

Chinese and Japanese commentators have traditionally summarized the message of the Lotus Sūtra in three lessons. The first is that Śākyamuni was both a mortal being and a manifestation of the Eternal Buddha. As such, the questions of his demise are settled decisively in favor of his being present forever. That is, the Buddha does not die, just as the Buddha's presence is extended throughout time, so the salvation of the Buddha extends to all beings. The second lesson is that salvation is universal and includes even women, who were regarded in other sūtras as being incapable of becoming buddhas. Third, the Lotus Sūtra encompasses all approaches to salvation in the One Vehicle, which is sometimes equated with Mahāyāna Buddhism; at other times the One Vehicle is limited to the Lotus Sūtra itself. Together these three lessons comprise a message that is eternal, universal, and comprehensive.

It is precisely on the basis of these characteristics that the Lotus Sūtra is presented as the highest truth. The highest truth is by nature a sovereign truth that stands above other teachings; and the One Vehicle is therefore supreme. This is an interesting logic that leads to the conclusion that because the Lotus Sūtra is inclusive of all times, persons, and approaches, it is the absolute truth that supersedes the messages pro- pounded by other sūtras and teachers. It is this sūtra's dual character that makes it possible for Tendai Buddhists to accept so many other teachings and practices while Nichiren Buddhists reject them.

In the following parable of the burning house, a rich man saves his sons—who do not realize that the house they are in is on fire—by promising them a variety of wonderful carts to lure them out. Actually he has only one cart, but his deliberate misrepresentation is justified by the fact that it was an expedient device used for the boys' own salvation and by the magnificent splendor of the one kind of cart he did give them. Encompassing the virtues of all of the other carts, this One Vehicle was singularly supreme and eclipsed everything else.

This important point is made not through philosophical argumentation but by parable, a literary device that the Lotus Sūtra uses extensively. It is these stories that have endeared the Lotus Sūtra to so many people and have inspired poets, artists, and even politicians to create verse, paintings, and ideologies that make up what has been called the culture of the Lotus Sūtra.

#### PREACHING THE ONE GREAT VEHICLE [MAHĀYĀNA]

*Lotus Sutra*

At that time the World-Honored One calmly arose from his samādhi and addressed Śhāriputra, saying: "The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter."

Śhāriputra, ever since I attained Buddhahood I have through various causes and similes widely expounded my teachings and have used countless expedient means to guide living beings and cause them to renounce their attachments.

Why is this? Because the Thus-Come One is fully possessed of both expedient means and the perfection of wisdom.

Śhāriputra, to sum it up: the Buddha has fully realized the Law that is limitless, boundless, never attained before.

Śhāriputra, the Buddhas preach the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, but the meaning is difficult to understand. Why is this? Because we employ countless expedient means, discussing causes and conditions and using words of simile and parable to expound the teachings. This Law is not something that can be understood through pondering or analysis. Only those who are Buddhas can understand it.

Śhāriputra, I know that living beings have various desires, attachments that are deeply implanted in their minds. Taking cognizance of this basic nature of theirs, I will therefore use various causes and conditions, words of simile and parable, and the power of expedient means and expound the Law for them. Śhāriputra, I do this so that all of them may attain the one Buddha vehicle and wisdom embracing all species." [pp. 23-31]

#### THE PARABLE OF THE BURNING HOUSE

"Śhāriputra, I will now make use of similes and parables to further clarify this doctrine. For through similes and parables those who are wise can obtain understanding.

Śhāriputra, suppose that in a certain town in a certain country there was a very rich man. He was far along in years and his wealth was beyond measure. He had many fields, houses, and menservants. His own house was big and rambling, but it had only one gate. A great many people—a hundred, two hundred, perhaps as many as five hundred—lived in the house. The halls and rooms were old and decaying, the walls crumbling, the pillars rotten at their base, and the beams and rafters crooked and aslant.

At that time a fire suddenly broke out on all sides, spreading through the rooms of the house. The sons of the rich man, ten, twenty, perhaps thirty, were inside the house. When the rich man saw the huge flames leaping up on every side, he was greatly alarmed and fearful and thought to himself, I can escape to safety through the flaming gate, but my sons are inside the burning house enjoying themselves and playing games, unaware, unknowing, without alarm or fear. The fire is closing in on them, suffering and pain threaten them, yet their minds have no sense of loathing or peril and they do not think of trying to escape!

Śhāriputra, this rich man thought to himself, I have strength in my body and arms. I can wrap them in a robe or place them on a bench and carry them out of the house. And then again he thought, This house has only one gate, and moreover it is narrow and small.

My sons are very young, they have no understanding, and they love their games, being so engrossed in them that they are likely to be burned in the fire. I must explain to them why I am fearful and alarmed. The house is already in flames and I must get them out quickly and not let them be burned up in the fire!

Having thought in this way, he followed his plan and called to all his sons, saying, "You must come out at once!" But though the father was moved by pity and gave good words of instruction, the sons were absorbed in their games and unwilling to heed him. They had no alarm, no fright, and in the end no mind to leave the house. Moreover, they did not understand what the fire was, what the house was, what danger was. They merely raced about this way and that in play and looked at their father without heeding him.

At that time the rich man had this thought: The house is already in flames from this huge fire. If I and my sons do not get out at once, we are certain to be burned. I must now invent some expedient means that will make it possible for the children to escape harm.

The father understood his sons and knew what various toys and curious objects each child customarily liked and what would delight them. And so he said to them, "The kind of playthings you like are rare and hard to find. If you do not take them when you can, you will surely regret it later. For example, things like these goat-carts, deer-carts, and ox-carts. They are outside the gate now where you can play with them. So you must come out of this burning house at once. Then whatever ones you want, I will give them all to you!"

At that time, when the sons heard their father telling them about these rare playthings, because such things were just what they had wanted, each felt emboldened in heart and, pushing and shoving one another, they all came wildly dashing out of the burning house.

At this time the rich man, seeing that his sons had gotten out safely and all were seated on the open ground at the crossroads and were no longer in danger, was greatly relieved and his mind danced for joy. At that time each of the sons said to his father, "The playthings you promised us earlier, the goat-carts and deer-carts and ox-carts—please give them to us now!"

Śhāṇputra, at that time the rich man gave to each of his sons a large carriage of uniform size and quality. The carriages were tall and spacious and adorned with numerous jewels. A railing ran all around them and bells hung from all four sides. A canopy was stretched over the top, which was also decorated with an assortment of precious jewels. Ropes of jewels twined around, a fringe of flowers hung down, and layers of cushions were spread inside, on which were placed vermilion pillows. Each carriage was drawn by a white ox, pure and clean in hide, handsome in form and of great strength, capable of pulling the carriage smoothly and properly at a pace fast as the wind. In addition, there were many grooms and servants to attend and guard the carriage.

What was the reason for this? This rich man's wealth was limitless and he

had many kinds of storehouses that were all filled and overflowing. And he thought to himself, "There is no end to my possessions. It would not be right if I were to give my sons small carriages of inferior make. These little boys are all my sons and I love them without partiality. I have countless numbers of large carriages adorned with seven kinds of gems. I should be fair-minded and give one to each of my sons. I should not show any discrimination. Why? Because even if I distributed these possessions of mine to every person in the whole country I would still not exhaust them, much less could I do so by giving them to my sons!"

At that time each of the sons mounted his large carriage, gaining something he had never had before, something he had originally never expected. "Śhāṇputra what do you think of this? When this rich man impartially handed out to his sons these big carriages adorned with rare jewels, was he guilty of falsehood or not?"

Śhāṇputra said, "No, World-Honored One. This rich man simply made it possible for his sons to escape the peril of fire and preserve their lives. He did not commit a falsehood. Why do I say this? Because if they were able to preserve their lives, then they had already obtained a plaything of sorts. And how much more so when, through an expedient means, they are rescued from that burning house."

[Adapted from Watson, *The Lotus Sūtra*, pp. 23-31, 56-63.]

### THE VIMĀLAKĪRĪ SŪTRA (YUIMA-KYŌ)

The *Vimālakīrī Sūtra* eulogizes Buddha's lay disciple, *Vimālakīrī*, who lives as a householder and yet achieves a wisdom unmatched even by those following a monastic discipline. At the Japanese court, this ideal of the Buddhist layman found favor among men active in state affairs, and later under Fujiwara auspices, a date was reserved on the court calendar for reading and expounding on this sūtra. An extant commentary on the *Vimālakīrī* text has been traditionally ascribed to Prince Shōtoku. Although some modern scholarship has questioned this attribution, there can be little doubt that the sūtra itself and its teaching of Emptiness and Expedient Means were influential in seventh-century Japan.

At the time in the great city of *Vaishali* there was a rich man named *Vimālakīrī*. Already in the past he had offered alms to immeasurable numbers of Buddhas, had deeply planted the roots of goodness and had grasped the truth of birthlessness. Unhindered in his eloquence, able to disport himself with transcendental powers, he commanded full retention of the teachings and had attained the state of fearlessness. He had overcome the torments and ill will of the devil and entered deeply into the doctrine of the Law, proficient in the perfection of wisdom and a master in the employing of expedient means. He had successfully

fulfilled his great vow and could clearly discern how the minds of others were tending. Moreover, he could distinguish whether their capacities were keen or obtuse. His mind was cleansed and purified through long practice of the Buddha Way, firm in its grasp of the Great Vehicle, and all his actions were well thought and planned. He maintained the dignity and authority of a Buddha, and his mind was vast as the sea. All the Buddhas sighed with admiration, and he commanded the respect of the disciples, of Indra, Brahma and the Four Heavenly Kings.

Desiring to save others, he employed the excellent expedient of residing in Vaishali. His immeasurable riches he used to relieve the poor, his faultless observation of the precepts served as a reproach to those who would violate prohibitions. Through his restraint and forbearance he warned others against rage and anger, and his great assiduousness discouraged all thought of sloth and indolence. Concentrating his single mind in quiet meditation, he suppressed disordered thoughts; through firm and unwavering wisdom he overcame all that was not wise. . . .

He frequented the busy crossroads in order to bring benefit to others, entered the government offices and courts of law so as to aid and rescue all those he could. He visited the places of debate in order to guide others to the Great Vehicle, visited the schools and study halls to further the instruction of the pupils. He entered houses of ill fame to teach the folly of fleshly desire, entered wine shops in order to encourage those with a will to quit them. . . .

The common people honored him as first among them because he helped them to gain wealth and power. The Brahma deities honored him as first among them because he revealed the superiority of wisdom. The Indras honored him as first among them because he demonstrated the truth of impermanence. The Four Heavenly Kings, guardians of the world, honored him as foremost because he guarded all living beings.

In this way the rich man Vimalakīrti employed immeasurable numbers of expedient means in order to bring benefit to others.

Using these expedient means, he made it appear that his body had fallen prey to illness. Because of his illness, the king of the country, the great ministers, rich men, lay believers and Brahmans, as well as the princes and lesser officials, numbering countless thousands, all went to see him and inquire about his illness.

Vimalakīrti then used this bodily illness to expound the Law to them in broad terms: "Good people, this body is impermanent, without durability, without strength, without firmness, a thing that decays in a moment, not to be relied on. It suffers, it is tormented, a meeting place of manifold ills.

"Good people, no person of enlightened wisdom could depend on a thing like this body. This body is like a cluster of foam, nothing you can grasp or handle. This body is like a bubble that cannot continue for long. This body is

like a flame born of longing and desire. This body is like the plantain that has no firmness in its trunk. This body is like a phantom, the product of error and confusion. This body is like a shadow, appearing through karma causes. This body is like an echo, tied to causes and conditions. This body is like a drifting cloud, changing and vanishing in an instant. This body is like lightning, barely lasting from moment to moment.

"This body is like earth that has no subjective being. This body is like fire, devoid of ego. This body is like wind that has no set life span. This body is like water, devoid of individuality. . . .

"This body is impure, crammed with defilement and evil. This body is empty and unreal; though for a time you may bathe and cleanse, clothe and feed it, in the end it must crumble and fade. This body is plague-ridden, beset by a hundred and one ills and anxieties. This body is like the abandoned well on the hillside, old age pressing in on it. This body has no fixity, but is destined for certain death. This body is like poisonous snakes, vengeful bandits or an empty village, a mere coming together of components, realms and sense-fields.

"Good people, a thing like this is irksome and hateful and therefore you should seek the Buddha body. Why? Because the Buddha is the Dharma body. It is born from immeasurable merits and wisdom. It is born from precepts, meditation, wisdom, emancipation and the insight of emancipation. It is born from pity, compassion, joy and indifference. . . .

The body of the Thus-Come One is born of immeasurable numbers of pure and spotless things such as these:

"Good people, if you wish to gain the Buddha body and do away with the ills that afflict all living beings, then you must set your minds on attaining supreme perfect enlightenment."

In this manner the rich man Vimalakīrti used the occasion to preach the Law to those who came to inquire about his illness. As a result, numberless thousands of persons were all moved to set their minds on the attainment of supreme perfect enlightenment. [pp. 32-36]

#### ENTERING THE GATE OF NONDUALISM

In the following passage, the sūtra deals with the question of how one enters "the gate of nondualism," that is, the entrance to "supreme perfect enlightenment."

At the time Vimalakīrti said to the various bodhisattvas, "Sirs, how does the bodhisattva go about entering the gate of nondualism? Let each explain as he understands it."

One of the bodhisattvas in the assembly, whose name was Dharmā Freedom, spoke these words: "Sirs, birth and extinction form a dualism. But since all



dharmas are not born to begin with, they must now be without extinction. By grasping and learning to accept this truth of birthlessness, one may enter the gate of nondualism."

The bodhisattva Delight in Truth said, "The true and the not true form a dualism. But one who sees truly cannot even see the true, so how can he see the untrue? Why? Because they cannot be seen by the physical eye; only the eye of wisdom can see them. But for this eye of wisdom there is no seeing and no not seeing. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

When the various bodhisattvas had finished one by one giving their explanations, they asked Manjushri, "How then does the bodhisattva enter the gate of nondualism?"

Manjushri replied, "To my way of thinking, all dharmas are without words, without explanations, without purport, without cognition, removed from all questions and answers. In this way one may enter the gate of nondualism."

At that time Vimalakīṭi remained silent and did not speak a word.

Manjushri sighed and said, "Excellent, excellent! Not a word, not a syllable; this truly is to enter the gate of nondualism."

[Adapted from Watson, *The Vimalakīṭi Sūtra*, pp. 32–35, 104, 110–111]

## Chapter 4

### CHINESE THOUGHT AND INSTITUTIONS IN EARLY JAPAN

At this point a chapter devoted especially to Chinese influences in early Japan may seem needless, for in every topic discussed so far this influence has been quite conspicuous. As the Yamato people consolidated their position in central Japan and their rulers attempted to win undisputed supremacy over other clans of the confederacy, it was to the Chinese example that they turned more and more for political guidance and cultural direction. In Prince Shōtoku we have already seen the embodiment of this tendency to adopt and adapt all that China might contribute to the unification and pacification of a restless, turbulent people.

The most striking examples of this trend are to be found in the series of imperial edicts issued during the period of Great Reform (Taika), which began in 645. Proceeding from the theory enunciated in Shintoku's constitution that "in a country there are not two lords; the people have not two masters," these reforms asserted the doctrine that "under the heavens there is no land which is not the king's land. Among holders of land there is none who is not the king's vassal." On this ground an ambitious program was launched to curb the powers of the clan leaders, who had frequently jeopardized the throne itself in their struggles for power. In place of the old political organization based on clan units was to be the systematic territorial administration of the Chinese, with local governors designated by the court, centrally directed and executing a uniform law to represent the paramount authority of the emperor. In keeping a

mous prestige of the capital in cultural affairs. Indeed, Kyoto's position as the cynosure of civilization was even further enhanced during this period by the military weakness of China from the eighth to twelfth centuries, to which the Japanese looked less and less often as a final authority in all matters. In religion, it is true, the two great movements inaugurated in the early eighth century, the Tendai Buddhism introduced by Saichō and the Esoteric Buddhism ably propagated by Kūkai, were imports from China significantly adapted by their Japanese proponents. Nevertheless, their progress was advanced by close association with the court, and their characteristic forms of expression increasingly reflected the court's prevailing attitudes and manner of life. Thus, although both these forms of Buddhism were egalitarian in theory—that is, as outgrowths of the Mahāyāna teaching, they stressed that all men had the potential for Buddhahood—in the Japanese setting, their activities were strongly conditioned by the aristocratic nature of court society. Again, despite the universalistic claims of the Mahāyāna as revealed in Tendai and Shingon eclecticism—their readiness to grant a place for all religious teachings and all forms of religious practice in a comprehensive view of Truth—there was a noticeable tendency to stress the hierarchic order of these forms of religious consciousness in the ascent to Truth. Thus, even though Tendai and Shingon Buddhism contained the seeds later sown abroad by the popular religious movements of the medieval period, in the Heian period itself the dissemination process was somewhat delayed.

Meanwhile, however, the Heian court attained great heights of cultural achievement. Increasingly, the Japanese asserted their independence of Chinese forms in literature and art and developed a native script better suited to the expression of their own language. The great monuments of this period of cultural efflorescence are the famous *Tale of Genji* by Lady Murasaki and the *Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon mirroring the court life of the time and the aesthetic preoccupations of the Heian aristocrats, as well as the great imperial collections of native poetry and the magnificent scroll paintings of this period. In them we find elegant expressions of the Heian passion for aesthetic refinement and the first clear intimations of the classic canons of Japanese taste, which inspired and guided the later development of a distinctive and highly distinguished artistic tradition.

## Chapter 6

### SAICHŌ AND MOUNT HIEI

One day in the seventh moon of 788, a young monk made his way up the side of Mount Hiei repeating this song of prayer he had composed:

O Buddhas  
Of unexcelled complete enlightenment  
Bestow your invisible aid  
Upon this hut I open  
On the mountain top.<sup>1</sup>

The monk was Saichō (767–822), and the little temple he founded developed into a center of learning and culture for the entire nation until, by order of a ruthless military leader, the complex of three thousand temple buildings on Mount Hiei was razed in 1571. Saichō's temple would almost certainly never have attained such a remarkable position had it not been for the decision of Emperor Kanmu [r. 781–806] to move the capital away from Nara, the stronghold of the established sects of Buddhism. Kanmu was a Confucian by training and, as such, was opposed to the encroachment into political power by the Buddhist clergy. The attempt to establish Dōkyō as the ruler of Japan repre-

1. Dengyō *Daini zenshū*, IV, p. 756 (1912 ed.).

sent the closest the monks came to success in creating a "Buddha land," but even when this failed, they were by no means reduced to a purely religious status. It was in order to restore to the sovereign his full prerogatives that Kammu determined to move the seat of government. In this decision he had the support of the Fujiwara and certain important families traditionally opposed to Buddhism, as well as that of the descendants of such Chinese immigrant families as the Hata, who are credited with having introduced sericulture to Japan. Saichō himself was of Chinese descent. Another outstanding figure of the period, General Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, who extended the imperial domains to the northern end of the main island of Japan, was of Korean descent.

Although Kammu's dislike of the monks' secular ambitions and his impatience with their interminable wrangling had made him somewhat distrustful of them, he realized that he needed Buddhist support for the reforms he intended to effect. These included steps to enforce Buddhist discipline, to secularize those monks and nuns who violated the laws of celibacy, to limit the economic activities and acquisition of land by temples and monasteries, and to tighten the restrictions on the establishment or maintenance of private temples outside the authorized system of provincial monasteries and nunneries. Saichō suited Kammu's purposes. He had originally left Nara because of his dissatisfaction with the worldliness and, he believed, the decadence of the monks there. He became convinced that only in an entirely different environment could a true moral purge and ethical awakening take place. When he first established his little temple, the area around Mount Hiei was mainly uncultivated marshland, but six years later, in 794, it was chosen as the site of the capital. Saichō may have been instrumental in adopting this site, but in any case, once the capital had been moved there, he enjoyed the patronage of Emperor Kammu. Saichō was sent to China in 804, chiefly to gain spiritual sanction for the new Buddhist foundation on Mount Hiei. China was considered the "fatherland" of Japanese Buddhism, and without some Chinese credentials, Saichō's monastery would have no standing alongside those of the powerful sects in Nara. Saichō did not originally intend to found a new sect but, rather, an ecumenical center for the combined study of the teachings separately established in Nara. When Saichō's first temple opened, the Healing Buddha was enshrined there, just as it was in so many of the Nara temples. Moreover Saichō's initial inclinations, no doubt in reaction to the intense sectarian rivalries in Nara, were to try to reconcile competing claims in an eclectic, ecumenical movement. In his early religious training, Saichō had learned about Zhiyi's commentaries on the Lotus Sūtra that had been brought to Japan by Ganjin, a disciplinary master invited from Tang China to help reform Nara Buddhism. Zhiyi's comprehensive synthesis of Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine and practice—a religious accompaniment to the unification process in late-sixth-century China—also fitted Emperor Kammu's efforts to build the new capital of Heian (Kyōto) and strengthen

the state's control over many aspects of Japanese life, including religious institutions.

Thus when Saichō was designated by the court to visit China and learn the latest developments in Tang Buddhism, he made an effort to acquaint himself with several current trends, receiving initiation in forms of Esoteric Buddhism and Zen as well as Zhiyi's Tendai (Ch: Tiantai) teachings and practices then undergoing something of a revival in late-eight- and early-ninth-century China. In the short year of his stay, however, Saichō devoted his attention mostly to Zhiyi's grand synthesis of Esoteric Buddhism in scripture, philosophy, and meditation and less to the other two schools, which emphasized practice. By contrast, Kūkai, who accompanied Saichō on this mission, went on to the Tang capital and, during a much longer stay, acquired a greater mastery of Esoteric texts, mandalas, and practices.

On his return to Japan, Saichō was authorized to conduct a training program at his center on Mount Hiei, which was dedicated to the "One Way" (of the Mahāyāna) and the Tendai form of meditative praxis known as the "calming" (lit., "cessation") and "contemplation" (*shikan*).<sup>2</sup> Thus Saichō's initial aim was clearly to promote the Tendai Lotus school, as it was known, but not to the exclusion of other schools. His program of study included the Esoteric discipline identified with the Vairocana Sūtra, as well as the study of Confucian Classics, and the students authorized to participate in the program included representatives of the Nara sects in an ecumenical company.

If, however, Saichō's hope was to promote an inclusive religious movement in keeping with Zhiyi's own synthetic philosophy and Kammu's aim to overcome the divisive rivalries of the Nara temples, events turned in an opposite direction. Cooperation with other sects failed, and Saichō was compelled to press his own primary aims in a more single-minded way, almost, one might say, as a loner. One of Saichō's disappointments was the deterioration of his relationship with Kūkai, whose superior knowledge of Esoteric rituals he had hoped to use. Saichō's dedication to Mahāyāna universalism and the cause of the One Way manifested a genuine desire to improve his knowledge and understanding of Buddha's Law, regardless of whether or not the material he studied formed part of the Tendai teachings. He stated as his principle:

A devout believer in Buddha's Law who is also a wise man is truly obliged to point out to his students any false doctrines, even though they are principles of his own sect. He must not lead the students astray. If, on the other hand, he finds a correct doctrine, even though it is a principle of

<sup>2</sup> That is, doctrines openly stated in rational, discursive terms rather than profound mysteries only hinted at or pointed to by subtle signs, symbols, and gestures (Esoteric Buddhism).

another sect, he should adopt and transmit it. This is the duty of a wise person. If a man maintains his partisan spirit even when his teachings are false; conceals his own errors and seeks to expose those of other people; persists in his own false views and destroys the right views of others—what could be more stupid than that? From this time forward, monks in charge of instruction in the Law must desist from such practices.<sup>3</sup>

Saichō was much impressed with the splendid Esoteric rituals, and senior though he was to Kūkai, he humbly requested and received from him initiation into one of the most important of these rites. Also, he frequently borrowed texts from Kūkai's extensive library. Saichō even sent Taihan, one of his favorite disciples, to study with Kūkai. But these deferential relations only glossed over important differences in the interpretation of how Esoteric Buddhism was related to the Lotus, since Saichō believed in the essential harmony of the two, whereas Kūkai asserted the former's superiority over the latter. Relations between Saichō and Kūkai came to an abrupt end when Kūkai, writing on Taihan's behalf, refused Saichō's request that Taihan return to Mount Hiei. Then, when Saichō asked to borrow a certain Esoteric sūtra, Kūkai this time replied that if he wished to study the Truth, it was everywhere apparent in the cosmos, but if he wished to learn about Esoteric Buddhism, he would have to become a regular student. The tone of Kūkai's letter was condescending, and we cannot be surprised that Saichō was offended by it.

At the same time, Saichō's relations with the Nara temples worsened. Like Kammu, he had hoped not to alienate the established sects but found himself increasingly embroiled with them (especially the dominant Hosō sect) over his proposals on behalf of the Tendai Lotus teaching and Zhiyi's system of practice as the culmination of the Mahāyāna. Defending himself from these criticisms, Saichō argued that with the exception of the Kegon, the Nara schools had derived authority for their doctrines from secondary sources—the commentaries—instead of from the sūtras themselves. Saichō denounced this feature of Nara Buddhism in pointing out the superiority of the Lotus's teachings based (as he supposed) on Buddha's own words.

Saichō referred often to the "Two Vehicles" of Nara Buddhism. By this he meant Hīnayāna and what may be called Quasi-Mahāyāna, the latter referring to such schools as the Hosō and Sanron. Against these doctrines Saichō upheld the "One Vehicle" of the true Mahāyāna. The emphasis on "oneness" took various forms. Most important, it meant universality, in contrast, say, to the Hosō sect, which had evolved as a somewhat exclusive religion, with certain persons seen as precluded by their inborn shortcomings from attaining Buddhist

perfection, whereas Tendai Buddhism preached enlightenment for all. Saichō declared that all men had in them the possibility of gaining enlightenment:

In the lotus-flower is implicit its emergence from the water. If it does not emerge, its blossoms will not open; in the emergence is implicit the blossoming. If the water is three feet deep, the stalk of the flower will be four or five feet; if the water is seven or eight feet deep, the stalk will be over ten feet tall. That is what is implied by the emergence from the water. The greater the amount of water, the taller the stalk will grow; the potential growth is limitless. Now, all human beings have the lotus of Buddhahood within them. It will rise above the mire and foul water of the Hīnayāna and Quasi-Mahāyāna, and then through the stage of the bodhisattvas to open, leaves and blossoms together, in full glory.<sup>4</sup>

The strong language that Saichō uses here in his characterization of the Nara schools as Hīnayāna is not out of keeping with the Lotus's stigmatizing of those who refuse to accept Śākyamuni's final revelation, but it contrasts with Saichō's own initial efforts at reconciling and harmonizing the different schools.

Among the contentious issues was Saichō's relaxation of the traditional disciplinary rules or precepts that the Nara monks accepted when they were inducted into the full Hīnayāna ordination. Hiei monks were allowed to take a simpler set of Mahāyāna or Bodhisattva vows less tied to the traditional monastic discipline and more adapted to the life of a lay bodhisattva. The latter "precepts" (actually more like injunctions) featured ten major and forty-eight minor rules of conduct, simpler and more general than the exacting 250 rules of the earlier monastic regimen directed toward strict disciplinary observance and meditative praxis. Ganjin's reform movement in the Nara period reinforced this strict discipline, but Saichō's featured a more generalized ethic, as found in the *Famwang jing* (J. *Bonmō kyō*), a Chinese text purporting to be the words of the Buddha in India. This text had come to be widely accepted in China, though disagreement remained over whether the *Famwang* precepts alone were sufficient for the ordination of monks. Despite uncertainty over its authorship, Saichō believed that the *Famwang* precepts were more in keeping with the Lotus's teaching of the universality of the Buddha nature and the accessibility of salvation for all, whereas the so-called Hīnayāna path—assuming that Nirvāna was more difficult to attain and, practically speaking, achievable in this life only by a few—insisted on the need for monks to make a more rigorous and protracted effort to fulfill the traditional Noble Eightfold Path.

More was involved here, however, than simply issues of discipline. In op-

3. Dengyō Daiishi zenshū I, p. 447 (1922 ed.).

4. Ibid., p. 436.



posing Saichō, the Nara temples were not only defending their vested interests—including a monopoly of the ordination process as established in the old capital, as well as their key role in the system of state superintendence over Buddhist institutions—but were also standing firm for what they believed to be authentic Buddhist tradition. Saichō found himself at odds with them on both counts.

Although the court-approved system of accredited students registered at Mount Hiei provided for a substantial representation of monks from the Nara denominations, records kept by Saichō himself indicate that many of them were not in residence on Mount Hiei but had drifted away, several back to their home temples, no doubt because they were more concerned with their own ordination and certification in Nara than with satisfying Saichō's curriculum.

Disappointed at this outcome but still undeterred, Saichō asked Kammu's successor, Emperor Heizei, to approve a new set of regulations for Mount Hiei that would sequester the students on the mountain for a full twelve years. These regulations would also provide for an ordination platform to be established there that would free the monks from being held hostage to Nara and liberate Saichō's Enryakuji Temple from supervision by the Nara monks. Saichō's ordination, called the "Bodhisattva or Mahāyāna ordination," was based on the simpler rules of the *Famwang jing*, which, being more generally adaptable to the roles of the Bodhisattva, also would serve his aim of training monks for service to state and society.

Thus on the one hand, Saichō's new regimen was more relaxed in relation to the earlier, more numerous and detailed disciplinary rules identified with the so-called Hinayāna ("narrow or smaller vehicle"), but on the other hand, it imposed a new strictness insofar as it emphasized seclusion on the mountain to concentrate on an intensive program of study, known as the "Buddhist discipline (or regulations) of the mountain school" (*sanga huppo* or *sanga shiki*). In this way the demands of the training became associated not with the old *vinaya* but with the rigors of life for those identified as "monks confined to the mountain" (*nōzan bikku*) engaged in "mountain training and mountain learning" (*sanshū, sangaiku*).

Yet for all this confinement and constraint, Saichō's program reflected his attempt to prepare the Bodhisattva monks for broad service to society. In this respect, the program incorporated some of the public, charitable activities earlier associated with Gyōgi (see chapter 5) in Shōmū's time and also the secular roles traditionally identified with the Confucian "noble person" (*Chū junzi*).<sup>15</sup> This breadth of scope and balance of learning was represented by the three roles that Saichō had in mind for his monks: those who were gifted in both speech and action, who would be called "treasures of the nation" (*kokuhō*) and would be kept at the mountain headquarters to serve as religious leaders; those gifted in speech but perhaps not in action, who would be "teachers of the nation" (*kokushi*) who would spread the teaching in the country at large; and

those primarily adept at practical activities who would be known as "of service to the nation" (*kokuyō*), performing useful public works in construction, engineering, and charitable projects.

At the height of the state-building phase in early Japan, the word rendered here as "nation" had strong connotations of the dynastic state, and Saichō thought of his efforts as serving the aim of mutual support and protection between Buddhism and the imperial state, known as "Buddhism protective of the state" (*gokoku bukyō*). Indeed, his monastic establishment—standing as a moral and spiritual bastion to the northeast of the capital (as protection against evil spirits from that direction)—was known as the "Protector of the Nation" (*Chingo kokkei*). Hence Saichō, both dependent on Kammu's support and intensely devoted to him, emphasized loyalty to the ruler and also, in his emphasis on service to the people and on making religious salvation more accessible to them, gave a certain populist, if not nationalist, tone to his concept of the state or nation (*oku*). In an age often obsessed with the pessimistic view that Buddhism had entered a state of decline (in the latter degenerate stage of the Law, *marpo*), Saichō seemed almost optimistic with regard to the Japanese people's capacity for fulfilling the Lotus's promise of universal salvation.

Saichō's last years were difficult ones personally. When his political fortunes were reversed after the death of his great patron Kammu in 806, Saichō's petition to establish an independent ordination platform for his Bodhisattva monks and to be free of the state superintendency dominated by the Nara sects was strongly opposed by the latter, which held steadfastly to traditional Buddhist practices. Accusations between Nara and Mount Hiei became more and more acrimonious.

Thus, contrary to Saichō's original, rather generous, ecumenical impulses in the context of continuing sectarian rivalry, even his efforts to protect and implement a vision of the Greater Vehicle as a broad-based religious movement were beset by sectarian defensiveness and a siege mentality. It was only after Saichō's death in 822, following years of unremitting and unrewarding struggle, that the court gave its belated approval, as a kind of posthumous tribute, to his proposals for an independent center at Mount Hiei.

The groundwork done and the broad religious base established by Saichō for this mountain monastery proved remarkably durable. The Tendai Lotus school and his Enryakuji Temple continued to serve as a major headquarters of Japanese Buddhism and as a fountainhead for many of the most vital religious currents of succeeding ages.

## THE TENDAI LOTUS TEACHING

Although its basic scripture is the Lotus of the Wondrous Law (*Saddharmapundarika Sūtra*), a work from north India or Central Asia, the Tendai school was



alleys of the Lotus, how the Buddha prepared his followers for the full revelation of the Mahāyāna.

During the late Northern and Southern Dynasties period (317–589), the practice of “classification of the teachings” (Ch: *panjiao*, J: *hangyō*) became the principal means by which Buddhist exegetes sought to deal with the overwhelming diversity of scriptures and teachings that poured into China between the second and sixth centuries. Motivated by the desire to explain the comprehensive design of the Buddha’s preachings as well as the most effective path to salvation, this classification of the teachings played a seminal role in reshaping Indian modes of Buddhist thought and practice into a distinctive Sinic Buddhist tradition.

The next selection is an outline of the five periods or flavors—the core of the Tendai scheme of doctrinal classification. It is taken from the *Guanyin shu*, a commentary on Zhiyi’s short *Treatise on the Contemplation of the Mind* (*Guanyin lun*) compiled by his disciple Guanding. This system, derived from the Nivāna Sūtra but supported by parables from the Lotus, organizes the Buddha’s preaching career into five basic periods, which unfold one upon the other, leading the Buddha’s assembly of followers progressively to the highest and purest expression of the Buddha’s vision. That vision is the unadorned preaching of the final revelation in the Lotus Sūtra, in which the Buddha reveals both his pedagogic strategy and the ultimate purpose of his teaching career.

Note that throughout his discussion of the five periods, Guanding refers repeatedly to the parable of the impoverished son in the Lotus Sūtra (see SCIT 1, 450) and to a classification of the Four Teachings used in guiding beings of different spiritual capacities, namely, (1) the “Tripiṭaka teaching,” attracting them to the attainment of arhatood and extinction in nirvāna; (2) the “shared teaching,” involving an elementary and one-sided understanding of emptiness; (3) the “separate teaching,” aimed at reaching Buddhahood by intermediate stages involving both the empty and the provisional; and (4) the “perfect or rounded teaching,” as the direct and full realization of the Middle Truth or Mean, embracing all polarities of empty and provisional, nirvāna and saṃsāra, and so on.

When the Buddha first attained the Way on the bodhi seat of perfect quiescence, he conceived the desire to test [beings of the transmigratory world] with the [perfect] Dharmā of the Great [Vehicle].<sup>6</sup> However, animate beings did not have the capacity [for it] and were unresponsive to training by the Great [Vehicle]. Hence, in the chapter on Faith and Understanding [of the Lotus Sūtra], [the Buddha] illustrates [this situation] by saying, “The rich old man, seated on his lion throne, spied his [long lost] son and recognized him immediately,

Thereupon he dispatched a bystander to go after the son as quickly as possible and bring him back. At that time the messenger raced swiftly after the son and laid hold of him. . . . The impoverished son, alarmed and fearful, cried out in an angry voice, “I have done nothing wrong! Why am I being seized?” But the messenger held on to him more tightly than ever and forcibly dragged him back.” . . .

In the Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus Sūtra [the Buddha says], “If I were to force my teaching on sentient beings, they would persecute the dharma and thereby fall into evil destinies of rebirth.” Thus he says, “I would rather speedily enter nirvāna and not preach the dharma.” This, then, is the [meaning of the simile that] likens everything that the Buddha produced to the [tasteless] flavor of plain milk.<sup>7</sup> Calling to mind the powers of expediency employed by Buddhas of the past, the Buddha thought to himself, “I now will do as they have done and bring sentient beings to salvation through expedient devices.” Thereupon he set off for Vārāṇasī, where he preached the doctrine of the arising and cessation [of saṃsāra] and the elimination of the four bases of delusion. It is with this idea in mind that [the Faith and Understanding chapter of the Lotus Sūtra] says, “[The rich father] dispatched two more attendants to pursue his son and bring him back.” For “twenty years” [the son, unaware of his heritage, labored to] expel the excrement of the intellectual and affective delusions. This [period] corresponds to the transformation of raw milk into cream, which represents the shift from the ordinary unenlightened state to the sainthood [of the Hīnayāna].

Next comes the [period when the Buddha] preached the expanded or *vipaśyā* [discourses], drawing on the expedient devices of the three [tripitaka, shared and separate] teachings to advocate [eventual] submission to the perfect [teaching]. Thus, in the Vinayaśāstra [Sūtra], the two separate and perfect teachings are used to humble the ten great [arhat] disciples [of the Buddha], and the perfect [teaching] is employed to repudiate the approach that progresses through distinct [stages] and is adhered to by bodhisattvas of one-sided practice. In this way they are led gradually to submit [to the perfect teaching].

Previously, people responded to the Buddha’s expounding of the Great [Vehicle] with revilement and disbelief, making it impossible for [the Buddha] even to preach it. At this juncture, when persons who had already obtained the saintly path of the two vehicles heard him preach the Great [Vehicle], they harmed themselves and destroyed their karmic propensity [for the Mahāyāna by slandering it]. Thus, with a voice that reverberated through the great chitico-sm, [the Buddha] praised the wondrous dharma [of the Mahāyāna] as some-

6. That is, the teaching of the Flower Garland Sūtra (the Huayanjing or Avatamsaka Sūtra), which the Buddha allegedly preached on the bodhi seat during the first three weeks after his enlightenment.

7. That is, ordinary sentient beings derived no benefit from the Buddha’s initial preaching of the perfect middle truth of the Mahāyāna, responding to it as though “deaf and dumb.”

8. From the Expedient Means chapter of *The Lotus Sūtra*, trans. Watson, p. 44.

thing difficult to conceive. [Consequently,] even those who had not yet achieved enlightenment no longer gave rise to disparagement. With this idea in mind, [the Faith and Understanding chapter of the Lotus] states, "By the end of this time the son felt that he was understood and trusted, and he could come and go at ease, but he still lived in the crude hut as before." Moreover, "He could not cease thinking of himself as mean and lowly." This represents the transformation of cream into *butter curds*, which corresponds to the preaching of the *vaipulya* or expanded teaching that followed in the wake of the *tripitaka* teaching.

Next comes [the period in which the Buddha] preached the Wisdom (Prajñā) Sūtras. The Buddha expounded the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñā-pāramitā) Sūtras for the bodhisattvas, drawing on the expedients of the two shared and separate teachings in an effort to advocate [eventual] submission to the perfect [teaching]. The Belief and Understanding chapter [of the Lotus] says, "The father perceived that his son was bit by bit becoming more self-assured and magnanimous in outlook," and "he ordered him to take over the family affairs." Hence it says in the verses [of the same chapter] that "the Buddha changed us to preach the *pāramitā* on behalf of the bodhisattvas," and yet "we never thought of appropriating for ourselves even a single meal." This represents the transformation of raw butter curds into *butter*. It corresponds to the preaching of the Wisdom [Sūtras] that came after the expanded (*vaipulya*) [period].

After the Wisdom [period] comes the preaching of the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sūtra. In the [Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus] Sūtra [the Buddha] says, "I will straightaway cast aside [all] expedients and preach only the unexcelled way." This [refers to] none other than the expounding of the present contemplation of the perfect [teaching], in which one contemplates the mind of a single instant of thought as being identical with the Thus-Come-One's jeweled trove of the middle way and the Buddha's wisdom of permanence, pleasure, selfhood, and purity. Thus, the [Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus] Sūtra says, "I will straightaway cast aside [all] expedients and preach only the unexcelled way." This [refers to] none other than the expounding of the present contemplation of the perfect [teaching], in which one contemplates the mind of a single instant of thought as being identical with the Thus-Come-One's jeweled trove of the middle way and the Buddha's wisdom of permanence, pleasure, selfhood, and purity. Thus the [Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus] Sūtra says, "[A Buddha] comes forth into the world for one great reason alone." The Buddha replies, "[It is] to cause sentient beings to open the door to Buddha Wisdom," as well as to reveal, awaken to, and enter [this wisdom]. With this idea in mind, it says in the chapter on Belief and Understanding, "The father, realizing that his end was approaching, gathered his relatives and said, 'I am your father; you are my son. All of my wealth and property I entrust to you.'" [This corresponds to the transformation of melted butter into

the finest essence of *ghee*], which represents the preaching of the perfect teaching of the Lotus [Sūtra] that comes in the wake of the Wisdom [Sūtras].

Thus one should realize that the other three teachings are all expedients for this marvelous contemplation of the perfect teaching, [devised for the purpose of] subduing and readying people to receive this wondrous contemplation. Also one should know that the perfect contemplation is both arcane and wondrous. How could the three other teachings possibly compare with it?

[*Guanyin fan shu*, T.D. #6, no. 1921:399–600c, DS]

### HUIJI: THE METHOD OF CALMING AND CONTEMPLATION IN THE MAHĀYĀNA

In the following, Huiji explains how by the method of calming (lit., "cessation or stopping") one puts an end to discriminating thoughts and attains the unity of the Pure Mind. This method corresponds to the truth of Emptiness. At the same time, by means of "contemplation," one recognizes or observes the provisional, conditional reality of all phenomena in the *samsāra* world of ordinary experience. This corresponds to the truth of Tentativeness. The ultimate reality attained by the Middle Path (the truth of the Mean in the threefold conception) embraces and harmonizes the other two as at once both conditional and unconditional, through an insight that is transrational and not definable in words.

QUESTION: Why is [the Mind] called True Thousness?

ANSWER: All dharmas depend on this Mind for their being and take Mind as their substance. Viewed in this way, all dharmas are illusory and imaginary and their being is really nonbeing. Contrasted with these unreal dharmas, the Mind is called True (Real).

Furthermore, although the dharmas have no real being because they are caused by illusion and imagination, they have the appearance of arising and ceasing. . . . Because of the power, from time immemorial, of ignorance and imagination to influence it, the substance of the mind is affected by this influence and manifests itself. These unreal appearances have no substance; they are but the Pure Mind. Hence it is said that [substance and appearance] are not different. . . .

The substance of the Pure Mind does not have the character of distinction between the two [purity and being defiled]; all is everywhere the same and undifferentiated. It is only because of the illusory manifestations caused by the power of influence that differences appear.

But these illusory appearances are created and annihilated, whereas the substance of the Pure Mind is eternal, without coming into or going out of exist-