a favorite pilgrimage destination and cemetery site, made more sacrosanct by the presence of Kobo Daishi's tomb and the belief that he is not really dead but "sleeping" there, and some day will reappear.[15]

TENDAI: THE *LOTUS SUTRA,* PROPER ORDINATION FOR MONKS, AND BUDDHAHOOD FOR ALL HUMANS

During the Heian period, Kobo Daishi created the synthesis of Shingon (esoteric Buddhism) with the other forms of exoteric Buddhism that constituted the major ideology for the nation. A contemporary of Kukai (or Kobo Daishi), Saicho (later known as Dengyo Daishi) made a different but equally important contribution to the emergence of Japanese Buddhism. Within the institutional history of Japanese Buddhism, Tendai can be considered more widely influential than Shingon, for it was the direct source of most of the later Buddhist developments in Japan. Although Dengyo Daishi went to China at the same time (on the same boat) as Kobo Daishi, his experience there was quite different. Dengyo Daishi had been attracted to the few Tendai writings available in Japan; he went to China to acquire additional Tendai materials and a more complete knowledge of the Buddhist system. He viewed the esoteric Buddhism of China merely as one important Buddhist tradition along with Ch'an (the Chinese term for the Zen sect); for him the T'ien-t'ai sect was superior to the other Buddhist traditions. ("Tendai" is the Japanese pronunciation of T'ien-t'ai or Tiantai.) Dengyo Daishi spent most of his time in China at the headquarters of the T'ien-t'ai sect, on the mountain called T'ien-t'ai.

The Chinese monk Chih-i (or Zhiyi; 538–97) established the T'ien-t'ai sect, focusing on the *Lotus Sutra* and the teachings of the great Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna. Chih-i considered the *Lotus Sutra* the culmination of the Buddha's teaching and used it as the foundation for creating one grand system out of earlier Buddhist teachings. He emphasized the notion that all life was present in the mind of the historical Buddha from the moment of his enlightenment, and he related this idea to Nagarjuna's philosophical insistence on the emptiness of all phenomenal existence (that is, life here and now). Chih-i's doctrine is a threefold analysis of existence that both denies and at the same time affirms phenomenal existence.[16] For the layperson, this means that even daily life, if properly perceived and meditated on, can be the road to Buddhahood (becoming Buddha or attaining the level of a Buddha). In both China and Japan this teaching emphasized that proper Buddhist practice is dependent upon proper meditation.[17]

When Dengyo Daishi returned to Japan, he retraced his steps to the mountain called Hiei overlooking Kyoto, where previously he had been studying and meditating. There he established Tendai, emphasizing the *Lotus Sutra* and the necessity of monastic retreat for proper meditation. Of course, the *Lotus Sutra* already had a considerable history in Japan; even Prince Shotoku is said to have written a commentary on it, and the Buddhist schools of Nara had recognized its profundity. Dengyo Daishi's contribution was to teach the primary importance of the *Lotus Sutra.* He criticized earlier interpretations of it as false and proposed as the true interpretation that "all sentient beings could eventually attain Buddhahood,"[18] emphasizing the notion in the *Lotus Sutra*

that all life has the potential for becoming enlightened. According to him, the *Lotus Sutra* was not a lesser teaching or one among the many writings, but the supreme message of Buddhism.

Dengyo Daishi was uncompromising not only on doctrinal matters, but also in matters of training and ordination. His criticism of Nara Buddhism and his concern for proper meditation led him to prescribe a twelve-year period of training for monks on Mount Hiei, during which time they were not allowed to leave the mountain.[19] His insistence on officially establishing the proper rite of ordination (the *bodhisattva* form of ordination, which he had received in China and which he wanted to establish in Japan) involved him in a lifelong struggle with the government, which granted his request only after his death.

Actually, Dengyo Daishi was caught between the two camps of Nara Buddhism and the government. Nara Buddhism and the state had what today might be called a symbiotic relationship: the state financially supported and controlled ordination of monks; in turn, Nara Buddhism used its religious power to protect the nation and its rituals to heal and bless the court families. Dengyo Daishi's aim in setting up new ordination procedures was a complex mix of political and religious motives. He favored a form of ordination he and his Chinese masters considered Mahayana, a form superior to the "Hinayana" ordination of Nara Buddhism. But by proposing that this new kind of ordination take place on Mount Hiei, he could escape the direct administrative authority of Nara Buddhism and establish for himself and his organization greater freedom as a religious institution. Dengyo Daishi established the precedent of a religious institution set apart from (but, of course, still dependent upon) the government. Both Dengyo Daishi and Kobo Daishi "were instrumental in establishing a new type of monasteries that were exempted from the controls and restrictions imposed by" the Nara pattern of state Buddhism. The difference between the two figures is that Kobo Daishi strove to integrate Shingon with the existing Buddhist establishment, whereas Dengyo Daishi was more isolationist, seeking to divorce Tendai from the Buddhist establishment.[20]

The mountain headquarters of Hiei symbolizes Dengyo Daishi's great hope for Japanese Buddhism. He was concerned that Buddhism in Japan be orthodox in ordination rites, scriptures, doctrine, and devotion. Having received proper ordination himself, he felt qualified to lead orthodox Buddhism in Japan. Convinced that the *Lotus Sutra* was the essential teaching of Buddhism, he upheld it as the foremost scripture. For doctrine he transmitted the T'ien-t'ai teachings based on the *Lotus Sutra,* that every phenomenal aspect of the world is filled with Buddha-nature. Determined that his monks be properly devout and disciplined, he required long periods of meditation. History rewarded Dengyo Daishi's efforts, for Mount Hiei later became the monastic and scholastic headquarters of Japanese Buddhism, regardless of sect affiliation. In spite of the ravages of time and warfare, much of the glory of this monastic headquarters survives today, and it is a popular tourist attraction just outside Kyoto. One of the distinctive architectural structures at Mount Hiei is the chapel with an image of Amida in the center of an empty room, so that priests can circumambulate Amida while in devotional meditation. The faith in Amida nurtured within Tendai later blossomed in the practices of the Pure Land

The impact of Tendai on popular life is not so striking as that of Shingon (with its complex iconography). One of Tendai's greatest contributions is the placing of the *Lotus Sutra* in the center of attention, for this is one of the most influential scriptures for Japanese Buddhism. In it we find the most direct and dramatic expression of Mahayana Buddhism: all beings may easily attain enlightenment through simple acts of devotion. In the words of the *Lotus Sutra,* those who "embrace, read, recite, expound and copy the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, even only one verse, and look upon this sutra with the same reverence as they would the Buddha" will attain enlightenment.[21] This compassionate rendering of Buddhism summed up the meaning of the tradition to the majority of the Japanese people. Dengyo Daishi, by emphasizing potential Buddhahood for all people, paved the way for the geographical spread of Tendai and opened the door more widely to the propagation of Buddhism to the common people.

Tendai teaching so emphasized the penetration of Buddha-nature within the phenomenal world that in medieval times it preached the inherent Buddha-nature of the natural world: "even plants and trees are in possession of Buddha-nature."[22] Here we see how the Japanese appreciation of the natural world and Tendai teaching formed a notion central to Japanese Buddhism and to Japanese thought and arts, too. Some scholars see this emphasis on original enlightenment to be the paradigm of medieval Buddhism and the key to medieval culture: "this paradigm was characterized by . . . the conviction that enlightenment is directly accessible in the present moment, and that practice represents the expression of enlightenment, not merely the means to achieve it."[23] Shingon and Tendai notions of inherent, or original, enlightenment contrast sharply with Nara Buddhism's notions of enlightenment, which required lengthy cultivation and gradual attainment.[24]

Kobo Daishi and Dengyo Daishi were contemporaries, but they led different careers and made contrasting contributions to Japanese Buddhism. Some scholars feel that Dengyo Daishi would have been more successful if he had been more compromising in his attitude toward the schools of Nara Buddhism. Both men founded headquarters of mountain Buddhism in Japan, but their fortunes were quite different. Kobo Daishi's fame was immediate and lasting—and his synthesis of esoteric and exoteric Buddhism transformed Buddhism from a Confucian-controlled servant of the government to the major ideology; yet his movement was of lesser importance for institutional religious history. In contrast, Dengyo Daishi and Tendai are of greater importance for subsequent religious history as the direct or indirect source of later Buddhist sects.

Two major elements that Dengyo Daishi brought to Japan along with Tendai were Zen practices and faith in the *bodhisattva* named Amida. For a while these two elements had only a minor role within Tendai because Tendai gradually became heavily laden with Shingon ritualistic influence. Dengyo Daishi had learned and practiced some esoteric Buddhism, but he was no match for Kobo Daishi, the master of esoteric Buddhism in Japan; esoteric Buddhist rites were in great demand by the imperial court and aristocracy, and

there studying esoteric Buddhism and then returned to Japan and incorporated it into Tendai. These two elements of faith in Amida and Zen practices, previously dormant within Tendai, woke to new life. They became so active that they burst the bonds of Tendai and gave rise to new movements. (These developments will be seen in the next chapter.)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND JAPANESE RELIGION

The Heian period was a strong affirmation of the Japanese creative ability to mold innumerable continental borrowings. Nara Buddhism had remained more of a foreign religion, serving both the state and the court. Kobo Daishi and Dengyo Daishi were in agreement about the main reason for searching out authoritative Buddhism in China: to mold it into a truly Japanese Buddhism. Because of their efforts, Buddhism in Japan took on a decidedly Japanese character, and also moved closer to the people.

At the outset of this chapter we indicated that the period of development and elaboration was characterized by two trends: the continuation of general patterns that had taken shape in the formative period and the appearance of new influences such as the new importations of Buddhism. Thus far we have surveyed only the new influences. Tendai and Shingon, however, were not simply signs of discontinuity; on the contrary, they reinforced the earlier religious patterns. Both Shingon and Tendai deliberately emphasized the Japanese character of Buddhism. The headquarters of both were founded with full cooperation of local *kami* who were considered the patron deities of the two mountains on which the monasteries were located. Thus, the rapport between the Buddhas and *kami* became even more intimate. Tendai and Shingon also tended to spread Buddhist teachings and build temples in areas distant from the capital.

In addition, although the two movements had reacted against the controlling authority of state Buddhism at Nara, eventually both the ritualism of Shingon and the ecclesiastical authority of Tendai were used to protect and bless the state. The artistic and magical heritage of esoteric Buddhism and the Tendai focus on the *Lotus Sutra* gradually blended with the Japanese emphasis on purification and ritualism. Many Buddhist divinities such as Kannon, Amida, and Jizo became increasingly important as objects of popular piety. Magical charms and Buddhist divinities were not confined to organized Buddhism—to temples and priests—but became a part of the living faith of the people. "All through the Nara and Heian periods, almost all the sects of Buddhism aimed at tangible rewards in this world and they mainly depended upon incantation and magic."[25] All in all, the Heian period saw Buddhism take on a decidedly Japanese character as it increasingly penetrated the life of the people.

Meanwhile, the religious elements described in Part I coexisted with the new movements. In fact, the beliefs of Taoism (especially the Koshin cult) were more active in the Heian period than at any other time. Medi-

as *The Tale of Genji* show how the people's movements were determined by the "unlucky directions" determined by Chinese customs and Taoist elements. The age was pervaded by all the implications of the *yin-yang* cosmology. The charms and incantations of earlier Buddhism, reinforced by both Shingon and its Taoistic coloring, penetrated all classes of society. The seventh-century precedent of having Buddhist priests perform funeral services had led to widespread dependence on Buddhism for death rites. The Buddhist festival of *bon* for honoring the return of the souls of the dead, probably with the help of ancient Japanese practices, became popular throughout the country. Various religious practitioners—diviners, exorcists, and ascetics—drew on all the previous traditions to serve the religious needs of the people. Shinto became more fully organized, as was evidenced by the compilation of the *Engishiki* of 927, but tended to lean on the prestige of Buddhism. The many *kami* of Shinto became even more closely identified with the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas,* and we will see that Shinto became organized around the complex philosophies of Taoism, Shingon, and Tendai. Folk religion, too, showed its vitality in the daily life of the people.

An example of the distinctively Japanese interrelationship of all these elements is Shugendo, which became organized during and after the Heian period. Building on the ancient theme of sacred mountains and festivals performed on mountains, Shugendo was a "mountain religion" that emphasized pilgrimage to the mountains and ascetic retreats within the mountains. It combined the Shinto notion of local *kami* dwelling on mountains with the

Kannon is one of the most popular Buddhist divinities in Japan. People "worship" Kannon by ladling water over the statue and using brushes (bought inside the temple grounds) to scrub the part of the statue corresponding to the part of their body that is ailing. On one fine September Sunday in Tokyo, about seventy-five people (mostly women) were patiently lined

Buddhist notion of local incarnations (avatars, or *gongen*). In addition, it borrowed the theories and charms of Chinese customs and Taoism. The legendary founder of Shugendo gained religious power by combining the aspects of several traditions: he practiced Buddhist asceticism on a Japanese sacred mountain while taking over features of the Chinese mountain wizard (*hsien* or *xian* in Chinese, *sennin* in Japanese). Many popular religious practitioners gained their extraordinary powers by climbing sacred mountains for rigorous training before descending the mountain to minister to the needs of villagers. In later periods Shugendo practitioners (called *yamabushi*) were instrumental in spreading the charms and incantations of esoteric Buddhism (mixed with Taoistic charms and Shinto elements) to the people. The *yamabushi* were important in spreading Buddhism to outlying areas of Japan. This is but one illustration of the complex religious interrelationships within the Heian period and later periods.[26]

NOTES

1. For an excerpt from *The Tale of Genji,* see my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 201–4. A recent translation is Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji,* trans. Royall Tyler (New York: Viking, 2001), 2 vols.

2. Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra,* p. 25.

3. Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra,* has summed up both a critique of sectarian studies and support of the newer "extra-sectarian" studies; see pp. 399–416 for his critique of the category of "Heian Buddhism," which he rejects as "a false category, created by the intellectuals of the Meiji period (1868–1912), among whose agendas was to legitimize the status quo of Buddhism in their society in which the imperialist state and its nationalist Shinto ideology subjugated" Buddhism (p. 16).

4. Ibid., p. 13.

5. Ibid., pp. 24–25.

6. The usual reasons given for the move of the capital from Nara are the ancient practice of avoiding pollution at the death of the previous emperor, the contemporary fear of the overpowering influence of Buddhism, and the scandal of the monk Dokyo's attempted usurpation of the throne; Ronald P. Toby has added to these reasons the politics of the "gradual transition from 'court to capital.'" See his "Why Leave Nara? Kammu and the Transfer of the Capital," *Monumenta Nipponica,* vol. 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1985), pp. 331–47. For details surrounding Dokyo, see Bender, "The Hachiman Cult and the Dokyo Incident." Both articles contain useful documentation.

7. See the folk legend "Saint Kobo's Well" in my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 135–36.

8. For an introduction to the life and thought of Kobo Daishi, with translations of his writings, see Yoshito S. Hakeda, trans., *Kukai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University, 1972). See also the materials on Kobo Daishi and Shingon in Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University, 2001), vol. 1, ch. 7.

9. For a general work covering the whole range of Shingon, from the origins of esoteric Buddhism in India to its thought and practice in Japan, see Taiko Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism,* trans. Richard and Cynthia Peterson (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).

10. Charles D. Orzech, *Politics and Transcendent Wisdom: The* Scripture for Humane Kings *in the Creation of Chinese Buddhism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1998), p. 48. See also his discussion of *chen-yen, shingon,* and *mantra* on pp. 135–36.

11. *Hizo-hoyaku,* as translated and quoted by Minoru Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1978), p. 30. This book is a convenient introduction to Tantric Buddhism, and Shingon doctrine and practice.

12. For a detailed study see Adrian Snodgrass, *The Matrix and Diamond World Mandalas in Shingon Buddhism* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988), 2 vols.

13. For a lavishly illustrated book on esoteric Buddhist temples and art, see Takaaki Sawa, *Art in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism,* trans. Richard L. Gage (New York: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1972). For comparison-contrast of Shingon and Tendai meditation on *mandala,* see Michael Saso, *Tantric Art and Meditation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1990).

14. For a description of these rites, see Richard K. Payne, *The Tantric Ritual of Japan: Feeding the Gods: The Shingon Fire Ritual* (New Delhi: Aditya, 1991).

15. For a view of the varying conditions but constant popularity of Mount Koya, see Hirochika Nakamaki, "Religious Civilization in Modern Japan: As Revealed Through a Focus on Mt. Koya," in *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World, VI, Religion,* ed. Tadao Umesao et al. (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology) pp. 121–36.

16. For a brief interpretation of this doctrine, see de Bary et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* 2d ed., vol. 1, ch. 6. For a more comprehensive treatment, see Paul L. Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-T'ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1989). See also Paul L. Swanson, ed., *Tendai Buddhism in Japan,* vol. 14, no. 2–3 of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (June–Sept. 1987).

17. For a concrete description of Tendai meditation—a feast of iconography and a banquet of ritual details—see Saso, *Tantric Art and Meditation.*

18. Paul Groner, *Saicho: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1984), p. 101. This work provides a "biography of Saicho" as well as a study of Saicho's view of Buddhist precepts.

19. For the text of this proposal for government approval of the twelve-year training (excerpted from Groner, *Saicho*), see my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 83–85.

20. Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra,* pp. 402–3.

21. *The Lotus Sutra,* trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University, 1993), p. 161. An excerpt from this scripture is included in my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 54–60.

22. William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California, 1983), p. 22. LaFleur treats at length the notion of *hongaku,* or "original enlightenment": "Hongaku expressed the insight that the nature of *kaku* or *satori* (usually translated 'enlightenment' or 'realization') is of something already in existence rather than envisioned as a future possibility" (p. 20). For an excerpt from this work, see my *Religion in the Japanese Experience,* 2d ed., pp. 60–65.

23. Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 1999), p. 302. This book is a comprehensive treatment of "original enlightenment" in comparison and contrast with Buddhism in Nara, Heian, and Kamakura times.

24. Ibid., pp. 11, 31.

25. Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1964), p. 363.

26. For Shugendo, see my *A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendo: An Example of Japanese Mountain Religion* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970); and Hitoshi Miyake, *Shugendo: Essays on the Structure of Japanese Folk Religion.*