

Chapter 7

KŪKAI AND ESOTERIC BUDDHISM

Outstanding among the Buddhist leaders of the Heian period was Kūkai (774–835), a man whose genius has well been described: “His memory lives all over the country, his name is a household word in the remotest places, not only as a saint, but as a preacher, a scholar, a poet, a sculptor, a painter, an inventor, an explorer, and—sure passport to fame—a great calligrapher.”¹ Indeed, his reputation was so great that Shingon Buddhism, the sect of Buddhism that he founded, is centered as much on the worship of Kūkai the saint as it is on the teachings of Esoteric Buddhism, the larger tradition to which Shingon belongs. From the ninth century to this day, faithful Shingon believers have revered Kūkai as a living savior who still sits in eternal meditation on Mount Kōya ready to respond to those who call on him for help. The divinization of Kūkai is the product of an imagination inspired by faith, and it is also based on the memory of a real person of extraordinary accomplishments.

Kūkai came from one of Japan’s great aristocratic families. As a boy, he showed exceptional ability in his studies, and at the age of fifteen, he was taken by his uncle, a Confucian scholar and imperial tutor, to the capital for further education. In 791 the eighteen-year-old Kūkai entered the Confucian college that had been established to train young men to serve in official government

1. Sansom, *Japan, a Short Cultural History*, p. 230.

positions, and there he read widely in the Confucian classics. By this time, his family's political fortunes had waned, and his relatives expected him to use his talents and training to help restore their position. But Kūkai abruptly withdrew from college and left the capital to become a wandering mendicant in the forests.

The reasons for this sudden change are given in the preface to his first major work, *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings*, which he wrote in 797 at the age of twenty-four. He describes his meeting a Buddhist monk while he was a student at the university and learning a mantra for increasing his memory and understanding of Buddhist scriptures. "Believing what the Buddha says to be true," Kūkai threw himself into this practice in the mountains and by the seashore and had such a deeply moving experience that he decided to enter the Buddhist order against his family's wishes. In arguing for the superiority of Buddhism over Confucianism and Taoism, Kūkai wrote the *Indications* to justify his decision to take up the religious life and to explain why such a seemingly rash action was not really at odds with loyalty, filial piety, and morality.

Having discovered a copy of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra, one of the basic scriptures of Esoteric Buddhism, Kūkai was determined to learn more of its teachings and rituals. A rare opportunity was afforded him when he was selected to accompany an official diplomatic mission to China in 804. The ship on which he was traveling with the ambassador of the mission ran into severe weather and drifted far to the south, landing near the city of Fuzhou. Another ship carried the vice ambassador and the monk Saichō, the founder of Tendai Buddhism in Japan, and managed to arrive at Mingzhou to the south of the Yangtze River. Unlike Saichō, who studied different forms of Buddhism for less than a year before returning to Japan, Kūkai traveled far inland to the capital of Changan, where he stayed for two and a half years studying Sanskrit and Esoteric Buddhism with Indian and Chinese masters at the Ximing Temple, one of the major centers of Buddhist studies.

The international character of Buddhism was very much in evidence in Changan, one of the world's great cities at that time. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian students studied with learned teachers from India, Central Asia, and China and joined together to translate Sanskrit and Central Asian texts into Chinese. They also wrote commentaries, compiled dictionaries and concordances, wrote language textbooks, discussed doctrinal issues, debated sectarian differences, and engaged in the life of practice and rituals. Kūkai thrived in this rich atmosphere of learning and concentrated on studying Sanskrit with an Indian teacher and Esoteric Buddhism under the tutelage of Huiguo (746–805), the Chinese heir to the Esoteric tradition developed by Indian and Central Asian masters. He returned to Japan as the eighth—and first Japanese—patriarch of the Shingon school.

As used to describe the kind of Buddhism Kūkai learned in China, the term Esoteric has several meanings. In terms of *practice*, Esoteric Buddhism is char-

acterized by—though it has no monopoly over—the use of *mantras* (formulaic chants), *mandalas* (diagrams of deities and the ritual universe), *mudras* (ritual hand gestures), and graphic forms of meditation that use the sensory faculties to allow the practitioner to be immersed in the world of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. In a strict *sectarian* sense, Esoteric Buddhism is identified primarily with the Shingon school, although it later included Tendai (technically a form of Exoteric Buddhism) after Saichō's successors adopted Shingon ideas and practices. In its style of *transmission*, Esoteric Buddhism is thought of as abstruse and secret and therefore can be passed on from a master only to qualified and worthy disciples who will maintain the confidentiality of the knowledge they receive. Kūkai related how Huiguo waited almost until his death before he found in his Japanese student an adequate receptacle of knowledge.

Shingon Buddhism was readily received by Heian aristocrats and later by commoners as well. The basis of its appeal lay in its bold reinterpretation of the basic Mahāyāna idea that the ordinary world is identical with the world of the buddhas. While Kūkai still affirmed that the world of the buddhas resists articulation and expression, he was optimistic in championing the teachings and rituals of Esoteric Buddhism as a means for overcoming that resistance. For instance, whereas in Exoteric teachings the dharma body (*dharmakaya*) of the Buddha was said to be beyond the reach of words and ideas, Kūkai asserted that the Dharmakaya Buddha preaches, has form, and therefore can be expressed in words and objects. In a society that valued literature and art so highly, Heian aristocrats found Shingon Buddhism aesthetically accessible. Kūkai brought back a trove of texts and ritual objects, and in his memorial to the emperor which lists and explains each item, he wrote:

The law [dharma] has no speech, but without speech it cannot be expressed. Eternal truth [*tathatā*] transcends color, but only by means of color can it be understood. Mistakes will be made in the effort to point at the truth, for there is no clearly defined method of teaching, but even when art does not excite admiration by its unusual quality, it is a treasure which protects the country and benefits the people.

In truth, the Esoteric doctrines are so profound as to defy their enunciation in writing. With the help of painting, however, their obscurities can be understood. The various attitudes and mudras of the holy images all have their source in Buddha's love, and one may attain Buddhahood at sight of them. Thus the secrets of the sutras and commentaries can be depicted in art, and the essential truths of the Esoteric teaching are all set forth therein. Neither teachers nor students can dispense with it. Art is what reveals to us the state of perfection.² Shingon painting and sculp-

2. From Kūkai's *Memorial on the Presentation of the List of Newly Imported Sutras*, quoted in Moriyama, ed., *Kōbō Daishi den*, p. 249.

ture utilize rich colors and elaborate motifs, all of which are filled with symbolic meanings communicated through the forms themselves and can be discussed with extensive elaboration.

Probably the Shingon school's most important use of painting was in the two mandalas, representations of the cosmos under the two aspects of potential entity and dynamic manifestations. The indestructible potential aspect of the cosmos is depicted in the Diamond (Vajra) Mandala. In the center, Mahāvairocana Buddha is shown in contemplation, seated on a white lotus and encircled by a white halo. Around him are various buddhas and sacred implements. The dynamic aspect of the cosmos is depicted in the Womb (Garbha) Mandala, "wherein the manifold groups of deities and other beings are arrayed according to the kinds of the powers and intentions they embody. In the center there is a red lotus flower, with its seed-pod and eight petals, which symbolizes the heart of the universe."³ Mahāvairocana Buddha is seated on the seedpod of the lotus, and the petals are occupied by other buddhas.

The mandalas were used to represent the life and being of Mahāvairocana Buddha and also served to evoke mysterious powers, much in the way that the mudras were performed. One important ceremony in which the mandalas figured was that in which an acolyte was required to throw a flower on the mandalas. The Buddha on which his flower alighted was the one he was to worship and emulate particularly. It is recorded that Kūkai's flower fell on Mahāvairocana Buddha in both the Diamond and Womb Mandalas. His master was amazed at this divine indication of the great destiny in store for the young Japanese.

The special relationship between Kūkai and Mahāvairocana is symbolic of the central Shingon teaching of the Three Mysteries of the body, mouth, and mind by which even ordinary people can gain intimacy with the world of the Buddha. Through the use of mudras, which are prescribed gestures formed with the hands, a kind of ritual sign language is made possible by which one can both communicate with Mahāvairocana Buddha, the dharmakaya who speaks, and also be bodily identified with this central figure of the Shingon pantheon. With one's mouth, mantras can be recited, and in the proper ritual context, verbal communication and identity can be established. The mind is the means of meditation, and through it, one can think right thoughts and visualize the buddhas and the worlds they live in. Human faculties are thus capable of understanding and experiencing a good part, if not the entirety, of what it means to be enlightened, and it is this optimistic affirmation of the ability to become a buddha in this bodily existence that found ready appeal. Later in the Kamakura period, doubts about and a loss of confidence in this

3. Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, pp. 126–127.

claim gave rise to Pure Land Buddhist movements that proposed rebirth in the Pure Land as an alternative to achieving enlightenment.

Despite its inherent appeal, the Shingon Buddhism of Kūkai still represented a new sect and thus posed an institutional challenge to the Buddhism established in Nara. Saichō's Tendai Buddhism also faced the same difficulty of gaining acceptance, but unlike Saichō, who chose to oppose the Nara establishment and press for the independent right to ordain his own priests, Kūkai adopted a cooperative approach. He established good relations with major Buddhist leaders and even gained ecclesiastical appointments to important temples. These appointments were made by the government, and throughout his life after his return from China, he held a variety of positions in temples other than those of his own Shingon sect. In 810, for instance, Kūkai was made the administrative head of Tōdaiji, the most important institution of the Nara establishment, and in 827 he held the government post of senior director of monastic officials (*daisōzu*).

Kūkai held these and other positions all the while he worked to establish his own Shingon institution. In 816, at the age of forty-three, he received permission from the court to build a monastic center on Mount Kōya, a site he selected in the remote mountains far to the south of Nara and even farther from the new capital in Kyoto. He chose this location precisely because of its remoteness, believing that natural wilderness was most conducive to religious discipline and practice. Since his official duties kept him away from Mount Kōya most of the time, his disciples assumed the responsibility of developing the monastery as the headquarters of his growing sect. After Kūkai died on Mount Kōya at the age of sixty-two in 835, they propagated the legend that he really did not die but was still alive sitting in eternal meditation in his mausoleum. Mount Kōya is still the destination of many pilgrims who worship him as a living savior and call him by his posthumous name, Kōbō Daishi, the Great Master of the Extensive Dharma.

INDICATIONS OF THE GOALS OF THE THREE TEACHINGS (*SANGŌ SHĪKI*)

In the *Indications*, the earliest of his writings, Kūkai evaluates Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism and concludes that Buddhism is the most profound of the three religions. In his preface, he makes it clear that the superiority of Buddhism justifies his entry into its priesthood.

The work consists of four parts: the preface; the speeches of Kimō (Tortoise Hare), who represents Confucianism; of Kyōbu (Nothingness), who speaks for Daoism; and of Kamei-kotsuji (Mendicant X), who makes the case for the superiority of Buddhism and whose identity with Kūkai himself is suggested at one point. A concluding poem

summarizes the essence of the three teachings and indicates Kūkai's determination to abandon his effort to become a state official.

The discussion is developed in a dramatic way. At the home of their host, Tokaku (Hare's Horn), the Confucian Kimō is asked to admonish a delinquent youth known as Shitsugakōshi (Leech's Tusk), who represents Kūkai's own dissolute nephew. After the Confucian reproves the young man and lectures him about the excellence of the Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty, the Daoist scoffs at his teaching and explains the superiority of the Daoist way of standing apart from the world and becoming an immortal. Finally, the Buddhist mendicant criticizes the Confucian for promoting his own standing in the world and the Daoist for seeking longevity. The superior alternative, he argues, is Buddhism, which does not reject loyalty and filial piety but adds to those virtues the teaching of moral retribution, the principle of unity, freedom from discrimination, detachment from fame and profit, and the joys of tranquillity. Overwhelmed by this argument, the Confucian and the Daoist convert to Buddhism.

The following are excerpts from the preface and the mendicant's speech in which Kūkai explains some of the basic tenets of Buddhism in response to his hearers' request upon their conversion.

Preface

My relatives and teachers opposed my entering the priesthood, saying that by doing so I would be unable to fulfill the Five Cardinal Virtues⁴ or accomplish the duties of loyalty and filial piety. I thought then: living beings are not of the same nature; there are birds which fly high in the sky and fish which sink low in the water. To guide different types of people, there are three teachings: Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Although their profoundness varies, they are still the teachings of the sages. If an individual chooses one, he does not necessarily repudiate loyalty and filial piety by doing so.

Now I have a nephew who is depraved and indulges in hunting, wine, and women and whose usual way of life consists of gambling and dissipation. It is obvious that an unfavorable environment has caused him to lead this kind of life. What has induced me to write [this story] are the opposition of my relatives [to my becoming a Buddhist] and the behavior of this nephew.

The Mendicant's Speech

The mendicant replied [to his nephew]: "Indeed it is fortunate that you have repented before you went too far. Now I will tell you of the origins of suffering

4. The Five Confucian Virtues: humaneness, rightness, ritual decorum, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

in this life of transmigration and of the bliss of nirvana. On these points the duke of Zhou and Confucius did not speak, nor did Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi preach. Even the followers of Hīnayāna do not know about the attainment of bliss. Only the bodhisattvas who are destined to be Buddhas in the next stage can obtain and enjoy it. Listen well. I will summarize the essential points and show them to you.”

Kimō and the others came down from their seats and said: “Yes, we will compose ourselves and listen to you attentively.”

The mendicant opened his innermost heart, and with flowing eloquence narrated the essence in a rhyme prose entitled “The Ocean of Transmigration” and, in addition, showed them how to attain great enlightenment:

The ocean of transmigration is limitless, surrounding the furthestmost limits of the triple world. It is without end, encompassing all the four continents. It gives breath to all and regulates all. By emptying its enormous stomach, it absorbs many rivers; with its huge mouth, it sucks in many lakes and ponds. Huge waves strike incessantly with relentless force against the hills, and billows roar constantly against the capes. The sound of stones crushing against each other in the sea rumbles day and night like thunder. Within its waters grotesque objects are produced, monstrous creatures grow, and strange beings abound.

Among them are scaly fishes filled with hatred, stupidity, and extreme greed. Their heads and tails are endlessly long, and they seek constantly after food, with their fins raised, tails striking, and their mouths open. When they swallow a billow, the boat of nongreed is smashed, and its sail vanishes from sight. When they spew forth spray, the rudder of the boat of compassion is broken, and all the people on it are killed. Swimming and diving haphazardly, they are filled with avarice and dishonesty. Their greed being as deep as a valley, they fail to consider the inevitable later harm. Like mice or silkworms, they gnaw at everything, having no sympathy or regard for others. They forget completely the retribution that will afflict them for endless eons in the future; they look forward only to acquiring honor and prosperity while alive.

. . .

Therefore, the small boat bearing the Five Precepts⁵ must be made to float to the shore where the demons abide, and the wagon carrying the Ten Precepts⁶ must be drawn to the regions where the devils dwell. Unless

5. Not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery, not telling lies, and not drinking intoxicating beverages.

6. These are the basic vows not to kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, use exaggerated speech, slander, equivocate, cover, give way to anger, and hold biased views.

a man gives rise to the excellent aspiration to attain enlightenment in the evening and seek after the result of enlightenment in the morning, he cannot approach the grand Dharmakaya⁷ and break through the vast ocean of transmigration. Borne on the raft of the Six Paramitas,⁸ he should cross to the other side. He should cross the waves of passion on the ship of the Noble Eightfold Path,⁹ using the mast of effort and the sail of meditation, with the armor of patience for protection from thieves, and the sword of wisdom for defense against enemies. Whipping the horse of the Seven Means¹⁰ to attain enlightenment, he should gallop away from the ocean of transmigration and transcend the clamorous dust-filled world. Then as a token of predicted future enlightenment, he will receive the gem hidden in the topknot of the Universal Monarch, as did Shāriputra and the Nāga girl, who offered her necklace to the Buddha.¹¹ Soon he will pass through the ten stages of attaining enlightenment. The stages may be many, but the required disciplines are not difficult to fulfill. Meanwhile, he will overcome all obstacles and attain Suchness (*tathatā*) and, upon reaching enlightenment, will be called the Lord, the Buddha. Then he will abide in the principle of unity with his mind freed from discriminations; by virtue of his wisdom shining like four mirrors,¹² he will be detached from both the abuse and the praise of the world. Transcending the phenomenal world, he will be immutable. Knowing neither increase nor decrease, he will be tranquil and serene, rising above the three divisions of time.¹³ How magnificent and splendid will he be! Not even the Yellow Emperor, the sage king Yao, and Fu Xi will be worthy of tending his footgear, nor will the Universal Monarch, Indra, Brahmā, and the rest be worthy to serve as his footmen. No matter how much abuse the devils and heretics may heap on him, it will be in vain, and no matter how much praise the disciples of the Buddha and those who have attained enlightenment by themselves may offer him, it will still be inadequate.

...

7. The Ultimate Reality, the unconditioned Absolute, personified.

8. Charity, morality, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom.

9. The path by which one can approach final deliverance: right views, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

10. Contemplation, choosing the correct doctrine, effort, joy, repose, samādhi, and equanimity.

11. Predictions that Shāriputra and the Nāga (serpent) girl would be future Buddhas appear in the Lotus Sūtra. After the Nāga girl had offered the Buddha a priceless necklace, she was transformed into a man and later attained Buddhahood (TD 9, p. 35c).

12. In *The Awakening of Faith*, the characteristics of enlightenment are discussed with analogies to four types of mirror. See Hakeda, trans., *The Awakening of Faith*, pp. 42–43.

13. Past, present, and future.

“Though what I have said is but the smallest part of the teachings of my master the Buddha, now it should be evident to you that the petty seeking for longevity of Daoism and that dusty breeze of the secular world, Confucianism, are not worthy of comparison. They are not worthy to be spoken of in the same breath with Buddhism.”

Kimō and the others were, while listening, at times frightened, ashamed, sorrowful, or filled with laughter. Along with the development of the story, they changed their expressions, sometimes they dropped their heads, and then again they lifted their faces. Finally they said approvingly:

“We are fortunate to have met this great authority and to have learned the supreme teaching which transcends the mundane world. We had not heard this doctrine before, and perhaps we would not again have had the opportunity to listen to it. If we had not met you, we would still be occupied in greedy activities and would have fallen into hell, the world of ghosts, or the world of beasts. Your instructions have made us feel much relieved in both body and mind. We feel that we are awakened, like worms stirred by thunder in the spring after the long sleep of winter or like the ice in the shade that starts to melt when the sun rises. How superficial the teachings of Confucius and Laozi are! From now on we will observe faithfully your teaching with our whole beings—by writing it on the paper of our skins, with pens of bone, ink of blood, and the inkstone of the skull. Thus your teaching will be the boat and the wagon by which we may cross over the ocean of transmigration.”

The mendicant said: “Please go back to your seats. I will compose a poem of ten rhymes clarifying the three teachings; recite it instead of singing popular songs.” Then he made this poem:

The light of the sun and moon breaks through darkness,
And the three teachings illumine ignorance.
Nature and desire vary from person to person,
Treatment differs with each physician.
Human duties were preached by Confucius;
On learning them one becomes a high government official.
Laozi taught the creation by yin and yang;
On receiving his instructions one can observe the world from the tower of a
 Daoist temple.
Most significant and profound is the teaching of the ultimate path of
 Mahāyāna.
It teaches the salvation of oneself and of others;
It does not exclude even animals or birds.
The flowers in the spring fall beneath the branches;
Dew in autumn vanishes before the withered grass.
Flowing water can never be stopped;
Whirling winds howl constantly.

The world of senses is a sea in which one well may drown;
 Eternity, Bliss, the Self, and Purity are the summits on which we ultimately
 belong.
 I know the fetters that bind me in the triple world;
 Why should I not give up the thought of serving the court?

[Adapted from Hakeda, trans., *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 134–139]

KŪKAI AND HIS MASTER

This and the following passage are taken from *A Memorial Presenting a List of Newly Imported Sutras and Other Items*, which Kūkai wrote to the emperor upon his return from studying in China. In addition to listing the many religious articles that he brought back with him, Kūkai reports on the results of his studies and extols the doctrines into which he was initiated. Among the points that he especially emphasizes are (1) his personal success in gaining acceptance by the greatest Buddhist teacher of the day in China; (2) the authenticity of this teaching in a direct line of succession from the Buddha; (3) the great favor in which this teaching was held by the recent emperors of the Tang dynasty, to the extent that it represented the best and most influential doctrine current in the Chinese capital; and (4) the fact that this teaching offers the easiest and quickest means of obtaining Buddhahood, probably an important recommendation for it in the eyes of a busy monarch.

ENCOUNTER WITH HUIGUO

During the sixth month of Enryaku 23 (804), I, Kūkai, sailed for China aboard Ship One in the party of Lord Fujiwara, envoy to the Tang court. By the eighth month we reached the coast of Fujian and by the end of the twelfth month arrived at Changan, where we lodged at the official guest residence. The envoy and his retinue started home for Japan on the eleventh day of the third month, Enryaku 24 (805), but in obedience to an imperial edict, I alone remained behind in the Ximing Temple where our Eichū (d. 816)¹⁴ formerly had resided.

One day, while calling on the eminent Buddhist teachers of the capital, I happened to meet the abbot of the East Pagoda Hall of the Qinglong Temple, whose Buddhist name was the Acharya Huiguo. This great priest was the disciple chosen to transmit the dharma from the Tripiṭaka Master of Broad Wisdom [Bukung] of the Daxingshan Temple. His virtue aroused the reverence of his age; his teachings were lofty enough to guide emperors. Three sovereigns who revered him were initiated by receiving *abhiṣeka* consecration. The four

14. A Japanese monk who studied in China before Kūkai.

classes of believers looked up to him for instruction in the Esoteric Buddhist teachings.

I called on the abbot in the company of five or six monks from the Ximing Temple. As soon as he saw me, he smiled with pleasure and joyfully said, “I knew that you would come! I have waited for such a long time. What pleasure it gives me to look upon you today at last! My life is drawing to an end, and until you came, there was no one to whom I could transmit the teachings. Go without delay to the altar of *abhiṣeka* with incense and a flower.” I returned to the temple where I had been staying and got the things which were necessary for the ceremony. It was early in the sixth month then that I entered the altar of *abhiṣeka* for primary initiation. I stood before the Matrix Mandala and cast my flower in the prescribed manner. By chance it fell on the Body of Mahāvairocana Tathāgata in the center. The master exclaimed in delight, “How amazing! How perfectly amazing!” He repeated this three or four times in joy and wonder. I was then given the fivefold *abhiṣeka* and received instruction in the grace (*kaji*) of the Three Mysteries. Next I was taught the Sanskrit formulas and ritual manuals for the Matrix Realm and learned the yogic practices which use various sacred objects of concentration to gain transcendental insight.

Early in the seventh month I stood before the Diamond Mandala, and I was given once more the fivefold *abhiṣeka*. When I cast my flower it again fell on Mahāvairocana, and the abbot marveled as he had before. Also, early in the following month I received the *abhiṣeka* for the ordination into the mastership of the transmission of the dharma. On this day I provided a feast for five hundred monks and made wide offerings to the four classes of believers. The dignitaries of the Qinglong Temple, Daxingshan Temple, and others all attended the feast, and everyone was delighted for my sake.

Then I received instruction in the mantras and mudras of the five divisions of the Vajraśekhara Sūtra and spent some time learning Sanskrit and the Sanskrit hymns. The abbot informed me that the Esoteric Buddhist scriptures are so abstruse that their meaning cannot be conveyed except through art. For this reason, he ordered the court artist Li Zhen and about a dozen other painters to execute ten scrolls of the Matrix and Diamond Mandalas and assembled more than twenty people to make copies of the Vajraśekhara Sūtra and other important Esoteric Buddhist scriptures. He also ordered the bronzesmith Zhao Wu to cast fifteen ritual implements. These orders for the painting of religious images and the copying of the sūtras were issued at various times.

One day the abbot told me: “Long ago, when I was still young, I met the great Tripiṭaka master [Bukung]. From the first moment he saw me he treated me like his son, and on his visit to the court and his return to the temple, I was as inseparable from him as his shadow. He confided to me, ‘You will be the receptacle of the Esoteric Buddhist teachings. Do your best! Do your best!’ I was then initiated into the teachings of both the Matrix and the Diamond and into the secret mudras as well. The rest of his disciples, monks and laity alike,

studied just one of the two great teachings [Diamond and Matrix] or a yogic practice on one sacred object of concentration with the use of one mudra, but not all of them as I did. How deeply I am indebted to him I shall never be able to express.

“Now my existence on earth approaches its term, and I cannot long remain. I urge you, therefore, to take the mandalas of both realms and the hundred volumes of the teachings of the Diamond Vehicle, together with the ritual implements and these objects which were left to me by my master. Return to your country and propagate the teachings there.

“When you first arrived, I feared I did not have enough time left to teach you everything, but now I have completed teaching you, and the work of copying the sūtras and making the images has also been finished. Hasten back to your country, offer these things to the court, and spread the teachings throughout your country to increase the happiness of the people. Then the land will know peace, and people everywhere will be content. In that way you will return thanks to the Buddha and to your teacher. That is also the way to show your devotion to your country and to your family. My disciple Yi-ming will carry on the teachings here. Your task is to transmit them to the Eastern Land. Do your best! Do your best!” These were his final instructions to me, kind and patient as always. On the night of the full moon, in the twelfth month of the past year, he purified himself in a ritual bath, and lying on his right side and making the mudra of Mahāvairocana, he breathed his last.

That night, while I sat in meditation in the hall, the abbot appeared to me in his usual form and said, “You and I have long been pledged to propagate the Esoteric Buddhist teachings. If I am reborn in Japan, this time I shall be your disciple.”

I have not gone into the details of all that he said but have given the general import of the acharya’s instructions.

[Adapted from Hakeda, trans., *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 146–149]

The Transmission of Esoteric Buddhism

The sea of dharma is of one flavor but has deep and shallow aspects in accordance with the capacity of the believer. Five Vehicles¹⁵ can be distinguished, sudden and gradual according to the vessel. Among the teachings of sudden enlightenment, some are Exoteric and some, Esoteric. In Esoteric Buddhism itself, some aspects represent the source, others, the tributary. The teachers of the dharma of former times swam in the waters of the tributary and hung on

15. Vehicle (*yāna*) means the teachings that carry sentient beings to their respective goals. There are vehicles for common men, celestial beings, sravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, and bodhisattvas.

to the leaves, but the teaching transmitted to me now uproots the stump which blocks the source and penetrates it through and through. Why?

In ancient times Vajrasattva personally received the teaching from Mahāvairocana. Several centuries later it was transmitted to the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, who transmitted it to the Acharya Vajrabodhi (670–741), the Tripiṭaka master, who for the first time taught the fivefold Esoteric Buddhist doctrine¹⁶ in China during the Kaiyuan era (713–741). Although the emperor himself revered the doctrine, Vajrabodhi could not spread it widely. Only through my spiritual grandfather [Bukung], the Acharya of Broad Wisdom, did it become popular. Bukung first received the transmission from Vajrabodhi, the Tripiṭaka master, and moreover visited the Acharya Nāgabodhi in southern India and acquired completely the Vajraśekhara Sūtra comprising eighteen divisions. After having studied thoroughly the Esoteric Buddhist teachings consisting of the doctrines of the Matrix, etc., he returned to China during the Tianbao era (742–756). At this time Emperor Xuanzong first received *abhiṣeka* from him; the emperor revered him as his teacher. Since then Emperors Suzong (r. 756–762) and Daizong (r. 763–779) have received the Dharma. The Shenlong Monastery was built within the imperial palace, and everywhere in the capital the altars for *abhiṣeka* were set up. The emperor and the government officials went to the altars to receive *abhiṣeka*; the four classes of believers and the populace reverently learned the Esoteric Buddhist teachings. This was the period when the Esoteric Buddhist school began to flourish, and from this time on the practice of *abhiṣeka* was widely adopted.

According to Exoteric Buddhist doctrines, one must spend three eons to attain enlightenment, but according to the Esoteric doctrines, one can expect sixteen great spiritual rebirths [within this life].¹⁷ In speed and in excellence, the two doctrines differ as much as one endowed with supernatural power differs from a lame donkey.

[Adapted from Hakeda, trans., *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 143–144]

ENLIGHTENMENT IN THIS BODILY EXISTENCE

Throughout the history of Buddhism, the central debate regarding enlightenment has been whether it can be realized in this existence or only after many lifetimes. Kūkai's position, which is characteristic of Esoteric Buddhism as a whole, is that it can be

16. The fivefold Esoteric Buddhist doctrine means the teachings given in the Vajraśekhara Sūtra in which the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and others are classified under the five divisions—Buddha, Vajra, Ratna (jewel), padma (lotus), and karma (action). Vajrabodhi, who came from India to China in 720, first introduced the Esoteric Buddhist teachings belonging to the Diamond Realm.

17. To experience the samādhi of sixteen Bodhisattvas in the mandala of the Diamond Realm.

realized immediately, and he wrote a treatise, *Attaining Buddhahood in This Bodily Existence* (*Sokushin jōbutsu gi*), to explain and prove his point. After establishing that the idea is attested to in the scriptures, Kūkai presses his point forward with some standard Mahāyāna ideas such as harmony and the notion of the interpenetration of things with all other things, which is exemplified in the image of Indra's Net. He also uses Esoteric Buddhist ideas, in particular the teaching of the Three Mysteries and *kaji*, or grace. It is important to note—as Kūkai himself reiterates—that these ideas are to be experienced in meditation and ritual practice, for it is only in this context that the practitioner's three mysteries of body, mouth, and mind will be interfused with the Three Mysteries of Mahāvairocana. A similar harmony can be reached in the experience of *kaji*, which is linked with the practice of prayer. *Ka* is the bestowal or adding of grace by Mahāvairocana, and *ji* is the receiving and retaining of it by the practitioner. The idea of enlightenment in this existence was continually debated by those who accepted it as a practical goal and those who rejected it as an impossibility, and as such, it exerted an enormous influence on Buddhist thought in Japan.

QUESTION: In sūtras and shastras it is explained that after three eons, one can attain enlightenment. Is there evidence for the assertion that one can attain enlightenment in this very existence?

ANSWER: The Tathāgata has explained it in the Esoteric Buddhist texts.

QUESTION: How is it explained?

ANSWER: It is said in the Vajrasākhara Sūtra that “he who practices this samādhi can immediately realize the enlightenment of the Buddha.”

Also: “If the sentient beings who have come across this teaching practice it diligently four times day and night, they will realize the stage of joy in this life and perfect enlightenment in their subsequent sixteen lives.”

REMARKS: “This teaching” in the foregoing quotation refers to the king of teachings, the teaching of samādhi realized by the Dharmakaya Buddha himself. “The stage of joy” is not the first stage of Bodhisattvahood as defined in the Exoteric Buddhist teachings but the first stage of Buddhahood of our Buddha Vehicle, the details of which are explained in the chapter discussing stages.¹⁸ By “sixteen lives” is meant that one is to realize the attainments of the sixteen great Bodhisattvas,¹⁹ the details of which are also explained in the chapter discussing the stages. Again it is said: “If a man disciplines himself according to this

18. Kūkai seems to be referring to the discussion of the ten stages of the development of the religious mind in the first chapter of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra (see p. 23).

19. Kūkai interprets “sixteen lives” as realizing the samādhi of the sixteen Bodhisattvas surrounding the Four Buddhas in the inner circle of the Diamond Mandala, not as repeating the cycle of birth and death sixteen times.

superior doctrine, he will be able to attain in this life unsurpassed enlightenment.” Furthermore: “It should be known that he himself turns into the Diamond Realm; since he becomes identical with the Diamond, he is firm and indestructible. An awareness will emerge that he is of the Diamond Body.” The Mahāvairocana Sūtra states: “Without forsaking his body, he obtains supernatural power, wanders on the ground of great space, and perfects the Mystery of Body.” Also: “If he wishes to gain the perfection of religious discipline in his lifetime, he must select a certain method of meditation that suits his inclinations and concentrate on it. For this, he must personally receive instruction in mantra recitation from an authentic master. If he observes the mantras and masters yoga, he will gain perfection.”

...

QUESTION: How do you analyze the meaning of the words [attaining enlightenment in this bodily existence] given in these sūtras and shastras?

A summary in verse:

The Six Great Elements are interfused and are in a state of eternal harmony;
The Four Mandalas are inseparably related to one another:
When the grace of the Three Mysteries is retained,
[our inborn three mysteries will] quickly be manifested.
Infinitely interrelated like the meshes of Indra’s net are what
we call existences.

There is the One who is naturally equipped with all-embracing wisdom.
More numerous than particles of sand are those who have the King of
Mind and the consciousnesses;
Each of them is endowed with the Fivefold Wisdom, with infinite wisdom.
All beings can truly attain enlightenment because of the force of mirrorlike
wisdom.

...

These Esoteric Buddhist texts explain the methods of the samādhi of swift effect and suprarational action. If there is a man who wholeheartedly disciplines himself day and night according to the prescribed methods of discipline, he will obtain in his corporeal existence the Five Supernatural Powers.²⁰ And if he keeps training himself, he will, without abandoning his body, advance to the stage of the Buddha. The details are as explained in the sūtras. For this reason it is said, “When the grace of the Three Mysteries is retained, [our inborn three

20. Supernatural action, vision, hearing, ability to read the minds of others, and knowledge of former states of existences.

mysteries will] quickly be manifested.” The expression “the grace . . . is retained (*kaji*)” indicates great compassion on the part of the Tathāgata and faith (*shinjin*) on the part of sentient beings. The compassion of the Buddha pouring forth on the heart of sentient beings, like the rays of the sun on water, is called *ka* [adding], and the heart of sentient beings which keeps hold of the compassion of the Buddha, as water retains the rays of the sun, is called *ji* [retaining]. If the devotee understands this principle thoroughly and devotes himself to the practice of samādhi, his three mysteries will be united with the Three Mysteries, and therefore in his present existence, he will quickly manifest his inherent three mysteries. This is the meaning of the words, “[our inborn three mysteries will] quickly be manifested.”

“Infinitely interrelated like the meshes of Indra’s net are what we call existences.” This line explains in simile the state of perfect interfusion and interpenetration of the infinite Three Mysteries of the manifestations [of Mahāvairocana]. Existence is my existence, the existences of the Buddhas, and the existences of all sentient beings. Also designated by this word is the Mahāvairocana Buddha in Four Forms, which represent his absolute state, his state of bliss, his manifesting bodies, and his emanating bodies. The three kinds of symbol—letters, signs, and images—are also included in this category. All of these existences are interrelated horizontally and vertically without end, like images in mirrors, or like the rays of lamps. This existence is in that one, and that one is in this. The Existence of the Buddha [Mahāvairocana] is the existences of the sentient beings and vice versa. They are not identical but are nevertheless identical; they are not different but are nevertheless different.

[Adapted from Hakeda, trans., *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 225–232]

THE TEN STAGES OF RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS

The realization of the nondual identity between Mahāvairocana and all forms of existence represents the highest level of consciousness that is not immediately apparent. This insight is attained by making progress through levels of understanding, which can be associated with the teachings of various religions and schools. The immediate occasion for Kūkai’s *Ten Stages of Religious Consciousness*, in which Shingon is treated as a separate philosophy, was a decree issued in 830 by Emperor Junna ordering the six existing Buddhist sects to submit in writing the essentials of their beliefs. Of the works submitted at this time, Kūkai’s *Ten Stages* was by far the most important in both quality and magnitude. Each of its ten chapters presents a successive stage upward of religious consciousness. The work was written entirely in Chinese, not merely good Chinese for a Japanese writer, but with an ornate poetical style somewhat reminiscent of Pope’s attempt in his *Essay on Man* to present philosophical ideas in rhymed couplets. The following is Kūkai’s own summary of his long and detailed essay on the ten stages.

RECAPITULATION OF THE TEN STAGES OF RELIGIOUS
CONSCIOUSNESS

1. The mind animal-like and goatish in its desires.
The ordinary man in his madness realizes not his faults.
He thinks but of his lusts and hungers like a butting goat.
2. The mind ignorant and infantile yet abstemious.
Influenced by external causes, the mind awakens to temperance in eating.
The will to do kindnesses sprouts, like a seed in good soil. [Confucianism.]
3. The mind infantile and without fears.
The non-Buddhist hopes for rebirth in heaven, there for a while to know peace.
He is like an infant, like a calf that follows its mother. [Brahmanism or popular Daoism.]
4. The mind recognizing only the objects perceived, not the ego.
The mind understands only that there are Elements, the ego it completely denies.
The Tripiṭaka of the Goat Cart is summed up by this verse [Shrāvaka vehicle of Hīnayāna Buddhism].
5. The mind freed from the causes and seeds of karma.
Having mastered the twelve-divisioned cycle of causation and beginning, the mind extirpates the seeds of blindness.
When karma birth has been ended, the ineffable fruits of nirvana are won. [Pratyeka Buddha vehicle of Hīnayāna Buddhism]
6. The Mahāyāna mind bringing about the salvation of others.
When compassion is aroused without condition, the Great Compassion first appears.
It views distinctions between “you” and “me” as imaginary; recognizing only consciousness, it denies the external world [the Hossō school].
7. The mind aware of the negation of birth.
Through eightfold negations, foolishness is ended; with one thought the truth of absolute Voidness becomes apparent.
The mind becomes empty and still; it knows peace and happiness that cannot be defined [the Sanron school].
8. The mind which follows the one way of Truth.
The universe is by nature pure; in it knowledge and its objects fuse together.
He who knows this state of reality has a cosmic mind [the Tendai school].
9. The mind completely lacking characteristics of its own.
Water lacks a nature of its own; when met by winds, it becomes waves.
The universe has no determined form but, at the slightest stimulus, immediately moves forward [the Kegon school].

10. The mind filled with the mystic splendor of the cosmic Buddha.
 When the medicine of Exoteric teachings has cleared away the dust,
 the True Words open the Treasury.
 When the secret treasures are suddenly displayed, all virtues are appar-
 ent [the Shingon school].

[From *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, I, p. 420; adapted from Hakeda, trans.,
Kūkai: Major Works, pp. 163–164]

A SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Kūkai's proposal to establish a "school of arts and sciences (*shūgei shūchi-in*)" reveals two important tendencies in his thought. First is the universalistic and egalitarian character of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Citing the teachings of the Lotus Sūtra, which stress the essential oneness of all being, Kūkai asks support for a school that would be open to all, regardless of social status or economic means. The second reflects Kūkai's catholic outlook, affirming the value of both religious and secular studies and also of combining the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism) in the school's curriculum.

Generally, in Japan as in China, religious and secular studies represented two separate ways of life. Recall that Saichō wished his monks to combine a religious and secular vocation, but classical Confucian studies had a very subordinate role in the training of Mount Hiei's monks, for whom he conceived social action and public service in very practical terms.

In Kūkai's time, secular education was closely linked to official recruitment and training and largely restricted to the ruling classes. Though ostensibly Confucian, it failed to measure up to Confucius's ideals of brotherhood, as Kūkai points out. Indeed, the aristocratic character of Japanese society strongly resisted the potentially egalitarian elements in Buddhism and Confucianism. In this case, even though a Fujiwara nobleman donated an attractive site for the school, Kūkai had difficulty obtaining continuing support for his work, and the school was forced to close ten years after his death, in 845. In recent times, however, it has been revived and is now an active four-year college supported by the Shingon sect.

Having dedicated myself to the salvation of all beings, and hoping to establish a school for the study of the Three Teachings [Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism], I asked Lord Fujiwara for the donation of his residence. Without even exchanging a formal document of agreement, he immediately offered me the house, which may well be worth one thousand gold pieces, for the sake of accumulating merit toward his enlightenment.

Thus, I obtained this superb site, as lovely as the park of Jeta,²¹ without having to spend any money. My long cherished desire was at once fulfilled. I have given it the name of School of Arts and Sciences and made up a tentative program as follows:

The Nine Schools²² and Six Arts²³ are the boats and bridges that save the world; the Ten Baskets²⁴ and the Five Sciences,²⁵ are the treasures that benefit people. The Tathāgatas of the past have studied them, those of the present are now studying them, and those of the future will also, thereby attaining great enlightenment. Bodhisattvas of the ten directions have studied them all and realized the all-pervading wisdom. Unless one resorts to these studies, one cannot gain the essentials of how to establish oneself in the world, cannot learn the principles of governing the country, and cannot attain nirvana on the other shore, terminating the transmigratory life on this shore.

Emperors have built state temples; their subjects have constructed private temples; in this way they have made efforts to spread the Way [Buddhism]. But those who wear robes in the temples study Buddhist scriptures, while scholars and students at the government college study non-Buddhist texts. Thus they are all stuck when it comes to books representing the Three Teachings and Five Sciences [as a whole]. Now I shall build a school of arts and sciences, offering instruction in the Three Teachings, and invite capable persons to join. With the aid of these teachings, which can be compared to the sun [Buddhism], the moon [Daoism], and the stars [Confucianism], my sincere desire is to enlighten those who are wandering in the dark down the wrong path, and lead them to the garden of enlightenment mounted on the Five Vehicles. . . .

It may be objected, however: “The government maintains a state college where the arts and sciences are encouraged and taught. What good is a mosquito’s cry [a private school] compared to rumbling thunder [a government school]?”

My reply is: “In the capital of China, a school is set up in each ward to teach the young boys. In each prefecture a school is maintained in order widely to educate promising young students. Because of this, the capital is filled with talented young men and the nation is crowded with masters of the arts. In the

21. The park where Shākyamuni had his monastery and taught. It is said that the rich man Anāthapindika bought the park from Prince Jeta, paying him the sum of gold pieces needed to cover the surface of the land, and offered the park to the Buddha.

22. The nine schools of philosophy: Confucian, Daoist, Yin-yang, Legalist, Logic (“Names”), Mo-ist, Horizontal and Vertical Alliances, Unclassified Teachings, and Agriculture.

23. Rites, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics.

24. The classification of all teachings into ten categories in Buddhism. “Basket” signifies a container of the scriptures.

25. The five subjects of study in Buddhism: grammar, logic, medicine, arts, and Buddhism.

capital of our country, however, there is only one government college and no local schools. As a result, sons of the poor have no opportunity to seek knowledge. Those who like to study but live a great distance from the college encounter great difficulty traveling to and fro. Would it not be good, then, to establish this school to assist the uneducated?" . . .

Although I am not of much ability, I am determined to pursue the plan under way; I will not give up this task, no matter how difficult it may be. Thus I may requite my vast obligations to the emperors, my parents, the people, and the Three Treasures and also make this a means of realizing Ultimate Truth, achieving the Highest Wisdom, and winning final deliverance.

REGULATIONS FOR INVITING THE INSTRUCTORS

Confucius said in the *Analects*: "It is best to live in a community where the spirit of humaneness prevails. Unless one dwells in its midst, how can he attain true knowledge?"

[IV,1] He also said: "One should study the [six] arts." It is stated in the [Mahāvairochana] Sūtra: "By the time one has become an authentic master, one should have studied the various arts and sciences." A commentary [to the Dasabhhūmika] also says: "In order to attain enlightenment, a bodhisattva studies the five sciences." Therefore, Sudhana visited a hundred and ten cities to seek the teachings of fifty-[three] teachers;²⁶ the Bodhisattva "Always Crying" went throughout the city in his search for wisdom; both sought seriously for the profound dharma. . . .

Even if one finds a suitable place, there will be no way of getting an understanding without teachers. Therefore, first of all, teachers should be invited. Of these there should be two kinds: those who teach the Way and those who teach secular subjects. The teachers of the Way must teach the Buddhist scriptures, and the secular teachers must set forth the non-Buddhist texts. That religious and secular teachings should not be separated is the noble saying of my teacher.

A. INSTRUCTION BY TEACHERS OF THE WAY

To teach both Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism is the pleasure of the clergy. Should there be students who want to study non-Buddhist texts alongside Buddhism, let the secular teachers take care of them. For those who want to study Buddhist scriptures and commentaries, the clergy should spare no efforts, abid-

26. This story appears in the Gandavyūha Sūtra.

ing by the Four States of Mind²⁷ and the Four All-Embracing Virtues.²⁸ Without discriminating between noble and low-born, the clergy should offer instruction in Buddhism as appropriate to all students.

B. INSTRUCTION BY SECULAR DOCTORS

The secular doctors should be well versed in one part of each of the following subjects: The Nine Classics,²⁹ the Nine Schools,³⁰ the Three Profound Texts,³¹ the Three Histories,³² the Seven Outlines,³³ and the Histories of the Seven Dynasties.³⁴ Through one text in each of these subjects, they should be able to instruct the students in poetry, metrical prose, pronunciation, reading, punctuation, and interpretation. . . .

Should there be religious who desire to study non-Buddhist subjects, the secular doctors should teach them according to their needs. If young, uneducated children wish to learn how to read and write, genuine teachers should instruct them in a spirit of deep compassion, filial piety, and loyalty. Whether the students are high-born or low, rich or poor, they should receive appropriate instruction, and their teachers should be unremitting in admonishing them. “The beings in the three worlds are my children” roars the Buddha [in the Lotus Sūtra]. And there is the beautiful saying of Confucius: [in *Analects*, VII, 5] “All within the four seas are brothers.” Do honor to them!

C. MEALS FOR BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

“Man is not a hanging gourd [fed by the vine]” said Confucius. That man lives on food is what Shākyamuni taught. If one wants to propagate the Way, one must necessarily feed those who follow it. Whether they be religious or laymen,

27. The Four Brahma Vihāras—positive loving kindness, compassion, joy, and indifference.

28. In order to lead others to love and receive the truth of Buddhism, one must (1) give them what they like, (2) speak affectionate words to them, (3) practice conduct profitable to them, and (4) cooperate with and adapt oneself to them.

29. The *Classic of Changes*, the *Classic of Odes*, the *Classic of History*, the *Record of Rites*, the *Classic of Ceremonials*, the *Rites of Zhou*, the *Zuo Zhuan*, the *Gong-yang Zhuan*, and the *Gu-liang Zhuan*.

30. Compare Kūkai’s *Memorial on the Presentation of the List of Newly Imported Sutras*, quoted in Moriyama, ed., *Kōbō Daishi den*, p. 249.

31. The *Classic of Changes*, *Dao-de jing*, and *Zhuang Zi*.

32. The *Historical Records of Sima Qian*, the *History of Former Han* and the *History of Later Han*.

33. Outlines of compilations made of the six arts; the schools of philosophy; poetry and metrical prose; military science; divination; and technical, medical, and agricultural subjects.

34. The histories of Song, Southern Qi, Liang, Chen, Wei, Northern Qi, and Zhou.

teacher or student, any who want to study should be provided with free meals. I am a poor monk, however, and am unable to bear the expenses of the school. For the time being, I shall somehow provide the means, but should there be anyone who cares to render a service to the nation or who wishes to escape from illusions and realize enlightenment, let him give a donation, no matter how small the amount may be, to help me fulfill my aspirations. May we, then, ride together on the vehicle of Buddhism to benefit the people of later generations.

Written by Kūkai on the Fifteenth Day of the Twelfth Month, the Fifth Year of Tenchō (828).

[From *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, III, pp. 535–539]

Chapter 8

THE SPREAD OF ESOTERIC BUDDHISM

Students of the history of Japanese Buddhism may get the impression that the various schools were not only succeeded but also superseded by other sects as the religion developed. They may thus suppose that the schools of the Nara period gave way to Tendai and Shingon Buddhism, which in turn were replaced by one after another of the popular sects of the medieval period. Instead of following a regular sequence of rise, flourishing, decline, and extinction, however, most of the sects continued to exist long after their periods of glory and within their general patterns of growth, and were sometimes capable of unexpected revivals. This was certainly true of the Nara sects, some of which not only preserved their identity throughout the Heian and medieval periods but still exist today. Similarly, Esoteric Buddhism—by which is meant here both Tendai and Shingon—continued to be influential long after Kūkai’s time. Esoteric Buddhism set the predominant tone of religious life in the Heian period, and its influence extended to all the other schools. Even the popular sects that turned away from its emphasis on ritual drew much of their inspiration from ideas and practices from the vast storehouse of Esoteric Buddhism. Its syncretism readily combined with other beliefs, whether the Buddhism of other sects, Shinto, or even disparate teachings like yin-yang. And a place for some new god could always be found in its spacious pantheon.

When, however, the hundreds of deities who populated the mandalas proved too much even for the polytheistic Japanese, their number was gradually re-

duced to thirteen preferred objects of worship: Fudō, Shaka, Monju, Fugen, Jizō, Miroku, Yakushi, Kannon, Seishi, Amida, Ashiku, Dainichi, and Kokūzō. Of these thirteen, the most exalted were considered to be Dainichi (Vairochana), Ashiku (Akshobhya), Amida (Amitābha), Miroku (Maitreya), and Shaka (Shākyamuni). Dainichi occupied the center of Esoteric Buddhism's pantheon. To the east of him sat Ashiku, the source of life, and, to the west, Amida, the dispenser of infinite love. Miroku, the Buddha of the future, and Shaka, the historical Buddha, completed this group of Tathāgatas.

Each of the thirteen deities had claims to the worshipers' attention, but by the late Heian period, three of them came to occupy a special place in the religious life of Japan: Kannon (Avalokiteshvara), one of the Bodhisattva attendants of Amida, who came to be worshiped as a goddess of mercy (although a male deity in India); Fudō (Achala), a fierce god apparently of Indian origin, although neither a Buddha nor a Bodhisattva; and Jizō (Ch: Dicang), whose cult took many forms identified with compassion and redemption. Statues of Kannon were erected at thirty-three sites of remarkable beauty in Japan, and pilgrimages to the different shrines were popular with all classes, from the imperial family downward. The famous temple of the "33,333 Kannon," in Kyoto, each with a "thousand hands" for dispensing mercy, was built in the twelfth century and serves as an indication of the great popularity of this deity during the late Heian period. In contrast to the merciful Kannon, Fudō was represented as a "terrible figure, livid in color and of a ferocious expression. He is surrounded by flames and carries a sword and a rope to smite and bind evil. He is generally explained as typifying the fierce aspect assumed by Vairochana when resenting wrong doing."¹ If Kannon represented the female (or Garbha mandala), Fudō stood for the male (or *vajra*) and, as such, was popular with the rising warrior class, who—as the guardians of the state in the face of disorder—may have likened themselves to the powerful Fudō. Accordingly, the cult of Fudō spread to regions where nature presented its severest face—rocky crags and seashores. Illustrations of Jizō's widespread cult are given in the following reading.

Probably the most important event in the history of Esoteric Buddhism after the death of Kūkai (who established the teachings in Japan) was its triumph on Mount Hiei, the stronghold of Tendai. Saichō himself had studied Esoteric learning with Kūkai, but it remained for his disciple and successor Ennin (794–864) to found Tendai esotericism (Taimitsu). Ennin had led a rather colorless life as a priest and teacher and was already in his forties when he was sent to China for study in 838. At first unable to obtain the necessary authorization to visit either Wutai or Tiantai shan, the two most important Buddhist centers,

1. Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism*, pp. 348–349.

Ennin managed with great difficulty to be set ashore on the Chinese coast and was later fortunate enough to meet a general who secured permission for him to visit Wutai shan and other holy sites. Ennin finally returned to Japan in 857 after extensive study with the masters of each of the Tendai disciplines. Upon his return to Mount Hiei, he organized study of the two mandalas, instituted Esoteric initiation, and promoted other branches of Esoteric learning. Ennin also introduced to Japan the invocation of Amida Buddha's name (*nembutsu*), which he had heard at Wutai shan, and had a special hall built for this purpose. For some people, the *nembutsu* became an all-sufficient means of gaining salvation, but for Ennin it was only one among many means of achieving Buddhahood.

Common to both Tendai and Shingon esotericism was the idea that all people could attain Buddhahood in this very life and body through the infinite variety of means and practices represented symbolically in the different forms of the mandala. These could range from the simplest forms of religious practice to the most sophisticated—from the rugged practices and severe austerities of mountain religion to the highly cultivated arts of court society. In this respect, the mysteries of the Esoteric religion, seen as emerging from the timeless bliss of the law body of the Buddha, could take any number of forms, including the secret transmission from master to monk, the aesthetic refinements that induced an emotional rapture among courtiers and court ladies alike, or the mantras, hand signs (*mudras*), and incantations that, for the ordinary believer, were a palpable expression of numinous mysteries.

In affirming this universality of means and ends, the esoteric teachings spoke of a simple gate to salvation that was the equivalent of all other gates, *ichimon fumon*, with a gate open to everyone corresponding to one's own personal makeup or level of religious consciousness, but all leading to Buddhahood. Through this gate, one entered into the reality of the Cosmic Buddha and the Buddha entered into oneself by a process of reciprocal response and interpenetration as the grace and power of the Buddha was "added" to one's own effort (*kaji*). In this way, Esoteric Buddhism could appeal to both the most refined sensibilities and the simplest or even crudest emotions. Functioning as both a court religion and a popular cult, it could exemplify the universalism of Mahāyāna salvation as well as the particularisms of an aristocratic, hierarchical society. What it did not attempt to provide or define was a universal political code, or a social ethic—no doubt reflecting the ambivalence of Kegon philosophy in these matters (see chapter 5). The Kegon philosophy tended to turn to Confucianism, as Saichō and Kūkai had done, and as the Shingon monk Mongaku would do in a letter to the shogun included in the following readings.

Nevertheless, in the infinite variety of its adaptive means, Esotericism served as the dynamic source of new religious practices and movements that emerged

in the medieval period, responding to conditions greatly changed from the relative peace and stability of the Heian period. The competitions and, indeed, conflict that often ensued in the darker, more dangerous medieval age, however, already had their antecedents in the rivalry among Mount Hiei and other religious centers in the late Heian period.

The very establishment of Tendai esotericism had marked a new phase in the relations between Tendai and Shingon. The Tendai monks had never forgiven Kūkai for placing Tendai below Kegon in his *Ten Stages*, and for a long time they had sought some way of emerging from under the domination of Shingon. With the development of Tendai esotericism, it was believed on Mount Hiei that Shingon's claim to stand at the head of the Ten Stages in unique splendor had at last been rendered untenable. The two schools of esoteric teaching had many points in common but at least one basic difference: Shingon had originated in China as the esoteric teachings of the Kegon school and held as its central tenet the superiority of Esoteric over Exoteric Buddhism. Tendai esotericism, however, originated in China as the esoteric discipline of Tendai itself, which taught that the exoteric and esoteric teachings were one.

The contest between Tendai and Shingon for recognition as the center of esotericism resulted in victory for the Hiei monks. Their success was due partially to the failure of Shingon to produce great leaders in the generations after Kūkai and partially to the advantage that geographical proximity to the capital gave to Hiei over the more distant Kōya. But the split in the ranks of Tendai esotericism caused by the founding of the Miidera school prevented the Mount Hiei monks from taking full advantage of the supremacy they gained over Shingon and led to some of the least attractive episodes in the history of Japanese Buddhism.

Miidera was a temple founded in 674 by the shores of Lake Biwa. It was associated with the Ōtomo family, and with the decline in the family's fortunes, the temple fell into ruins. Enchin (814–891), a nephew of Kūkai, opened a center of study at the Miidera shortly after his return to Japan in 858 from six years of study in China of the Tendai and esoteric teachings. In 864 the temple was attached to the Enryakuji on Mount Hiei. Enchin's appointment in 868 as abbot of the Enryakuji made him the most important figure in Tendai Buddhism, and his strong personality earned for him devoted followers and bitter enemies. Enchin's immediate successors to the abbacy of the Enryakuji were of his school, but they were followed by a line of men who were identified with Ennin. When in 933 the emperor unexpectedly appointed a follower of Enchin's as abbot, the Ennin faction rebelled against him, and as a result the followers of Enchin marched from Mount Hiei to the Miidera, where they formed an almost entirely independent school. Violent disputes frequently broke out between the two branches of Tendai esotericism. In 1039, for example,

the appointment of a Miidera man resulted in a demonstration by three thousand Hiei monks before the house of the regent in Kyoto, thereby compelling the deposition of the unwanted abbot. This violence peaked in 1081 when Hiei monks burst into the confines of the Miidera and set it afire, destroying most of the buildings. They returned three months later to finish the job. During the next three centuries, the Miidera Temple was burned seven times, usually by the Hiei monks, and reconstructed each time by Enchin's determined followers.

The rise of "warrior-monks" was a prominent feature of the late Heian period and medieval Buddhism. Their lawlessness grew during the reigns of Emperor Shirakawa (1082–1086) and his immediate successors. Whenever the monks had a demand, they would march in force on the capital, bearing with them the palanquins of the Shinto god Sannō, the guardian deity of Mount Hiei. The first such descent took place in 1095, and in almost every one of the next thirty or forty years, either the Tendai warrior-monks or those of the Hossō sect from the Kōfukuji in Nara, brandishing the sacred tree of the Kasuga (Shinto) Shrine, stormed into the capital. Frequent battles between the Tendai and the Hossō monks disturbed the peace in the capital for about a century starting with Shirakawa's reign. In 1165, the Hiei monks burned the Kiyomizudera, the stronghold of the Hossō sect in Kyoto, and the Hossō monks attempted unsuccessfully to burn the Enryakuji.

Beset by such internecine warfare, Esoteric Buddhism also had to struggle against a tendency for the impressive rituals associated with the Three Mysteries to degenerate into mere superstition. The spells recited to prolong life were typical of this trend in the late Heian period. Texts of these spells had been brought to Japan from China by Kūkai, Ennin, and Enchin, but the earliest mention of the performance of the secret rituals accompanying them dates from 1075, during Shirakawa's reign, when the abbot of the Enryakuji performed the ceremony. It was performed again in 1080 in the imperial palace. This ritual was carried out in exact conformity to the texts, which prescribed that before the presiding monk could perform the spell, he had to bathe with perfumed water, don newly purified clothes, receive the Eight Commandments, and eat a meal of plain rice, honey, and milk. The actual ceremony required twenty-one small platforms built on top of a large platform, and different types of rare incense and flowers to accompany each part of the prayers.

As time went on, various heresies gained currency that tended to discredit Esoteric Buddhism. The most notorious was the so-called Tachikawa school, founded in the early twelfth century by a Shingon believer with the aid of a yin-yang teacher whom he met while in exile. They evolved a doctrine teaching that "the Way of man and woman, yin and yang, is the secret of becoming a Buddha in this life. No other way exists but this one to attain Buddhahood and

gain the Way.”² As authority for this statement, the Vajra and Garbha Mandalas were declared to be symbols of the male and female principles, and other elaborate yin-yang correspondences were drawn as well. The Tachikawa school appears to have indulged in the sexual rites practiced by the somewhat similar Shāktist sects of Tibet. In 1335, as the result of a memorial submitted by the Mount Kōya monks against the Tachikawa school, its leader was exiled and books expounding its principles were ordered to be burned. Traces of its doctrines still survive, however, in existing Buddhist sects.

PRAYER OF THE RETIRED EMPEROR SHIRAKAWA ON OFFERING THE
TRIPITAKA TO HACHIMAN

In November 1128, the retired Emperor Shirakawa—father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of emperors reigning in his own lifetime—offered his prayer to the god Hachiman for ten more years of life. On this occasion, he presented a copy of the Tripitaka to be read without interruption by six priests, and in his prayer, the emperor enumerated other acts of piety already performed. These reflect the Esoteric Buddhism then prevalent at court, especially in its iconographic forms. The syncretic tendencies of Esoteric Buddhism also are apparent in its association with notions concerning immortality and longevity, which are typical of popular Daoism. These same tendencies account for making such an offering to Hachiman. It may seem curious that the Shinto god Hachiman was favored with a copy of the Buddhist scriptures, but in the ages of Combined Faith, Hachiman was worshiped as a great bodhisattva, and such a gift seemed wholly appropriate. Despite the fervent prayers made to him, however, Shirakawa died the following year.

The practice of a sovereign’s abdicating and becoming a Buddhist monk while continuing to rule in the name of a boy emperor was inaugurated by Emperor Uda (r. 889–897) and became an established institution with Shirakawa. Not only a devout Buddhist but also an astute politician, Shirakawa saw the advantages of governing from behind the scenes with the title “Emperor of the [Buddhist] Law (*hōō*).” This represents a fusion of the *tennō* concept with the title King of the Law (*hōō*) once accorded the monk Dōkyō, who in the Nara period was thwarted in his attempt to become emperor. With the emperors themselves becoming monks, power could hide behind a religious screen without clear public accountability.

Shirakawa’s prayer was actually written by a courtier, Fujiwara no Atsumitsu (1062–1144). It is in balanced prose, the ornate Chinese style that Kūkai had popularized in Japan.

2. Statement in the *Hōkyōsho*, an anti-Tachikawa work that is one of our chief sources of information about the school.

This copy of the Tripiṭaka, transcribed by imperial order, is composed as follows:

Mahāyāna sūtras	2,395 volumes
Hīnayāna sūtras	618 volumes
Mahāyāna vinayas	55 volumes
Hīnayāna vinayas	441 volumes
Mahāyāna shāstras	515 volumes
Hīnayāna shāstras	695 volumes
Biographies of the Bodhisattvas and Arhats	593 volumes
Total	5,312 volumes

The above enumerated sūtras, vinayas, shāstras, and biographies are respectfully offered to the Hachiman Temple at Iwashimizu, to be used for lectures and sermons.

I recall that when I was still young and inexperienced, the former sovereign transmitted to me the imperial rank. Grave though the responsibility was, I remained ignorant of the ways of administration. When I received the documents and records of the domains within the four seas, I felt as though I stood before a profound abyss, and when I tried to control the multifarious activities of government, it was like driving a team of horses with rotting reins. How, I wondered, could I devise a good plan so that I might rule my land in peace? I placed my faith in the spirits of my ancestors and relied on the powers of the gods of Heaven and Earth.

Soon after my assumption of the imperial rank, in the year 1074, I paid homage at the palace of the Bodhisattva Hachiman. Since that time, I have arranged an imperial visit every year in the third moon. In the morning, when the petals of the palace cherry blossoms are wet with dew, I leave the purple gate in my palanquin; in the evening, when the mountain nightingales are singing in the mist, I stand in worship by the fence of the shrine while voices and flutes harmoniously blend. This has become an established practice, although unknown in former times.

More than forty years have passed since my abdication. Often have I urged my carriage forward through stormy winds in the pine-clad hills; many times have I offered my devotion on the steps of the shrine in the woods. I have made this pilgrimage twenty-five times. During this period I have built a pagoda at the Usa Shrine to help establish the prestige of the sacred precincts. I have had the Great Wisdom Sūtra copied in gold to extol the bliss of the temporal and real Law. It would be hard to recall all the treasures that have been offered, the lectures on the holy writings that have been sponsored, and the devotion expressed by my pilgrimages of thanks. During all this time, whenever I have stood in thought by the window, my mind has been drawn to the moon³ of

3. In Buddhist writings, the moon is often used as a symbol of wisdom.

clear insight, and whenever I have sat in meditation, my graying brows have been knitted in concentration.

My descendants, always increasing in numbers, have succeeded one after another to the imperial rank,⁴ and each one has enjoyed a long reign devoted to solicitude for the people. That now, despite my advanced age, I am able to help my lord, the boy sovereign, is indeed a sign that I have obtained the grace of Heaven and the favor of the gods. For me to have witnessed my great-grandson receive the prognostications for his reign⁵ shows that I have attained an age approaching a rarity.

“It is not the millet which has a piercing fragrance; it is bright virtue.”⁶ Buddha’s teachings, not bright gems, are what is precious. All the true teachings we possess are those preached by the peerless Shākyamuni during his lifetime. At his birth he stood on the lotus, and the air of the Lumbinī Grove first was replete with his fragrance.⁷ In his wanderings he saw the Tree, and the moon of enlightenment attained its fullness. On high mountains and level fields alike, the sun of mercy shone everywhere. In the Deer Park and on Vulture Peak, the fructifying rain of the Law fell in abundance. The Greater and Lesser Vehicles ran abreast, and the Basic and the Complete Schools⁸ both opened their gates. The teachings traveled ten thousand leagues over the boundless seas, above the high-tossing billows, to be transmitted at last from those distant lands to our imperial realm. Here sovereigns and subjects all have offered devout reverence; the high and the mighty have vied with each other in acts of piety. The prosperity of the land has no other source but this.

Therefore, I have had several copies of the sūtras, vinayas, and shāstras made on behalf of the Three Bodies of the Buddha, in order to promote the Surpassing Cause of enlightenment and to bring about the perfect and ultimate Enlightenment of the Buddha. . . .

4. Shirakawa reigned from 1072 to 1086 and abdicated in favor of his seven-year-old son Horikawa, who reigned from 1086 to 1107. On Horikawa’s death, his four-year-old son Toba (Shirakawa’s grandson) succeeded him and reigned from 1107 to 1123, abdicating in favor of his four-year-old son Sutoku (Shirakawa’s great-grandson). In 1128, the year of this document, Shirakawa was seventy-five years old; his son was dead; his grandson Toba was twenty-five years old; and his great-grandson Sutoku was nine years old.

5. Prepared at the beginning of an emperor’s reign by specialists in the Chinese art of prognostication.

6. A quotation from the *Classic of History*. See Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Shoo-King*, pt. V, bk. XXI, p. 2.

7. Important episodes in the life of the historical Buddha are given here: his birth in the Lumbinī Grove, his attainment of enlightenment under the bodhi tree, his first sermon at the deer park in Benares, and his teaching to the ascetics of Vulture Peak.

8. The two vehicles and two schools refer to Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

At this point we have omitted the details of other donations by Emperor Shirakawa, including temples, statues, and the copying of the Tripiṭaka.

Of the six fundamental disciplines, the observance of the commandments is considered the most important; of the ten commandments, the prohibition on the taking of life is the prime one. All living creatures are our dear friends; successive generations are of one flesh and blood. There is no end to the turning of the Wheel and no escape from the torments of hell. There is no one source of life, but fish, insects, birds, and beasts are variously born from transformation, moisture, eggs, and the womb.⁹ However tiny a creature may be, it clings to life as though it were more important than Mount Tai. . . . When word reached me that various provinces offered a tribute of fish, in accordance with regulations, I forbade this practice completely. Eleven provinces halted their offerings of regional maritime produce; the people left off their tribute. As time went on, fish could dart about without fear. In addition, 9,823 fine-meshed fishing-nets were burned, and in more than 45,300 places, hunters' trails were covered. Those who violated the edicts were severely punished.

The virtue of sparing life comes from the fact that it arouses divine retribution. Brahmā, sitting in his lofty palace in Heaven, scrutinizes the minds of men and clearly knows their thoughts. Shakra, dallying in his pleasure garden, turns his compassionate glance and illuminates all actions. He who accomplishes an act of mercy will have a prayer accomplished; he who increases the happiness of others will have his span of life increased. . . . When I consider my own life and attempt to calculate how long it will last, I realize that if I pray to live 120 years, there are but rare precedents for such a great age. If I hope for eighty years, not much remains of my old age. The most I desire is to prolong my life ten years more. Then, as progenitor of three successive sovereigns, I shall be without peer in the world, and as the senior by six years of Shākyamuni,¹⁰ I shall have all I desire in this mortal world. If the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman extends his divine protection, the gods will answer my great prayer; if the Tathāgatas of the ten directions¹¹ vouchsafe their aid, my life will be strong as the Diamond. I shall then be able to attain enlightenment, and I shall certainly be born in the paradise of peace and purity. The moral force of good actions brings neighbors;¹² their merit has no bounds. This one good action

9. The four modes of birth: (1) birth from the womb as animals, (2) birth from the egg as birds, (3) birth from moisture as fish and insects, (4) sudden birth without any apparent cause as bodhisattvas.

10. By Japanese reckoning, Shirakawa was seventy-six years old. Since Shākyamuni is said to have died at the age of eighty, if Shirakawa had lived ten more years, he would have been six years older than Shākyamuni was when he died.

11. The eight points of the compass plus up and down.

12. A quotation from the *Analects*, IV, 25: "The Master said: Moral force never dwells in solitude; it will always bring neighbors."

will reach alike the reigning emperor, the retired emperor, the empress dowager, the empress, the princes and the princesses, and they will enjoy great longevity. The nation will boast a reign of peace and harmony; all people will be at liberty to enjoy their pleasures. Thus may all, from the pillars of Heaven above, to the circle of the wind below,¹³ taste the savor of the Law and sojourn in the garden of enlightenment. [November 17, 1128]

[From Tsuji, *Nihon bukkyō shi*, jōsei hen, pp. 728–733]

MIRACLE TALES OF THE BODHISATTVA JIZŌ

Jizō was already a popular earth goddess in India and a bodhisattva figure in China before entering the pantheon of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism as it became incorporated into the amorphous and readily permeable conception of divinity in various Shinto cults, themselves highly fluid and miscible. In Japan, Jizō was often portrayed as a savior or god of mercy, associated with acts of repentance. In this respect, his cult functioned in ways similar to that of the Bodhisattva Kannon. Like the latter, Jizō was much involved with the popularization of the Lotus Sūtra and with the cult of Amida and the Pure Land. His versatility is shown by his popularity among warriors and women and by his identification as a special protector of children—in which function he often appeared as a child.

The following two stories appeared in a collection of popular tales, *Miracles of the Bodhisattva Jizō* (*Jizō Bosatsu reigen ki*), attributed to the monk Jitsuei (early eleventh century) of the Miidera, a major center of Tendai esotericism not far from its rival, Enryakuji, on Mount Hiei.

HOW MOCHIKATA RECEIVED A MIRACULOUS REVELATION

A warrior called Musashinosuke Mochikata lived in the household of a former governor of Owari. As a warrior Mochikata naturally appreciated the martial arts, but at the same time he engaged in unvirtuous deeds; nevertheless he still placed his trust in Jizō. On the eighteenth and twenty-fourth days of every month he abstained from *sake*, meat, and women. He observed this abstinence, singlemindedly thought of Jizō, and devoted himself to religious services. He continuously recited the name of Jizō even when giving vent to abuse and danger. He tried to repay the care his mother had taken of him in childhood by devoting himself to the way of the Ikkō followers and by giving away his wealth and property.

A *hijiri* ascetic named Chūjitsu constantly relied on Jizō and never ceased reciting his name. One night he dreamed that he met a golden Jizō who said

13. The lowest circle of the world in the Buddhist cosmogony was that of the wind.

to him, “At dawn tomorrow I will meet you again at Tō-in to the east of Rokkaku. The person whom you will meet there will be no one else but me.” Just as Jizō said this, Chūjitsu woke up.

So at dawn Chūjitsu went there as instructed and saw Mochikata. He hurried up to him, bowed, and worshiped him. Mochikata felt that this was strange and asked Chūjitsu why he did this. Chūjitsu described in detail the marvelous dream of the previous night.

Mochikata thought, “In spite of my deluded mind, this dream is probably because I have concentrated on Jizō during these days. I am truly grateful that I have had this meeting on such a significant occasion.” Deeply moved, he said to Chūjitsu, “I am a lowly and vulgar man who does not deserve worship. However, since a person’s merciful mind is the same as that of the Buddha, we should not despise anyone and regard his mind as lowly. Your dream was probably due to my constant devotion to Bodhisattva Jizō. To practice filial piety toward my mother, I have been reciting Jizō’s name and observing abstinence. These good deeds may sound small and insignificant, but they must have touched the heart of the Buddha.

“As the vow of the Bodhisattva Jizō says, ‘If a man obeys his mother’s instructions, he will occupy the same body with Jizō.’ My merciful mind and filial piety are the same as those of Jizō—they are no different. If a man has a deeply sincere mind, he will move and finally communicate with the divine mind. Such a mind is regarded as the same as that of Jizō. Since mind and body are the same, my body is that of Jizō. But alas, I am still arrogant and insufficient in faith and practice. I will abandon my worldly life and harken to Jizō’s vow.”

[Dykstra, *Jizō*, p. 192]

ABOUT THE “MALT JIZŌ” OF KANUKI IN SURUGA

Long ago there was a woman who lived near Kanuki in Suruga. She was very poor and had no savings at all, and since she had no support she occasionally visited shrines and temples. While listening to the sacred words in the shrines and the sermons in the temples, she learned that Bodhisattva Jizō excelled other Buddhas, and that if a person merely thought about Jizō, his greatest desire would be instantly realized and he would become a Buddha in the future. Ever since that time the woman had deeply trusted in Jizō and had never neglected him.

The woman had a deep sense of filial obligation and she felt constantly distressed because she had no means of fulfilling her duty. With much sadness she thought to herself, “I am getting older, and how many years are now left to me? The anniversary of my mother’s death will come soon and I do not know what to do.”

She then decided to go to an acquaintance, borrow some rice, make some

sake out of it, sell it, and with the profit therefrom she could arrange for a small memorial service. Reciting the name of Jizō, she went to the acquaintance to borrow the rice.

The owner of the rice said to her, “Do you have any collateral if you can’t pay back the rice?” She replied, “Since I am doing this for the sake of my mother, I do not mind how much I have to suffer in repaying the loan. I myself will be the collateral.”

The man was impressed by her sincerity and said to her, “Why don’t you sell *sake* then?” and agreed to loan her three hundred pieces of copper at fifty percent interest.

“How kind of you,” the woman said as she pressed her palms together in prayer and recited the name Jizō. . . .

The woman thought that this was solely due to the mercy of Jizō, and so she placed the loaned money in front of her wooden statue of Jizō which she worshiped daily. She said to the Jizō, “Using this money as capital, I will make some *sake*, obtain a small profit, and then use it to console my late mother’s soul. Please help me to fulfill my filial duty.” . . .

So the woman made *sake* and sold it. She was most successful, for since her *sake* tasted better, buyers gathered at her gate as though it were a marketplace. And so she eventually made a considerable profit. She then thought to herself, “At the very outset I had no idea of making a large profit and decided to sell the *sake* for a small profit.” She then returned the three hundred copper pieces along with the interest. . . .

Many days passed and the woman continued to sell her *sake* at a low profit. Her customers told her, “We just can’t do without your *sake*.” So as a result, she was able to make a lot of money and her business was immensely successful.

One day the woman heard that a close friend in Numazu was critically ill and she thought, “Since the place is nearby, I will go over and see her and return quickly.” Being a widow, the woman was especially careful about being away from home. She shut the brushwood-fence door and the braided doors four times to make quite sure that they were secure, and then she left and hurried off to her friend.

While she was chatting with her friend about the old days, it suddenly began to rain. As the rain became so torrential that it even made holes in rocks, the woman thought that it would be better to wait for it to stop before returning home. But the rain continued and finally a flood washed away a bridge, thus making it impossible for her to get home. The woman worried to herself,

“I may have to stay here indefinitely. All my work now seems to have been in vain, despite all my plans to save my mother by making a small profit from the rich owner’s loan. This flood will spoil all the *sake* I have made and I will lose my customers. O Bodhisattva Jizō, what a shame that I have failed to attain my purpose! Surely it must have been a demon’s trick to make me think of coming here!” In this way the woman lamented in a pitiful manner.

On the third day the rain finally stopped and the river fell. The woman asked for help, crossed the river by boat, and finally reached home. She was pleased to see that the fastened brushwood door was still shut and seemed to be just as she had left it. She took the lid off the *sake* jar, wondering how much had been spoiled—but not a single drop of *sake* was left!

The woman was greatly astonished and looked about, thinking that the *sake* might have leaked out. She then noticed strained lees heaped up beside the jar, and when she carefully examined them she found three *kan* and thirty copper pieces.

So she made inquiries among her neighbors and they told her, “We heard that you had asked someone to sell the *sake*, since you could not return home for the last few days on account of the flood. We saw a person of noble appearance with a blue hat selling *sake* at your place. Since his *sake* tasted better than yours and he served his customers courteously, many people heard about it and came and bought his *sake*.”

The woman was very pleased and said, “I can’t believe it!” But a neighbor continued, “Ask people and listen carefully to what they tell you. A sick man on his deathbed in this neighborhood drank the *sake*—and he suddenly recovered and has been walking around without difficulty since this morning. My own husband had been ill in bed for the past hundred days, but he regained his strength through drinking this *sake*. So you can see, it can’t have been a trick.”

“I wonder who sold the *sake*?” the woman thought. “I will inform my Buddha and thank him.” So she washed her hands, purified herself, and went on to the Jizō statue which she had worshiped for so long. She prayed to him, “Merciful Jizō, thanks to your aid I can now undertake my filial responsibility to my late mother.”

She then opened the doors of her Jizō’s portable shrine. What a surprise! Instead of a string of beads, the Jizō statue was graciously holding some malt in his hand. Now the woman understood that the bodhisattva had sympathized with her in her poverty and had manifested his mercy by responding to her desperate petition. This was indeed a most unusual happening in this degenerate age. . . .

This was truly unusual. Since divine power operates in mysterious ways, it can never pervert the truth. This means that the Buddha appears only in the mind of faith. If a person has doubts, how can a Buddha manifest himself? But if a person has a strong and firm faith, a Buddha will most certainly appear.

People called him the “Malt Jizō” of Kanuki in Suruga, and he exists to this very day. Those who have placed their trust in this Jizō have never failed to obtain their requests. It is said that Jizō’s vows to save sentient beings surpass those of other bodhisattvas.

[Dykstra, *Jizō*, pp. 197–200]

*SEX AND BUDDHAHOOD—A SHINGON HERESY*SELECTIONS FROM *THE PRECIOUS MIRROR* (HŌKYŌSHŌ)

This short work written by the Shingon monk Yūkai (1345–1416) is of interest in tracing certain developments in the later history of Esoteric Buddhism. In its emphasis on the pedigree of the Shingon teachings, it was no more than echoing Kūkai's words of six hundred years before, but in the meantime the orthodox tradition suffered greatly from the numerous heresies that developed out of the religion's Tantric aspects. In the excerpts given here, Yūkai attacks one of the most notorious heresies, the so-called Tachikawa school, and in other parts of his essay, he mentions that Shingon's name had been lent to magical arts that bore little relation to the doctrines taught by Kūkai, including the art of discovering buried treasure and the art of flying about at will. Even the most outlandish heresy was capable of producing scriptural evidence for the validity of its view, for the Buddhist canon as transmitted to Japan contained an incredible variety of texts, some of them little more than formulas for magical rites. The Tachikawa school was almost extinct by Yūkai's day, as he himself states, but other bizarre heresies continued to dominate Esoteric Buddhism.

Shingon Esotericism is the secret doctrine taught by Vairochana, the King of Enlightenment, and transmitted by the Eight Founders. It is called the Supreme Highest Vehicle of the Buddha and bears the title of the Realm Surpassing All Sects. Indeed, only through this teaching can one exterminate the extremely heavy burdens of karma or save the living creatures difficult of conversion or quickly realize the Buddhist knowledge. That is why in ancient times eight wise philosophers who went to China to seek the Law received instruction in Shingon. The Eastern Temple [Shingon] had five transmitters of the teachings: Kūkai, Shūei, Eun, Engyō, and Jōgyō.¹⁴ The other school [Tendai] had three transmitters: Saichō, Ennin, and Enchin. . . . Among the teachings received from China, those obtained by Kūkai are the senior ones because they were passed down from one heir to the traditions to the next, from the Great Founder Vairochana to Huiguo, the abbot of the Green Dragon Temple in China. I cannot enter into details here, but although Huiguo transmitted the Law to many people . . . only Kūkai and Yiming were instructed in the two mandalas, and Yiming was not fully instructed. He died without transmitting the Law to anyone. Only Kūkai was the true heir of Huiguo. . . . Kūkai in turn transmitted the teachings to many disciples. [Genealogical tables are omitted.]

Someone asked, "It is indeed true that the Shingon teachings are the highest

14. Shūei (808–884), Eun (798–869), Engyō (799–852), and Jōgyō (d. 866)—together with the more famous Kūkai—Saichō, Ennin, and Enchin are often spoken of as the eight monks who sought the Law in China.

of all the schools and are the direct road for attaining Buddhahood. However, in late years the false and the true have become confused. To enter a false path and to violate the true way of becoming a Buddha is like saying East is West, and the point of view becomes topsy-turvy. How then can one attain the goal of becoming a Buddha? I crave your instruction on this matter.”

I replied, “It is difficult to distinguish jade and stone; it is easy to be misled by worthless things and difficult to establish the difference between the false and the true. For example, among the disciples of the Daigo-Sambō-in, there was a man called the *ajari* Ninkan. On account of some crime of which he was found guilty, he was exiled to the province of Izu, and there he earned his living by teaching Shingon to married laity and to meat-eating, defiled people, whom he made his disciples. A yin-yang teacher from a place called Tachikawa in the province of Musashi studied Shingon with Ninkan and combined it with his yin-yang doctrines. The false and the true were thus confounded; the inner and the outer learning were indiscriminately mixed. He called it the Tachikawa school and expounded it as a branch of Shingon. This was the origin of the heresy

The principle of this sect was to consider the way of men and women, yin and yang, to be the secret art of obtaining Buddhahood in this flesh and the only means of obtaining Buddhahood and gaining the Way. They made outrageous assertions that the Buddha had previously taught their doctrines, a diabolic invention deserving of eternal punishment in hell. Ignorant people, not realizing this, upheld it as the most profound and secret Law. How can one say that they possessed true views and genuine knowledge? The Shūrangama Sūtra declares, “Those who secretly desire to perform acts of greed and lust are fond of saying that the eyes, ears, nose and tongue are all ‘pure land’ and that the male and female organs are the true places of perfect knowledge [bodhi] and nirvāna. The ignorant people believe these foul words. They are to be called poisoners, hinderers, and demons. When they die, they become devils who afflict and unsettle people in this world, causing them to become confused and unwittingly to fall into the hell of eternal punishment.” How can people belonging to that hell be called Shingon believers? . . .

This Tachikawa school later spread to the province of Etchū. In successive generations, two teachers, Kakumei and Kakuin, lived on Mount Kōya [and taught Tachikawa doctrine there]. At this time, many secret manuals and texts of this heretical school were in circulation, often called “oral transmission of the secrets of esoteric doctrine.” To this day, there are ignorant people who study such works and believe them to possess the loftiest thoughts. In truth, they are neither exoteric nor esoteric but merely so many stones wrapped in jade. . . . Many people studied these teachings, but they did not meet with divine favor, and for the most part, both the teachings and the men have perished. A few are left, but I do not know how many.

[From TD 77, no. 2456:847–849]

PRAYERS FOR THE SHOGUN

This letter was written to Shogun Yoriei by the Shingon monk Mongaku, who had been a close adviser of Yoriei's father, Minamoto Yoritomo. In refusing to offer prayers for the shogun, Mongaku does not hesitate to scold him for his failings as a ruler. The forthrightness and independence of mind displayed by this monk of the more formalistic Shingon sect show that these were qualities characteristic of Kamakura Buddhism in general—and not just of figures like Dōgen and Nichiren. This letter is a fine illustration of both the abuse of esoteric practices by those with little understanding of them, and the reaffirmation of true religion by persons like Mongaku.

LETTER OF THE MONK MONGAKU TO SHOGUN YORIEI A.D.1200

I respectfully acknowledge your second letter. I sent you an answer before, but since you have written me again, I am replying again in the same tenor. While reading your letter, I repeatedly felt that I was listening to a message from the late shogun and I was deeply moved.

[You ask me] to offer prayers—and I remember with gratitude beyond expression that the late shogun rebuilt the East Temple¹⁵ and made possible through his generosity the reestablishment of the Takao monastery. Through these merits, he will be saved in the life hereafter. It is also due only to his generosity that I, Mongaku, have been able to do something for Buddhism and accomplish something for the good of man. I therefore have remained ever grateful for his generosity and happy beyond words. Even before you asked me to offer prayers, it was always my fervent desire that you should enjoy peace and security.

[May I say], however, that prayer takes effect only for those who practice virtue and who love the good. In the dwellings of those who offend, prayer is of no avail. By offenders, I mean those who destroy life without proper cause and those who live a life of pleasure and indulge themselves with liquor, women, and wealth, ignoring the grief of others and disregarding the well-being of the nation. When men are virtuous and good, on the other hand, it means that they reverence both the law of Buddha and the law of the state and are ever concerned with the welfare of the people. In short, it means that they must have character such as is expected of a parent by all people, even the lowliest man or woman—peasants and those in all walks of life.

When a man who has no concern for these things or who is ruthless and offensive or who has only selfish motives orders a monk or other spiritual in-

15. Tōji in the original text, but it must refer to the Tōdaiji in Nara, which Yoriei's father, Yoritomo, helped rebuild in 1190.

termediary to offer prayers, there may be those who will reply with favorable works because the order comes from a lofty source. But if the petitioner is not a good man, he must not only expect that there will be no answer to his prayers, but he must expect that he may be worse off than before.

Therefore, if you must have prayers offered, Your Highness should command only those monks or astrologers who are not dishonest or subservient but are straightforward. Your Highness should tell them your misdemeanors and try at all times to make amends. This Your Highness should by all means do. If your actions are not good and you tell others to pray for you, you are really putting yourself in a precarious situation.

Your Highness is the shogun of Japan. He who is asked to pray for you should be a man of great mind and great integrity. A person of steadfast virtue and lofty disdain of flattery but yet of compassionate heart must be selected to be the master of your prayers.

When it is a question of offering prayer as a sovereign as well as an individual, the first object of prayer should be the whole country and the whole people. How one may pray depends upon one's position in life. He whose influence does not affect the nation may offer prayers for his own benefit. But in these days, the rulers as well as the ruled offer up prayers on their own account. Such prayers have no effect, for they are not in accord with the invisible mind of Buddha and are in discord with the transparent light of Heaven. I beg Your Highness, and must repeat it again and again, that you deem it your duty to merit the confidence of all, so that with you as shogun in Kamakura, complaints of injustice will nowhere be heard and unreason will nowhere prevail.

If Your Highness acts in that way, you [will] have no need for prayers for yourself. [The goddess of] the Great Shrine of Ise, the Bodhisattva Hachiman, [the deities of] Kamo and Kasuga will all be pleased; and all Buddhas, sages, gods, and goddesses, without exception, will extend their hands to safeguard you.

Even before Buddhism came into existence, there were in India and in China, as well as in Japan, wise kings and sage rulers under whom all the land was prosperous and all the people lived a happy life. The sovereigns, long of life, were like father and mother to the people. The Five Emperors and the Three Sovereigns, among whom were Yao and Shun, were rulers who came before the time of Buddha. Your Highness is more fortunate [than they] in that you are acquainted with the Three Treasures of Buddhism which those others could not know. Your Highness, therefore, should put your mind on the life hereafter. You should endeavor to get away from this "house of fire" of the three existences and, rising above the troubles of repeated transmigration, attain to Buddhahood. Such should be the first prayer of the ruler as well as of the ruled.

...

In these days, however, all religious works and rituals sponsored by the great are merely for the eye and are only an expense to the country and a burden to

the people. Buddha and the deities do not accept them at all. Those who pray should know that Buddha and the deities accept only virtue and faith; material treasures have no appeal for them.

It is with this in mind that Your Highness, at the head of your warriors, should guard the emperor and become the mainstay of the whole nation. If you go astray in any way or have evil in your heart, you will prove to be only an enemy of the country. Its downfall will be the logical result. . . .

If Your Highness does not conduct yourself well, all men throughout the land will come to believe that you are not a good man. Then mountain bandits, sea marauders, highwaymen, and thieves will abound and in the end will bring ruin to your regime. . . . Then Your Highness, not realizing that all this is your own fault but believing it to be the work of criminals will merely go on arresting men, punishing them, imprisoning them, and cutting off their heads or their limbs to the detriment of the country. It is necessary to think of the retribution waiting in the life to come.

When your Highness once realizes that these crimes are not always the offenses of others but are due to your own recklessness and when you are sincerely convinced of it, if you ask any learned man how best to govern, the answer will be simple—as simple as shooting at a target, as the saying goes. As long as your Highness knows how to rule yourself, there is no need for regulations about this or that, no need for prohibitions, orders, or proclamations, because the people will be submissive and obedient. Then the land will naturally be at peace and well ordered. . . .

The late shogun always thought Mongaku to be a man of tough fiber and straightforward speech. I have never been in the personal service of Your Highness; it must have been offensive to Your Highness for me to write to you in the way I do. For this I beg your forgiveness. However, it has seemed to me that Your Highness is too much addicted to pleasures and has no regard for the complaints or the sufferings of the people. I thought this so deplorable that I told the late shogun confidentially that you should be sent away somewhere into exile—that such a course would be a real act of love toward you. . . .

Because I am frank and outspoken, I am certain that your Highness hates me. That I do not mind. I have written you thus only because I desire you to be good, and more than that, to grow in virtue.

A learned scholar quotes a text to the effect that a good word spoken for the sake of the ruler and the people is more valuable than hundreds and thousands of gold offerings. To this the ancient sage-kings bore testimony. Therefore do not fail to listen to those who tell you your shortcomings. If Your Highness tries to keep the nation in order without being mindful of your own faults, you will be like a man who expects to get rid of illness without taking medicine.

There are men of loyalty and faithfulness from whom you can learn your shortcomings, who do not change their colors in the service of Her Highness your mother. Let them speak to you in secret, not in public. Listen to them

directly; do not heed the lip service of monks. If they speak ill of you, you will be apt to become angry; but you must practice patience. Cure by fire is painful, but it is only through endurance that illness can be cured.

There are none more despicable than those who change their colors. There are none more loyal than those who tell you your faults. I pray Your Highness to remember this. Even if a man is agreeable and likable, beware of him if he is a cheat. But if there be one whom you dislike and do not wish to see, give him his due if he be of sterling character. The art of government, it seems to me, lies in nothing more nor less than in this awareness of true character.

I cannot thank Your Highness enough for the two letters with which you have honored me. This is my answer, written with all reverence and respect. Tenth day of the first month of the second year of Shōji [1200].

[From *Kokushi taiki*, XXXIII, *Azuma Kagami*, pp. 579–584]

ANNEN: MAXIMS FOR THE YOUNG (DŌJIKYŌ)

Annen (841–889) was a major figure in the promotion of Tendai esotericism at Mount Hiei after Saichō's time. "Esoteric," which basically means "mysterious," can be understood as "secret" or even "exclusive" in a particularistic sense but in its more universalistic aspect can represent the wondrous workings of the Three Mysteries (body, speech, and mind) in all humankind. It is in this sense that Annen's "Maxims for the Young" should be taken as an accommodation of Mahāyāna's adaptive means to the common person, often in a quite conventional and prosaic manner.

Many of these instructions for the young are drawn from the Chinese, and especially Confucian, canonical literature, syncretized with Indian and Buddhist views. Indeed, they often seem to express a proverbial wisdom or etiquette common to many cultures. But Annen makes it clear that Buddhism represents the highest wisdom, that worship of the native Japanese gods comes next in the hierarchy of values, and that Confucian morality stands on a lower level. Similarly, although filial piety is encouraged, loyalty to parents and lay teachers cannot compare with that to religious teachers, whose redemptive function goes far beyond this life. Given the religious goal toward which these instructions lead, it may not be surprising that instead of providing a guide for schooling or systematic education, the following excerpts often refer to matters of adult life and society that the young might find relevant only later in life.

In the presence of a superior, do not suddenly stand up.
If you meet [such a person] on the road, kneel and then pass on.
Should he summon you, comply respectfully
with hands clasped to your breast, face him directly.
Speak only if spoken to; if he addresses you, listen attentively.

Make threefold obeisance to the Three Treasures [of Buddhism],
twofold obeisance to the [Shinto] gods.

In the presence of others, bow once
But show the highest respect to your teacher or lord.

When passing a graveyard, be reverent;
When passing a [Shinto] shrine, descend [from horse or carriage],
In front of a [Buddhist] temple or pagoda, do nothing to defile it [such as
defecation or urination].
When the writings of the [Confucian] sages are being read, do nothing
indecorous.

In all human relations there are appropriate forms of ritual respect
At court there must be laws and regulations;
If men [in authority] contravene ritual respect, transgressions will follow
among the masses.

In dealing with the people, say no more than is needed;
your business done, move on quickly.
In the conduct of business, let there be no breach of trust;
In your speech, keep to your word.

When words are many, they are worth little . . .
The man who is bold inevitably falls into danger . . .
The guileless man commits no transgressions . . .

The walls have ears; keep to yourself whatever might be taken in slander.
Even the heavens have eyes; commit no wrongdoing even in secret . . .
A three-inch tongue can do untold harm to a five-foot body;
The mouth is the gate of much misfortune; the tongue is the root of many
mishaps . . .

Natural disasters can be averted; from disasters of one's own making, there is
no escape.

Pile up good deeds and a house will have no end of blessings;
Indulge in evil deeds and it will have no end of calamities.

Good deeds done in secret/are bound to reap rewards in the open.
Good conduct performed unseen/will make one's good name shine

Hearts, like faces, differ from one another; like water, they take the shape of
the container.

Do not try to bend another man's bow or ride another's horse.

Seeing the cart ahead overturned should be a warning to the cart behind.
Not to forget what happened before is to learn a lesson for the future . . .

When the gods punish fools, it is not to slay but to chasten them,
A teacher strikes the student not from malice but for the student's own
improvement.

Birth confers no honor on one; it is the practice of self-cultivation that
endows one with wisdom and virtue.
The man of worth may not enjoy riches; the one who is rich may not be
worthy of honor.
If one, though rich, still has many desires, he may be called poor.
If one, though poor, is contented, he may be called rich.

A teacher who fails to admonish his disciple, may be called a breaker of the
commandments.
A teacher who admonishes his disciple may be called an upholder of the
commandments.

When one keeps a bad disciple, both teacher and disciple will fall into Hell;
When one nourishes a good disciple, both teacher and disciple will attain
Buddhahood. . . .

Leaving one's kin and cleaving to a strange teacher, one may achieve [the
three forms of Buddhist learning]: Discipline, Concentration, and
Compassion.
Even though one may be dull by nature, one can surely attain the learning of
Buddhahood.

One character learned each day amounts to 360 in a year.
Each character learned is worth a thousand pieces of gold.
One stroke of the brush may save many lives.

One should not neglect a teacher who has taught you even for the length of
one day; how much less a teacher who has taught you for years.

To a Buddhist teacher, you are indebted for three generations (past, present,
and future, that is, for all time).
To a parent you are only indebted for one lifetime . . .
A disciple must walk seven feet behind his teacher, and not tread on his
shadow. . . .

On a winter's night, dressed lightly, endure the cold as you recite the whole
night through;
On a summer day with little to eat, repel hunger as you persist in learning till
the day is done. . . .

Great though the vices of the wise man be, he will not fall into Hell;
 Slight though the vices of the foolish man be, he will assuredly fall into Hell.
 The fool clings to sorrow like a prisoner clasped in jail.
 The wise man ever enjoys happiness, like one resplendent with Heaven's
 light . . .

Each morning in the hills and fields, one kills other creatures to feed one's
 own;
 Each night in the rivers and seas, one fishes to support one's life;
 To support life day and night, day and night one creates evil karma.
 To satisfy one's tastes for the span of a day, one falls into Hell for eons. . . .

The cycle of birth and death is unceasing; seek nirvana now.
 The life of the body is impure, befouled by the passions; seek enlightenment
 straight away.
 Even in the halls of Indra's palace, there is the grief of unceasing change.
 Even in Brahmā's heaven, the pain of fire and sword awaits.

Compassion shown to one person is worth a sea of merit;
 What is done for many but with selfish intent gains only a poppy seed's
 reward. . . .
 Piling up sand to make a stupa will earn a golden body,
 An offering of flowers to the Buddha will merit a lotus seat. . . .

For the guidance of the young, I have explained the doctrine of retribution.
 What is drawn from the Inner and Outer [Buddhist and Confucian] canons,
 let no reader
 despise or ridicule.

[*Annen Oshō no kenkyū*, pp. 2–32; dB]