

# The Buddhist-State Relationship in Japan: Some Observations on the Thought of Saichō and Kūkai

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Throughout virtually all of Japanese history, Buddhism and the Japanese state have maintained a close, symbiotic relationship. Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the sixth century, and soon thereafter, the court began to hold elaborate Buddhist ceremonies to pray for the welfare of the country. Moreover, by the mid-eleventh century, there had developed the ideology of *ōbō-buppō sōe* 王法仏法相依 (literally, “the interdependence of the Imperial Law and the Buddhist Law”), i.e., “the idea that the state and Buddhism are dependent on each other as the (two) wings of a bird or two wheels of a cart.”<sup>1</sup> This ideology, emphasizing the inseparability of Buddhism and the state, remained dominant until the Meiji Restoration (1868), when the new government sought to restructure the country using Shinto, or the native Japanese religion, as its ideological foundation.

It must be emphasized that the close relationship between Buddhism and the state was mutually beneficial for both of the parties involved. That is to say, just as the emperor and the nobility employed Buddhist ritual power to ensure their dominance over the country as well as the peace and prosperity of the realm, Buddhist monks actively sought and used government backing to further their own sectarian agenda. In my paper today, I want to focus on Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and Kūkai 空海 (774–835), two monks from the early Heian period (794–1185) who founded the Tendai 天台 and Shingon 真言 schools, respectively. Both monks felt that the older schools of Japanese Buddhism were inadequate to respond to the needs of their age. Their new schools, they firmly believed, provided a much needed practical element — that is to say, an innovative path of spiritual training hitherto unknown in Japan — lacking in the older schools. And significantly, both monks requested, and effectively employed, court backing to spread their new teachings, specifically by appealing to the usefulness of their practices and rituals for the state.

## Introduction and Early Development of Japanese Buddhism

Before turning to these figures, however, it is necessary to briefly review the Buddhist-state relationship in pre-Heian times. Significantly, Buddhism was closely intertwined with the Japanese court from the very beginning. As a matter of fact, the introduction of Buddhism to Japan is itself portrayed as the result of a court decision. According to the *Nihon shoki* 日本書記 (also known as *Nihongi*), a history of Japan compiled in 720, Buddhism was officially transmitted to Japan in 552<sup>2</sup>, when King Syōng-myōng 聖明王 of the Korean state of Paekche 百濟 delivered a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha to the Japanese court.<sup>3</sup> Initially, there appears to have been opposition to accepting this new foreign religion.<sup>4</sup> However, after a pitched battle in 587, the clans opposing Buddhism were finally defeated and Buddhism became a major presence in the Japanese religious scene.

Subsequently, the emperor and the nobility actively promoted the Buddhist religion, building magnificent temples and sponsoring elaborate ceremonies. In particular, the use of Buddhist rituals to ensure the peace and prosperity of the state (called in Japanese *chingo kokka* 鎮護国家, literally “pacification and protection of the nation”) is frequently cited as one of the characteristic features of Japanese Buddhism of this period. It can be said that the Japanese court saw in Buddhism a new and powerful spiritual technology, useful, among other things, for curing illnesses of the nobility as well as for averting calamities, both natural and human-made. As early as 660, the court sponsored a ceremony centered on the reading of the *Benevolent Kings Sūtra* to pray for military victory in Korea.<sup>5</sup> By the mid-Nara period, this sūtra, along with the *Golden Light Sūtra*<sup>6</sup> and the *Lotus Sūtra*,<sup>7</sup> had been elevated to the status of the three so-called “nation protecting sūtras,” and they were frequently employed to deal with natural disasters such as epidemics and droughts.

However, it must also be noted that the court also sought to regulate and control the Buddhist establishment as well. To this end, the office of Superintendent of Monks (*sōgō* 僧綱) was established to oversee the Buddhist establishment, and the *Soniryō*, laws regulating the conduct of monks and nuns, was promulgated during this period. The first sign of this attempt at state control was the establishment of the office of *sōgō* by Empress Suiko in 623. In this year, a monk murdered his grandfather with an ax.<sup>8</sup> The monk was executed for his crime, but a few days later the Empress appointed monks to monastic offices for overseeing the Buddhist

establishment. The Superintendent of Monks, which developed from this system, reached its classic form later on in the Nara period, when the three offices that made up this board were called *sōjō* 僧正, *sōzu* 僧都 and *risshi* 律師.

Secondly, the Japanese government tried to control Buddhism by promulgating laws governing the conduct of monks and nuns. With the Taika Reforms of 645, Japan firmly committed herself to reforming her government along Chinese lines. As a part of this program, legal codes modeled on those of China were composed. Significantly, the Soniryō 僧尼令 (Civil Codes for Monks and Nuns) was incorporated into the Penal and Civil Codes of the Yōrō Era of 757. The Soniryō consists of consists of 27 articles, seven of which deal with actions leading to the monk or nun being reverted to lay life. Such actions include conducting astrology to cause unrest among the people, studying the military arts, and engaging in such acts as murder, illicit sex, theft and claiming to have attained spiritual liberation (article 1). Monks who tell fortunes, as well as monks who go out of the temples (where they are supposed to stay) and teach the common people are also liable to being defrocked (article 2). Once returned to lay life, these monks will be punished under the regular penal codes. These laws suggest that the state was worried that monks would use their preaching abilities to fan unrest among the population and cause trouble to the state.

In the year 710, the first permanent capital was established at the city of Nara, inaugurating a new period of Japanese history called the Nara period (710–794). The close relationship between Buddhism and the state in ancient Japan culminates in this period, with the creation in 741 of the *kokubunji* 国分寺 system, a nation-wide network of provincial temples, by Emperor Shōmu (reign 724–749) and, two years later, the construction in Nara of the Tōdaiji 東大寺 with its colossal statue of Vairocana Buddha (the “Great Buddha”) as the head *kokubunji*.

Although the *kokubunji* system was conceived to quell a serious smallpox epidemic that was spreading throughout the country, it must be understood in the context of the mid-Nara political situation. Japan was then experiencing a period of major political instability, as exemplified by widespread peasant unrest and the revolt in 740 of Fujiwara no Hirotsugu 藤原弘嗣. Shōmu believed that Buddhism could help unify the country and bring stability to the land. In 737, in response to a smallpox epidemic (and the growing military threat of Silla on the Korean peninsula), Shōmu ordered the creation of a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha with two

attendant bodhisattvas in each province; concurrently he also decreed that a copy of the *Mahāprajñāparamitā Sūtra* be made in each province, presumably to be used in rituals to pray for the safety of the nation.<sup>12</sup> In 741, a year after Hirotsugu's rebellion, Shōmu embarked on the creation of the nation-wide *kokubunji* system of provincial temples. In the third month of this year, he commanded that a seven-story pagoda, as well as ten copies each of the *Golden Light* and *Lotus Sutras*, be made in each province to pray for the peace and safety of the nation. The temple housing the pagoda was to be called "Temple for Protecting the Nation by the Four Heavenly Kings of the *Golden Light Sūtra*" (Konkō shitenno gokoku no tera 金光四天王護国之寺). Ten monks were assigned to reside at each temple. Concurrently, a nunnery housing ten nuns, to be called "Temple for the Destruction of Transgression by the *Lotus Sūtra*" (Hokke Metsuzai no Tera 法華滅罪之寺) was ordered established in each province.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in 743, Shomu ordered the construction of an immense statue of Vairocana (Dainichi nyorai, or the Great Sun Buddha) at the Tōdaiji at in the western extremity of the capital of Nara. The Tōdaiji was conceived as the head *kokubunji* and the Great Buddha as a symbol of national unity. Hence, the casting of the Great Buddha was seen as a means of "bringing the dissatisfied elements back into the government fold"<sup>14</sup> by providing the country with a prominent new symbol of national unity.

The Great Buddha was completed in 752,<sup>15</sup> but the Japanese court soon thereafter became suspicious of the growing influence of Buddhism. This wariness was precipitated by the monk Dōkyō (?–772), who used his influence with Empress Shōtoku (reign 764–770) to rise to the post of Chancellor (Dajō daijin), the highest office in the government bureaucracy, and eventually attempted to usurp the throne in 769.<sup>16</sup> Although Dōkyō failed, his attempt made the court deeply suspicious of the power of the Buddhist establishment. Finally, in order to escape the influence of the entrenched temples, Emperor Kammu (reign 781–806) transferred the capital to Heiankyō (present-day Kyoto) in 794, inaugurating a new period of Japanese history, the Heian period (794–1185).

### Saichō and Kūkai: New Developments in Heian Buddhism

The previous section outlined the Buddhist-state relationship in pre-Heian age, focusing on how Buddhism forged a close relationship with the court during the two and a half centuries after it was transmitted to Japan. However, by the end

of the Nara period, Buddhism had gained so much power and influence that it came to be regarded with suspicion by the political authorities. As noted above, this attitude was exacerbated by the Dōkyō incident and led to the transfer of the capital away from Nara, with its numerous mighty temples, to Heiankyō.

This, in short, was the political situation into which Saichō and Kūkai were born. These two monks are generally credited with ushering in a new age of Japanese Buddhism. The early Heian period is depicted as an expansive, optimistic period in Japanese history, and the new Buddhist schools founded by these two monks also shared these characteristics. Both Saichō and Kūkai made the hazardous journey to China in order to bring back new schools of Buddhism — the Tendai and Shingon schools, respectively — which became very powerful during the Heian period. The position gained by these schools was due, in large measure, to their success at forging close ties with the court and nobility. In order to gain support to spread their teachings, both Saichō and Kūkai emphasized the utility of their new teachings for the state. However, it must be emphasized that they were both highly idealistic monks, who believed that their new and innovative Buddhist teachings would provide fresh and much-needed spiritual direction for the country. In their opinions, the primary task of a Buddhist was his or her own spiritual cultivation (or, more concretely, to achieve Buddhahood and attain liberation from the cycle of transmigration through spiritual practices such as meditation). However, they were also firmly convinced that the Buddhist teachings required them to work concurrently for the welfare of the country and its people. This fundamental (and for them unquestioned) presupposition led them to adopt a cooperative stance towards the political authorities.

### Saichō and the Controversy over the Bodhisattva Precepts

Saichō, whose ancestors were immigrants from China, was born in the province of Ōmi (now Shiga prefecture), adjacent to the capital.<sup>17</sup> After being ordained a monk in Nara, he established a hermitage on Mt. Hiei, located near his birthplace, to devote himself to religious practices. While at his mountain hermitage, he began to study the works of Chih-i 智顛, the Chinese monk who founded the Tendai (Chinese: T'ien-t'ai) school. After Emperor Kammu moved the capital to Heiankyō, Saichō quickly attracted the attention of the court, thanks to the fact that Mount Hiei was located just northeast of the new capital. Since, according to

Chinese geomancy, evil influences come from the northeast, Saichō's temple was ideally located to provide spiritual protection to the capital. Soon Saichō was appointed one of ten monks serving the court (*naigubu* 内供奉) and in 802 was invited by Wake no Hiroyo 和気広世 and Matsuna 真綱, two influential members of the court, to participate in a retreat to study Tendai Buddhist texts at Takaosanji 高雄山寺, their clan temple on Mount Takao situated to the northwest of the capital. As Paul Groner notes, the Wake were pious Buddhists, but in the aftermath of Dōkyō's attempt to seize the throne for himself, they "were particularly interested in encouraging new types of Buddhism which would not be a threat to the government."<sup>18</sup>

Having gained the patronage of important figures at court, Saichō was subsequently granted permission to accompany the official embassy to China in order to study at Mt. Tiantai, the central temple of the Tiantai school. Saichō set sail in 804 and spent a total of eight and a half months on the mainland. He returned to Japan in the fifth month of 806, and henceforth worked to establish the Tendai school as an independent Buddhist institution in Japan.

The last years of Saichō's life was marked by two bitter debates with monks of the older Buddhist schools of Nara. In 817, he became involved in an acrimonious debate with the Hossō 法相 monk Tokuitsu 徳一 (780?-842?) over the question as to whether or not all beings can gain complete Buddhahood. Saichō, following the standard Tendai position, maintained they did, while Tokuitsu, following the Hossō view, argued that, since people differ in their spiritual abilities and inclinations, some of them are innately unable to attain complete Buddhahood. The Saichō-Tokuitsu debate lasted over five years and was marked by great virulence on both sides. Despite the length of the exchange, however, neither participant were able to claim a clear-cut victory, and the question of whether to accept or reject the doctrine of universal Buddhahood remained a controversial issue in Japanese Buddhism for several more centuries. (Eventually, the Tendai position won out.)

More important for the purpose of this paper is the second debate concerning the use of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts for ordination. Saichō became involved in this debate even while he was engaged in the debate over Buddhahood with Tokuitsu. In 818, Saichō petitioned the court to allow monks of his Tendai school to be henceforth ordained using the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts found in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*. This was a radical — and highly controversial — proposal,

since it implied the rejection of the traditional set of precepts which had regulated the lives of Buddhist monks and nuns.

Saichō set forth his proposal in three petitions, known collectively as *Regulations for Student Monks of the Mountain* (*Sange gakushō shiki* 山家学生式), presented to the court between 818 and 819. These petitions are: (1) *Six Article Regulation* (*Rokujō shiki* 六条式), written in the fifth month of 818, (2) *Eight Article Regulation* (*Hachijō shiki* 八条式) written in the eighth month of 818 and (3) *Four Article Regulation* (*Shijō shiki* 四条式), written in the third month of 819.<sup>19</sup> Although there is a gradual evolution in Saichō's position among these three documents,<sup>20</sup> for the purposes of this paper, we can say that his main point is already clearly enunciated in the first petition, the *Six Article Regulation*. In this document, Saichō proposed that Tendai monks should henceforth be designated Mahāyāna bodhisattva monks and that these newly ordained monks must be made to reside for twelve years to undergo thorough training at his temple on Mt. Hiei. The first point — that Tendai monks be designated Mahāyāna bodhisattva monks — is especially significant, since it indicated Saichō's desire to ordain Tendai monks using the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts found in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*.<sup>21</sup> In Mahāyāna discourse, a bodhisattva refers to those who, not only undertake Buddhist practice to gain enlightenment for oneself, but concurrently works, out of compassion, for both the spiritual and physical (or material) welfare of all beings in order to help them attain enlightenment. In other words, it can be said that a bodhisattva is committed to seeking enlightenment for himself or herself by working in the service of others. Before Saichō made his radical proposal, all Japanese clerics had been ordained using the precepts found in the *Four Parts Vinaya* (*Shibunritsu* 四分律), the vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka school, enumerating 250 precepts regulating the lives of monks (the same text set forth 348 precepts for nuns). However, Saichō argued that the precepts of the *Four Parts Vinaya* were inferior Hīnayāna precepts and maintained that those who aspire to be “bodhisattva monks” should be ordained on Mt. Hiei using the precepts granted expressly to bodhisattva, specifically the ten major and forty-eight minor Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts found in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*.<sup>22</sup> By receiving these precepts,<sup>23</sup> Saichō proclaimed, monks of the Tendai school will henceforth be bodhisattva, devoted both to seeking one's own enlightenment while serving others and helping them attain enlightenment.

This, in short, is the doctrinal reason that Saichō gives for ordaining Tendai

monks using the *Brahmajāla* precepts. However, there also seems to have been another, more practical reason for his decision: many of the monks who initially came to study with Saichō left his temple for other locations. This can be seen from a contemporary register of students, which notes that, of the 24 monks who entered the Tendai school between 807 and 818, only ten remained as of 818. Among those who left, six had switched to the rival Hossō school located in Nara.<sup>24</sup> Such a situation arose because Tendai novices, even those who had entered the Buddhist order at Mt. Hiei, had to receive ordination at the traditional ordination platform at Tōdaiji in Nara in order to become full-fledged monks. Apparently many who went to Nara found the urban charms of the old capital too hard to resist and refused to return to Mt. Hiei. By insisting that his students be ordained on Mt Hiei using a different set of precepts than the one used at the Tōdaiji (the ordination at Tōdaiji was based on the *Four Parts Vinaya*), Saichō hoped to stop the exodus of promising monks from his temple.

Saichō's petitions predictably met with strong opposition from the monks of the traditional schools of Nara, and Saichō wrote *Treatise Revealing the Precepts* (*Kenkairon* 顕戒論) to answer their objections. The court, however, failed to act on Saichō's proposals. It was only seven days after his death in 822 that the court permitted the Tendai school to build a Mahāyāna ordination platform on Mt. Hiei where the school's monks could be ordained using the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*.

### Saichō's View of Buddhism and the State

It has been noted that "Saichō's writings sometimes appear to be tinged with nationalism, probably because of his strong feelings of the prestige of the court."<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, one of Saichō's core beliefs, which appears repeatedly in his writings, is that Buddhism has an essential role to play in maintaining the health and welfare of the emperor as well as the prosperity of the country as a whole.<sup>26</sup> And indeed, as Takeda Chōten has pointed out, when Saichō uses the term "nation" (*kokka* 国家), he frequently uses it to refer specifically to the person of the emperor as well as the country as whole, suggesting that the two were in some sense identical in his mind.<sup>27</sup> In this context, it must be pointed out that Saichō was an obscure monk until he caught the attention of Emperor Kammu after the relocation of the capital to Heiankyō. Neither his journey to China nor his initial success at spreading the

new Tendai teachings in Japan would have been possible without imperial backing. Hence it comes as no surprise that in his writings Saichō adopts a reverential tone when speaking of Kammu. For example, in the *Six Article Regulation*, Saichō says, “I sincerely ask that in accordance with the late emperor’s august wish, Tendai yearly ordinands be forever designated Mahāyāna practitioners and bodhisattva monks.”<sup>28</sup> Another similar example is found in *Treatise Revealing the Precepts*, where he states, “The perfect school of the one vehicle was established by the former emperor. Who among monks and laymen of the world can fail to revere it?”<sup>29</sup> Of course, it may be argued that there is nothing unusual in Saichō’s using such tone of deference, since it was the commonly accepted way in which an emperor was addressed in this age. However, this in itself is significant since it shows that Saichō fully accepted the Japanese social hierarchy and intended to “work within the system,” so to speak. For him, the relationship between religion (specifically Buddhism) and the state was in no way adversarial.

Occasionally, Saichō speaks of Japan using the honorific title “The Great Country of Japan” (*Dainipponkoku* 大日本国), and this has been taken as evidence of his nascent nationalism.<sup>30</sup> However, as Paul Groner has pointed out, this term is usually coupled with a similarly honorific term for China, “The Great T’ang” (*Daitō* 大唐). This coupling would seem to indicate the Saichō was trying to place Japan on an equal level with China. But, as Groner has further argued, Saichō most likely saw China as being the model of Japanese Buddhism. This is exemplified by the fact that he went to China to study Buddhism as well as the fact that he modeled many of his reforms on Chinese precedent.<sup>31</sup>

Another example of an incipient national consciousness may be found in Saichō’s claim that the people of Japan as a whole possess “perfect faculties” (*enki* 円機), or the mature ability to understand the most profound insights expressed in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the fundamental text of the Tendai school. Saichō first puts forth this idea in a brief passage in the preface to a treatise entitled the *Ehyō Tendaiishū* 依憑天台宗 dated 816,<sup>32</sup> and discusses it in greater detail in the *Shugo kokkaishō* 守護国界章, a lengthy work written in the course of his debate with Tokuitsu. Clearly Saichō is here arguing that Japan is a special and privileged land. However, we must not forget the context in which Saichō made this claim. As noted above, the *Shugo kokkaishō* was written to defend the *Lotus Sutra*’s teachings of universal Buddhahood from Tokuitsu’s criticism. By arguing that Japan was the land of

perfect faculties, i.e., the mature ability to fully understand and accept the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Saichō sought to demonstrate that this country is uniquely suited to accepting the *Lotus Sūtra* and its doctrine of universal Buddhahood. In other words, Saichō's appeal to the special character of Japan was not as an unqualified exaltation of Japan, but a strategic move to defend the Tendai sectarian position against the attack of the established Hossō school.

Perhaps Saichō's most important statements concerning the Buddhist-state relationship are to be found in the documents concerning the debate over the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts. As noted above, this debate originated with Saichō's petition requesting court permission to ordain the monks of his Tendai school using the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*. Since this entailed the unprecedented rejection of the traditional, and universally accepted, precepts of the *Four Parts Vinaya*, his arguments for instituting this new system had to be highly convincing. Saichō successfully justified his innovation by arguing that the new system was designed to create and foster bodhisattva monks, that is to say, monks devoted to achieving their own enlightenment by working for the spiritual and material welfare of all beings. It is the duty of the Tendai school, Saichō maintained, to train such bodhisattva monks and send them out to the world to work for the good of the country. Such a vision, Saichō contended, requires Tendai monks to be ordained using the precepts of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, granted specifically to people who aspire to become bodhisattvas. By coming to recognize himself as a bodhisattva through the Mahāyāna ordination, a monk can subsequently engage in the arduous training required of them and, after completing their training, to work actively in the world in the service of others.

Saichō lays out the blueprint for his educational program for bodhisattva monks in the *Six Article Regulation*, the first of the three petitions he presented to the court. In article two of this work, Saichō requests that Tendai monks who have received the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts be made to remain on Mt. Hiei for twelve years to study to become fully trained monks. Then, in articles three and four, he further proposes that these monks be divided into two groups, those who study the Meditation Course (*shikangō* 止觀業) and those who study the Esoteric Course (*shanagō* 遮那業). Significantly, it is stipulated that the monks of the former course must recite daily the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Golden Light Sūtra*, the *Benevolent Kings Sūtra*, the *Ruler Protecting Dhāraṇī Sūtra* and other nation-protecting sūtras.

Similarly, monks in the Esoteric Course were required to meditate on the mantras of such sūtras as the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, *Vajraśekhara Sūtra*, *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñī Sūtra*, *Amoghapāśakalpārāja Sūtra* and *Uṣṇīṣavijaya Dhāraṇī Sūtra*, which are effective in protecting the welfare of the nation. As this shows, Saichō conceived the recitation of sūtras and mantras for the protection and welfare of the state to be a major component of the training of Tendai bodhisattva monks. Although this perspective flows naturally from his emphasis on bodhisattva practice (as noted above, as part of their spiritual practice, a bodhisattva must work, not only for his own attainment of Buddhahood, but for the material and spiritual well-being of all living beings), Saichō probably emphasized this aspect of their training in order to convince the court of the benefits that would accrue to the state from supporting his reform program.

Moreover, in sections five and six, Saichō lays out the career of the bodhisattva monks after they have finished their course of training as follows:

5. After twelve years, students in the two courses shall receive appointments in accordance with their achievements in study and practice. Those who can both speak and act shall remain permanently on Mount Hiei to head the order; they are treasures of the nation. Those who can speak but not act shall be teachers of the nation. Those who can act but not speak shall be assets of the nation.

6. As is specified in the Chancellor's directive, the teachers of the nation and those of use to the nation shall spread the Dharma and be appointed as lecturers in the provinces.... They are to benefit the nation and its people by repairing reservoirs and irrigation ditches, reclaiming uncultivated land, restoring fallen levees, making bridges and boats, planting trees and ramie, sowing hemp and grasses, digging wells and drawing water....<sup>34</sup>

Here Saichō outlines the employment of monks who have completed the twelve-year training period. He divides such monks into three classes: (1) treasures of the nation, (2) teachers of the nation and (3) assets of the nation. The treasures of the nation — the best graduates who are both eloquent in speech and accomplished in religious practice — are to remain on Mt. Hiei as the school's leaders. In contrast, the teachers of the nation (“those who can speak but not act”) and assets of the nation (“those who can act but not speak”) are to be appointed to provincial posts

throughout Japan where they can provide useful services to the people.

In this way, Saichō sought to justify the ordination of Tendai monks using the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts by stressing the usefulness of bodhisattva monks ordained under these precepts for the country. While in training, they will daily recite the nation-protecting sūtras to pray for the peace and prosperity of the land, and once they have become fully trained, they will work throughout Japan to improve the daily life of the population. Although this may just sound like self-serving rhetoric to gain court support for his reforms — and in fact Saichō did self-consciously play up this point for its political appeal — it also reflects his sincere belief that Buddhism has an obligation to work for the welfare of the country and its people. And it must be emphasized again that his notion of a socially active Buddhism has its roots in the Mahāyāna bodhisattva ideal of service for others.

### Kūkai and Estoeric Buddhism of the Shingon School

As noted above, Kūkai is known as the founder of the Shingon school, the second new school of Buddhism introduced to Japan in the early Heian period.<sup>35</sup> Kūkai was born in 774, seven years after Saichō, in Sanuki 讃岐 province (presently Kagawa prefecture) on the island of Shikoku. His father was a member of the local nobility. Kūkai studied Chinese classics and poetry under his uncle Atō no Ōtari 阿刀大足, a prominent literati, and traveled to the capital at the age of eighteen to further his studies at the national university. However, after a fateful meeting with a monk who introduced him to the Kokuzō Gumonjihō 虚空藏求聞持法, the mantra of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarba, Kūkai turned to Buddhism. It is not known what he did for the next decade, but he apparently practiced austerities in the mountains. It was around this time that he wrote the well known *Sangō shiiki* 三教指歸 (*Indication of the Goals of the Three Teachings*) describing the relative merits of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. In 804, he was granted permission to accompany an official embassy to China. Incidentally, Saichō was also traveled to China as a member of this embassy. After arriving on the continent, Kūkai went to the capital city of Chang-an to study the Shingon teachings, i.e., esoteric Buddhism, under Hui-kuo (Jap. Keika 惠果). Hui-kuo recognized Kūkai as a worthy successor and made him the eighth patriarch of the Shingon school.

After spending two years on the continent, Kūkai returned to Japan to spread the esoteric Buddhist teachings he had mastered under Hui-kuo. In this, he

was quite successful, winning the support and patronage of important members of the court, especially Emperor Saga. In 816, Kūkai was given permission to build a monastery at Mt. Kōya, which still remains the head temple of the Shingon school, and several years later, in 823, he was granted the temple of Tōji 東寺 located at the southern part of the capital, with the promise that it would thereafter remain an exclusively Shingon institution. In the first month of 835, he undertook for the first time the Latter Seven Day Rite (Goshichinichi mishūhō 後七日御修法, also called simply Mishūhō) at the imperial palace to pray for the health of the emperor and the prosperity of the country but died just three months later on Mt. Kōya.

According to Kūkai, Shingon Buddhism teaches that it is possible to “attain Buddhahood in this very body,” without having to undertake arduous practice for aeons, which is the case according to the teachings of the non-esoteric Buddhist schools. Moreover, esoteric Buddhism possesses numerous elaborate rituals to gain so-called “worldly benefits” (*genze riyaku* 現世利益), including recovery from illnesses, longevity, safe delivery at childbirth, prosperity for the state and family, and a host of other divine favors. For this reason, esoteric Buddhism became perhaps the most popular form of Buddhism in Heian Japan. The Latter Seven Day Rite is one such ritual for “worldly benefits.” Although Kūkai’s understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and the state can be discussed from various perspectives, in the pages below, I will focus on the Latter Seven Day Rite which he succeeded in incorporating into the annual ritual cycle of the imperial palace in 835.<sup>36</sup>

### Kūkai and the Latter Seven Day Rite

As noted above, the Latter Seven Day Rite was started by Kūkai in 835, just months before his death. In many ways it was the crowning event of his illustrious career. Before Kūkai began this ritual, the court celebrated the new year by holding a Shinto ritual from January first to seventh, followed by a Buddhist ceremony called Misai-e 御齋会, centered on a lecture on the *Golden Light Sūtra*, on the next seven days (January 8–14). On the nineteenth day of the final month of 834, Kūkai presented a memorial to the court suggesting a seven day esoteric ritual be held in conjunction with the Misai-e. In the memorial, Kūkai contended that, as presently held, the *Golden Light Sūtra* is simply read and its meaning discussed academically. Hence “although lectures on the meaning of the nectar (of practice) are heard, its sublime taste is probably not acquired.”<sup>37</sup> For this reason, he proposed

that “during the seven days of the lecture, fourteen monks who have previously received the precepts and fourteen novices be chosen, whereupon they will establish a separate room as a place of practice (within the palace), lining up images of deities, setting up implements for worship, and reciting mantras...”<sup>38</sup> But significantly, even though he proposed the introduction of this esoteric ritual into the court’s new year ceremonies, Kūkai did not call for the abolition of the Misai-e. Instead, in his usual diplomatic manner, he suggested that it be used to supplement the older Buddhist ritual. As Brian Ruppert notes, “Kūkai clearly saw this new rite as providing the esoteric essence that would compensate for what he saw as the superficiality of the exoteric Misai-e rite.... Kūkai was, however, careful to stress that the activities of the esoteric clerics would complement the Misai-e by providing needed substance to the annual cycle of Buddhist rites performed in the first month.”<sup>39</sup>

Kūkai’s suggestion was quickly accepted and this ceremony, which came to be known as the Latter Seven Day Rite, was held in the second week of 835.<sup>40</sup> The rite was an elaborate and impressive sequence of esoteric ritual procedures, consisting primarily of seven types of offerings (Sanskrit: *pūja*, Japanese: *kuyōhō* 供養法) and three types of empowerment (Sanskrit: *adhiṣṭāna*, Japanese: *kaji* 加持). The seven types of offerings are (1) ritual of offering to Mahāvairocana and his maṇḍala, (2) a fire ritual (Sanskrit: *homa*, Japanese: *goma* 護摩) for preventing calamities, (3) a fire ritual for increasing fortune, (4) ritual of offering to the five wrathful divinities (*godai myōō* 五大明王), (5) ritual of offering to the twelve gods, (6) the ritual offering to Gaṇapati, and (7) ritual offering to Shinto gods, while the three types of empowerment are (1) the empowerment of scented water, (2) the empowerment of the emperor’s robes, and (3) the empowerment of the emperor’s body. With the exception of the sixth and seventh offerings, the offering rituals were performed three times each day for seven days.<sup>41</sup>

The ceremony was held at the Mantra Chapel (Shingon-in 真言院), located adjacent to the Daigokuden 大極殿 (the central administrative hall) at the heart of the imperial palace. The Womb Maṇḍala and the Diamond Maṇḍala were hung on the eastern and western walls of the chapel, respectively, and a great ritual altar (*daidan* 大壇) was placed in front of each. The main ritual was performed at one of these two altars, alternating between them each year. On the north wall between the two altars was an altar for the five wrathful deities, hung with paintings of these fierce-looking divinities.

The main figure invoked in this ritual was Ratnasambhava, one of Mahāvairocana Buddha's attendant bodhisattvas, whose symbolic representation is the wish-granting jewel (*cintāmaṇi*). Moreover, during the ritual, the Buddha's relics were enshrined at the altar in use that year. The major aim of this ceremony, to procure the health and longevity of the emperor, was accomplished by means of the three empowerments mentioned above. On the last three day of the ceremony, specially prepared scented water was empowered by chanting mantras on them, and the water was sprinkled on the emperor's robes that had been carried into the hall. The climax of the entire ritual came on the last day, when the scented water was sprinkled on the emperor himself.

Despite several interruptions, the Latter Seven Day Rite continued until the Meiji period, when Buddhist rituals were expunged from the imperial palace. However, it was revived by the Shingon school in 1883, and is now carried out at the Consecration Chapel (Kanjō-in 灌頂院) at Tōji in Kyoto.

As Yamaori Tetsuo has suggested, behind Kūkai's proposal to introduce the Latter Seven Day Rite into the annual ritual cycle of the imperial palace, it is possible to discern his ambitious "scheme" (*kuwadate* 企て) to bring peace and stability to Japan through esoteric Buddhism. To borrow Yamaori's words, Kūkai sought to recreate Japan "by aggressively moving into the political world" and "putting the country on a stable course by introducing esoteric Buddhist thought" into the activities of the court.<sup>42</sup> The Latter Seven Day Rite, which utilized esoteric rituals to ensure the health and longevity of the emperor, was the culmination of Kūkai's lifelong attempt to restructure the ideological foundation of the nation by using esoteric Buddhism.

Before closing this section, it may be worth noting that this was not the first time that Kūkai had attempted to convince the court of the benefits of esoteric rituals for the nation. According to Yoritomi Motohiro, in 810, four years after he returned from China, Kūkai sent a memorial to Emperor Saga requesting permission to hold a ritual to pray for the peace of the nation at the temple on Mt. Takao, the Wake clan temple mentioned above. As a precedent, Kūkai cited the example of similar rites conducted in the Chinese imperial palace. This request apparently was not granted. But it is important to note that this request was made just a month and a half after the so-called Kusuko Incident (Kusuko no hen 薬子の変), in which Retired Emperor Heizei, along with his favorite consort Kusuko and her brother

Fujiwara no Nakanari 藤原仲成, attempt to overthrow the reigning Emperor Saga. Although the attempt failed, clearly Kūkai saw this incident as an excellent opportunity to convince Emperor Saga of the benefits of sponsoring the newly transmitted esoteric rituals court.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

In the pages above, I have discussed how Buddhism was closely intertwined with the state since its introduction to Japan. This relationship was a mutually beneficial one, inasmuch as the court sought to use Buddhist rituals to ensure the welfare of the state and its rulers, and Buddhist monks used the support they gained from the court to spread their teachings. Both Saichō and Kūkai, who introduced new forms of Buddhism to Japan in the early Heian period, also sought to spread their teachings by exploiting court patronage. This is not to say, however, that they sought to create ties with political authorities solely for their own self-serving interests. Both monks envisioned Buddhism as having a vital role to play in the spiritual life of the country. Saichō, for example, stressed that monks should pray for the emperor and the country while undergoing the twelve-year period of training on Mt. Hiei, and that those who had completed the course of training should work for the country by undertaking public works projects to benefit the country and its people. On the other hand, Kūkai sought to restructure the spiritual foundation of the Japanese state by introducing esoteric Buddhist rituals into court ceremonies. The close ties they helped forge between Buddhism and the state remained an important feature of Japanese religion and politics until the middle of the nineteenth century.

## Notes

- 1 Adolphson 2000, 15. On the development of the *ōbō-buppō sōe* ideology, see Kuroda 1994.
- 2 Modern scholarship, however, has amended the date of the transmission of Buddhism to Japan in 538. See Rhodes 2006, 2–3.
- 3 Aston 1972, 2: 65.
- 4 According to the *Nihon shoki*, after the statue arrived, Emperor Kimmei held a council with his ministers to decide whether or not to worship this new statue. Two ministers, Mononobe no Okoshi and Nakatomi no Kamako, opposed it,

arguing that the emperor has always worshipped only the native Japanese gods. In contrast, Soga no Iname, who was more open to new ideas from the continent, pushed for the acceptance of the new religion, arguing that “all of the western frontier lands without exception do it worship. Shall Akitsu Yamato (i.e., Japan) alone refuse to do so?” (Aston 1972, 2: 66). As a result, Emperor Kimmei entrusted the statue to Iname, who converted his house at Mukuhara into a temple and enshrined the statue there. But in 570, when an epidemic attacked Japan, the Mononobe and Nakatomi clans blamed it on the native god’s anger at the worship of the foreign deity. The temple at Mukuhara was burned to the ground and the statue was thrown into the canal at Naniwa.

- 5 On this sūtra, see de Visser, 1928, 116–198. There are two translations of this sūtra, one attributed to Kumārajīva and another by Amoghavajra. The latter, which is heavily influenced by esoteric Buddhism, is translated by Orzech 1998. In this sūtra, the Benevolent Kings, a pair of guardian deities in the Buddhist pantheon, promise to protect the country in cases of natural disasters resulting from fire, water and wind (T 8, 830a). Hence, this sūtra was believed to protect the state in case of warfare and invasion. The country of Paekche, with whom Japan was allied, was then facing the attack of the combined armies of T’ang China and the Korean state of Silla, and the ceremony was conducted to pray for Paekche’s victory. As it turned out, the sūtra recitation proved ineffective, since Paekche was defeated by T’ang China and Silla just two months after the ceremony.
- 6 On this sūtra, see de Visser 1935, 431–488. It was first translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa under the title *Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明經. It was this version that was initially used in Japan. Later, it was retranslated by I-tsing during the T’ang dynasty under the title *Konkōmyō Saishōōkyō* 金光明最勝王經. This version was transmitted to Japan by Dōji (?–774). Dōji had spent seventeen years (from 701–718) in China, and stayed at the Hsi-ming Temple where I-tsing also resided. After Dōji brought the *Saishōōkyō* to Japan, it quickly superseded the *Konkōmyōkyō*.

The *Golden Light Sūtra* declares that, if a king sincerely reveres this sūtra, the Four Heavenly Kings (Vaiśravaṇa (Japanese: Bishamonten), Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Virūḍhaka, Virūpākṣa) will protect the king and the people of his country. Moreover, it also says that if the country is attacked by an enemy army, the four

kings will defeat it (T 16, 427c). In a different section of the sūtra, it also says that wherever lectures are conducted on this sūtra, the country will be blessed with four types of prosperities: (1) the king of those countries shall be free from diseases and all other calamities, (2) the king's life shall be long and without obstacles, (3) they shall have no enemies, and their warriors shall be brave and strong, and (4) there shall be peace, abundance and joy in those countries, the True Law (*shōbō*, Sanskrit: *saddharma*) shall spread everywhere and the king will always be protected by the Four Heavenly Kings (T 16, 417b; the English rendering of the four types of prosperities is based on de Visser 1935, p. 439.)

- 7 There is no overt reference to Buddhas, bodhisattvas or heavenly beings protecting the country in the *Lotus Sūtra*. However, in the Dhāraṇī Chapter (chapter 26), it is said that two heavenly beings, Vaiśravaṇa (Bishamonten) and Domain Holder (Jikokuten), will protect all who recite their *dhāraṇīs*. (The same promise is made by female *rākṣasas* [demons] as well.) Moreover, it is also stated that the recitation of this sūtra results in the destruction of evil karma, with wholesome effect on the country as a whole. It is probably for these two reasons that the *Lotus Sūtra* came to be used in ceremonies to ensure the welfare of the country.

It may also be mentioned in passing that several other sūtras were also employed in ceremonies to pray for the welfare of the state and the court. One such sūtra was the massive *Large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* in 600 fascicles, which was read to protect the nation against all types of calamities, including eclipses, earthquakes, epidemics and, especially, drought (de Visser 1935, 496–507). Another notable sūtra was the *Medicine King Sūtra*. This sūtra enumerates the twelve vows of Medicine King Buddha (Sanskrit: Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha), prominent among them the vow to cause “all sentient beings who are ill and hopeless to obtain recovery, peace and joy of body and mind, and wealth, and to obtain the unexcelled *bodhi*, by hearing his name.” (de Visser, 1935, 534). In later passages, the sūtra states that if relatives of a person stricken with illness take refuge in Medicine King Buddha and request monks to read this sūtra, the sick person will recover (de Visser, 2: 537–38).

- 8 Aston 1972, 2: 65.

- 9 It may also be mentioned in passing that the Soniryō was apparently based

- on the Chinese “Regulations for Taoists and Buddhist” of the T’ang period. C. f. Futaba 1962, 6 (in the English resume appended to the end of the book).
- 10 These four acts like murder etc. are called the four *pārājikas* in the monastic vinaya codes, and are crimes resulting in the expulsion of from the monkhood.
- 11 On the Soniryō, see Ishida 1984, 43–48. It has been suggested that these lines from the Soniryō must be understood in the context of the arrest and exile of En-no-gyōja (or En-no-otsunu) in 699, or just three years before the Yōrō Codes were enacted. Very little is known about En-no-gyōja, but according to the short notice in the *Nihon shoki*, he practiced austerities on Mt. Katsuragi, located at the southwest corner of the Nara basin, and gained proficiency in the magical arts. Apparently he used his powers to work widely among the people. Viewed as a dangerous person, En-no-gyōja was accused of sorcery and was exiled to Izu. See Ienaga 1967, 107.
- 12 Aoki et. als. 1989–1998, vol. 2, 313.
- 13 Shomu’s edict is found in Aoki et. als. 1989–1998, vol. 2, 387–91.
- 14 Matsunaga and Matsunaga 1974, 122.
- 15 Although the casting was finished in 749, the statue was not formally consecrated until 752.
- 16 On Dōkyō’s attempt to usurp the throne, see Bender 1979, 138–44.
- 17 On Saichō’s life and thought, see Groner 2000.
- 18 Groner 2000, 34.
- 19 These texts are translated in Groner 2000, 116–23, 131–35 and 138–44 respectively.
- 20 This point is emphasized in Groner 2000, 107.
- 21 This is made explicit in a petition entitled *Petition Asking for Permission to Install Bodhisattva Monks* dated six days after the Six Article Regulation, in which Saichō requested court approval to initiate Tendai monks “in accordance with Mahāyāna (teachings).” See Groner 2000, 129. Incidentally, the *Six Article Regulation* is dated thirteenth day of the fifth month of 818 while the *Petition Asking for Permission to Install Bodhisattva Monks* is dated twenty-first day of the fifth month of 818. See Groner 2000, 128 and 130.
- 22 As is well known, there are two major branches of Buddhism: the so-called Mainstream Buddhism now dominant in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and

Mahāyāna Buddhism, found in Tibet and east Asia. Historically, the latter has denigrated the former as an inferior form of Buddhism, calling it by the derogatory term “Hīnayāna” or the “Lesser Vehicle.” (Incidentally, the term Mahāyāna means “Greater Vehicle.”) The Mahāyānists criticized Hīnayāna monks as being “selfish” and concerned only for their own enlightenment. In contrast, the Mahāyānists upheld the new spiritual ideal of the bodhisattva, who practices for the enlightenment, not only of oneself, but of all beings. Although “Hīnayāna” is a term of derision and is thus offensive to the followers of Mainstream Buddhism, it will be used here as a historical term because the Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna dichotomy is central to Saichō’s rhetoric of bodhisattva precepts.

23 For a list of these precepts, see Matsunaga 1969, 152–54.

24 Groner 2000, 125–26.

25 Tsunoda, de Bary and Keene 1964, 115.

26 In a detailed study, Takeda Chōten has argued that when Saichō discusses how Buddhism can “protect the nation,” he is using the term “nation” to refer to both the emperor (who is identified with the nation) as well as the country of Japan as a whole. See Takeda 1981, 69–70.

27 Takeda 1981, 67.

28 Cited in Takeda 1981, 68. The English translation, which is slightly amended, is from Groner 2000, 117.

29 T 74, 590b. Cited in Takeda 1981, 68.

30 Tsunoda, de Bary and Keene 1964, 115.

31 Groner 2000, 174–75.

32 The passage reads, “In Japan, the Perfect faculties (*enki*) of the people have already matured. The Perfect teaching has finally arisen.” Quoted in Groner 2000, 181.

33 Groner 2000, 120–21.

34 Groner 2000, 122–23.

35 On Kūkai, see Hakada 1972 and Abe 1999.

36 The Latter Seven Day Rite is described in Abe 1999, 344–55 and Ruppert 2000, 102–41.

37 Ruppert 2000, 103–104.

38 Ruppert 2000, 104.

- 39 Ruppert 2000, 104.
- 40 The description of the rite below is based on Abe 1999, 347–55 and Ruppert 2000, 107–25.
- 41 Abe 2000, 348. The ritual offering to Gaṇapati was conducted twice daily for seven days, while the ritual offering to Shinto gods was performed just three times during the entire ritual cycle, on the first, fourth and last days.
- 42 Yamaori 2008, 9. A similar but much more nuanced point is made by Abe 1999.
- 43 Yoritomi 2006, 6–9.

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## 《日本語要旨》

### 日本における仏教と国家の関係

——最澄と空海 of 思想に関連して——

ロバート F. ローズ

日本では仏教は常に国家と密接な関係を持ちながら発展した。この論文では、平安初期に活躍した最澄と空海を取り上げ、彼らが国家と仏教の関係をどのように理解し、その理解が彼らの教団形成にどのような影響を与えたのかを考察する。両者とも自らの教団を樹立するために、朝廷と密接な関係を築いた。しかし、それは単に教団の利益を求めためではなく、両者とも仏教は日本を発展させるうえで大きな役割があると確信していたため、朝廷に接近したという側面もあることも注意しなければならない。

本論では最澄と空海 of 思想を取り上げる前に、それ以前における国家と仏教 of 関係を概観する。『日本書紀』によると、欽明天皇十三年（五五二年）に百済の聖明王が仏像などを朝廷に送ったことによって、仏教が日本に初めて伝わったとされている。これが史実かどうかはともかく、これは仏教が伝来当初から朝廷と密接な関係にあったことを示唆している。その後も仏教は朝廷と密接な関係を保ちながら広まった。仏教は鎮護国

家をもたらす宗教として重視された一方、僧尼令などによって厳しい管理の対象にもなった。また奈良時代には、聖武天皇によって国分寺や国分尼寺が各国に設けられ、総国分寺として東大寺が建立された。

平安時代初頭には最澄と空海によって天台宗と真言宗が日本に伝えられたが、両者とも仏教は日本の発展のために果たすべき大きな役割があると考えていた。最澄は大乘戒壇建立を求めて『山家学生式』を著したが、そのなかで天台宗の僧侶は大乘菩薩戒によって出家すべきであると主張し、これらの菩薩僧は利他行を実践し、国のために尽くさなければならないと論じた。一方、空海は中国から伝えた密教を中心に鎮護国家の思想を展開し、玉体護持のために宮中で後七日御修法という儀式を創設した。このように最澄も空海も国家と密接な関係を持つ形で、中国から伝えた新しい宗派を日本で確立していったのである。

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