

Saichō and Kūkai

A Conflict of Interpretations

Ryūichi ABÉ

安部龍一

This article reappraises the interaction between Saichō (767–822) and Kūkai (774–835), founders, respectively, of the Japanese Tendai and Shingon schools of Buddhism. This new appraisal is based on the historical conditions in which these two men sought to introduce new types of Buddhism at the close of the age of Nara Buddhism, rather than on the conventional, idealized characterizations of the two figures as the founding fathers of their respective schools. What emerges is the unbridgeable difference between Saichō and Kūkai in their interpretive strategies for delineating the role of esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō) in establishing a new order in the early Heian Buddhist community, a difference that presented itself as a persistent tension that underlay Saichō's alliance with Kūkai from the very outset of their relationship.

SAICHŌ 最澄 AND KŪKAI 空海 are renowned as the founders, respectively, of the Japanese Tendai and Shingon schools, both of which grew into influential institutions of continuing importance even today. The two figures cooperated, moreover, in an effort to transplant the seed of esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教) to the cultural soil of Japan. Saichō, for example, prepared the way for Kūkai—still largely unrecognized after his return from T'ang China—to perform the Mikkyō initiation ritual of *abhiseka* (*kanjō* 灌頂) for the high priests of the Nara Buddhist establishment and the dignitaries of the imperial court. Saichō also endorsed the court's bequest to Kūkai of the mountain temple of Takaosan-ji northwest of Kyoto as the first center for Kūkai's Shingon school. Kūkai, in turn, responded to Saichō's wish to incorporate Mikkyō into the eclectic system of Tendai by training Saichō and his disciples in the esoteric Buddhist rituals and by lending Saichō various Mikkyō texts that he had brought with him from China.

However, what makes the relationship between Saichō and Kūkai decisive in Japanese Buddhist history is not so much their cooperation as the manner in which it came to an end. Their alliance began to deteriorate when Saichō, after receiving *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai, hurried back to Mt. Hiei, where the work of laying the foundation of the new Tendai school awaited him. Saichō continued to study and copy Mikkyō texts borrowed from Kūkai, but despite Kūkai's repeated requests he did not return to Takaosan-ji to resume his studies. Their rapport finally terminated when Kūkai harshly condemned Saichō's approach to Mikkyō as a transgression of the esoteric precept of *samaya*, and Saichō retorted by denouncing Kūkai's manner of instruction. Thus it was Mikkyō that brought Saichō and Kūkai together; it was also Mikkyō that drove them apart. The break between Saichō and Kūkai left a long-lasting legacy in the Tendai and Shingon schools, whose complex relationship, constantly oscillating between affiliation and rivalry, shaped the contours of Buddhist history in the Heian period.

In this essay I seek to reconstruct the historical process through which the discord between Saichō and Kūkai escalated into their final rupture, and attempt to illustrate the nature of Saichō's dissension with Kūkai in light of the differences in their strategies for establishing Mikkyō in Japan. While Saichō aimed at integrating Mikkyō into his Tendai Lotus school, Kūkai distinguished Mikkyō from Kengyō 顯教 (exoteric Buddhism) and thereby presented Shingon not merely as a distinct sect but as a new Buddhist movement independent of the institutional framework of the existing Mahāyāna schools, including Tendai. I argue that, because of this underlying difference, the alliance between Saichō and Kūkai was from its outset built on fragile foundations and remained far more strained than has previously been postulated. I also suggest that studying this aspect of their relationship sheds light on the intrinsic connection between subsequent historical developments and the religious philosophies advanced by Saichō and Kūkai.

The Mikkyō of Saichō's Tendai Lotus School

In 804 and 805 Saichō made an eleven-month trip to China, the aim of which was to bring to Japan the authentic transmission of the T'ien-t'ai Dharma lineage. During the last month of his stay on Chinese soil, while awaiting the arrival of his ship at the port city of Ming-chou, Saichō traveled to Yüeh-chou to collect additional Buddhist texts. At Lung-hsing ssu 龍興寺 Saichō chanced to meet the priest Shun-hsiao

順曉, from whom he received instruction in esoteric Buddhism.¹ On the nineteenth day of the fourth month of 805 (Chen-yü 21), Shun-hsiao granted *abhiṣeka*, the esoteric Buddhist initiatory rite, to Saichō and his disciple-interpreter Gishin 義真 (781–833) (*Kenkairon engi* 顯戒論緣起, DZ 1, p. 279). On the fifth day of the fifth month they received additional *abhiṣekas* from three teachers in the vicinity (*Naishō buppō sōshō kechimyakufu* 内証佛法相承血脉譜, DZ 1, pp. 246–47). From Yüeh-chou Saichō brought back ritual instruments, illustrations of esoteric deities, and thirty-eight Mikkyō texts, including some in Sanskrit (*Dengyō Daishi shōrai esshūroku* 伝教大師将来越州録, DZ 4, pp. 23–36).

Of the four transmissions Saichō received, that of Shun-hsiao was of particular importance, since it provided Saichō with the foundation for his efforts to incorporate Mikkyō within the training program of his new Tendai school. Two major traditions of Mikkyō were transmitted from India to China during the mid-T'ang period: the Matrix (*garbha*) Maṇḍala lineage, imported by Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735) and based on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*; and the Diamond (*vajra*) Maṇḍala lineage, transmitted by Vajrabodhi (671–741) and Amoghavajra (705–774) and based on the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra*. In the *Esshūroku* (the catalog of texts, iconographies, and ritual instruments collected by Saichō in Yüeh-chou), Saichō states, “The Master [Shun-hsiao] guided us [Saichō and Gishin] into the maṇḍala altar of the five-family *abhiṣeka* (*gobu kanjō mandara danjō* 五部灌頂曼荼羅壇上)” (DZ 4, p. 381). The Dharma-transmission document that Shun-hsiao gave to Saichō describes the maṇḍala used at the *abhiṣeka* as the “thirty-seven-deity maṇḍala of the Tathāgata Vairocana (*birushana nyorai sanjū shichison mandara* 毘盧遮那如來三十七尊曼荼羅).” These records suggest that Saichō was initiated into the Diamond Maṇḍala, which comprises thirty-seven principal deities representing the five distinct “families” of the

¹ It has traditionally been asserted in the Tendai school that Saichō had already developed an interest in Mikkyō prior to his trip to China and that studying esoteric Buddhism was therefore one of the original goals of his expedition. However, an increasing amount of historical research both inside and outside the Tendai school demonstrates that Saichō's encounter with Mikkyō in China was rather accidental. SONODA Kōyū indicates that Saichō originally planned to send two disciples to study T'ien-t'ai, and that only with Kanmu's strong encouragement did he decide to lead the trip himself (1974, pp. 479–80). KUCHI Gyō points out that, according to the *Kenkairon engi* (the collection of official documents for establishing the Tendai Lotus school, compiled by Saichō himself), Saichō's initial aim in visiting Yüeh-chou was not to study Mikkyō but to obtain copies of Buddhist texts that he had not been able to find in T'ai-chou (1984, p. 40). For Saichō's lack of knowledge of Mikkyō prior to his China trip, see MISAKI 1988, pp. 170–83, and KUCHI 1984, pp. 167–70. Regarding the political pressure on Saichō from Kanmu's court to incorporate Mikkyō as part of the Tendai curriculum, see NAKAO 1987, pp. 23–24, 121–23.

Buddha, Lotus, Vajra, Jewel, and Dharma.

The same document lists the three mantras given to Saichō as proof of his Dharma transmission. Shun-hsiao describes them as the “pledge of the three families” (*sanbu sanmaya* 三部三昧耶), suggesting an association with the Matrix Maṇḍala, which consists of the deities of the Buddha, Vajra, and Lotus families. In fact, the variant forms of the first two of the three mantras, *Oṃ aṃ vaṃ raṃ hūṃ khaṃ* and *Oṃ a vi ra hūṃ khaṃ*, which are noted, respectively, as the mantras for the higher and intermediate perfections (*jōbon shijji* 上品悉地, *chūbon shijji* 中品悉地), occur in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (T 18.52c, 20a). But the third mantra of the lower perfection, *Oṃ a ra pa ca na*, derives from a sūtra closely related to the *Vajrasekhara Sūtra* (T #1173, 20.710b). Modern scholars therefore largely agree that Shun-hsiao represented a Sinicized form of Mikkyō based on apocryphal texts of Chinese origin in which the Matrix and Diamond traditions were amalgamated (*ryōbu gōjū* 兩部合糅).²

What further obscures Shun-hsiao’s *abhiseka* is that he himself describes his lineage solely in terms of the transmission of the Matrix Maṇḍala tradition:

The great tripiṭaka master, the prince of the brāhman nation, whose Dharma name was Śubhakarasiṃha, turned his wheel of Dharma at Nālandā monastery in the land of the Buddha. Later, he reached the great nation of T’ang and transmitted his Dharma to I-lin 義林. This great master, the Teacher of the Nation, who is now one-hundred-and-three years old and is preaching the Dharma in Silla, gave his transmission to his disciple, the priest Shun-hsiao.

(*Kenkairon engi*, DZ 1, pp. 279–80)

² The obscurity of Saichō’s description of Shun-hsiao’s *abhiseka* caused confusion among his successors and later Tendai priests. Annen 安然 (841–?), for example, states in his *Taizōkai taijūki* 胎藏界対受記: “My teacher, the great priest [Henjō], always had doubts about the Dharma transmission [of the three mantras Saichō received from Shun-hsiao]. I recently found these three mantras of perfection (*sanshu shijji shingon* 三種悉地真言) described in the ritual manual *Sonshō hajigoku hō* 尊勝破地獄法. The description there largely matches the transmission given by Master Shun-hsiao” (T 75.98b). Henjō questioned the authenticity of the transmission from Shun-hsiao because Saichō did not identify the sūtras and ritual manuals upon which the *abhiseka* based itself, and because Saichō described mantras without the mudrās that should accompany them at *abhiseka*. The ritual manual identified by Annen lists three mantras in the same order as described for Shun-hsiao’s initiation, but it was not among the texts brought back by Saichō. There are three variations of this ritual manual (T 18, #905, #906, #907). All show a tendency to mix elements of the Diamond and Matrix traditions and are heavily influenced by Taoism. Thus, although the texts claim to be translations by Śubhakarasiṃha, they are considered to have been composed in China. For a detailed study of Shun-hsiao’s transmission to Saichō in relation to these ritual texts, see NASU 1975, pp. 1009–32; KIUCHI 1984, pp. 51–58, and MISAKI 1988, pp. 184–85.

Because of Shun-hsiao's identification of himself with the Matrix lineage,³ it appears that Saichō remained unaware of the elements of the Diamond tradition inherent in his initiation. He neither imported the *Vajrasāekhara Sūtra* nor incorporated its study into the initial training program of the Tendai school. It was only after his study of Mikkyō with Kūkai that Saichō became aware of the importance of the Diamond tradition. This attests to the haphazard nature of Saichō's study of Mikkyō in China and to his lack of prior knowledge of the esoteric tradition. Because the *abhiṣeka* was conducted in Chinese with frequent references to mantras in Sanskrit, Saichō had to participate through his interpreter Gishin and thus may have had only a partial understanding of Shun-hsiao's ritual procedures.

Saichō's interpretation of Shun-hsiao's transmission changed and evolved as his understanding of esoteric Buddhism deepened, especially through his contacts with Kūkai (GRONER 1984, pp. 52–61). In later works such as the 819 *Naishō buppō sōshō kechimakufu* Saichō redefined the nature of his initiation by claiming that Shun-hsiao represented not only the Matrix lineage but the Diamond lineage as well (DZ 1, p. 242). In his *Kenkairon* 顯戒論, composed in the same year, Saichō describes Shun-hsiao's initiation as *ryōbu kanjō* 兩部灌頂, the dual *abhiṣeka* of the Diamond and Matrix Maṇḍalas (DZ 1, p. 35).⁴

Thus, as Saichō himself recognized,⁵ his exposure to and study of Mikkyō in China had been limited. This does not mean, however, that his importation of Mikkyō was insignificant. In his edict of 805, Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (737–809, r. 781–806) celebrated its historical importance: “The secret teaching of Shingon (*shingon hikyō* 真言秘教) had yet to be transmitted to our land. It was a great fortune that this doctrine was obtained by the Master Saichō, who is indeed worthy to be a Teacher of the Nation” 国師 (DZ 5, p. 21).⁶ In the ninth month of

³ Because no Chinese historical source refers to either Shun-hsiao or H-in, it is impossible to ascertain the historicity of Saichō's claim regarding Shun-hsiao's lineage.

⁴ On the drastic change in Saichō's interpretation of Shun-hsiao's lineage, Groner states: “Saichō probably changed his view of the [Shun-hsiao's] ceremony as a result of his association with Kūkai. The initiation from Shun-hsiao was a very hurried affair which was conducted in Chinese and included secret teachings.... Given this situation, Saichō might well have reinterpreted the initiation during the fifteen years which elapsed between his meeting with Shun-hsiao and his authorship of the *Kenkairon*” (59). See also KIUCHI 1984, pp. 49–50.

It remains unknown whether Saichō based his redrawing of Shun-hsiao's genealogy on any factual foundation. Fascicle 4 of the *Piao chih tsi* 表制集 of Amoghavajra, for instance, lists his twenty-one Dharma-heir disciples, but does not mention Shun-hsiao (T 52.845c).

⁵ See Saichō's letter to Fujiwara Fuyutsugu (DZ 5, p. 439). See also *Rankei ionshū* 蘭契遺音集 (KZ 5, p. 371).

⁶ Kanmu's edict is quoted in *Eizan daishiden* (DZ 5, p. 22).

the same year Saichō, at Kanmu's command, performed a state-sponsored *abhiṣeka* at Takaosan-ji.⁷ Eminent priests from the Nara Buddhist community were invited to participate in this, the first Mikkyō initiatory ritual performed in Japan, and Saichō became renowned as a teacher of esoteric Buddhism.

Four months later, in the first month of 806, Saichō's Tendai Lotus school (*Tendai hokke shū* 天台法華宗) won official recognition when the court of the ailing emperor Kanmu issued another edict, this one permitting two annual ordinands (*nenbundosha* 年分度者) for Saichō's new school on Mt. Hiei. This edict states that, following Saichō's request, the ordinands would be divided between two curricula: the *shanagō* 遮那業 course, centering on the study of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (this was the Mikkyō curriculum, *shana* being the abbreviation for *Birushana*, the Japanese transliteration of *Vairocana*), and the *shikangō* 止観業 course, based on the study of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止観, the seminal work of the T'ien-t'ai patriarch Chih-i 智顛 (538–597) (this was the Tendai curriculum, *shikan* being the Japanese reading of Chih-i's central practice of *chih-kuan* [cessation and contemplation]) (*Kenkairon engi*, DZ 1, pp. 294–96). Thus from its very inception the Tendai Lotus school was equally based on Mikkyō and T'ien-t'ai. It was as a subdivision of Saichō's new school that Mikkyō first received the official acknowledgment of the imperial court and became a proper subject of study in Japanese Buddhism.

Kanmu died only two months after issuing this edict, and the new emperor, Heizei 平城 (774–824, r. 806–809), was enthroned in the fifth month of the same year. In contrast to Kanmu, who had eagerly patronized Saichō's new Buddhist school as a pivotal element in his policy of reforming the Nara Buddhist establishment, Heizei remained indifferent to the Buddhist cause. As a result, the allotment of Tendai ordinands was withheld during the three years that Heizei reigned.

In the tenth month of 806 Kūkai, having completed his Mikkyō study under Hui-kuo 惠果 (487–593) at Ch'ing-lung ssu 青龍寺 in the T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an, arrived at the port of Dazaifu. In contrast to Saichō's transmission, which comprised mixed elements of the Matrix and Diamond traditions, Kūkai's Dharma lineage involved a dual transmission of two separate *abhiṣekas* in the Matrix and Diamond

⁷ Shortly after this first *abhiṣeka*, Kanmu ordered Saichō to perform yet another initiation at Nodera (aka Tendai-in, present-day Jōjū-ji; DZ 1, p. 639). Because the content and the recipients of the two rituals overlap, it is difficult to consider that the rituals were performed solely for the transmission of Mikkyō Dharma. KIUCHI argues that Saichō's *abhiṣeka* was aimed at healing Kanmu's illness (1984, pp. 66–81). For a strongly political interpretation, see NAKAO 1987, pp. 170–85.

Maṅḍalas. Kūkai's cause, too, suffered as a result of Kanmu's death. At Dazaifu, Kūkai composed *Shōrai mokuroku* 将来目録, a catalog of the Buddhist texts, iconographies, ritual instruments, and other cultural items he had brought from China (KZ 1, pp. 69–104). Listed in his catalog are over one hundred and forty Mikkyō sūtras and ritual manuals, forty-two Sanskrit texts, eleven maṅḍalas, and other iconographies. In the tenth month he presented his catalog, together with all the items listed in it, to the court. But there was no response, and Kūkai was forced to remain in Dazaifu.

In the fourth month of 809 illness forced Heizei to abdicate, and Kamino 神野 (786–842), Kanmu's sixth son, ascended the throne as Emperor Saga 嵯峨 (r. 809–823). In a letter to Fujiwara Fuyutsugu 藤原冬嗣, a prominent court noble, Kūkai states that it was only after the enthronement of Emperor Saga that he was able to recover all the items submitted to the court and that he received imperial permission to promulgate his new school of Shingon.⁸ In the seventh month Kūkai finally received the government's permission to enter the capital of Kyoto and to take residence in Takaosan-ji (KZ 5, p. 424).⁹ In the first month of the following year (810), Saga's court retroactively granted the Tendai Lotus school the allotment of the annual ordnands for the past three years and for that year, and Saichō's training of Tendai students in the two curricula of *shanagō* and *shikangō* finally began (*Tendai Hokkeshū nenbun tokudo gakushō myōchō* 天台法華宗年分得度学生名帳, DZ 1, pp. 250–53).

Toward the Union of Tendai and Shingon

It remains unknown exactly when Saichō and Kūkai became acquainted. Because they both traveled to China in the same fleet (though on different ships) in 804, many have speculated about an early encounter. However, there exists no solid evidence of any meeting prior to the beginning of Emperor Saga's reign. A total of twenty-four letters from Saichō to Kūkai are included in the *Dengyō Daishi shōsoku* 伝教大師消息 (DZ 5, pp. 441–72).¹⁰ In contrast, only five, or possibly six, letters of

⁸ In the letter Kūkai says that he is approaching the age 60 (*chimyō* 知命). It was thus most likely composed in 834.

⁹ The permit was issued on the sixteenth day of the seventh month of 809 by the Ministry of Grand Polity (*daijōkan* 太政官) to the governor of Izumi Province. The discovery in 1978 of a handwritten manuscript of Kūkai's *Shōrai mokuroku* at Sefuku-ji suggests that Kūkai resided in this Izumi temple before his entry to Kyoto in 809. See SAWA 1979; KIUCHI 1984, pp. 132–33.

¹⁰ The original manuscript of this text has a colophon by the copyist, the priest Dōkai 道快 of Tō-ji: "Copying completed on the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month of 1381 at

Kūkai to Saichō remain today.¹¹ The contents of the letters suggest that there was far more correspondence actually exchanged between them. A significant number of the letters are dated with only day and month, without reference to the particular year in which they were written. Despite these limitations, these letters remain the most reliable source for understanding the relationship between Saichō and Kūkai.

The earliest of the surviving missives is Saichō's letter of the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month of 809 to Kūkai at Takaosan-ji requesting the loan of twelve texts (DZ 5, pp. 450–51). The letter, which lacks any introductory remarks, consists of a succinct statement of Saichō's request followed by a list of the texts he wishes to borrow. Its style suggests that Saichō had exchanged earlier letters with Kūkai, and that the two had already met and were perhaps well acquainted by then. It is also highly probable that the letter was not Saichō's first request to borrow materials from Kūkai's library.

Kūkai moved to Takaosan-ji only a month before he received Saichō's earliest surviving letter. Saichō's requests to Kūkai for texts must therefore have begun immediately after the texts were released by Saga's court. In another letter Saichō states that he is intent upon copying all the works listed in Kūkai's *Shōrai mokuroku*, which Saichō had personally copied (DZ 5, p. 460).¹² It thus appears that Saichō had recognized the merit of Kūkai's imports for the Mikkyō curriculum of

Jizō-in of Daigo-ji. It is said that this manuscript was originally compiled by the Reverend of Ono 小野.” An earlier collection of Saichō's letters, entitled *Dengyō Daishi gūhōsho* 伝教大師求法書, carries a colophon by the anonymous copyist stating, “In the latter part of the fourth month of 1079 I produced this copy based on the handwritten manuscript by the Reverend of Ono [Ningai 仁海]. The original handwritten letters by the Master of Tendai Mountain [Saichō] are preserved in the archives of Ninna-ji.” These colophons indicate that the surviving letters of Saichō were originally collected and compiled into a single volume by the abbot Ningai of Tō-ji (951–1046) and that at the beginning of the eleventh century the originals of certain of Saichō's letters still existed. Some scholars doubt their authenticity since they were preserved in the hands of Shingon priests. However, it is now generally agreed that the letters provide reliable information. The original of one of Saichō's letters to Taihan, commonly known as the *Kyūkakuchō* 久隔帳, is in the national museum at Nara. The edition of this letter in the *Shōsoku* proved identical to the original. Additional proof is furnished by the *Denjutsu isshin kaimon*, Saichō's biography composed by his disciple Kōjō. Kōjō's description of Saichō's study of Mikkyō under Kūkai (DZ 1, pp. 529–30) matches the contents of Saichō's letters in the *Shōsoku*.

¹¹ Three letters of Kūkai to Saichō are preserved in the *Shūi zasshū* 拾遺雜集 (KZ 3, pp. 642–44), and the others in the *Seireishū* 性靈集, fascicle 10 (KZ 3, pp. 547–52). Another letter of Kūkai to Saichō was recently discovered at Sefuku-ji; see TAKAGI 1990, p. 177. Yet another letter of Kūkai to a certain Buddhist teacher in the *Kōya zappitsu shū* (KZ 3, pp. 595–96) is most likely addressed to Saichō; see below in this article.

¹² Saichō's handwritten copy of the *Shōrai mokuroku* is preserved at Tō-ji. See TŌKYŌ KOKURITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1983, p. 225.

the Tendai Lotus school. In fact, eleven of the twenty-four extant letters from Saichō to Kūkai in the *Dengyō Daishi shōsoku* concern the loan and copying of texts. These surviving letters confirm that before the collapse of their affiliation Saichō had copied nearly half of all the texts listed in the *Shōrai mokuroku*.¹³

The second-largest group of Saichō's surviving letters to Kūkai, comprising six letters, consists of requests for Mikkyō training for himself and his disciples. In a letter of the second month of 811, Saichō asks Kūkai to initiate him into the *abhiṣeka* of Vairocana:

To the Great Teacher of Takao:

I, Saichō, will visit the capital on the fourteenth day of this month. It is in the constant thoughts of this humble priest to receive your kind instructions and to study the secret school (*himitsushū* 秘密宗). However, I have not been able to make myself available, and years have passed. At this opportunity I would like to visit your temple to receive the *abhiṣeka* for the single deity of Vairocana (*henjō isson kanjō* 遍照一尊灌頂). For about seven days I would like to join your disciples and study your Dharma gate. If you, Master, could accept my request with your boundless benevolence, I will be at your side immediately.

Your humble disciple, Saichō
(DZ 5, p. 456)

The letter suggests that Saichō's study of Kūkai's Mikkyō had until that point been limited to the perusal of texts, and that now he was willing to receive Kūkai's initiation into Mikkyō, that is, to formally become his disciple. It remains unclear what Saichō meant by the expression *henjō isson kanjō*. The *isson* (single deity) in Kūkai's vocabulary—as well as in that of later Tendai esotericism—refers to a ritual meditation directed toward a particular deity, in contrast to meditations upon the multiple deities in the maṇḍala. Because in Kūkai's system the *abhiṣeka* is always performed before the maṇḍala images, the terms *isson* and *kanjō* are contradictory. This appears to reflect the difference between the Mikkyō initiation received by Saichō and that received by Kūkai.

In the fifth month of 812 Saichō, having fallen seriously ill, appointed his two senior disciples Enchō 円澄 (772–837) and Taihan 泰範 (778–858?) as his successors, with Enchō to become *zasu* 座主 (head priest overseeing Dharma transmission) and Taihan *sōbettō* 総別当 (chief administrator in charge of daily affairs) (*Kōnin sannen*

¹³ For the extent of Saichō's copying of Kūkai's texts, see TAKAGI 1990, pp. 153–54.

isho 弘仁三年遺書, DZ 5, p. 425). Within less than a month of his appointment, however, Taihan left Mt. Hiei and retired to Takashima in his home province of Ōmi. In his letter of farewell to Saichō, dated the twenty-ninth day of the sixth month of 812, Taihan, citing his “repeated offenses that merely polluted the sacred realm,” asks Saichō to excuse him from his duties (DZ 5 *furoku*, pp. 136–37). Despite Saichō’s urgent request that he immediately resume his responsibilities, Taihan never rejoined Saichō’s Tendai Lotus school. Later in the same year, Taihan, still at Takashima, accepted Saichō’s invitation to join him at Takaosan-ji for Kūkai’s initiation. Taihan thereafter remained at Takaosan-ji and continued his study of Mikkyō as one of Kūkai’s select disciples.¹⁴

Both Taihan’s letter and Saichō’s reply suggest that the former’s departure was caused by a serious dissension among Saichō’s disciples. In his letter Saichō comments, “Recently, our temple is rife with annoyances and distress. The novices, attendants, and teachers of every hall speak words of slander against one another” (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, p. 465). Taihan was not the only priest who left Mt. Hiei—according to a document written by Saichō in 819, out of the twelve ordinands who entered the two curricula between 807 and 812, only two, Kōjō 光定 (779–851) and Tokuzen 徳善, remained at Mt. Hiei (DZ 1, pp. 250–52). Many defected to the Hossō school, while a few left for Takaosan-ji to study Mikkyō. The defections, which persisted for several years, weakened the institutional foundation of Saichō’s new school.

It was in the atmosphere of crisis caused by his illness and the departure of his disciples that Saichō sent a letter dated the nineteenth day of the eighth month of 812 requesting Kūkai’s cooperation in training the *shanagō* students.

To the Teacher Henjō [Kūkai] of the West:

I thank you for your letter expressing your willingness to transmit the Dharma to me. How wonderful that with your timeless kindness you have kept your promise. The matter of transmitting and spreading our two schools is constantly in my thoughts.... These days, people are difficult to guide and teach; they hardly meet the government’s qualifications for the ordination. But the Vairocana school (*shanashū* 遮那宗) and Tendai interfuse with one another. They also share the same commentary.... There should be no such thing as prefer-

¹⁴ Taihan was listed by Shinga 真雅, one of Kūkai’s senior disciples, in his report to the imperial court in 878, as one of the ten leading disciples whom Kūkai acknowledged as his Dharma-heirs (KZ 5, p. 405).

ring one to the other. The *Lotus* and the *Golden Light* are those texts to which the previous emperor [Kanmu] devoted himself, and there exists no difference between the One Unifying Vehicle [of Tendai] and Shingon. I thus beg your help every year in finding suitable students [for the *shanagō*]. Please wait for my visit, when I will discuss this matter with you in detail.

Your disciple at the East Mountain [Hiei], Saichō
(DZ 5, p. 456)

Kūkai was then residing in Yamashiro Province west of Hiei at the ancient temple Otokunidera, said to have been founded by Prince Shōtoku. In his letter Saichō emphasizes the unity of Shingon and Tendai, claiming that because Tendai and Shingon are One Unifying Vehicle (*ichijō*), the highest teaching of Mahāyāna, they must be identical (the “same commentary” that Saichō refers to is Śubhakarasiṃha’s commentary on the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* [T #1796, vol. 39]). In a letter four years later to Taihan, then studying with Kūkai at Takaosan-ji, Saichō states, “The One Unifying Vehicle of the Lotus (*hokke ichijō* 法華一乘), the One Unifying Vehicle of Shingon (*shingon ichijō* 真言一乘)—what difference in excellence could there be?” (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, p. 469). Saichō’s thesis of the oneness of Tendai Perfect Teaching and Mikkyō (*enmitsu itchi* 円密一致) became one of the principal sources of discord that later distanced him from Kūkai.

For Saichō, however, the true significance of the letter lay not in the notion of *enmitsu itchi* but in his request for Kūkai’s cooperation in deepening his knowledge of Mikkyō and managing the *shanagō* program. Saichō urgently needed Kūkai’s assistance to stem the defection of Tendai ordinands and prevent the *shanagō* curriculum from total collapse. In 812 and 813, Saichō and a large number of his disciples were to receive Kūkai’s ordination at Takao and begin their official study of Mikkyō under him. It appears not accidental that, beginning in 817, only a few years after this ordination, Saichō’s records show no defectors among the *shanagō* annual ordinands (*Tendai hokkeshū nenbun tokudo gakashō myōchō*, DZ 1, p. 253).

Takao Initiation: The Beginning of the End of the Alliance

As soon as he regained his health in late 812, Saichō took steps to carry out his part of the arrangement with Kūkai. In the tenth month, in Kōjō’s company, he traveled to Nara and attended the Yuimae 維摩会, the lecture on the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* held annually at Kōfuku-ji.¹⁵

¹⁵ Yuimae and other annual services at Nara temples are described in SNB, pp. 341–47.

On his return to Hiei, he visited Kūkai at Otokunidera. In a letter to Taihan dated the fifth day of the eleventh month of 812, Saichō describes his meeting with Kūkai.

To my Dharma-colleague (*dōbō* 同法) Teacher Han [Taihan] at Takashima:

I, Saichō, the decrepit priest of Mt. Hiei, cordially announce to you the opportunity to receive the transmission of *abhiṣeka*.

On the twenty-seventh day of the last month, during the course of my pilgrimage, I took lodging at Otokuni-dera and paid reverence to the Teacher (*ajari* 阿闍梨) Kūkai. Pains-takingly detailed and exhaustive was his instruction to me. He personally showed me the images of the deities of the three “families” (*sanbu* 三部) and their maṇḍalas. We made a promise about [the *abhiṣeka*] at Takao. I will first depart to Takaosan-ji. The Teacher [Kūkai] will resign from his post [of *bettō*] at Otokunidera and will make his permanent residence at Takaosan-ji.... We have decided that the tenth day of the twelfth month will be the day of initiation. I beg you, my great Dharma colleague, hurry back to Mt. Hiei, complete your preparations here, and come to Takaosan-ji on the twenty-seventh of this month. Do not hesitate to accept my invitation. I will relay to you the details of the initiation through my messenger Kōnin.

Your humble Dharma-colleague, Saichō
(DZ 5, pp. 462–63)

Kōjō provides an eyewitness account of Saichō’s meeting with Kūkai:

Our late master [Saichō] visited the teacher [Kū]kai at Otokuni-dera in Nagaoka. We stayed there that evening. Our late great master and the great master [Kū]kai spoke face to face for a long time and decided upon the matter of the *abhiṣeka*. We then entered Takaosan-ji and our late great master, to realize his long-cherished wish, received from the great master [Kū]kai the *abhiṣekas* of the two realms (*ryōbu kanjō*) [of the Diamond and Matrix Maṇḍalas].

(*Denjutsu isshin kanmon*, DZ 1, p. 529)

These documents demonstrate that at Otokuni-dera Saichō finally obtained Kūkai’s permission to receive the *abhiṣeka*. Saichō was also on this occasion reminded of the importance of the Diamond Maṇḍala, which with the Matrix Maṇḍala forms the dual transmission that Kūkai received from his master Hui-kuo. At Otokuni-dera Saichō borrowed the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra*, the text associated with the Diamond

Maṇḍala, promising Kūkai that he would complete his study of the sūtra and return it by the fourth month of the next year (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, pp. 454–55).

However, it appears that, despite the extensive discussion, Saichō did not fully grasp the weight of the Diamond realm tradition in Kūkai's *abhiṣeka*. Or perhaps Saichō had already developed an understanding of the two realms that, in contrast to that of Kūkai, placed a heavier emphasis on the Matrix tradition. In an 818 work explaining to the court the training regimen for Tendai Lotus students, Saichō defines *shanagō* as a “curriculum in which students are trained in the meditative recitation of [the mantras for the deities in] the three families” (*Kanshō tendaiishū nenbun gakushōshiki* 勸獎天台宗年分學生式, DZ 1, p. 14). The term *sanbu*, as discussed earlier, refers to the Matrix Maṇḍala, representing the Buddha, Lotus, and Vajra families; Saichō makes no mention of the Diamond Maṇḍala, representing the Buddha, Lotus, Vajra, Jewel, and Dharma families. In another work for the court composed in 819, Saichō redefined the Mikkyō curriculum as *taihi taizōgō* 大悲胎藏業, the curriculum of the Matrix Maṇḍala of the Great Compassion.

Saichō's stress on the Matrix tradition was perhaps a natural outgrowth of his own Mikkyō initiation in China, which he originally understood as representing the Matrix lineage alone. Nevertheless, his neglect of the Diamond Maṇḍala may have led him to seriously misunderstand the actual proceeding of Kūkai's *abhiṣeka* at Takaosan-ji. In a letter dated the thirteenth day of the eleventh month of 812 and addressed to Chisen 智泉 (789–825), one of Kūkai's senior disciples, Saichō states, “With the great benevolence of Teacher [Kūkai], on the tenth day of the next month, I will be guided into the maṇḍalas of the Matrix of Great Compassion and the Diamond Realm (*kongōkai* 金剛界)” (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 1, p. 462). The letter suggests that Saichō thought the two *abhiṣekas* for the Diamond and Matrix Maṇḍalas would be completed in one day, or that he thought initiation into the two Maṇḍalas would require only one *abhiṣeka*. However, as Kūkai describes in the *Shōrai mokuroku*, which details his own initiation by Hui-kuo (KZ 1, pp. 98–101), the Shingon initiation requires two distinct *abhiṣekas*, which, because of the extended study of mantras and mudrās involved, must be scheduled on separate occasions.

That was exactly how Kūkai actually conducted the *abhiṣekas* at Takaosan-ji. Saichō arrived at Takao on the fourteenth day of the eleventh month.¹⁶ On the following day, according to the *Kanjō rekimyō*

¹⁶ For the exact date of Saichō's arrival at Takaosan-ji, see his letter to Taihan of the fifteenth day of the eleventh month of 812, *Dengyō Daishi shōsoku* (DZ 5, p. 468).

灌頂歴名, Kūkai's own handwritten record of the *abhiṣekas*,¹⁷ Kūkai initiated Saichō and three lay persons into the Diamond Maṇḍala. On the same day Saichō sent a letter to Taihan appealing for food, which was apparently in quite low supply at Takao. However, he makes no mention of the Diamond Maṇḍala *abhiṣeka* he received that day from Kūkai. On the nineteenth day, Saichō wrote to Fujiwara Fuyutsugu requesting material support for the forthcoming *abhiṣeka*.

Although I, Saichō, have traveled abroad, I lack [knowledge in] the path of Shingon. Fortunately, Teacher [Kū]kai ... mastered this path at Ch'ang-an and is now retired at Takao. I have come here to study this path and will receive *abhiṣeka* on the thirteenth day of the next month.

(DZ 5, p. 441)

It appears that logistical problems involving food and other supplies at Takaosan-ji forced Kūkai to reschedule the date for the second *abhiṣeka*. Here again Saichō does not refer to the Diamond realm initiation four days earlier, and his letter gives the impression that the thirteenth day of the twelfth month would be his first opportunity for Shingon initiation.

Kūkai's *Kanjō rekimyō* shows that the Matrix *abhiṣeka* actually took place on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month.¹⁸ As with the first *abhiṣeka*, Kūkai lists Saichō as the very first initiate of the ritual, demonstrating that both the Diamond and Matrix initiations were performed in response to Saichō's personal request. But in its scale the second *abhiṣeka* differed significantly from the first. In contrast to the four initiates of the Diamond *abhiṣeka*, those for the Matrix *abhiṣeka* totaled over 190, including priests, novices, lay practitioners, and even court musicians. This disproportionately large number of initiates seems to have been the major cause of the logistical problems and the rescheduling of the second *abhiṣeka*.

Among the priests initiated into the Matrix Maṇḍala were Saichō's senior disciples Enchō, Kōjō, Kōnin 光仁, Kōchū 光忠 (d. 815), and Tokuzen. Taihan, who had refused to rejoin Saichō at Mt. Hiei and

¹⁷ These records survive at Takaosan-ji as the *Kanjō rekimyō* (aka *Takao kanjōki*) (KZ 3, pp. 620–29). For an analysis of this text as a source of historical data, see TAKAGI 1990, pp. 309–56 (includes an annotation of the original text). For a study of *Kanjō rekimyō* as a work of calligraphy and for a discussion of the authenticity of the text from the point of view of calligraphic style, see KOMAI 1984, pp. 188–218.

¹⁸ Although the *Kanjō rekimyō* gives the total number of Matrix initiates as 145, the actual list of initiates shows that the figure 145 corresponds to the number of students originally registered prior to the *abhiṣeka*. Numerous additions and alterations of names in the list suggest that the actual number of students initiated on the fifteenth of the twelfth month was far greater than the 145 originally expected. KIUCHI identifies the total of the Matrix initiates as 194 (1984, p. 149).

arrived at Takao directly from Takashima, was also initiated. KIUCHI Gyōō identifies the number of Saichō's disciples who received this *abhiṣeka* as twenty-three (1984, p. 147). TAKAGI Shingen, however, believes the number to have been much larger, and argues that a majority of the sixty-two priests who received the *abhiṣeka* either were Saichō's disciples or were affiliated with Saichō (1990, p. 347). The presence of Kōjō and Kōchū—*shikangō* ordinands for 806–810—demonstrates that those who received the Shingon initiation were not limited to *shanagō* students. This concentration of Saichō's disciples at the Matrix *abhiṣeka* suggests, again, that Saichō originally believed Shingon initiation to be complete with a single *abhiṣeka*, or that he considered only the Matrix tradition essential to, and worthy of inclusion in, the Tendai Lotus training program. That none of his disciples received the first Diamond *abhiṣeka* seems to have resulted from a combination of Saichō's misunderstanding of Shingon's dual transmission *and* his preference for the Matrix tradition.

One of the major functions of the *abhiṣeka* is to identify a deity in the maṇḍala as a *honzon* 本尊 (Skt. *iśvara*), the initiate's personal tutelary deity. This is accomplished by the procedure called *tōge tokubutsu* 投華得佛 (flower-throwing for receiving a Buddha), in which the initiate, blindfolded and guided by a teacher to the maṇḍala altar, stands before the altar and drops a flower petal, which drifts onto one of the maṇḍala deities. Inscribed in smaller characters under the names of the initiates in Kūkai's *Kanjō rekimyō* are the maṇḍala deities identified by the individual participants. The rudimentary initiation, or *kechien kanjō* 結縁灌頂 (*abhiṣeka* for establishing karmic affinity with a deity), is complete when the initiates receive instructions in the particular mantras and mudrās for their own tutelary deities.

Those of advanced learning—most typically the ordained—receive additional training in the *issonbō* 一尊法 (the meditative ritual addressed exclusively to their particular tutelary deity). This consists of the *jūhachidō* 十八道, eighteen progressive sequences of ritual actions, each involving coordinated practices of mudrās, mantras, and visualizations. Certain initiates are further encouraged to study the *taihō* 大法, an advanced meditative ritual in which all the principal deities are invoked and their maṇḍala mentally constructed through mudrā formations, mantra recitations, and visualizations. The initiation known as *jimyō kanjō* 持明灌頂 (the *abhiṣeka* of grasping mantras as *vidyā*, the wisdom of enlightenment) is followed by an extensive study of these complex meditative methods, which distinguishes it from the rudimentary initiation.¹⁹

¹⁹ This type of initiation is also known as *gakuhō kanjō* 学法灌頂 (the *abhiṣeka* of mastering

Select disciples who have received the *jimyō kanjō* are given an initiation of the highest order, the *denkyō kanjō* 伝教灌頂 (the *abhiṣeka* of transmitting the teaching, more popularly known as the *denbō kanjō* 伝法灌頂, the *abhiṣeka* of Dharma transmission). With this *abhiṣeka* the initiate is officially recognized as a full-fledged master. Because it involves ritual actions performed in a visually constructed maṇḍala, it is given only to those who have thoroughly mastered the *taihō*.²⁰

Returning to our discussion, it appears that following the ceremony Kūkai immediately began his post-*abhiṣeka* instructions to Saichō and his disciples. Saichō, however, returned to Mt. Hiei by the twenty-third day of the twelfth month, leaving behind some of his disciples to continue the studies in his place.²¹ Enchō explained Saichō's abrupt departure in a letter to Kūkai dated the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month of 831.

During the winter of 812 our late master, the Great Reverend Saichō, in his request to the court for receiving the *abhiṣekas* of the grand meditative methods (*taihō kanjō* 大法灌頂) in the two maṇḍalas of the Matrix and Diamond, stated, "Although I, Saichō, traveled to the great T'ang, I did not have a chance to study Shingon. At this opportunity, I would like to receive the transmission of the secret Dharma of Shingon." He also stated in his letter to you, Great Teacher: "I, Saichō, sailed to the great T'ang, and yet had not studied Shingon. I would like to receive your instructions in the meditative methods of Vairocana's Matrix and Diamond [Maṇḍalas]." In response to these requests, on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of the same year, the *abhiṣeka* altar was established, and [Saichō], together with over one hundred of his disciples, was sprinkled with the sacred water of the mantra-grasping *abhiṣeka* (*jimyō kanjō*) and received instructions in the mantras of the eighteen paths (*jūhachidō*). We found studying mantras in Sanskrit rather difficult.

Our master then asked: "How many months would it take for us to master the ritual manuals on the grand meditative methods (*taihō giki* 大法儀軌)?" You replied: "It will be com-

Dharma). The term *jimyō* is defined in fascicle 9, chapter 43 of Śubhakarasiṃha's *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, T 39.674c–75a.

²⁰ Śubhakarasiṃha's *Commentary* states that the entire ritual sequences of *denkyō kanjō* could be carried out in the master's and the disciples' meditative visualizations. See the *Commentary*, fascicle 3, chapter 3, T 39.613a–c.

²¹ See Saichō's letter of the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of 812 sent from Mt. Hiei to Taihan at Takao, asking him to continue the study of Mikkyō and to transmit his mastery of Mikkyō to Tendai students (DZ 5, pp. 465–66).

plete in three years.” In grief, [our master] said: “I originally expected it to be complete in three months (*ikka* 一夏). If it requires years of training, I have no choice but to return to my abode, deal with the affairs of my own school and, thereafter, come back and resume my study.” Thus in the first month of 813 he entrusted me, Taihan, Ken’ei 賢榮 and other disciples to you, Great Teacher, for further study of Shingon.

(*Rankei ionshū* 蘭契遺音集, KZ 5, pp. 383–85)²²

Enchō’s description reveals that there existed yet another level of miscommunication between Kūkai and Saichō regarding the *abhiṣeka*s at Takaosan-ji. Saichō obviously expected Kūkai to grant him the *abhiṣeka* of the highest order, *denkyō kanjō*, which would make Saichō a Mikkyō master capable of performing the same *abhiṣeka* for his own disciples. In addition, Saichō originally assumed that three months would be sufficient to complete the training to master *taihō*, the grand meditative methods required for this highest *abhiṣeka*. However, as Enchō’s letter clearly demonstrates, the actual initiation given to Saichō on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month was *jimyō kanjō*, the second order *abhiṣeka* that permits the initiate to begin the formal study of mantras, mudrās, and visualizations. The letter also suggests that the study of mantras in Sanskrit posed a problem for the students. Advanced work in Mikkyō ritual requires an understanding of Sanskrit phonetics and of Siddham (Jpn. *shittan* 悉曇), a Sanskrit script transmitted to East Asia. At least a rudimentary knowledge of Sanskrit grammar is also needed to fully grasp the construction of mantras and dhāraṇīs.

²² Because Enchō’s letter has Saichō admitting his lack of knowledge of Mikkyō and relying heavily on Kūkai, in the past certain Tendai scholar-priests doubted its authenticity. The letter was originally included in the *Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, a collection of Saichō’s and his disciples’ letters compiled by Ningai (951–1046), but when the *Shōsoku* was placed in the *Dengyō Daishi zenshū* the editors intentionally omitted it. However, modern scholars generally agree that the letter is genuine. First, Saichō’s statement acknowledging his lack of knowledge of Mikkyō is a direct quote from a letter of established authenticity from Saichō to Fujiwara Fuyutsugu dated the nineteenth day of the eleventh month of 812 (DZ 5, p. 439). Second, the content of Enchō’s letter corresponds to that of Saichō’s letters to Kūkai and other historical sources describing Saichō’s study of Mikkyō; among the most important of these sources is the *Denjutsu isshin kaimon*, Saichō’s biography by his disciple Kōjō, in which Kōjō states that in the first month of 813 he visited Saichō on Mt. Hiei, then was sent back to Takaosan-ji to continue his Mikkyō studies (DZ 1, pp. 529–30). Third, in his letter Enchō requests Kūkai to resume his training of Tendai students. According to Kōjō’s *Isshin kaimon*, this request was granted: “Although he [Enchō] was already sixty years old [in 831], for the sake of realizing the vision of our late master [Saichō], he trained himself in the great path of Shingon. He received from the great priest Kūkai detailed instructions on the precepts and yogas of the three mysteries” (DZ 1, p. 639). For an extensive discussion of the authenticity of Enchō’s letter, see KUCHI 1984, pp. 179–87.

In a letter composed when he was approaching fifty (ca. 821), Kūkai states that only four of his leading disciples—Gōrin 杲隣, Jichie 実慧, Taihan, and Chisen—finally mastered the *taihō* (*Kōya zappitsu shū* 高野雜筆集, KZ 3, p. 583).²³ This shows that even Kūkai's disciples, with constant access to their master's instruction, required years of training to master the *taihō*. For Saichō, however, three additional years of training at Takaosan-ji was clearly impossible. The disunion among his disciples and the problem of defections required his immediate return to Mt. Hiei. Saichō therefore entrusted his disciples to Kūkai to continue their study of Mikkyō (DZ 5, pp. 448–49; DZ 1, pp. 529–30).²⁴ On the sixth day of the third month of 813 Kūkai performed yet another *jimyō kanjō* and a total of eighteen priests were initiated into the Diamond Maṇḍala. As a result, Enchō, Kōjō, and three other disciples of Saichō completed their reception of the dual transmission of the Diamond and Matrix traditions. Taihan, too, was initiated into the Diamond tradition (KZ 3, pp. 627–28). According to Kōjō, Saichō's disciples stayed at Takao until the sixth month of that year to complete their post-initiation training and then returned to Hiei (KZ 1, p. 530). Taihan, however, remained at Takaosan-ji.

The limited number of initiates at the third *abhiṣeka* is again indicative of Saichō's preference for the Matrix tradition. Before his study at Takao, Saichō's knowledge of Kūkai's Mikkyō might well have been limited, but by the time the Diamond *abhiṣeka* was performed he had studied with Kūkai for more than a month and must have realized that Kūkai's system rested on the dual foundations of the Diamond and Matrix traditions. Yet only five disciples of Saichō received *abhiṣekas* in both maṇḍalas. This suggests that Saichō had no intention of adopting the entirety of Kūkai's Mikkyō into the Tendai's *shanagō* curriculum, and was determined from the outset to absorb only certain elements, particularly from Kūkai's Matrix tradition. In fact, Saichō never included the study of the *Vajrasekhara Sūtra* and its Diamond Maṇḍala among the official requirements for *shanagō* students.²⁵

²³ Takagi Shingen dates this letter to 821, when Kūkai was forty-eight.

²⁴ See also Saichō's letter of the eighteenth day of the fourth month, in which he entrusts his disciple Tokurei 徳令 to Kūkai for the study of Mikkyō (DZ 5, p. 459).

²⁵ In his *Tendai hokke nenbun gakushōshiki* (*Rokujōshiki* 六条式), submitted to the court in 818, Saichō specifies the following four sūtras as required readings for the *shanagō* students: the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (*Daibirushana jōbutsu jinpen kaji kyō* 大毘盧遮那成佛神變加持經, T #848), the *Mahāmayūri Sūtra* (*Butsumo daikujaku myō kyō* 佛母大孔雀明王經, T #982), the *Amogapāśa Sūtra* (*Fukū kenjaku jinpen shingon kyō* 不空罽索神變真言經, T #1092), and the *Buddhośṅṣa Sūtra* (*Butchō sonshō darani kyō* 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼經, T #967) (DZ 1, p. 12). See also his *Hiei-zan Tendai hokke-in tokugō gakushōshiki*, also of 818, in which Saichō identifies the same four sūtras as requirements for younger candidates seeking to become *shanagō* students (DZ 1, p. 21).

For Kūkai, Saichō's selective adaptation of Mikkyō could not be tolerated. That Saichō received the dual initiation into the Diamond and Matrix Maṇḍalas meant for Kūkai that Saichō was now not merely his friend and ally but also one of his Mikkyō disciples—he was officially initiated into Shingon and was committed by the two *abhiṣekas* to faithfully observe the Mikkyō of the dual transmission that Kūkai had received from Hui-kuo.

Thus at the Takaosan-ji initiation of 812, the high point of the cooperation between Saichō and Kūkai, there were already symptoms of serious discord between the two figures. The various inconsistencies and miscommunications regarding the three *abhiṣekas*—the obscurity surrounding the scheduling of the first two *abhiṣekas*, the disproportionately large number of initiates at the second, Matrix *abhiṣeka*, and Saichō's abrupt departure from Takao thereafter—are best seen in the light of differences that began to manifest themselves between Saichō and Kūkai.

Face-to-Face Transmission versus Transmission by Writing

Saichō continued his study of Mikkyō on Mt. Hiei, sending letters to Kūkai requesting the loan of Mikkyō texts. Originally, as suggested in Enchō's letter, Saichō intended to return as soon as possible to Takao to resume his study with Kūkai. However, there is no indication that Saichō ever met with Kūkai again after his return to Hiei from Takao. Thus, Saichō's subsequent study of Mikkyō was limited to the reading of texts. The latest of Saichō's datable letters to Kūkai was from the tenth day of the second month of 816. He writes:

To the Great Teacher Henjō [Kūkai] of Takao:

The first book of Cheng-kuan's 澄觀 new *Commentary to the Hua-yen* in ten fascicles [*Daihōkōbutsu kegonkyōsho* 大方広佛華嚴經疏, T #1735].

The ritual manual on Ucchuṣma (Jpn. Ususama) in one fascicle [*Daiiriki ususama gikikyō* 大威力烏枢沙摩儀軌經, T #1225].

I have not yet completed copying these two texts, which I borrowed from you for the sake of transmitting the Dharma. However, because of the urgent request in your letter, I am returning them. As usual I have counted and confirmed the number of the fascicles. I am entrusting them to your messenger Inman.

Although I have not found time yet, when the right opportunity arrives, I will travel to meet you there again.

Sincerely,

Your distant disciple, Saichō (DZ 5, p. 450)

Although Saichō kept these two texts for an exceptionally long time (Cheng-kuan's commentary for more than five years, and the Ucchuṣma ritual manual for three years),²⁶ Kūkai's demand that Saichō return the uncopied texts is suggestive of a serious deterioration in their relationship. Saichō's surviving letters demonstrate that his borrowing of Kūkai's books continued for seven years, from 809 to 816, and that he managed to copy at least 214 fascicles, that is, nearly half of the entire 461 fascicles of Kūkai's imported texts (TAKAGI 1990, p. 152). In one of his letters to Kūkai, Saichō explains his desire to borrow the Mikkyō texts.

My intention is only to copy your texts. When I finish copying them in accordance with your catalog [*Shōrai mokuroku*], I will immediately bring them to your temple and listen to your instruction. While I have everything necessary for the transcription work here at my temple, it would be extremely difficult to carry out the copying at your temple, beginning with the procurement of food. I beg you, my great teacher, please do not suspect that I am stealing your texts with arrogant intentions, with wicked mind. I have entrusted Taihan to convey my thoughts to you. Please lend me the books I need to copy. I, your humble disciple, have never attempted to transgress the *samaya*.

(DZ 5, pp. 459–60)

The term *samaya* (Jpn. *sanmaya*) in the letter refers to an initiate's pledge at the *abhiṣeka* to uphold the Mikkyō precepts (*Himitsu sanmaya bukkaigi* 秘密三昧耶佛戒儀, KZ 2, pp. 140–49). Transgression of the *samaya*—known as *otsu sanmaya* 越三昧耶 or *oppōzai* 越法罪—is the most serious misconduct for a Mikkyō practitioner, and includes such acts as teaching Mikkyō meditative practices to noninitiates, reciting and inscribing mantras without the knowledge of Sanskrit and the

²⁶ Saichō's letter of the fourth month of 811 shows that he had already had Cheng-kuan's commentary for several months. Saichō reports to Kūkai that the cursory style of the text made copying extremely difficult (DZ 5, pp. 458–59). The Ucchuṣma ritual manual, together with six other titles, was originally loaned to Saichō on the eighteenth day of the twelfth month of 812, immediately after the Matrix *abhiṣeka* at Takao (DZ 5, pp. 450–51).

Saichō's preference for the Matrix tradition may relate to the *Commentary on the Mahāvairocana Sūtra* (*Dainichikyōsho* 大日經疏, T #1796), which was orally related by Śubhakarasiṃha and transcribed by his Chinese disciple I-hsing 一行. I-hsing, renowned for his mastery of both Mikkyō and T'ien-t'ai, often uses T'ien-t'ai terms to explain Mikkyō concepts. The *Commentary* thus provides a crucial link in Saichō's efforts to integrate Mikkyō within the Japanese Tendai school. By contrast, the group of commentaries and ritual manuals on the *Vajrasākhara Sūtra* prepared by Amoghavajra make no direct reference to T'ien-t'ai doctrine.

Siddham script, and reading scriptural texts without the guidance of a master.²⁷ Although the letter is merely dated the eighteenth day of the first month with no mention of the year, Saichō's reference to *samaya* transgression shows that it was sent to Kūkai after the Takao initiation. There exist other letters of Saichō dated after 812 in which he appeals to Kūkai to continue support for his copying at Hiei. Saichō states: "I have no wrong intentions; please do not ignore my request [for copying]" (DZ 5, p. 449). Elsewhere he says: "How could your transmission [of Mikkyō teaching] be wasted? Do not think of [my borrowing] as an act of arrogance" (DZ 5, pp. 451–52).

These letters bear witness to the persistent tension between Saichō and Kūkai, which began to intensify after Saichō's return to Hiei at the close of 812. One of Kūkai's letters in the *Kōya zappitsu shū* provides further insight into their discord:

Thank you for your letter, which I received from [my messenger] Nobumitsu, who visited you. Also, I thank you for your gift of brush and paper. Cold weather still persists. How are you faring? I am living out my days peacefully. Although we are separated in the east [Hiei] and the west [Takao], our friendship always remains as fresh as the pine leaves.

As I mentioned to you before, it requires personal instruction to transmit the teaching of the scriptures you asked to borrow. Let me state again my principle [for teaching Mikkyō]: It requires a special occasion to reveal the profound Dharma of the maṇḍalas; it takes beings of exceptional capacity to promulgate it. The great masters [Shingon patriarchs] who established the method of transmitting the Dharma left admonishments to the followers of latter ages not to violate the *samaya*. Thus it is not my will that grants or deprives you of [the Mikkyō transmission]; it is your own mind that either attains or loses it. My only wish is to demonstrate with my own hands to you the mudrās, to convey to you mantras through my own mouth, and to transmit [Dharma] to your mind. I hope you clearly realize this principle.

(KZ 3, pp. 595–96)

Although this letter lacks both date and addressee, its content shows that the recipient once received *abhiṣeka* from Kūkai, maintained a friendship with him for several years through correspondence, and had requested to borrow Kūkai's texts. It also shows that a

²⁷ For the definition of *otsu sanmaya*, see *Kongōchō yugachūryakushutsu nenjūkyō* 金剛頂瑜伽中略出念誦經, fascicle 4, T 18.250a; *Dainichikyō*, fascicle 4, T 18.30a; and *Dainichikyō sho*, fascicle 14, T 39.722b–c.

potential violation of the *samaya* had become an issue for Kūkai, who encourages the recipient to come to his temple to resume an interrupted training in Mikkyō. In addition, the terms *east* and *west* are used in the correspondences between Saichō and Kūkai to refer, respectively, to Mt. Hiei and Takaosan-ji.²⁸ Thus this letter by Kūkai fits perfectly into the context of Saichō's letters to Kūkai in the years following the Takao initiation. These letters demonstrate that, while Saichō saw no harm in copying the texts, Kūkai felt that there were certain texts Saichō could not properly understand because he had not completed Shingon training. For Kūkai, Saichō risked transgressing the *samaya* through an excessive reliance on the written word without resort to an authorized teacher, a transgression punishable by expulsion from the Mikkyō order. If Saichō was to continue copying texts at Hiei, he must first complete his training with Kūkai.

It is this strained interaction between Saichō and Kūkai that provides the context for another letter from Kūkai to Saichō, one that scholars have identified as being directly responsible for ending the affiliation between Saichō and Kūkai. Although this letter is much more lengthy and detailed, its contents replicate the letter quoted above. What makes the letter particularly important is its harsh rhetoric accusing Saichō of persistent violation of the *samaya*. In fact, some scholars in the past, believing that Saichō and Kūkai maintained friendly relations at the time, felt the letter to be a forgery (TSUJI 1944, p. 304).²⁹ But when one understands the escalating tension between Kūkai and Saichō over the issue of *samaya* violation, the letter offers yet another proof of a deep chasm separating the two.

The letter was written in reply to Saichō's request to copy the *Rishushakuyō* 理趣釈經, a commentary on the *Path to Truth Sūtra*.³⁰

²⁸ See Kūkai's letter to Saichō in *Shūi zasshū* 拾遺雜集 (KZ 3, p. 643), in which Kūkai describes the traffic between Hiei and Takaosan-ji as *tōzai* 東西 (east-west) and addresses Saichō as *tōrei* 東嶺 (the eastern peak). Kūkai's original handwritten letter, commonly known as *Fūshinjō* 風信帳, is preserved at Tō-ji, and is renowned for its semicursive style of calligraphy. See also Saichō's two letters to Kūkai in *Dengyō Daishi shōsoku* (DZ 5, pp. 446–47, p. 459) in which Saichō describes himself as the disciple of *tōzan* 東山 (eastern mountain) and addresses Kūkai as the teacher of *seizan* 西山 (western mountain).

²⁹ Tsuji also cites the lack of any record of the letter until it appeared in the *Zoku henjō hakki seireishū hoketsushō* 統遍照発揮性靈集補闕鈔, compiled by Saisen 濟運 (1025–1115) in 1079. However, Tsuji overlooked the fact that the letter is listed as an autonomous text in the *Kōso gyoseisaku mokuroku* 高祖御製作目録 and *Daishi gyosaku mokuroku* 大師御作目録, composed, respectively, by Kakuban 覚鑿 (1095–1143) and Shingaku 心覺 (1117–1180). The catalogs indicate that the letter existed as an independent work and was widely regarded by Saisen's contemporaries as Kūkai's composition. TAKAGI argues for the authenticity of the letter on the basis of its rhetorical style, which parallels, sentence by sentence, other major works of Kūkai (1990, pp. 186–90). For additional bibliographical evidence, see TAKAGI 1990, p. 174.

³⁰ *Tairaku kongō fukū shinjitsu sanmayakyō hannya haramita rishushaku* 大樂金剛不空

Kūkai viewed this as an advanced sūtra that particularly required a trained teacher's personal instruction. In an 817 letter to the priest Enzō of Tōdai-ji, who asked Kūkai about difficult passages in this sūtra,³¹ Kūkai points out that the sūtra often resorts to radical subjects like killing and sexual desire to express the unconventionality of *prajñā-pāramitā*, and warns Enzō that these are esoteric metaphors that must not be interpreted literally. Kūkai emphasizes that the sūtra's profound meaning can only be grasped through the practice of meditation, an "esoteric meditation that cannot be discussed on paper, that must be transmitted face to face from master to disciple" (*Jissō hannyakyō tōshaku* 実相般若経答釈, KZ 1, p. 749).

The letter to Saichō is generally seen as a refusal to lend Saichō the *Rishushakukyō*. However, as KIUCHI (1984, pp. 162–63) and TAKAGI (1990, p. 182) have demonstrated, Kūkai's main point does not concern the actual loan of the text.

Your letter arrived and deeply comforted me. It is snowy and cold here. My Dharma-friend, Chief of Meditation (*shikan zasu* 止観座主), I believe you are faring well as usual. I am living out my days peacefully. Years have passed since we became friends, and I constantly think of our bond that is as strong as cement set with lacquer, as unchanging as evergreen, as harmonious as milk melting into water, and as fresh as the fragrance of herbs.... I never forget for even a moment that we promised to share the seat of Prabhūta-ratna Tathāgata and help propagate the Lord Śākyamuni's teaching.³² However, there is no one but you who are capable of transmitting the One Vehicle of the exoteric teaching (*kengyō ichijō*), and I am devoting myself exclusively to the Secret Treasury of the Buddhas (*himitsu butsumō*). We thus busy ourselves protecting our own Dharmas and find no time to talk together.

Although his wording in the letter is none other than courteous, it should be noted that Kūkai here draws a clear line between the two schools still in their nascent state by defining Tendai as an exoteric teaching (*kengyō*) and distinguishing it from Shingon, the esoteric teaching.

真実三昧耶経般若波羅密多理趣釈, T #1003. A commentary on *Tairaku kongō fukū shinjitsu sanmayakyō* (*Prajñā pāramitā naya śatapañcaśatikā*, aka *Adhyardhaśatikā prajñā pāramitā*), T #243.

³¹ *Jissō hannya haramita kyō* 実相般若波羅密多經, T #240. A variant translation of the *Prajñā pāramitā naya śatapañcaśatikā*.

³² A reference to the episode of the manifestation of Prabhūta-ratna Buddha's stūpa in fascicle 4 of the *Lotus Sūtra*, T 9.33c.

As soon as I opened your letter I realized that you are requesting a commentary on the *Path to Truth* (*rishushaku*). But there are many paths to truth (*rishu*, Skt. *naya*). Exactly what type of path to truth are you referring to? The path to truth, as well as writings explaining it, are so extensive that heaven cannot cover them, so vast that they overflow the earth.... Thus unless one relies on the power of the Tathāgatas' mind-ground and the Bodhisattvas' mind of emptiness, how is it possible to understand and, further, to uphold it? I am far short of nimble in capacity, but I would like to repeat to you the admonition of the Great Masters. It is my hope that you will rectify your mind with wisdom, cease your attachment to sophistry, and listen to the true words of the path to truth preserved in Mikkyō.

This section, which immediately follows the opening paragraph quoted above, demonstrates a drastic shift in Kūkai's tone of address. He no longer addresses Saichō as a friend and ally, but as a disciple. Kūkai insists on separating these two aspects of his relationship with Saichō: where Mikkyō study is concerned, Kūkai demands that Saichō observe his authority as teacher, however celebrated Saichō may be as head of the Tendai school. Kūkai then goes on to deliver a lengthy lecture to Saichō pointing out that it is Saichō's own attachment to writing that prevents him from attaining the path to truth. Ultimately, for Kūkai, the path to truth is beyond the scope of scriptural language and rests in the Tathāgatas' three mysteries, and in the oneness of Buddhas, practitioners, and sentient beings as revealed through Mikkyō practice. Kūkai bluntly presents his criticism to Saichō:

Are you enlightened or unenlightened? If you are enlightened, then your Buddha wisdom is already perfect and complete and there is nothing further for you to pursue.... If you are unenlightened, you must observe the Buddhas' admonitions. To obey the Buddhas' teachings, you must commit yourself to *samaya*. Once the *samaya* is violated, there exists no merit in either instructing or receiving the teaching. Whether the Secret Treasury [Mikkyō] rises or falls depends completely on the transmission between you and me. If you receive it improperly and if I give it to you inappropriately, how would it be possible for the practitioner of the future to understand the authentic path to pursuing the Dharma?

Furthermore, the deepest truth of the Secret Treasury cannot be expressed in writing. It can only be transmitted from one mind to another. Writing is dregs, nothing but broken tiles. If you receive the transmission of dregs and broken tiles, you will lose the ultimate truth. To discard the real and hold

fast to the unreal is the way of the fool, the way you must not follow, the way you must not aspire to. Those of the distant past pursued the path for the sake of the path. Those of the present follow it merely for fame and fortune.

Kūkai concludes his letter with a repeated plea:

I urge you: Do not transgress the *samaya*, protect it as if it were your life, strictly observe the four precepts (*shijūkin* 四重禁)³³ and cherish them as if they were your own eyes. If you pledge to practice in accord with the teaching, the five wisdoms of the Tathāgata will be immediately granted to you. Who, then, would hide from you the bright jewel of the universal monarch [i.e., the Path to Truth]?³⁴

(KZ 3, pp. 547–52)

Kūkai presses Saichō to fundamentally change his approach, or attitude, to studying Mikkyō. For Kūkai, Mikkyō requires a unique pedagogical discipline that places more emphasis on personal instruction than on reading texts. It is ultimately *menju* 面授 (face to face transmission), the personal transmission from master to disciple of the ritual meditative experience, that ensures the proper understanding of the texts, and not vice versa.

From Kūkai's point of view, Saichō never understood the qualitative difference between studying Shingon and studying Tendai, seen by Kūkai as an exoteric school. In the context of exoteric Buddhism sūtra study constitutes a meritorious act, but in esoteric Buddhism the same act without a qualified teacher leads only to false interpretations, given the highly technical, cryptic, and enigmatic nature of Mikkyō texts. Kūkai's letter is, in effect, an ultimatum demanding that Saichō cease his disobedience and follow Kūkai's pedagogical agenda in his study of Mikkyō.

Obviously, it would have been impossible for Saichō to accede to this demand. To acknowledge that Mikkyō study requires a training method distinct from his own would have been tantamount to accepting Kūkai's distinction between Shingon as an esoteric school and Tendai as an exoteric school. To recognize such an unbridgeable difference between Shingon and Tendai would have defeated Saichō's aim in establishing the *shanagō* curriculum, that is, the grafting of Mikkyō onto the Tendai Lotus school. Saichō's breaking off of his

³³ The four major prohibitions of the *samaya*: not to abandon the right Dharma, not to discard one's own bodhicitta, not to be parsimonious in teaching and helping others, and not to harm sentient beings. See the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, fascicle 2, T 18.12b, 40a.

³⁴ A reference to a parable in the *Lotus Sūtra*, fascicle 5, T 9.38c.

relationship with Kūkai must therefore have occurred immediately after he received this letter.

It was believed in the past that this ultimatum was in response to Saichō's letter of the twenty-third day of the eleventh month of 813 (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, p. 449), in which he requested the *Daishō monjushiri bosatsu sanbutsu hosshinrai* 大聖文殊師利菩薩讚佛法身礼 [Mañjuśrī's homage to the Dharmakāya] (T #1195), Kūkai's visualization diagram and commentary on this ritual manual, and the *Rishushakukyō*. According to Saichō's letter to Taihan dated two days later (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, p. 466), Saichō received from Kūkai a gift of a poem about the Mañjuśrī ritual manual.³⁵ In his introductory remarks to the poem Kūkai states that, in addition to the poem, he composed a diagram and commentary as aids in the Mañjuśrī ritual meditation. Reading this, Saichō decided to borrow Kūkai's diagram and commentary and, in return, compose his own poem on these two works.

Zaitzu Eiji has reported on the discovery at Sefuku-ji in Osaka Prefecture of a previously unknown letter from Kūkai to Saichō, in which Kūkai expresses his gratitude for Saichō's poems on his diagram and commentary (ZAITSU 1963, pp. 532-37).³⁶ This letter demonstrates that Kūkai did send Saichō at least two of the four texts he had requested. Hence Kūkai's ultimatum was not in fact a reply to Saichō's above-mentioned letter, which explains why there is no mention in the ultimatum of the diagram and commentary that Saichō had requested along with the *Rishushakukyō*. Their exchange of poems shows that, in the latter part of 813, Saichō's relationship with Kūkai still remained friendly and cooperative despite the underlying discord and tension. In fact, a letter to Kūkai dated the eighth day of the second month of 814 indicates that Saichō was still receiving books from Kūkai (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, p. 449). This makes clear that Kūkai's ultimatum was made not in 813 but several years later, most likely in 816, when, as discussed earlier, their correspondence seems to have ceased. It also shows that Saichō asked Kūkai to lend him the *Rishushakukyō* more than once and that Kūkai failed to respond positively to either of these requests.

Because this letter was unknown, earlier scholars could not understand why Kūkai had continued to lend Saichō books until 816 even though he had apparently replied to his friendly letter of the eleventh

³⁵ Kūkai's poem, together with his introductory remarks, is preserved in fascicle 3 of the *Seireishū*, "Chūju kankō no shi narabi ni jo" 中寿感興詩并序 (KZ 3, p. 429).

³⁶ Kūkai's letter is reproduced in TAKAGI 1981, p. 138. For an analysis of the importance of this letter in reappraising Kūkai's exchange with Saichō, see TAKAGI 1990, p. 177.

month of 813 with an ultimatum. Some argued that Saichō had acceded to Kūkai's demand in order to continue his transcription project, while others speculated that the ultimatum was sent not to Saichō but to Enchō, and that Saichō's affiliation with Kūkai dissolved of itself as Saichō's interest shifted away from Mikkyō in his final years.³⁷ However, when the ultimatum is moved to 816, one finds abundant evidence to support the thesis that the relationship between the two ended decisively.

Earlier in 813 Saichō had composed the *Ehyō tendaiishū* (DZ 1, pp. 343–66), which argues that the principal Buddhist masters of China and Korea all relied on T'ien-t'ai doctrine in composing their own works. By identifying numerous references to and quotes from T'ien-t'ai treatises in the works of Chi-tsang 吉藏 of the San-lun 三論 school, Chih-chou 智周 of the Fa-hsiang 法相 school, Fa-tsang 法藏 of the Hua-yen 華嚴 school, I-hsing of Mikkyō, and other prominent teachers, Saichō asserted that T'ien-t'ai formed the foundation for all major Buddhist schools in East Asia. In 816, however, Saichō added a new introduction to the work. This introduction chides Sanron, Hossō, and Kegon—the leading schools of Nara Buddhism—for ignoring the influence of T'ien-t'ai on the works of their Chinese patriarchs, but its criticism of Shingon stands out: “The esoteric Shingon Buddhist, the newcomer, went so far as to deny the validity of transmission through writing (*hitsuju* 筆授)” (DZ 3, p. 344). In this comment Saichō is unmistakably denouncing Kūkai for his comments in the ultimatum on Saichō's approach to studying Mikkyō. Saichō's public condemnation of Kūkai provides further evidence that Saichō dissolved his

³⁷ In Saisen's edition of the *Zoku henjō hakki seireishū hoketsushō*, Kūkai's ultimatum is entitled “Eizan no Chō hosshi *Rishushakukyō* o motomeru no tō suru sho” [A reply to the request for *Rishushakukyō* by the Dharma-master Chō of Mt. Hiei]. Akamatsu Toshihide pointed out that another letter to Saichō in the same volume was addressed “Eizan no Chō *wajō* 叡山澄和尚.” Because the title *wajō* (abbot; *kashō* in the Tendai reading), is reserved for exceptionally important priests, AKAMATSU argued that the letter addressed to “Chō hosshi” cannot have been to Saichō, and was probably to Enchō (1973). “Chō wajō,” however, is the title used in the catalogs of Saisen, Kakuban, and Shinkaku, where the letter is listed as the independent work *Eizan no Chō wajō Rishushaku o motomuru ni kotauru sho* (KZ 5, pp. 674, 685, 691). In addition, Kōjō's *Denjutsu isshin kaimon* indicates that Saichō was addressed even by his own disciples as “Saichō hosshi” (DZ 1, p. 640). These sources demonstrate that the titles *hosshi* and *wajō* were used interchangeably to refer to Saichō. In addition, the ultimatum was addressed to one who was attempting to pursue the study of Mikkyō through writing without completing post-initiation training. This was not the case with Enchō: as discussed earlier, Enchō completed his six months of training with Kūkai at Takao before returning to Mt. Hiei. This is precisely why Kūkai accepted Enchō's request of 831 and resumed teaching Enchō and other Tendai priests. In view of the fact that there are no records indicating that Enchō borrowed Kūkai's text, and that he had access to Saichō's borrowed texts, it is extremely difficult to accept Akamatsu's speculation.

alliance with Kūkai in 816, and that Kūkai's ultimatum was immediately responsible for ending their cooperation.

Of Taihan, Kengyō, and Mikkyō

Probably the most important evidence that Saichō's acrimonious breakup with Kūkai occurred in 816 is the simultaneous rupture of Saichō's relationship with Taihan, who, since taking residence at Takao in 812, had served as a liaison between his former teacher and Kūkai. By this time Taihan had established himself as a principal figure among Kūkai's disciples.

On the eighth day of the seventh month of 816 Kūkai received the imperial court's permission to build a monastery on Mt. Kōya for Mikkyō training (*Daijō kanpu kii kokushi* 太政官符紀井国司, KZ 5, pp. 426–27). Taihan and Jitsue were entrusted with the task of founding the new center (*Kōya zappitsu shū*, KZ 3, p. 575). On the first day of the fifth month of 816 Saichō sent a letter to Taihan at Takao urging him to quit his training with Kūkai and return to Saichō's order. Specifically, Saichō told Taihan that he would soon be departing for the eastern provinces and invited Taihan to assist him in his proselytizing activities for the Tendai Lotus school. Saichō states:

I do not forget your great contribution [to our school] even for a moment. At the Takao initiation, we helped each other and, together, pledged to attain the Buddha's wisdom. How could I expect that you would betray our original vow and live out your life in a place so distant from ours! It is common sense that one discards the inferior and pursues the superior. However, what difference in excellence could there be between the One Unifying Vehicle of the Lotus and the One Unifying Vehicle of Shingon? Sharing the same Dharma and sharing their devotion to it, such are good Buddhist friends.

(*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, p. 469)

In his reply Taihan squarely refuses Saichō's request:

You said in your letter, "Let us abide together in saṃsāra to help sentient beings. Let us travel together to all directions to promulgate the Tendai school." You also asked me, "What difference in excellence could there be between the One Unifying Vehicle of the Lotus and the One Unifying Vehicle of Shingon?"

I, Taihan, am so dull that I can hardly distinguish soy beans from wheat. How could I separate gems from pebbles? However, because I cannot remain forever perplexed by your

thundering question, I would like to state my view, one that is as narrow as that through a bamboo pipe. The Tathāgatas, the great teachers, provide the medicine of Dharma according to the capacities of their patients. They prescribe myriad medications corresponding to countless proclivities in people.... And yet the Dharmakāya Buddha unfailingly distinguishes himself from the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha. How, then, could there be no difference in depth between the exoteric and esoteric teachings? The teaching of the Dharmakāya is absolute, hidden, and ultimate, while the teaching of the Saṃbhogakāya is relative, apparent, and provisional. Therefore I am now immersing myself in the nectar of Shingon and have no time for tasting the medicines of the exoteric schools.

In addition, one must obey the rules of the practice for one's own sake and observe the stages in the practice of saving others. Unless one's mind is polished, it is impossible to serve others. I, Taihan, have not yet reached the stage of annihilating the six sensory attachments. How can I bear the responsibility of serving others? I would like to entirely entrust the matter of saving beings to you, Great Master. I would be deeply indebted if you would accept my resignation from duties. In the past, I vowed to help establish the One Unifying Vehicle of Tendai. Now that the school prospers with the Buddhas' protection and under the emperor's aegis...it is my wish that you would not censure me for my crazed attachment [to Shingon].

(*Zoku henjō hakki seireishū* 続遍照發揮性靈集,
fascicle 10, KZ 3, pp. 546–47)

Some scholars have argued that this letter finalizing the defection of Saichō's trusted disciple was responsible for ending Saichō's alliance with Kūkai (Tsuji 1944, p. 285). However, as discussed earlier, Taihan had already dissociated himself from Saichō when, in the sixth month of 812, he abandoned his post of *sōbettō* on Mt. Hiei and retired to Takashima. Saichō's above letter, as well as his earlier letters to Taihan entreating him to return to the Tendai school,³⁸ demonstrate that Taihan arrived at Takao as a Tendai expatriate and that from the very beginning of his residence there he functioned no longer as Saichō's disciple.

A careful reading of Taihan's letter reveals that it centers on the rejection of Saichō's claim that Tendai and Shingon are equal expres-

³⁸ As SHIOIRI Ryōchū points out (1937, p. 273), Saichō's letter to Taihan of the nineteenth day of the sixth month of 813 is signed, "A Dharma-colleague abandoned by you, Saichō" (DZ 5, p. 464). See also Saichō's letter requesting Taihan in Takashima to return immediately to Mt. Hiei (DZ 5, pp. 470–71).

sions of the One Unifying Vehicle and that therefore Taihan need not limit himself to the study of Shingon. Taihan draws a clear distinction between Shingon and Tendai, identifying the former as an absolute and unconditional teaching direct from the Dharmakāya Buddha, and the latter (following Saichō's own definition)³⁹ as a relative and provisional teaching based on the *Lotus Sūtra* preached by the Nirmāṇakāya, the Buddha Śākyamuni Buddha. Taihan's refusal to return to Saichō's assembly was particularly damaging to Saichō since it derived from his belief that Shingon is superior to Tendai.

Because Taihan's letter outlines the major distinctions between the esoteric and exoteric teachings as developed in Kūkai's *Benkenmitsu nikyōron* 弁顯密二教論 (KZ 1, pp. 474–505),⁴⁰ it is believed that the letter may actually have been written by Kūkai. Regardless of the letter's authorship, the fact remains that Taihan, in his own words or in those of Kūkai, directly rejected Saichō's view of the equality of Shingon and Tendai.⁴¹ Taihan's letter thus comprises further evidence of the irreconcilable differences separating Kūkai's and Saichō's assessment of the relationship between the Shingon and Tendai schools.

Immediately following his exchange with Taihan in 816, Saichō left for the eastern provinces of Shinano, Kōzuke, and Shimotsuke (SONODA 1952, p. 49). In the final years of his life, between his return to Mt. Hiei in the eighth month of 817 and his death there in the sixth month of 822, Saichō shifted the focus of his activity from Mikkyō to the defense of the Tendai Lotus school, holding a protracted doctrinal debate with the Hossō priest Tokuitsu 徳一 and working on his project to establish an exclusively Mahāyānist precept platform on Mt. Hiei (a plan that incurred the fierce opposition of the Nara schools). Historical records suggest that in these last years Saichō's interactions with Kūkai ceased completely. Thus 816—when the correspondence between Kūkai and Saichō ended, when Saichō openly denounced Kūkai's Mikkyō pedagogy in the *Ehyō tendaiishū*, and when

³⁹ Saichō identifies Tendai as *kyōshū* 經宗 (the sūtra school), and distinguishes it from the Sanron and Hossō schools, which he calls *ronshū*, schools based on the secondary textual authority of the śāstras. See *Hokke shūku* 法華秀句 (DZ 3, p. 273). See also *Eizan Daishi den* 叡山大師伝 (DZ 5 *furoku*, pp. 11–12).

⁴⁰ A letter by Kūkai of the first day of the fourth month of 815 to eminent priests in the eastern and southern provinces requesting their cooperation in copying and circulating essential Shingon scriptures contains the prototypical discussion on the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric teachings elaborated in the *Nikyōron*. It is presumed that the *Nikyōron* was composed shortly after this letter of 815. *Moromoro no uen no shū o susumete himitsu no hōzō o utsushi tatematsuru beki fumi* 勸諸有緣衆忠奉写秘密法藏文 (KZ 3, pp. 526–29).

⁴¹ Watanabe and Miyasaka cite two variant manuscript copies of this letter, in which the name *Taihan* was replaced by the terms *Kūkai* and *soregashi*, the characters indicating anonymity. See SSS, p. 440.

Taihan proclaimed his loyalty to Shingon—marked a crucial watershed in Saichō's life.

In the twelfth month of 819 Saichō produced the *Naishō buppō sōshō kechimyakufu*, a genealogical work tracing the lineages of his Dharma masters in Zen, Tendai, Mikkyō, and the Bodhisattva precepts. Saichō describes his reception of Mikkyō from Shun-hsiao as *taizō kongō ryōbu mandara sōshō* 胎藏金剛兩部曼荼羅相承, the transmission of the dual maṇḍalas of the Matrix and Diamond. Earlier Saichō had identified Shun-hsiao only as a disciple of the Korean priest I-lin, who had studied Matrix-tradition Mikkyō under Śubhakarasiṃha. In the *Kechimyakufu*, however, Saichō alters his description to state that Shun-hsiao had received Mikkyō not only from I-hsing but from the Diamond-tradition master Amoghavajra as well. However, Saichō's genealogy conspicuously lacks any mention of his initiation into Mikkyō by Kūkai in 812. By asserting that the Mikkyō Saichō received in China was as complete as Kūkai's dual-transmission Mikkyō, Saichō redrew Shun-hsiao's Mikkyō lineage to eradicate all traces of Kūkai from his Dharma genealogy.

In 820 Saichō presented this work to the court as support for his petition to establish a Mahāyāna precept platform on Mt. Hiei. Saichō's ultimate refusal to acknowledge his Mikkyō initiation from Kūkai indicates, again, that their relationship ended in a sharp antagonism that persisted for many years after their interaction ceased. As if to testify to their confrontation, Kūkai, in his magnum opus *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron* 秘密曼荼羅十住心論 (c. 830), closed the chapter on Tendai with a quotation from the *Hokke giki* 法華儀軌 (T #1000) warning Tendai students of the danger of transgressing the *samaya*. Kūkai's selection of this text appears far from accidental, since the *Hokke giki*, an esoteric ritual manual describing the Mikkyō meditation on the *Lotus Sūtra*, is a text Saichō had studied with Kūkai and eagerly recommended to his disciples.⁴²

⁴² See Saichō's letter to Taihan of the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of 812 asking Taihan to study the meditation of this ritual manual with Kūkai (*Dengyō Daishi shōsoku*, DZ 5, pp. 456–57). See also Kōjō's description of his study of this text with Kūkai (*Denjutsu isshin kaimon*, DZ 1, pp. 529–30). For the section of the *Hokke giki* quoted in Kūkai's *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron*, fascicle 8, see KZ 1, pp. 367–68. The quotation in question reads as follows:

Those men and women who desire to grasp the *Lotus Sūtra* must rely on the meditative practice of mantra recitation, the practice of the path of esoteric Bodhisattvas. Guided into the great Matrix Maṇḍala of Great Compassion, they must first purify their karmic obstructions with the fire of *homa* and receive *abhiṣeka* from their master. Then they must receive the master's instruction in the *samaya* and study the meditative rituals of shielding themselves [from evil forces] (*goshin kekkai* 護身結界), of invoking deities [at their ritual altars] (*geishō kuyō* 迎請供養), and of transforming themselves through visualization into the Bodhisattva

Conclusion: A Reappraisal

In his influential work on Japanese Buddhist history, TSUJI characterized Saichō as an earnest seeker of religious ideals who concealed “loftiness and purity” in “virtue and humility” (1944, pp. 283–84). By contrast, Kūkai was a “multitalented operator,” a politically minded strategist who “particularly excelled in manipulating people” (311). Tsuji depicts a Saichō who, though older and far more renowned than Kūkai, recognized the value of Kūkai’s Mikkyō and “humbled himself to become Kūkai’s disciple” (283). “Furthermore,” Tsuji continues, “Saichō sent his most trusted disciple, Taihan, to Kūkai to pursue Shingon. From Saichō’s earnest religious motives developed a beautiful friendship between the founders of Tendai and Shingon, a relationship ended abruptly and tragically when Taihan betrayed Saichō’s trust and defected to Kūkai” (285).

Progress in historical research since the publication of Tsuji’s work has revealed that Saichō was deeply involved in contemporary politics, negotiating with Emperor Kanmu’s court to found the Tendai school, and later with Emperor Saga’s court to establish the controversial Mahāyāna precept platform on Mt. Hiei. In each situation Saichō demonstrated his own political skills. Recent studies have also illustrated that the conflict between Saichō and Kūkai is too complex to explain away by the defection of Taihan, which, as discussed earlier, actually took place several years earlier than the final breakdown of Saichō’s relationship with Kūkai. These new findings remind us of an often overlooked fact that Tsuji’s characterizations of Saichō, Kūkai, and their relationship were derived from his personal, subjective impressions of Saichō’s and Kūkai’s writings.⁴³ Yet, as NAKAO Shunpaku

Samantabhadra. Unless the practitioners perfect [their knowledge] in each of these progressive stages, it will be impossible to swiftly realize samādhi however much they read and study this king of sūtras. It is therefore essential that, under the master’s supervision, practitioners conclusively master each of the mudrās, mantras, and ritual sequences in this manual. Those who prepare the altar for this ritual [for meditation or for instructing students] without [their master’s] authorization are transgressors of the *samaya*, for whom both instructing and learning this ritual will become the heaviest offense (T 19.594c–95a).

⁴³ Tsuji claims that Saichō’s writing is orderly, untainted, and elegant. He finds Kūkai’s calligraphy, despite its power and dynamism, distasteful because of its overt and repeated display of techniques (1944, pp. 284, 306). Tsuji was no expert in the art of writing, however, and students of Japanese calligraphy generally agree that Kūkai’s calligraphy played a crucial role in the development of the indigenous styles of Japanese calligraphy. Saichō’s calligraphic writings are important mainly as historical documents, and he wins no mention in such traditional calligraphy texts as the *Nyūbokushō* 入木抄, *Honchō nōsho den* 本朝能書伝, or *Yakaku teikun shō* 夜鶴庭訓抄. Komai Gasei, a prominent calligrapher and historian of Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, explains that the difference in Kūkai’s and Saichō’s styles

points out (1987, pp. 104, 170), the images of their personalities originally projected by Tsuji persist today among Japanese scholars.

In this essay I have proposed a shift of perspective in understanding Saichō's relationship with Kūkai, a shift from a precarious personality analysis to an examination of the historical conditions in which the relationship developed. Saichō may well have been earnest, virtuous, and humble, but at the time he first requested Kūkai's guidance in Mikkyō studies he was faced by a plague of defections on Mt. Hiei and the disintegration of his *shanagō* curriculum. Saichō must have been fully aware that by receiving Kūkai's *abhiṣeka* he was ceding to Kūkai the seat of leader in Mikkyō, but he nevertheless went ahead with it as a means of resolving the crisis he faced. For Kūkai, who had remained unsuccessful in proselytizing Shingon in the years after his return from China, granting the *abhiṣeka* to Saichō provided a rare opportunity to proclaim his authority as a Mikkyō master.

It is this historical context that best explains Saichō's study with Kūkai. Beyond the polite and friendly rhetoric of their correspondence, their alliance was from its very beginning overshadowed by discord. Saichō desired to understand Mikkyō in a particular way, a way that suited his goal of making Mikkyō a subdivision of the Tendai Lotus school. He refused to draw a clear distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric, he asserted an oblique relationship between the garbha and vajra maṇḍalas and their lineages, and he claimed validity for a Mikkyō transmission solely through textual studies. Kūkai could not acquiesce to Saichō's approach, which in his view deviated from the very aim of Shingon initiation. In this sense, it may be possible to see Kūkai's earlier writings aimed at rigorously distinguishing the exoteric and esoteric as primarily directed against Saichō, and only secondarily addressed to the conservative Nara schools.

It may be possible to say that the alliance between Saichō and Kūkai was also a battle of contrasting strategies for establishing Mikkyō as a new tradition in Japan, a tradition necessary for breaking away from the Nara Buddhist institution and opening a new chapter in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Despite all their exchanges, Saichō and Kūkai never reached an accord in their understanding of Mikkyō. In the end, however, both seem to have benefited from their troubled relationship. For Saichō and his disciples, the 812 Takao *abhiṣeka* and the

stemmed from their contrasting attitudes toward writing. Komai states that for Saichō writing was a practical matter, and that Saichō therefore limited himself to pragmatic styles that combined speed and legibility. Kūkai, in contrast, approached writing as an art. The diverse styles of calligraphy he employs in his works are intrinsically related to the figurations and moods of his compositions (KOMAI 1984, p. 221).

subsequent study of Mikkyō under Kūkai made possible the implementation of *shanaō* as the first officially approved Mikkyō curriculum within the institutional framework of Japanese Buddhism. Saichō's confrontation with Kūkai over the latter's systematic separation of Mikkyō and Kengyō (*kenmitsu taiben* 顯密對弁) may have complicated his effort to realize his vision of *enmitsu itchi*, but he did succeed in laying the cornerstone for the Taimitsu synthesis effected by his successors. For Kūkai, his interaction with Saichō made it possible to establish himself as a new authority within the Buddhist community of the early Heian period. In addition, his rupture with Saichō brought him closer to the Nara Buddhist establishment and facilitated his effort to esotericize the Nara schools. It was precisely their differences that helped Kūkai and Saichō to establish the identities of their own new schools, whose complex interactions have defined the texture of Japanese esoteric Buddhism.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR PRIMARY SOURCES

- DZ *Dengyō Daishi zenshū* 伝教大師全集, 5 vols. Eizan gakuin 叡山学院 ed. Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Kankō Kyōkai, 1966–1968.
- KZ *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 弘法大師全集, 5 vols. Hase Hōshū 長谷宝秀 et al., eds. Kyoto: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1910.
- SNB *Sanbōe shūsei* 三宝絵集成, Koizumi Hiroshi 小泉博 and Takahashi Nobuyuki 高橋信行, eds. Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 1980.
- SSS *Sangō shūiki, Seireishū* 三教指帰性靈集, Watanabe Shōkō 渡辺照宏 and Miyasaka Yūshō 宮坂宥勝, eds. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 et al., eds. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.

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