

The Development of the *Kenmitsu* System As Japan's Medieval Orthodoxy

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Medieval Japan was dominated by a religious system, the so-called kenmitsu system, which provided a cohesive ideological structure for its social and political order. It arose against the backdrop of the medieval estate system and the emerging peasant class. The core of the kenmitsu system was esoteric beliefs and practices, around which the different exoteric doctrines of Tendai and other schools coalesced. Esoteric practices were thought to embody the truths of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but also to provide thaumaturgic means to control the ominous spirit world recognized by society. The teachings and practices of Pure Land Buddhism were born out of this system, and the Tendai doctrine of original enlightenment (hongaku) was an archetypal expression of it. The kenmitsu worldview provided the ideological basis for the medieval Japanese state, and was integrated into its system of rule.

THE *KENMITSU TAISEI* 顯密体制 (exoteric-esoteric system) indicates, as a concept, the distinctive religious system that was recognized as orthodox in medieval Japan. It is a concept directly related to the unique character of religion in the medieval period, as well as to the unique character of the medieval state (*kokka* 国家). The purpose of the present essay on the development of the *kenmitsu taisei* is to consider the fundamental structure of this linkage between religion and the Japanese state, and the historical perspectives of that structure. In the medieval period, religion and the state were viewed as entities that

* This article is a translation of the first thirty-five pages (the introduction and part 1) of Kuroda Toshio's essay "Chūsei ni okeru kenmitsu taisei no tenkai" 中世における顯密体制の展開 (reprinted in KURODA 1994, pp. 45-182). Part 4 of this long essay is translated below (pp. 353-85) as "The Discourse on the 'Land of Kami' (*Shinkoku*) in Medieval Japan."

should exist in a relationship of mutual identity, not as essentially different things that should interact within a framework of opposition. The *kenmitsu taisei* operated on the level of such mutual identity. What this means, therefore, is that our consideration of this system is specifically an inquiry into the relationship between religion and the state.

The primary task of this essay is to reveal the medieval Japanese state's mystical and mysterious side that was derived from religion, and to explore its characteristics. In discussions of the state it is common to take up such matters as power, organization, and law, and there are natural reasons for doing so. But in the medieval Japanese state these were not the only matters of importance—there are excellent reasons for noting in particular the religious side of things as well.

Another task of this essay is to keep in mind issues relating to the intellectual history of Japanese religion. That is, I would like to consider the question of religion—or rather, of religious ideas—from the standpoint of their relationship to authority as it was exercised in the actual social order of the medieval period. This relationship provides us with a important key for understanding Japan's religious history in a relatively objective way, one that is little influenced by the subjective images that present-day sectarian historians superimpose upon the past. Such an approach helps free us from current doctrinal and devotional perspectives on history, perspectives related to the two major changes that occurred in Japanese religion subsequent to the medieval period: first, the official recognition of independent Buddhist sects in early modern times and the consequent systematization of sectarian doctrines; and second, the separation of Shinto from Buddhism and the rise of State Shinto in the modern era. These developments must not precondition our understanding of medieval religion, nor should they act as standards for evaluating it. Rather, medieval religion must be grasped using models that are most appropriate to the medieval age itself. This may seem obvious, but the fact is that even recent research by no means does this. The reason is that the task of liberating religious and intellectual history from doctrinal perceptions is neither easy nor self-evident.

One thing I must note in advance is that my argument presupposes the “estate-system society” (*shōensei shakai* 莊園制社会) and the “system of ruling elites” (*kenmon taisei* 権門体制), concepts that I have explained in earlier articles on the nature of society and the state in medieval Japan. There are, of course, a variety of other scholarly perspectives on these issues, perspectives from which the discussions in this essay

will no doubt appear extremely one-sided and arbitrary. To a certain extent, this is unavoidable. I myself believe that it is possible to acknowledge the truth of the facts presented here in their own right, without directly relating them to historical definitions of the period. Nonetheless, in my overall organization and analysis I have consciously sought to examine the links of medieval religion to *shōen* society and the *kenmon* system.

This essay was originally intended to cover the entire medieval period, with a number of sections on the relationship between the state and religion throughout medieval times. I believe that the *kenmitsu* system faced its final demise, a kind of closing of the books, with the appearance of the *shūkyō ikki* 宗教一揆 (religious uprisings) in late medieval times, so that a bigger picture extending to that point is called for. I have stopped short, however, sketching only a few main issues relating to the period up to the Nanbokuchō period (1336–1392), the time of the Northern and Southern Courts in the mid-medieval era. One reason for this is that I have not yet finished groundwork for a consideration of the various issues relating to the *kenmitsu taisei* in later medieval times. More importantly, though, my overall research on the late medieval state is, practically speaking, still in its initial stages. I will thus refrain from addressing matters of religion and the state in the latter half of the medieval period until my preparations are a bit more complete.

Founding the Kenmitsu System—The Rise of the Orthodox Establishment

The Heian period (794–1185), spanning nearly four-hundred years, had a rich religious history with a wide variety of developments, of which the founding of the Tendai and Shingon schools was first and foremost. The topic of this section is the overall history of this period, though I do not intend to go into great depth. Also, although it would of course be best to introduce the considerable scholarship relating to the development of Heian Buddhism, including Pure Land Buddhism, to do so in any detail would be impossible. For the purposes of this essay I will focus on the formation during the Heian period of the body of religious doctrine that gave rise to the ideological system I call the *kenmitsu taisei*, a system that claimed orthodox status and was totally fused with the authority of the medieval state. I will elucidate in condensed form the basis and process of its formation, and briefly examine its character and significance.

My intention is not, however, to treat the religious history of the Heian period as a mere preparation for that of the Kamakura period

(1185–1333). As mentioned above, I believe that we must reject this frequently adopted perspective and the associated interpretations based on the sectarian histories of the present-day Buddhist schools. Instead, we should seek to grasp in a comprehensive way the *kenmitsu taisei* as it existed in its own time. For this purpose we must identify what was important, from the perspective of intellectual history, in the transition from ancient to medieval Japan, and determine the ways in which this transformation constituted an emancipation of the spirit. This, I believe, must be our fundamental point of departure.

*Issues in Intellectual History During the Transition Period
From Ancient to Medieval Times*

The ancient Japanese state underwent slow change over the four-century Heian period as it moved toward the medieval state system. Since our understanding of the historical significance of this transition relates to our view of the nature and characteristics of both the ancient and the medieval state, a variety of perspectives are possible. Here I would like to present my own views, organizing them into the following three points that, in a sense, acknowledge the presuppositions of our intellectual historical stance.¹

The first point is that this transition signified the disintegration of the Asian-style community structure that had been at the foundations of society, and of the ancient autocratic state (*kodai sensei kokka* 古代専制国家) that had developed on this foundation. The distinctive qualities displayed by the ancient Japanese state all reveal it to be an ancient Asian-style social order. These features include the organization and principles of control of its communities, which were dominated by local chiefs and powerful families; the central and local administrative organizations, which performed household censuses on villages and concentrated authority in the imperial bureaus, provinces, counties, villages, and hamlets; and the hierarchical power structure, which extended from powerful local families all the way up to the emperor. All of these structures, in their various ways, ultimately broke down.

The second point to take up is the significance of the newly emerging peasant class. Since the key feature of the transition from the ancient to the medieval period was the feudalization of society, the rise of independent, small-scale farming was the most important element

¹ For my views on the transition from the ancient to the medieval period in Japan, see my essays “Shōensei shakai” (KURODA 1995b, pp. 129–316) and “Nihon chūsei no hokensei no tokushitsu” (KURODA 1995b, pp. 363–410).

for defining the nature of social development. In the case of Japan, independent, small-scale farming came into being with the formation of a new agricultural class centering on the *hyakushō* 百姓 (peasants), who emerged from the *kōmin* 公民 (commoners) of the ancient period. Within this new group, however, there were both the *gōmin* 豪民 (the “powerful people,” who later evolved into the *zaichi ryōshu* 在地領主, the resident lords of the *shōen* estates), and their diametric opposites, the *saimin* 細民 (the “destitute people”), who were later incorporated into the patriarchal system of control in the form of slaves (*dorei* 奴隸) or serfs (*nōdo* 農奴). Thus the patriarchal systems of slavery and serfdom developed from within this framework. It was on the basis of such developments that independence first became possible for the peasants. But fundamentally the production structure found in the estate system, which held sway over the independent peasantry, should be seen as dominant.

The third point to be made concerns the measures taken by the state to maintain and reorganize its system of control, and the deepening contradiction and deterioration that occurred as a result. For example, the Ritsuryō aristocrats and their descendants, while personally shifting their economic base to the estate system and its revenues, had to preserve the official categories of peasantry (*hyakushō*) and public land (*kōden* 公田), and strive to maintain bureaucratic government through the activities of “superior officials” (*ryōri* 良吏) in the form of rule by the imperial regents (*sekkon* 摂関). The national system of government and the *shōen* system of the aristocracy, notwithstanding various surface contradictions and confusions, stood in a basic relationship of mutual support. This relationship did not result from any active, positive viewpoint that they held in common, but rather from passive interaction as they responded primarily to the growth of the peasantry as independent, small-scale farmers. Because their policies shifted from one direction to another in accordance with the trends of the times, an inevitable confusion and deterioration occurred in politics and culture, both at the political center and in the outlying districts.

If these three features are taken to characterize Japan’s transition from the ancient to the medieval period, what issues does this transition raise from the perspective of intellectual history? This will be our next concern.

The first thing to consider in this respect is what new outlooks, as well as what supporting forms of thought, emerged from the diverse activities of the various classes during the transitional period. What, in other words, were the outlooks (*ishiki* 意識), thoughts (*shii* 思惟), wishes (*ganbō* 願望), dreams (*gensō* 幻想), and religious beliefs (*shinkō* 信仰) of

the people as expressed in their economic activities and social and private lives, as well as in their reactions to the authorities of the old and the new orders? The crucial element here is found, I believe, in the people's opposition, both in outlook and in thought, to the ancient thaumaturgic bonds represented by the political authorities of the ancient Asian-style community (from clan head to emperor), and in their liberation from these bonds. The opposition to which I refer was not of the bold (and rather exceptional) type in which a people rises up in rebellion against the rule of a powerful state. Rather, it consisted of a gradual move away from the almost primitive ignorance that pervaded daily life and the activities of economic production; of the acquisition of an active and independent role in the conduct of business; of an overcoming of the social and spiritual weakness that prevented individuals from surviving so much as a day if separated from the ancient community organization and its emotive bonds; and of an escape from the blind struggle for existence wherein people feared the emperor as they might a deity and labored like worker bees under the rule of the social authorities. It consisted, in short, of the liberation and elevation of the human spirit.

Nonetheless, the formation of the peasant class was not a one-directional advance in the status of the farming populace, for it occurred in the context of the rise of the powerful *gōmin* group and the decline of the destitute *saimin* group. Hence, although I have described the transition as a spiritual liberation from the constraints of earlier authority and ideas, it is important to note that it was a liberation achieved only with the harsh realization that society cannot avoid the instabilities of change and decline. The process of liberation from ignorance always involves a struggle against uncertainty; thus a psychologically inevitable part of the transitional process was the emergence of various paths for attaining liberation from the sufferings and fears of this life, and the formation of images of a longed-for world. Even when such aspirations took a religious form, I believe they must be analyzed with the realization that they did not start out as transhistorical, abstract phenomena addressing the universal problems of human existence, but that they developed in response to specific historical and ideological concerns.²

Secondly, we must note that paralleling the above-mentioned intellectual advances on the part of the ordinary people was the emergence of a crisis mentality within the aristocratic class and a corresponding

² Concerning the distinctive features of the consciousness of the common people during this period, astute insights have been presented by literary historians. See, for example, MASUDA 1960.

initiative by the state to reorganize ideology and control religion—an initiative born of the ruling class's struggle to remain in power. The aristocrats, as the ruling class within the ancient state structure, were more conservative, generally speaking, than the people they ruled. Nevertheless, amidst the disintegration of the ancient state and Asian-style community, the collapse of social functions, and breakdown of presumptions regarding privileged bloodlines (*uji* 氏, the fictive structure on which aristocratic rule was built), the aristocrats were thrown into a state of crisis regarding their own existence that overshadowed even their reactionary response to the actions of the ordinary people. The increase in this crisis mentality at the individual, social, and government levels was reflected in the political intrigues and secret plots of the mid-eighth to tenth centuries, in the decline of numerous aristocratic families, and in the psychological inclination toward an urban, personal sense of introspection and prose (see ISHIMODA 1943). The feeling of crisis led, on the one hand, to such structural changes as a new political ideology (expressed in the early tenth-century political reforms of the Engi era and in the appearance of “superior officials” [*ryōnin*]) and a reorganization of religion around concepts like spiritual protection for the state (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家). On the other hand, it stimulated serious introspection and rigorous intellectual questioning among the various levels of aristocrats who monopolized knowledge and learning and possessed refined political and intellectual skills. Attempts to comprehend the so-called imperial culture of the Heian period on the basis of the leisured lives of the aristocrats, or of the various new phenomena associated with the emergence of the lower classes, ignore the complexity and rigor of intellectual history, as well as the distinctive character of this transitional period.

There is a third point relating to the previous two, a point particularly relevant to the theme of this article. This is the fact that during this period there inevitably emerged an increased cognizance of the link between religion and the state. The ancient autocratic state had constituted an all-embracing entity from which no person had a separate, autonomous existence. Although from the reign of Empress Suiko (554–628) the conflicts and contradictions of autocratic rule had gradually led to the formulation of legal and religious restrictions regarding the state, these were still rooted in the self-perceptions of the Asian-style community structure and its leaders. From the ninth century, however, conditions underwent a fundamental change as the ancient autocratic state disintegrated and the medieval state emerged. At this point, both the aristocracy and the common people had to confront the question of what the nation was; regardless of one's

social position, it was no longer possible to dwell comfortably in the all-encompassing state of the ancient era. In a sense, this was the first time in history that an “objective” consideration of the state became necessary. Unlike the ancient period, in which the existence of the emperor was considered synonymous with that of the state and the state was manifested in all spheres of life, the transitional period witnessed the beginnings of the paradoxical medieval attitude in which attempts to limit state control, or even attack it, led to deepened inquiry into the state’s true meaning.³ Such objective reflections emerged principally with religion as a mediating agent and intellectual methodology. Though there were other modes of thinking—Confucianism, for instance—that were capable of performing this role, in actuality the conditions for their autonomous emergence had not yet appeared in Japan. Religion, in contrast, found its *raison d’être* in this role. Furthermore, to reiterate a previous point, this inquiry into the nature of the state was a historically inevitable development emerging from the respective needs of the ruling and the ruled—i.e., the crisis mentality of the aristocracy and the defiance and hopes of the common people. It was thus an inquiry that transcended class and encompassed a wide variety of positions, including some that were in direct opposition. In this way both religion and the state refined their thought and logic to the point where they underwent the qualitative change to the medieval religion-state relationship.

In a general, chronological analysis one can go on forever identifying questions regarding the transition from the ancient to the medieval period. If one is concerned with the fundamental issues relating to religion and the state, however, the three points outlined above are of central concern.

Overcoming the Ancient Thaumaturgic Bonds

In the section above I have attempted to identify the fundamental intellectual issues connected with the period of transition from ancient to medieval times. Below I would like to consider briefly the intellectual trends in religion during the ninth and tenth centuries. First I will examine the popular opposition to the thaumaturgic bonds promoted by the ancient authorities. For this purpose I turn to the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 [A record of miraculous tales of Japan], which

³ In the past people have been prone to see only the institutional incompleteness of the medieval state and not to notice the paradoxical linkages mentioned here. Consequently, there has been a tendency to overlook those threads in medieval intellectual and governmental history that led to these specific questions.

reflects the condition of religion and the common people in the late eighth and early ninth centuries.⁴

Previous studies have examined the *Nihon ryōiki* from a variety of perspectives. One is that passages of the *Nihon ryōiki* reflect the growth of powerful local families and individuals like county officials (*gunji* 郡司), as well as of a “wealthy and powerful local class” (*fugōsō* 富豪層) (see TAKATORI 1967 and KAWANE 1971). There are scholarly differences in interpretation, but basically the *Nihon ryōiki* depicts the *fugōsō* as a powerful, patriarchally structured class drawing its wealth from the control of slave labor and the possession of moveable property such as grain and seedlings, coins, and agricultural tools, and from large-scale loans and land management. Its compiler, Kyōkai 景戒 (8th–9th cent.), regarded such trends in society as inevitable, and using this material as his basis he propounded the doctrine of karmic rewards in this life. For now I will set aside attempts to situate the *fugōsō* in the class structure and define its historical significance. Rather, I will simply draw attention to the fact that the *Nihon ryōiki* presents multiple depictions of the class divisions between the common people (*kōmin*) and the “wealthy elite” (*fūki* 富貴), referred to variously in this period as *fugō no tomogara* 富豪の輩 (wealthy and powerful comrades), *inpu no tami* 殷富の民 (prosperous and wealthy people), *fumin* 富民 (wealthy people), *gōmin* 豪民 (powerful people), etc.

Along with accounts of the rich the *Nihon ryōiki* portrays the lives of the contemporary laboring populace and describes the joys and sorrows of the common people. Among the destitute people depicted are a mother and her children who are too poor to obtain food (I-13, 24; III-11); an impoverished widow who scavenges for fallen stalks of grain in the autumn (I-33); and two fisherman, an adult male and a young boy, who “receive an annual payment in wages” and who “are driven to work both day and night” (III-25). In many cases these indigent people are not personally subordinate to any particular household head, and they commonly belong to broken families. Also described are an orphan girl who loses her fortune after her wealthy and powerful parents die (II-34), and extremely poor women who gain good fortune and great wealth (II-28, 42). Such episodes appear again and again in this work as examples of how, despite everyone’s dreams of wealth and rank, the unfathomable vicissitudes of life continue, accompanied by anxiety and unusual occurrences. The historical reality

⁴ References to the *Nihon ryōiki* below are from the edition by ENDŌ and KASUGA (1967). The text consists of three fascicles, with thirteen stories in the first fascicle, twenty-four stories in the second fascicle, and eleven stories in the third fascicle. References below cite the fascicle and story number: e.g., I-13 refers to story number 13 in the first fascicle. For an English translation of this text see NAKAMURA 1973.

underlying these events was none other than the transition of the ancient commoner class (*kōmin*) to the various levels of the medieval peasant class (*hyakushō*), with some individuals emerging as wealthy and others as destitute. The *Nihon ryōiki* interprets these overall developments from the Buddhist standpoint of causality (*inga* 因果)—not, of course, in order to sanction such vicissitudes, but to stress, by utilizing people’s fear of misfortune and uncertainty, the inescapability of karmic effects (*genpō* 現報). The work is not an attempt to explain in Buddhist terms the rise of the *fugōsō* and portray its members as the new supporters of society; its aim, rather, is to disseminate the doctrine of causality through a portrayal of the severity, the misfortune, the joys, and the sorrows of the world at the time of the transition to the medieval era.

The *Nihon ryōiki*’s teachings, however, are based on more than just descriptions of the vicissitudes of life. The work also urges a reorientation in values and thinking. The preface to the first fascicle says, in a section on demonstrating cause and effect, “How could one show deference only to the traditions and records of other countries, and not believe in or tremble before the extraordinary events in our own land?” (ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 55). That is, from a recognition of the inevitability of karmic effects there arises an awareness of “our land” (*jido* 自土), in the sense that the universal principles revealed in the Buddhist teachings penetrate “our land” too. There is, admittedly, a certain national consciousness in this awareness of “our land,” since it is referred to in contrast with other lands, but the primary emphasis of the statement itself is on the notion of an all-penetrating universal truth. When in another passage the *Nihon ryōiki* says, “Paragons of good appear even in this remote land during our auspicious age” (III-19), it is stressing that the effects of karmic causes appear unfailingly even in this small, peripheral land. What it is not doing is preaching a theory of uniqueness (i.e., that Buddhist truths have a unique way of manifesting themselves in Japan), as in, for instance, the Kamakura-period discourse on Japan as the “land of the kami” (*shinkoku shisō* 神国思想).⁵ Thus the historical identity of the *Nihon ryōiki* should be seen in its recognition of the universality of Buddhist truth, and in its perception that the vicissitudes of both the rich and the poor are simply expressions of this truth.

⁵ See, for instance, the *Shasekishū* 沙石集, fasc. 1, pt. 1, Tale on Kōken (1110–1193) of the Miidera temple (for English translation see MORRELL 1985, pp. 76–79). On *shinkoku shisō* see my essay “Chūsei kokka to shinkoku shisō” in KURODA 1995a, pp. 3–82, which deals with this question and explains it briefly. [See also the articles in this issue, “The Discourse on the ‘Land of Kami’ (*Shinkoku*) in Medieval Japan” and “Religion, Ideology of Domination, and Nationalism: Kuroda Toshio on the Discourse of *Shinkoku*.”]

Next I would like to consider the sense of fear that people felt toward the inescapable workings of karma. This fear is reflected in the *Nihon ryōiki*'s descriptions of the mysterious thaumaturgic powers of the three treasures of Buddhism (Buddha, dharma, and saṃgha), as in the above-mentioned "How could one...not believe in or tremble before the extraordinary events?", or, "A sense of shame arose in them, and there was no end to their fright" (II-9, ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 205). What is expressed here is neither logic nor reverential praise, but fear of a transcendent thaumaturgic power. In this connection we should note the relationship of such power to the authority of the emperor, who in the ancient period stood as an absolute, transcendent entity. In one tale, entitled "On Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures, Honoring the Clerical Community, Having Sutras Recited, and Attaining Karmic Results in the Present" (I-32), this relationship is described in the following archetypal way. Emperor Shōmu (701–756) was hunting in the upper county of Sō when a deer ran into a peasant's house in a village there. Not knowing whose deer it was, the householder killed and ate it. Later the emperor, hearing this, sent agents to have the people of the household arrested. "At that time more than ten men and women all met with this tribulation. In body they trembled, and in heart they were frightened, for they had no one to fall back on. Their only thought was what, if not the supernatural power of the three treasures, could possibly save them from this profound tribulation" (ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, pp. 149–51). Upon taking refuge in the sixteen-foot Buddha of the Daian-ji temple and reciting sutras, they received a general amnesty on the felicitous occasion of an imperial prince's birth.

The emperor's authority, as reflected in this story, was definitely a "tribulation" (*nan* 難) to be feared, something transcending right and wrong. Here we can see a distinct psychological characteristic of the ancient Asian-style community structure and the authority of the autocratic ruler that was rooted in it. I believe that the feelings of the people toward the three treasures, wherein they "could not help but believe in or tremble before" the Buddha, dharma, and saṃgha, were more or less of the same type as those felt toward the emperor. It was this ancient-style fear that prompted people to put faith in the Buddhist teachings. But precisely because of this, as we can see in the story, the Buddhist teachings came to be recognized as a force that could deliver people from the power of the emperor. On the one hand, the emperor is portrayed in the *Nihon ryōiki* as a figure with the capacity to control thunder: "How could even the god of thunder not accept the emperor's invitation?" (I-1; ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 65)

On the other hand, he is relegated to a position of lesser strength before the Buddhist teachings, which are absolute and universal principles. Even though “all things in the emperor’s country are things belonging to the country’s emperor,” and “events occur at the sovereign pleasure of the country’s emperor,” still he was not regarded as absolute compared to Buddhism, as reflected in the statement, “A Buddhist meditation master accomplished in both wisdom and practice, when he reincarnated as a human, was born as the son of the emperor” (III-39; ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 289–91). Thus the ancient feeling of fear toward the emperor served as a medium through which the absolute authority of the Buddhist teachings was recognized, as a result of which the power of the emperor became relativized.

These conditions may have been gestating from as early as the time of Emperor Shōmu, who bowed down before the Great Buddha of Nara and declared himself “a slave of the three treasures.” But it should be noted that by the time of the *Nihon ryōiki* these feelings penetrated the lives of the common people too and were comprehended in terms of concrete events. From this time there also began to appear a natural shift in social standards concerning what is noble and what is lowly (*kisen* 貴賤), or exalted and reviled (*sonpi* 尊卑). Already in the *Nihon ryōiki* the secular authority of the emperor no longer set the standard for judging the noble—the Buddhist teachings had emerged as a superior standard. Along with such conventional expressions as “a novice priest of lowly appearance” and “a lowly beast” (II-1, 40), there are statements that reflect Buddhist criteria for distinguishing the high and the low, as in the reference to “a lowly heart that does not reflect on karmic causes” (III-15; ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 359). Although at this point in history the concepts, found later in the medieval class structure, of the *sen* 賤 (lowly) and the *hinin* 非人 (outcasts) had not yet developed,⁶ standards of authority and status were already undergoing a reorientation through the universal principles of Buddhism, as Buddhism utilized the authority of the autocratic ruler, the people’s sense of fear, and the unenlightened feelings characteristic of the ancient Asian-style community structure for the purposes of proselytization.

Although the noble and the low were differentiated on the basis of both secular and religious standards, there was an overlap in the two standards owing to the fact that the concepts of “noble” and “low” played an important role in expressing the stratified nature of society and the religious character of authority in both the ancient and the

⁶ See my essay “Chūsei no mibunsei to hisen kannen” (KURODA 1995c, pp. 185–233).

medieval period. In ancient times, when the secular and the religious were not yet separate, the authority of the emperor stood at the pinnacle of this value system. In this connection it is important to note that throughout the entire *Nihon ryōiki* the differentiation between the “sagely” (*sei* 聖) and the “unenlightened” (*bon* 凡) is far more significant than that between the noble and the lowly, reflecting a different value system. The distinction between the sagely and the unenlightened—a purely Buddhist distinction, of course—emerged as more important than the secular social distinction between the noble and the lowly. This is the reason that the *Nihon ryōiki* asks so emphatically, “How could one not believe in and tremble before [karmic causes]?” This distinction is also responsible for the concept of the “hidden sage” (*onshin no shōnin* 隱身の聖人), as in another passage from the *Nihon ryōiki* where the seventh-century Prince Regent Shōtoku Taishi (574–622), encountering a beggar by the side of the road to Kataoka, comments, “The sage [i.e., Shōtoku Taishi] recognizes the sagely; the unenlightened person does not. The unenlightened person, with the physical eye, sees only a lowly person. The sage, with the supernatural eye, sees the hidden person” (I-4; ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 79). The *Nihon ryōiki* also records the story of Prince Nagaya, who, by striking a mendicant novice priest on the head, brought on his own downfall and suicide. “One should not hesitate to fear a member wearing the Buddhist robes, even if he is lowly in appearance, for the hidden person of a sage is united with him therein” (II-1; ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 175). In other words, such a person might not be a sage in outward appearance, but might nevertheless be able to exhibit mysterious thaumaturgic powers.

Important guises that these hidden sages might assume were those of self-ordained novice clerics (*jido no shami* 自度の沙弥) or mendicant religious practitioners, both of whom were seekers of enlightenment in the mundane world. The *Nihon ryōiki* states, “Even if [the person right before you] is a self-ordained Buddhist master, look at him with a heart of forbearance and insight, for hidden sages mingle with the unenlightened” (III-33; ENDŌ and KASUGA 1967, p. 415). Among those in this category were people who lived amongst the worldly, lent money, and kept a wife and family (III-4), and wealthy people who established and resided in clan temples (III-23). There were also many beggars, mendicants, and physically deformed people, including a woman whom “ignorant and worldly people referred to derisively as ‘Monkey Sage’ (*saruhijiri* 猴聖)” (III-19). Still others appear to have been connected with village worship halls or private temples built by villagers (III-17, 28).

From these examples an image emerges of various classes of itinerants

who were displaced as the ancient community structure dissolved. Commonly they were called *shami* 沙弥 (novice clerics) or *shōnin/hijiri* 聖人 (sages), and among them were some who had been influenced by Buddhism, such as the aforementioned self-ordained *shami*. There were also many who undoubtedly had no connection with Buddhism, such as thaumaturges of folk religion, the financially ruined, the disabled, and the deranged. The *Nihon ryōiki*, however, interprets popular thaumaturgic beliefs and practices too as embodiments of the Buddhist teachings. Such things confirm that the notions of “sage” and “unenlightened” were being applied to the deepest realities of society. We can also discern therein the foundations of *shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合 thought (the identification of the kami with the buddhas), which later gave rise to mountain asceticism (*sangaku shugen* 山岳修験) and beliefs in ominous spirits (*goryō shinkō* 御霊信仰). It is important to note that the incarnated sage was recognized in many guises, not just in exalted figures such as Shōtoku Taishi or the great Nara priest Gyōki 行基 (668–749).⁷

Nevertheless, this shift in values, wherein the lowly was equated to the unenlightened, can be detected in only one example, that of the hidden sage. Such limited evidence reflects a certain weakness on the part of the common people, an inability to assert their spiritual independence or to conceive of themselves as active agents. Or, to put it more accurately, this image of the common people was the only one that the *Nihon ryōiki* was capable of. The question, however, is whether this was an accurate expression of the overall consciousness of the people during this period. It goes without saying that it was not. This is demonstrated by the very rise of the *gōmin* elite, frequently referred to in the *Nihon ryōiki*. Strictly speaking, the work looks upon this elite neither positively nor negatively. Yet the very existence of the *gōmin* indicates that the common people, both rich and poor, desired to be independent agents acting on the basis of their own will and desire—if such drives toward selfhood and autonomy were absent no one would have made the efforts necessary to achieve wealth and power. However, there is no reason why Kyōkai, the compiler of the *Nihon ryōiki*, should have developed this point in any logical way, considering his doctrinal standpoint from within Nara Buddhism.

Unification of Religion under Esoteric Buddhism

A far more positive response to the ninth-century common people’s

⁷ U1 Hakuju (1951, p. 11), points out regarding the *Nihon ryōiki*’s portrayal of Gyōki as a bodhisattva, “It was previously thought that this was linked to the *honji suijaku* theory.”

desire to overcome the ancient thaumaturgic bonds and perceive themselves as independent agents was the founding of the Tendai school by Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and the Shingon school by Kūkai 空海 (774–835). What contemporary intellectual trends did the development of Heian Buddhism, originating in Saichō’s and Kūkai’s schools, signify? Here I would like to summarize what I feel to be their fundamental characteristics.

The first point to make is that both Saichō and Kūkai advocated a Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective. As has been noted elsewhere (see TAKATORI 1955), Mahāyāna fit the needs of the social classes seeking liberation and independence, especially the provincial commoner classes from the *gōmin* on down. Saichō’s doctrine that “all sentient beings have the Buddha nature,” and Kūkai’s concept of the “inseparability of the sage and the unenlightened,” though already well established on the Asian continent, had an enormous historical significance in Japan owing to their congruity with the most pressing intellectual themes of the period. The question of what place Mahāyāna Buddhism held in ancient Asian society and what role it played in various social constructs is, of course, quite large and complex. But in Japan Mahāyāna developed in close and inseparable connection with the disintegration of the ancient autocratic state. From the standpoint of the common people, it appears to have performed the function of transforming their aspirations into religious doctrine.

Saichō’s and Kūkai’s thought, however, was not simply a proxy for the consciousness of lower-class commoners, much less an agent of confrontation with the ruling authorities. It is true that each figure in his own way opposed Nara Buddhism, which since the previous age had been united with state authority. Not only did they work for new, independent religious organizations and develop systematic classifications of doctrine (*kyōsō hanjaku* 教相判釈), but they also created “schools” (*shū* 宗) in a new sense—that is, religious organizations centering around master-disciple lineages rather than around doctrinal fields of study, as in the earlier six schools of Nara Buddhism. But we should not overestimate Saichō’s and Kūkai’s goals, thinking they intended to make religion and its thought completely independent of state authority. On the contrary, both of them petitioned the state to sponsor priests in their schools, and by imperial consent they each received two new priests annually (*nenbun dosha* 年分度者). Even the Mahāyāna ordination platform that Saichō wished to establish at Enryaku-ji, and over which he clashed so much with the Nara temples, was finally established, after Saichō’s death, only through imperial decree. In short, both Saichō and Kūkai sought to build their schools

within the framework of state authority, and relied upon it for approval. This characteristic was quite straightforwardly expressed in their thought from the very founding of their schools, in their emphasis on protection of the state (*chingo kokka*).

It would be wrong to take *chingo kokka* as a posture that compromises one's religious stature by offering unreserved service to the authorities. It is one thing to glorify unconditionally the country's sovereign and power holders, and to propound an unvarnished rationale in direct service to them. But the Mahāyāna concept of "benefiting self and benefiting others" (*jiri rita* 自利利他) gives rise to the idea of promoting peace and protecting the state in the sense of defending the people. Thus we should not perceive the concept of *chingo kokka* as indicative only of an obedient servant trailing behind the existing powers. Nonetheless, the writings of Saichō and Kūkai show a pronounced tendency to emphasize *chingo kokka* in the sense of aggrandizing the power of the sovereign and the state system of rule, although they also include the sense of defending the people (see MATSUNAGA 1969, p. 191). Although the desire of the people below for autonomy provided Saichō and Kūkai with a groundwork for developing their theories of Mahāyāna Buddhism, at the same time neither Saichō nor Kūkai claimed superiority for religious authority over secular authority. And, as just noted, both figures sought the rulers' approval of religion as an entity beneficial to the state and unilaterally defined religion as an agent in service to state power.

The grounds for this attitude lay in the particular historical conditions that existed in Japan during this period, not in some general tendency of Mahāyāna Buddhism. At this stage of impending transition from the disintegrating Asian-style community structure to the medieval period the illusion of the unassailable character of state authority was still firmly rooted, as can be seen from the enactment of the political "reforms" of Emperor Kanmu's reign. In addition, there was at this time a strong assertion of the particular social and political relationships of power lodged in the reactionary response of the ruling class. Hence Saichō's stress on *chingo kokka* should not be regarded as simply a compromise of Mahāyāna's lofty ideas. Rather, whether because of the climate of the times or the attitudes of the people involved, it should be seen from the outset as the only thing possible under the circumstances.

In addition to the rise of *chingo kokka* thought out of Mahāyāna Buddhism, another feature of Heian Buddhism that should be noted is the rapid development of *mikkyō* 密教 (the esoteric teachings) from the early Heian period.

Even in the period when Saichō and Kūkai were active the fact that Kūkai had a deeper understanding of *mikkyō* than Saichō did was one factor contributing to his success in the rivalry between the two. After Saichō's death the Tendai priests Ennin 円仁 (794-864) and Enchin 円珍 (814-891) traveled to China, where they studied the latest esoteric teachings. Upon their return to Japan they strove to develop an independent *mikkyō* tradition in the Tendai school. Ennin in his classification of the teachings propounded the doctrine of the "One Great Perfect Teaching" (*ichidaienyō* 一大円教), consisting first of an absolute standpoint (*zettaikan* 絶待観) wherein all separate, dependent entities disappear—i.e., wherein the distinctions between all forms of Buddhist thought and belief are transcended and the absolute value of each is recognized without preference—but also of a relative standpoint (*sōtaikan* 相待観) wherein separate, dependent entities are again recognized. Based on this perspective, Ennin made a distinction between the exoteric teachings (*kengyō* 顕教) and the esoteric teachings (*mikkyō*), and a further distinction between practice (*ji* 事) and principle (*ri* 理) within the esoteric teachings. The exoteric teachings consist of the teachings of the three vehicles (i.e., lower Mahāyāna), while the esoteric teachings consist of those of the single vehicle (i.e., higher Mahāyāna). Within the esoteric teachings there was also a differentiation made between sutras such as the *Lotus*, which embody only esoteric principle (*rimitsu* 理密), and those such as the *Dainichi*, which encompass both esoteric practice and esoteric principle (*jiri gumitsu* 事理俱密). This last category was considered the highest.

Enchin, likewise working from the doctrine of the One Great Perfect Teaching, went on to advocate the superiority of *mikkyō* and the inferiority of *kengyō*. This interpretive trend continued, reaching maturity in the theories of Tendai esotericism (*taimitsu* 台密) formulated by Annen 安然 (841-889?). Annen, who also based his thought on the doctrine of the One Great Perfect Teaching, organized and classified Buddhism in all its forms, integrating them into a grand system with four concise categories: one Buddha, one period, one place, and one teaching. Annen proposed the term *shingonshū*, "mantra school," to describe it all. The doctrine of the One Great Perfect Teaching, which can be traced back to I-hsing 一行 (673-727) in China, was inherited equally by all esoteric Buddhist thought, including Kūkai's doctrine of the "nine forms of exoteric teaching and the tenth (and highest) esoteric teaching" (*kuken jūmitsu* 九顯十密; SHIMAJI 1964, p. 361). The fact that Ennin, Enchin, and Annen all based their thought on the doctrine of the One Great Perfect Teaching may also be seen as a sign of their fundamental orientation toward the esoteric teachings.

The Tendai school, however, was not the only sect devoted to eso-

teric Buddhism. From the time that Kūkai established the Shingon-in subtemple at Tōdai-ji, Nara Buddhism too displayed a strong esoteric inclination. I will not go into this topic in detail here, but it is necessary to note that although Tendai, Shingon, and Nara Buddhism, as the three great religious powers of the early Heian period, inevitably fell into conflict, there was at the same time a similarity in their development. As ŌYA Tokujō comments,

In the end they all merged into the current of esoteric Buddhism, producing three branches—Tendai esotericism (*taimitsu*), Shingon esotericism (*tōmitsu* 東密), and Nara esotericism (*nanmitsu* 南密, if I may call it that).... Heian belief and practice became almost totally esoteric, for life could be preserved through *mikkyō*'s endorsement. (1929)

Nor was this phenomenon of esotericization limited to Buddhism. The practice of identifying the kami with the buddhas, which began in the eighth century, flourished all the more in the ninth. In the process the worship of Shinto spirits (*jingi sūhai* 神祇崇拜) was inevitably esotericized, and such things as mountain asceticism (*sangaku tosō* 山岳抖擻) became part of esoteric practice. Also, Onmyōdō 陰陽道 (the yin-yang tradition) created a social atmosphere of superstitious concepts that stimulated the popularization of esoteric incantations and prayers (*kaji kitō* 加持祈禱), thus playing an important role in the formation of one area of esoteric practice (see MURAYAMA 1960).

Within this trend toward esotericization, where did the individuality of the respective schools lie? What, for instance, characterized the Tendai school *as* Tendai? Tendai was not, as is generally thought today, a body of immutable doctrine established by Saichō. Rather, as can be seen in the doctrinal classifications developed and brought to maturity by Ennin, Enchin, and Annen, it was based on the transmission of forms of doctrinal argumentation centered on the perfect teachings of the *Lotus* (*Hokke engyō* 法華円教), but at the same time it propounded the “four-fold transmission” (*shishusōjō* 四種相承) of the perfect *Lotus*, of esotericism, of meditation, and of the precepts (*enmitsu zen kai* 円密禅戒), with a particular emphasis on the unity of the perfect *Lotus* and the esoteric teachings. In this sense *taimitsu*, Tendai esotericism, refers to the distinctive form of doctrine and practice found in the esotericism that developed within the Tendai's religious establishment on Mt. Hiei, an esotericism predicated on the view that *Lotus* thought and the esoteric teachings are not heterogeneous but exist in harmony. Based on this, what is distinctive about Tendai esotericism is that the concepts and rationale found in its classification of the teachings depend on Tendai's five fundamental interpretive

principles (*gojū gengi* 五重玄義) as well as the doctrines (*soshitsuji-hō* 蘇悉地法) transmitted to Japan via the esoteric sutra known as the *Soshitsuji-kyō* (see SHIMAJI 1964, p. 376; SHIMIZUDANI 1929, p. 222, and 1972, p. 349).

In short, it was not that there was a pure and immutable body of Tendai *Lotus* thought onto which the esoteric teachings were grafted and later flourished. Rather, a unique form of the esoteric teaching endowed with the features of Tendai *Lotus* thought—specifically, that found in its doctrinal dimensions at the time Annen lived—emerged and reached full maturity. The Tendai school’s individuality lies here. Nevertheless, the school definitely did undergo a process of esoterization. Within the sphere of esoteric thought, Shingon esotericism (*tōmitsu*) recognized only *jiri gumitsu*, the esoteric that encompasses both practice and principle, whereas Tendai esotericism included both *jiri gumitsu* and *rimitsu*, the esoteric of principle only. This was one of the distinguishing features of Tendai esotericism. But in the end, the decisive characteristic of esoteric Buddhism, whether Tendai or Shingon, was the supreme value placed upon esoteric practice (*jimitsu* or *mikkyō jisō* 密教事相)—that is, upon actual praxis found in religious techniques and ritualized forms (see SHIMAJI 1964, p. 377). Practice was valued so highly because esoteric Buddhism saw it as expressing fully its doctrinal ideal of an all-encompassing affirmation that transcends differentiation. Annen, who applied the doctrine of the One Great Perfect Teaching on the grandest and most extensive scale and who developed a system for unifying all religion, incorporated the so-called exoteric teachings into that system. But at the same time he dared to call the system the “mantra school” (*shingonshū*), based on a new standard of values where esoteric practice (*jimitsu*) was considered supreme.

In summary, I believe the fundamental nature of the interactions between the various religious traditions during the ninth and tenth centuries was for all religions to be subsumed or unified under esotericism as the ultimate, underlying principle. The custom of intersecarian studies (*kyōgaku no kenshū* 教学の兼修) that prevailed in the various Buddhist schools was thus predicated on a belief in the absolute superiority of the esoteric teachings. In *shinbutsu shūgō* thought (whether in the concept of *gohō zenshin* 護法善神 or *shinjin ridatsu* 神身離脱),⁸ the identification of the kami with the buddhas presupposed the subservience of the former to the latter—it was definitely not a relationship in which the kami stood on an equal footing with

⁸ *Gohō zenjin* refers to good kami who protect the Buddhist teachings; *shinjin ridatsu* is the notion that Buddhism liberates the kami from their present incarnations.

the buddhas.

Thus the religious history of the early Heian period, broadly viewed, can be described as a process where all religions and schools were subsumed under the esoteric teachings and formed a unified system. Put in another way, a distinctive form of esoteric thought, containing constitutive elements peculiar to Japan—in short, a Japanese form of esoteric Buddhism—came into existence.

The Basis for the Establishment of a Japanese Form of Esoteric Buddhism

As indicated above, all Japanese religion moved toward a state of unification under esoteric Buddhism, but the esoteric teachings that developed in Japan were not identical in philosophy or essential characteristics to the esotericism handed down from the time of Indian Buddhism. Rather, the Japanese teachings had their own special concrete features. Here I would like to explore what social and intellectual conditions underlaid their formation.

The first thing to note about this Japanese form of esoteric Buddhism is that, apart from mountain and forest asceticism (*sanrin tosō*), which remained unchanged from ancient times, “prayers and thaumaturgic methods representing degenerate applications of esoteric practices” were prevalent even within the original sphere of esoteric ritual (see SHIMAJI 1964, p. 383). These “prayers and thaumaturgic methods” included practices aimed at producing rain, safeguarding childbirth, healing diseases, defeating enemy countries, subjugating rebels, and attaining bliss in this world and the next, and it was widely assumed in society that such things represented the original purpose of the esoteric Buddhist teachings. Also, unique religious practices were developed for use as preparatory exercises on the occasion of esoteric initiations (*kanjō* 灌頂). These exercises have been identified as one example of departures from the original esoteric teachings (see SHIMAJI 1964, p. 409). Such activities should not be seen as representative of the original, standard form of esoteric Buddhism, for they were tinged with superstitious qualities that differ from the fundamental thought of Buddhism. They were closer in character to Japan’s ancient religious asceticism. The successive masters of the Tendai school tended to emphasize the dimension of praxis in esoteric Buddhism, and developed a classification of teachings that de-emphasized, relatively speaking, the perfect *Lotus* teaching, which Saichō had advanced as the highest ideal. They did so not because the theories of esoteric Buddhism were superior to those of other teachings, but because such prayers and thaumaturgic methods were in demand

in society at that period, and because Tendai's relevance as a school was in question if it did not respond to this demand. The significance of the *taimitsu* theories is that they were the product of the Tendai school's attempts to show doctrinal correspondences to prayers and thaumaturgic methods.

The next thing to note is that the prayers and thaumaturgic methods performed in the name of esoteric Buddhism were linked to the *chingo kokka* (protection of the state) theory described earlier, which strongly connoted service to the ruling powers. Specifically, the means of protecting the state were none other than prayers and thaumaturgic methods. To the extent that such methods were considered the actualization of the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideal, the state itself was inevitably placed in a position where, for the purposes of rule, it had to fill a religious and thaumaturgic role even as it focused on the wishes of the people. Although it is impossible without examining the exact contents of these esoteric prayers to grasp in depth their logical structure as an ideology, for now all we need to recognize is that esotericization did not stop simply at matters relating to the respective Buddhist schools, but extended to ones of the state as well.

What, then, was the social basis for the rise and development of a Japanese form of esotericism with these distinctive features? The customs of the aristocracy and its superstitious view of life are frequently cited as the reasons for the efflorescence of esoteric Buddhism in the Heian period, but we must not assume that they were the sole factors. One important avenue for exploring this issue is the belief in ominous spirits (*goryō shinkō*), which pervaded town and country in the ninth to tenth centuries.⁹ A typical example of such beliefs was that the spirit (*goryō*) of a notable person who had met an untimely death amid political intrigue would cause epidemics; rituals would thus be performed to pacify the spirit (*chinkon* 鎮魂) and quell the misfortune (*jōsai* 大災). Such beliefs originally arose among the common people. It is true there were special circumstances underlying *goryō shinkō*, linked to the dark political rivalries within the aristocracy during the early Heian period. But as a form of cultic belief it had affinities, as alluded to earlier, with such practices as pacifying spirits (*chinkon*), dispatching the dead (*sōsō* 葬判), nullifying wrongdoings (*metsuzai* 滅罪), and inviting good fortune (*shōfuku* 招福), all performed by thaumaturges among the common people of this period.

The first documentary evidence of *goryō shinkō* appears in a refer-

⁹ See the articles in KYŌTO DAIGAKU BUNGA KUBU DOKUSHIKAI 1959, e.g., by Shibata Minoru, "Gion goryōe: Sono seiritsu to igi"; Iwaki Takatoshi, "Goryō shinkō no hassei"; and Takatori Masao, "Goryōe no seiritsu to shoki Heiankyō no jūmin."

ence to a *goryōe* 御霊会, or spirit ceremony, dated the fifth month of 863 (5th year of Jōgan). This was the last year of Ennin's life, and also the time when Shingon esotericism, which went into decline after Kūkai, was finally beginning to show new life. The *goryōe* performed then, at the imperial site in Kyoto known as the Shinsen'en, already showed Buddhist influence and the involvement of the aristocracy. The Buddhist sutras chanted on this occasion included the *Konkō-myōkyō* 金光明經 [Golden light sutra] and the *Hannyashingyō* 般若心經 [Heart sutra], scriptures often used for quelling calamity and beseeching good fortune, and also for protecting the state. Thus in this instance we can see a clear and unifying link between Buddhism, the state, and the thaumaturgic ceremonies of the common people. The *goryō* were usually looked upon by the common people as evil spirits (*akuryō* 悪霊), individuals who, upon death, invaded and disrupted daily life. But they were the product of a consciousness separate from that found in the traditional festivals and rites (*saishi* 祭祀) of the ancient Asian-style community structure, as exemplified by the cult of the "Chinese deity" (*karakami* 漢神) mentioned in the *Nihon ryōiki* (II-5), to whom oxen were sacrificed in worship. That is, these were not simply individual vengeful spirits (*onryō* 怨霊), but were typically linked to political intrigues of the state, and thus received recognition and popularization far beyond the scope of any local cult. What this means, to put it another way, is that calamities and disasters in general were seen as related to the course of state events. Hence these spirits, commensurate with their degree of recognition and popularization, had to be subjugated through worship on a broader basis—that of the state, transcending the localized festivals and spirit rites of the ancient period. For that reason Buddhism was necessary. What Buddhism offered in this context was not, of course, advanced philosophical principles but rather, at a much more mundane level, thaumaturgic powers. But this thaumaturgy was not submerged in a natural, localized community structure as before. Instead, it had a generalized and translocal character, linking it broadly to the good or ill fortunes of individuals caught up in the process of urbanization as the ancient community structure disintegrated.

The thaumaturgic cult of the pacification of spirits outlined above was the most suitable soil for esoteric Buddhism to grow in. Buddhism, however, did not simply configure thaumaturgic methods to social demands, but also ennobled them with the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideal of protecting the land and the people. Although these practices did, in part, involve a low-level thaumaturgic mentality deriving from the common people's circumstances, as seen above in the world of the

Nihon ryōiki, at the same time they were undergirded by the new aspirations of the peasants for independent, small-scale operations of their own. Such thaumaturgic practices are exemplified in the cult of the Shidara kami, a “foreign deity” worshiped with singing and dancing in order to eradicate epidemic (see SHIBATA 1966 and TODA 1967). We must note, however, that these ominous-spirit cults were organized from the top down by the ruling class. Thus esoteric Buddhism’s prayers for the protection of the state also found a basis as religious ideology in this context.

The attempts by masters of esoteric doctrine in the various schools to develop complex classificatory systems of Buddhist doctrine may be seen as efforts to formulate a rationale for organizing and unifying the chaotic thaumaturgic teachings that prevailed during this period of transition. To investigate this rationale from just the perspective of Buddhist studies or the history of philosophy is itself quite an undertaking. All the more so the tasks, at present barely underway, of analyzing the true condition of Japanese esotericism, of understanding the historical circumstances that rendered its development inevitable, of plumbing the depths of its doctrine, and of grasping the workings and tensions of its thought.

Pure Land Buddhism and Esoteric Buddhism

In contrast to the ninth century, which, as discussed above, was characterized by the unification of the various forms of Japanese religion under esoteric Buddhism, the tenth century was distinguished by the growth of Pure Land Buddhism. I would now like to consider the relationship between the two, addressing particularly the question of whether Pure Land Buddhism arose as an alternative to, and as something qualitatively different from, esoteric Buddhism.

Generally, Pure Land Buddhism became popular in the period from the height of the Fujiwara regency in the tenth century to the rule of the retired emperors (Insei 院政) in the twelfth century. Among the reasons commonly given for its rise are the spread of *mappō* 末法 thought and the increase in social and political instability. Political confusion, the ineffectuality of the aristocratic class, and public disorders are all said to have stimulated ideas of “abandoning the tainted world” (*onri edo* 厭離穢土) and “longing for the Pure Land” (*gongu jōdo* 欣求淨土). Scholars have identified differences in outlook and intellectual inclination between the social classes, thus explaining the widely contrasting approaches to Pure Land Buddhism’s central practice of *nenbutsu*, ranging from the aristocracy’s aesthetic medita-

tive visualizations to the common people's thaumaturgic or frenzied calling of Amida's name. They also cite the activities of the *hijiri* 聖, the wandering holy men who symbolized liberation from the formal Buddhism of the temples and whose presence indicated a broad-based popular support for Pure Land Buddhism.¹⁰

Doctrinal explanations for the rise of the *nenbutsu* emphasize its linear development from *jōgyō zanmai* 常行三昧 (the Tendai constant-practice meditation retreat) to the *fudan nenbutsu* 不断念仏 (the continual *nenbutsu* chant), and from there to the thought of the great Pure Land classic, the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集. This perception of the *nenbutsu*'s lineal evolution is the result, first, of efforts by the influential modern schools of the *senju nenbutsu* 専修念仏 (exclusive *nenbutsu*) tradition to trace their roots in doctrinal history. It is also the result, however, of the Tendai sect's doctrinalization of *nenbutsu* thought, particularly in the context of its promotion of Ryōgen 良源 (912-985) as the restorer (*chūkō* 中興) of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei. This is why, despite the fact that the *nenbutsu* is known to have also prospered outside of Mt. Hiei in the Nara temples and the Shingon monastic complex on Mt. Kōya, and despite the knowledge that esoteric Buddhism was of great significance in providing a soil for the *nenbutsu* to flourish in, the dominant view remains that the Pure Land teachings developed in a direct line extending from Tendai doctrine to the *senju nenbutsu*. If it is true, though, that Mt. Hiei is where the Pure Land teachings thrived the most, it is all the more important to determine how they emerged within the broad, unifying influence of esoteric Buddhism described in the previous section.

It is standard to trace the origins of the *nenbutsu* on Mt. Hiei to the *jōgyō zanmai* meditation retreat, one of the four types of meditation retreat described in the Chinese T'ien-t'ai treatise, the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀. But in fact the *nenbutsu* first began on Mt. Hiei when Ennin introduced the *fudan nenbutsu* in 866 (Jōgan 8). The *fudan nenbutsu*, which was performed at the Constant Practice Meditation Hall (Jōgyō Zanmaidō) established by Ennin on Mt. Hie, was adopted from the five-tone, chorus-chanting method of *nenbutsu* (*goe nenbutsu* 五会念仏) that originated at the Mt. Wu-t'ai 五台山 monastic complex in China, where the tendency to syncretize teachings was strong. In function, the *fudan nenbutsu* has been described as a religious method of repentance and nullification of wrongdoings (*metsuzai zange* 滅罪懺悔) (see SONODA 1969). Thus the implementation of the *fudan nenbutsu* as

¹⁰ Works dealing with this topic are numerous. Among the ones I should mention are HORI 1953, INOUE 1956 and 1971, and articles contained in the "Kodaihen" section of FUJISHIMA and MIYAZAKI 1969.

Tendai's constant practice meditation retreat was tantamount to implementing a method of *metsuzai zange* as Tendai's gate of practice, a gate that properly should have consisted of Tendai *shikan* 止観 meditation. Clearly, this must have been the product of Tendai's entry into a religious climate of pacifying spirits, nullifying wrongdoings, dispatching the dead, and quelling misfortune, a climate that inspired Ennin to create Tendai esotericism.

Kūya 空也 (903–972), an itinerant holy man known as the “marketplace *hijiri*” who spread the *nenbutsu* among the people, is described as having originally been a thaumaturgic religious figure who pacified and dispatched spirits of the dead. He can therefore be clearly situated within the process of religious development that emerged from the common people's concern with thaumaturgy and the pacification of ominous spirits. Buddhist scholars have pointed out that Kūya's *nenbutsu* was never just a thaumaturgic practice, but was grounded in the true nature of the *nenbutsu* as a Mahāyāna Bodhisattva practice (FUTABA 1969). In considering Kūya, however, no one proposes that thaumaturgic methods, in and of themselves, evolved into *nenbutsu* practice. In the background were new developments in aristocratic society, all based on the pervasive esoteric thought. Specifically, there was a shift in ritual format, from “sutra reading by day and mantra recitation at night” to “religious lectures by day and *nenbutsu* at night.” For example, the Kangakue 勧学会 (Association for the encouragement of learning) and the Nijūgo Zanmaie 二十五三昧会 (Twenty-five member meditation association), based in Sakamoto at the foot of Mt. Hiei and influenced by Kūya's propagation of the *nenbutsu*, studied the *Lotus Sutra* before midday and practiced the *nenbutsu* in the afternoon. Following the *nenbutsu* they performed the Kōmyō Shingon 光明真言 (Pervasive light mantra) and the Kaji Dosha 加持土砂 (Earth incantation), which were said to be efficacious in nullifying wrongdoings and transferring merit to others (*metsuzai tsuizen* 滅罪追善) (see HAYAMI 1968 and 1969). Thus Kūya's world already recognized a connection extending from the thaumaturgic methods of pacifying spirits through the mantra to the *nenbutsu*. Kūya used these as a base in disseminating the *nenbutsu* in the opposite direction, to the common people. In his wake there was explosive development among the populace of the *nenbutsu* known as the “hometown *nenbutsu*” (*kyōri* 郷里 *nenbutsu*). This in turn stimulated the development of the Kangakue, composed of middle-level aristocratic literati and clerics from Mt. Hiei, and, by extension, inspired one cleric among them, Genshin, to compile the *Ōjōyōshū*.

Concerning Genshin 源信 (942–1017) and his Pure Land teachings, it is commonly said that he sought to revive the *Lotus* teachings of

Tendai and define a Tendai format for the *nenbutsu*, and even that he leaned toward discarding the esoteric mantra as a practice (see ISHIDA 1970). I believe, however, that it is necessary to understand Genshin in relation to his master Ryōgen, who with his considerable political influence revived the fortunes of Mt. Hiei and ushered in a period of Tendai efflorescence. Ryōgen's thinking was grounded firmly in the idea of the unity of exoteric and esoteric teachings (*kenmitsu itchi 顯密一致*) (see SHIMAJI 1964). The prosperity of Mt. Hiei's temples and doctrines under him comprised a form of Tendai self-assertion, all predicated on exoteric-esoteric unity. Ryōgen's disciple Genshin also worked from this assumption. Typically, Genshin's *nenbutsu* is considered to function totally within the framework of a Tendai perspective, in contrast to the later *senju nenbutsu* or Shingon *nenbutsu* (see ISHIDA 1962, p. 130). But to put Genshin's contribution more positively, he took the *nenbutsu*, which up to that time had been thaumaturgic and not clearly distinguished from the mantra, and gave it doctrinal underpinnings as a *nenbutsu* of meditative visualization (*kanjin 觀心 nenbutsu*), grounded in Tendai *shikan* meditation. In doing so, he carried forward the Tendai school's doctrinal self-assertion within the system of exoteric-esoteric unity. Genshin and Kakuun 覺運 (953-1007) developed Tendai doctrine in a meditative (*kanjin*) direction, and came to be viewed as the patriarchs of Tendai's Eshin and Danna branches respectively. Subsequently, Kakuchō 覺超 (953/960?-1034), who studied for a time under Genshin, succeeded Ryōgen in the Tendai lineage of esoteric teachings of the Kazan branch 華山流. He founded the "River lineage" (Kawa-ryū 川流) of Tendai esoteric practice, which mediated the exoteric with the esoteric. Kōkei 皇慶 (977-1049), who was closely linked to Kakuun, established the "Valley lineage" (Tani-ryū 祀流), which specialized exclusively in esoteric practices and further advanced Tendai esotericism. The Tendai features of Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* should be situated in the context of these developments. Thus it is problematic to describe the "*nenbutsu* of Mt. Hiei" (*yama no nenbutsu 山の念仏*), including that of Genshin's Pure Land teachings, as dismissive of the esoteric teachings. Even Genshin's *nenbutsu* of meditative visualization cannot be understood in a comprehensive way if defined only in terms of its differences with the thaumaturgic "hometown *nenbutsu*"¹¹ of the common people.¹²

¹¹ Concerning the "communal" character of the "hometown *nenbutsu*" and its link to "hometown life," see the chapter "Kyōri no *nenbutsu*" in SHIBATA 1966. It is difficult to ascertain the exact nature of the community structure among the common people in this period, but for now suffice it to say that it had significance for how the *nenbutsu* was practiced by the people.

¹² AKAMATSU (1966) points out that Kakuchō's *nenbutsu* was linked to village life in Izumi.

The emergence of the *hijiri*, in the medieval sense of the term, was a particularly noteworthy event in the history of Pure Land Buddhism subsequent to Kūya. The word *hijiri* appears frequently from ancient times on, and expressions like the “hidden sage” (*onshin no shōnin* 隱身の聖人) and the “incarnated sage” (*keshin no hijiri* 化身の聖) in works like the *Nihon ryōiki* are often regarded as signifying the same thing as the medieval *hijiri*. But in these instances the word refers to an individual or a being with thaumaturgic powers who transcends the unenlightened, and it therefore differs from its medieval counterpart. The term *hijiri* in the medieval context indicated a distinctive lifestyle reflected in clothing, behavior, and dwelling places, as found in the examples of the “itinerant *hijiri*” (*yugyō hijiri* 遊行聖) and the Mt. Kōya *hijiri*. In some cases, the word was even used to convey the idea of living an unmarried life in the style of a monk.¹³ This was not the case in the ancient period, when the outward appearance of a religious practitioner (*gyōja* 行者) or miracle-worker (*genja* 験者) as a novice cleric (*shamū*) or a mendicant (*kotsujiki* 乞食) did not specifically identify that person as a *hijiri*; rather, one was recognized as such only after being revealed to the world as a “hidden *hijiri*” or the “incarnation of a *hijiri*.” Instances of the various Chinese characters used for *hijiri* (e.g., *sei* 聖, *sen* 仙) in works prior to the ninth century all seem to convey this meaning.¹⁴ The medieval sense of the word *hijiri* developed in the tenth and eleventh century, in tandem with the efflorescence of the *nenbutsu*. Examples can be found in the *Konjaku monogatari*shū: “There is something known as an Amida *hijiri*,” and, “The Amida *hijiri* is a priest who walks about.”¹⁵ Thus, it refers, as in the example of Kūya, to a life of religious practice and good works in the form of spreading the *nenbutsu* among the common people, while forsaking both secular and monastic life without being explicitly anti-secular or anti-monastic.

This usage probably arose because the figure of the *hijiri* (in the ancient and original sense of the word) made such a strong impression on people through the example of Kūya. From his time there was a dramatic increase in the number of “Amida *hijiri* who walked about” and styled themselves in that fashion. The causes of this may be sought in the tensions and contradictions of tenth-century society, as

¹³ See, for example, “Shōnin densetsu no kotoba,” in *Wago tōroku* 和語灯録, fasc. 5, in *Jōdoshū zensho* 浄土宗全書 9, p. 609 (JŌDO-SHŪ KAISHŪ HAPPYAKUNEN KINEN KEISAN JUNBIKYOKU 1973), and *Shasekishū*, fasc. 4, no. 4 (see MORRELL 1985, pp. 145–46).

¹⁴ See the entry for Saikō 1 (854), 7th month, 22nd day, “Dankoku *hijiri*,” in the *Montoku jitsuroku* 文徳実録. Also, see instances of the word *hijiri* (or *shōnin*) in *Ruijū sandaikyaku* 類聚三代格, entries for Kōnin 3 (812), 9th month, 26th day; Jōkan 10 (868), 5th month, 15th day; and Kanbyō 9 (897), 6th month, 23rd day.

¹⁵ *Konjaku monogatari*shū 今昔物語集, fasc. 29, no. 9. See also ITŌ 1969.

expressed in such things as litigation by county officials (*gunji*) and peasants; the expanding importance of segmented agricultural and residential lands; the exclusion of middle- and lower-level aristocrats from positions of influence owing to an increased emphasis on pedigree in the aristocracy; and the isolation of the urban population. Despite the essential differences between the various classes, they all resembled each other in their isolation, self-reliance, and insecurity. This is what drove people to the *nenbutsu* and, in turn, to the practices of the *hijiri*. The reason, however, that such social conflicts led to this result was that well-developed esoteric *nenbutsu* practices were by that time firmly rooted among the people. In addition, clerics may have felt less of an urgency at this time to study scriptural commentaries and treatises and grapple with unsolved doctrinal and logical questions, since the various religious traditions had already been doctrinally unified under esoteric Buddhism—as seen, for instance, in the One Great Perfect Teaching doctrine in Tendai esotericism.

Hence the emergence of the medieval *hijiri* signified the maturing of the *nenbutsu* as one form of religious thought under the unifying influence of esoteric Buddhism. It is clear, nonetheless, that the efflorescence of Pure Land teachings—which might be described as a second stage in the esoteric unification process, since they were predicated on the practice of the *nenbutsu* rather than the performance of mantra—were the outcome of an initiative of the Tendai tradition specifically. In the wake of this achievement, *hijiri* eventually appeared in Nara Buddhism and the Shingon school as well, and each heralded a *nenbutsu* invested with the characteristics of their own school. From this time on in the Tendai school, there was an apparent shift from a doctrinal (*kyōsō* 教相) orientation to a meditative (*kanjin*) one, and from an orientation toward written works (*bunken* 文献) to one toward oral transmissions (*kuden* 口伝) (see HAZAMA 1948, vol. 2, pp. 1–10). The efflorescence of *hijiri* and the rapid increase in their number not only accommodated this shift in Mt. Hiei's sectarian atmosphere, but in fact provoked it—the change would not have been possible if not for the *hijiri* figure, who distanced himself from the monastery's sutra repository where doctrinal activity occurred.

One other very important dimension of the *hijiri* movement is that it encouraged self-assertion and a critical spirit among self-reliant individuals. Although the *nenbutsu* assemblages and associations and the *hijiri* groups residing at *bessho* 別所 (religious outposts detached from major temples) were united by shared religious regulations and a strong sense of common bond, it must not be overlooked that these groups were fundamentally different from natural communities in

that they were composed of self-aware individuals.¹⁶ People who originally became *hijiri* to cultivate good works and develop religious techniques distanced themselves from both the secular and monastic settings of daily life, and in so doing developed the potential to become critical of both the secular and the monastic. And, in fact, critics did emerge from within these groups. Nonetheless, I should emphasize that this does not mean that Pure Land Buddhism first arose as a movement opposing esoteric Buddhism. On the contrary, it was a Tendai creation realized within esoteric Buddhism's process of unifying religions.

Essential Characteristics of the Kenmitsu System

Considering the conditions, described above, under which Pure Land Buddhism developed, it must be concluded that the so-called eight schools (*hasshū* 八宗) of Buddhism in the Heian period did not exist alongside each other in a reciprocally opposing, mutually exclusive relationship, as is commonly believed today, but rather comprised a mildly competitive religious order resting on a shared base. This base was composed of thaumaturgic beliefs, practices for pacifying spirits, and (from the doctrinal standpoint) the esoteric teachings. Esoteric Buddhism was thus recognized by all eight schools as the universal and absolute truth, upon which the schools expounded their distinctive doctrines.

The relationship between the various *kenmitsu* (exoteric-esoteric) teachings was logically systematized through a classification based on both the transcendence of distinctions (*zettaikan*) (e.g., the concepts of the “One Great Perfect Teaching” [*ichidaiengyō*] and “nine forms of exoteric teaching and the tenth [and highest] esoteric teaching” [*kuken jūmitsu*]) and the recognition of distinctions (*sōtaikan*) (e.g., the concepts of “exoteric and esoteric” [*kenmitsu*], “practice and principle” [*jiri*], and “one vehicle and three vehicles” [*ichijō sanjō* 一乘三乘]). But at both the ultimate and pragmatic level these teachings were seen in terms of the combination of the exoteric and the esoteric, whether this relationship was one of “superiority and inferiority” (*shōretsu* 勝劣), “mutual dependence” (*sōgo izon* 相互依卑), “unity” (*itchi* 一致), or “perfect syncretization” (*ennyū* 円融).

Thus the word *kenmitsu* came to express the totality of Buddhism. Described in terms of stages of development, the ninth century was

¹⁶ The problem mentioned in note 11 above—i.e., the difficulty in knowing the nature of the community structure among the common people of this period—is relevant in this instance also.

when the idea of religious unity based on esoteric Buddhism was initially advanced, and the primary issue was the relative superiority or inferiority of the exoteric and esoteric teachings. From the tenth century, amidst the development of Pure Land Buddhism, the Tendai school took the lead in developing a system that, in the eleventh century, confirmed the exoteric and esoteric as coexistent entities—either as unified, as perfectly syncretized, or as mutually dependent. This system is referred to in this article as the *kenmitsu taisei*, with the word “system” signifying not a system of law or administrative control, but rather an ideological order. The logic and trends of thought characteristic of this system I refer to as “*kenmitsu ideology*” (*kenmitsu shugi* 顯密主義).

Esoteric Buddhism, characterized by a strong inclination toward prayers and thaumaturgic techniques, occupied the key position in this system and provided the basis for the respective school’s doctrines. The Shingon school, for instance, grounded such doctrines in Kūkai’s classification of teachings and in practices from the Ono and Hirosawa branches and subbranches, and boasted of Shingon esotericism’s exclusive powers. Meanwhile the Tendai school developed its unique *taimitsu* esotericism of practice and principle (*jiri*), as well as Tendai doctrines and meditations predicated on the unity of the perfect Lotus teachings and esoteric Buddhism. The principles that constituted the *kenmitsu* ideology existed not so much as fixed doctrine within each school, but rather as arguments that permeated and pervaded the teachings of various branches, lineages, or individuals through the custom of intersectarian studies (*kengaku* 兼学).

Kenmitsu ideology in its most archetypal form is found in the Tendai doctrinal tradition known as *hongaku shisō* 本覚思想 (original enlightenment thought), which first developed in substantive form during the Insei period (11th–12th cent.). Today Tendai *hongaku* thought is presented as one branch in the development of Tendai doctrine, and in a certain respect such an explanation has a sound basis. But for our purposes we need to examine what rationale shaped and directed Japanese Tendai in the direction of *hongaku* doctrine.¹⁷

The idea of original enlightenment first appeared in the *Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun* 大乘起信論 [Treatise on the awakening of Mahāyāna faith], and can also be found in rather developed form in the commentary on it, the *Shih Mo-ho-yen lun* 釈摩訶衍論 [Commentary on the

¹⁷ There are many works that address the topic of Tendai’s *hongaku* thought, such as SHIMAJI 1926. More recent studies include TAMURA 1965, TADA 1973, and ISHIDA 1967. There are, of course, many points remaining in this section that are still not sufficiently understood. I am particularly indebted to the study of Tamura Yoshirō.

Mahāyāna Treatise]. In China, however, *hongaku* was not originally emphasized in Tendai doctrine. Instead, it commonly appeared in Kegon doctrine, which stood in contrast to Tendai and was frequently at odds with it. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to think that there was no basis in Tendai doctrine for expounding *hongaku* thought. Kegon doctrine in fact influenced Chinese Tendai over time. For instance, the Tendai patriarch Chan-jan 湛然 (711–782) cited from the *Awakening of Faith* the concept that the absolute conforms to causation (*shinnyo zuien* 真如隨緣) and is manifested in this world, an idea consonant with the *hongaku* doctrine. Later, the Tendai priest Chih-li 知礼 (960–1028) actually used the word *hongaku* in his writings. But Saichō, who transmitted Chinese Tendai doctrine to Japan, did not address the topic of *hongaku* himself.

Hongaku thought in Japan was first emphasized in Kūkai's works. Kūkai attached great importance to the *Shih Mo-ho-yen lun*, the commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, citing it frequently in his own writings, and he considered the Shingon school to be grounded in the doctrine of "inherently existing, original enlightenment" (*honnu hongaku* 本非本覺). Subsequently, Shingon esotericism asserted the idea of "attaining Buddhahood in this very body" (*sokushin jōbutsu* 般身成仏), which presupposes a *hongaku* perspective. In the Japanese Tendai school, we should note first that Enchin cited in his *Kōen Hokkegi* 講演法華義 [Exposition on the meaning of the *Lotus*] a verse taken from the *Renge sanmaikyō* 蓮華三昧經 [Lotus meditation sūtra], known later as the "Verse in Praise of Original Enlightenment" (*Hongakusan* 本覺讚). Enchin was, of course, the one who propounded the superiority of the esoteric teachings and the inferiority of the perfect *Lotus* teachings. Next, Annen, the great systematizer of *taimitsu* doctrine who completed the process of esotericizing the Tendai school, cited both the *Renge sammaikyō* and the *Shih Mo-ho-yen lun*, and emphasized the doctrine of the nondualism of manifested things, a standpoint compatible with *hongaku* since the absolute is manifested as the basis of things (*nikenpon* 理顯本). It is worth noting here that from the start esoteric Buddhism and Kegon doctrine had strong affinities. In Japan too, emphasis on *hongaku* thought was a particular feature of the esoteric line of development.¹⁸

Ryōgen, aided by powerful *kenmon* families like that of Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Morosuke 藤原師輔 (908–960), brought unprecedented prosperity to Tendai through his efforts to restore the perfect

¹⁸ In the conclusion of his seminal article, SHIMAJI points out: "The two great stars of *hongaku* thought in the Heian period were the great master Kūkai of Shingon's *tōmitsu* esotericism, and Godai-in Annen of Mt. Hiei's *taimitsu* esotericism" (1926).

Lotus teachings and his education of such outstanding disciples as Genshin, Kakuun, Jinzen 尋禪 (943–990), and Kakuchō. Ryōgen ushered in a pronounced orientation toward the *nenbutsu* and meditative thought (*kanjin shugi*) in the doctrinal atmosphere of the Tendai school. Ryōgen and Genshin were represented in later periods as the authors of certain treatises on *hongaku* doctrine, but this was completely under false pretenses; moreover, their *nenbutsu* was one of Tendai meditative visualization, and contained almost no *hongaku* thought. Ryōgen's restoration of Mt. Hiei's temples and his advancement of its doctrinal studies should thus be viewed as a display of the Tendai *Lotus* aspect of the school.

However, as pointed out earlier, the *nenbutsu* at this time actually spread as a thaumaturgic practice for pacifying spirits, serving as a substitute for mantra and the Kaji Dosha (Earth incantation). In addition, Ryōgen's religious heirs supported in their doctrines the views of Annen, and carried forward the development of Tendai esoteric practices. Thus esoteric Buddhism was by no means removed from the Tendai scene. Looked at in a comprehensive way, Tendai's meditative orientation was essentially the school's distinctive response, framed in a Tendai idiom, to esoteric beliefs and thaumaturgic practices for pacifying spirits, all within a current of *mappō* thought. Tendai *hongaku* doctrine, which subsequently appeared within this meditative orientation, was not ultimately disconnected from figures like Ryōgen and Genshin. In the end, the *hongaku* doctrine can be described as a type of esoteric Buddhism that developed in the wake of Ryōgen's epochal meditative orientation. It even adopted the Shingon school's custom of oral transmissions (*kuden*), and borrowed Tendai doctrine and logic as its mode of expression, as in its use of the teaching of the original and the manifested dimensions of the *Lotus* (*Hokke no honjaku nimon* 法華の本迹二門).

In the abstract, *hongaku* thought is not generally associated with esoteric Buddhism. It has therefore been described as, "from the standpoint of form and function, thought that syncretizes the exoteric and esoteric, but, from the standpoint of essential message, thought that elucidates original enlightenment," and thus as "an absolute theory of the concrete, and a form of thought absolutely affirming things" (SHIMAJI 1926, p. 188). But, seen from its actual process of development, *hongaku* thought marked the high point of the esotericization of Tendai. In its actual manifestations, it comprised a body of rituals and a brand of thought that affirmed absolutely the present world, equivalent to the Shingon esoteric principle of attaining Buddhahood in this very body (see FUJITA 1934). We could go so far as to describe

hongaku thought as esoteric Buddhism, in both essential concept and actual practice, operating under the title of Tendai.¹⁹ In that sense, therefore, we can perceive in *hongaku* thought one archetypal form of the *kenmitsu* ideology.

At this point let us summarize the central characteristics of the *kenmitsu taisai*:

- 1 The *kenmitsu taisai* unified all religions through esoteric Buddhism on a foundation of thaumaturgic techniques for pacifying spirits.
- 2 Within it arose the respective schools' individual doctrines, esoteric practices, and teachings on the syncretization of exoteric and esoteric thought.
- 3 The eight schools (*hasshū*), as the institutional embodiment of *kenmitsu*, were recognized by secular society as orthodox, and constituted a type of religious establishment.

Tendai's *hongaku* thought was the archetype of *kenmitsu* ideology, and the Tendai school was the most representative agent of the *kenmitsu* system—that is, the school holding the most power and authority in medieval times—precisely because it displayed the above three characteristics more fully than other schools.

The structure of *kenmitsu* thought from this stage on was something quite distinctive to Japan in East Asian Buddhist history,²⁰ and was a reflection of the particular intellectual circumstances of the age—an age in which Buddhism, and by extension all religion, came to be known by the term *kenmitsu*. The *ken* of *kenmitsu*, meaning “exoteric,” conveyed the idea of something revealed (*kenji* 顯示), and was rational in its orientation. In contrast, *mitsu*, “esoteric,” indicated something secret (*himitsu* 秘密), and was psychological in its orientation. Although

¹⁹ Here it is necessary to note, from the other side, how Tendai esotericism was practiced. If we define esoteric Buddhism in a narrow and limited sense, there may be grounds for treating the *hongaku* doctrine separately from esoteric Buddhism, even as Tendai esotericism existed. But if we change our perspective so that we see these movements in their entirety, we realize that Tendai doctrine generally was transformed into one type or strand of esoteric Buddhism amid all the esoteric trends of the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei. In that sense, the Tendai *hongaku* doctrine can be described as esoteric. It is a difficult problem how to define the concept and scope of esoteric Buddhism. There is one line of thinking that would define it narrowly so that prayers and thaumaturgic techniques, and also *sadō mikkyō* 左道密教 (“left-handed esotericism,” a form of Tantric esotericism that incorporated sexual rituals), would be excluded from “orthodox” esoteric Buddhism. There is also a viewpoint that sees the Lamaist teachings as a particular expression of esoteric Buddhism. This may have some validity historically and in actual events.

²⁰ Concerning this point, there is again a need to compare Japanese with Tibetan Buddhism, which displays relatively similar patterns.

mitsu was the dominant and defining element, it was in the area left to *ken* (though this was sometimes little more than an adornment) that the unique and defining characteristics of a distinctly Japanese type of esoteric Buddhism took form, and that later developments in Japanese Buddhism emerged. In other words, it was because of the dominance and pervasiveness of esoteric Buddhism that the exoteric teachings first gave rise to the *nenbutsu*, subsequently generated the *honji suiijaku* 本地垂迹 doctrine,²¹ and eventually spawned the Kamakura schools of “New Buddhism.” The character and historical significance of each of these developments is different and must be analyzed in its own right. Nonetheless, the *kenmitsu* system stood behind them all, maintaining its vitality throughout the medieval period and forming the traditional and authoritative ideology.

If we survey the process by which the *kenmitsu* system was established, we can divide it into stages, and through them can understand most accurately this system as an ideology. As pointed out previously, the first stage was the unification of all religion based on esoteric Buddhism in the ninth century. The second stage was the development of Pure Land Buddhism in the tenth century, as a product of the Tendai school’s own self-assertion amid the esotericization of all religion. The third stage occurred in the eleventh century with the rise of strains of thought focusing on the mutual dependence of imperial law (*ōbō* 王法) and Buddhist teachings (*buppō* 佛法), a topic requiring further examination.²² This stage corresponded to the period when Tendai’s *hongaku* doctrine began to develop. At this stage the *kenmitsu* system was not limited to simply a religious system and ideology, but had established a bond and union with state authority, and in this sense had become firmly fixed as medieval Japan’s religious orthodoxy.

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²¹ The doctrine that the kami’s fundamental identity (*honji*) is that of the Buddha, and their manifested form (*suijaku*) is that of kami.

²² See the article “The Imperial Law and the Buddhist Law” in the present issue, pp. 271–85.

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