

## The Characteristics of Japanese Tendai

HAZAMA Jikō<sup>1</sup>

The Tendai 天台 school founded by Dengyō Daishi Saichō 伝教大師最澄 (767-822) is based primarily on the thought and practices of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai Lotus 天台法華 tradition. This does not mean that the T'ien-t'ai tradition was transplanted to Japan without any changes. Its form and content were polished, and its doctrine and teachings Japanized, resulting in significant development. The establishment of the new Tendai school by Saichō as a Buddhism of the mountains 山林仏教, in contrast to the urban Buddhism 都市仏教 of the previous Nara period (710-794), had a revolutionary significance for the religious world of the day. As the "womb" from which were born the "new" religious movements of the Kamakura period (1185-1333), the Tendai tradition retains a special place in the history of Japanese Buddhism. In this article I will examine some of the special characteristics of Japanese Tendai Buddhism, with the focus on its founder Saichō.

The first characteristic of the Japanese Tendai school is its advocacy of a comprehensive Buddhism, the ideal of a Buddhist school based on what is called the "One Great Perfect Teaching" 一大円教, the idea that all the teachings of the Buddha are ultimately without contradiction and can be unified in one comprehensive and perfect system. Chih-i, founder of T'ien-t'ai philosophy and practice, attempted this synthesis on the basis of the *ekayāna* doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Saichō transmitted not only the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai tradition but also the Zen 禪 and esoteric Buddhist 密教 traditions, and the bodhisattva precepts 梵網菩薩戒. He incorporated all of these elements under the rubric of the Japanese Tendai school to create a new school which was a synthesis of these four traditions. The Buddhism of

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Mt. Hiei, the headquarters of the Tendai school, included specialists both in the esoteric tradition (*shanagō* 遮那業) and T'ien-t'ai proper (*shikangō* 止觀業), propagated the bodhisattva precepts 円頓大戒, and later added the practice of *nenbutsu* 念仏 and faith in Amida. Such was the broad scope of teaching and practice offered to the Tendai adherent. Saichō included both esoteric and exoteric teachings, and avoided an obsession with any one category of the Buddhist tradition such as Zen or the precepts. He sought instead to unite all of these elements on the basis of a single fundamental principle, the comprehensive and unifying *ekayāna* spirit of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and harness this ideal for the good of the country as a whole, to "protect the nation" 鎮護国家.

It is said that Saichō's transmission of these numerous traditions were possible because his Chinese master Tao-sui 道邃 (dates unknown) was a believer in original or inherent enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覺) and thus promoted the idea of synthesizing and unifying the T'ien-t'ai, esoteric, and Zen Buddhist traditions, and that Saichō merely furthered his master's ideals. However, it is very doubtful that Tao-sui espoused these ideas. It is more likely that Saichō possessed a sufficient grasp of these four traditions before he visited T'ang China, and had already realized the need for their synthesis on the basis of the Buddhist elements which had already been transmitted to Japan. Saichō crossed to T'ang China in A.D. 804 and received transmissions of these four traditions. His immediate motive for visiting T'ang China was to fully understand the incomplete commentaries to the Sūtras then available in Japan, but the true significance of his seeking out the masters in China and receiving a direct transmission from them was the authority it provided for establishing a Japanese Tendai school which incorporated these four traditions, an idea which had germinated before his trip to T'ang China.

There are many topics and problems which could be discussed with regard to this transmission of the four traditions, but it is clear that the Japanese Tendai school founded by Saichō is structured with these four elements of T'ien-t'ai proper, esoteric Buddhism, Zen, and the bodhisattva precepts 円密禪戒. This is a characteristic very different from the Chinese T'ien-t'ai tradition with its teaching of a single doctrinal system based on the *Lotus Sūtra*. Saichō's intention must have been "to exhaust the profound meaning of the four traditions, and by unifying them return to the (teachings of) Nāgārjuna of old."<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that Saichō's ideal and goal was to establish a single comprehensive Buddhism. Given the true ideals of Saichō based on the *ekayāna* principle of the *Lotus Sūtra*, his ultimate purpose was not merely to unify these four traditions which make up the core of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but also to consolidate all concepts and beliefs from previous times, include all varieties of Buddhists and people of differing capacities<sup>3</sup> and lead them to

<sup>2</sup> Reference not identified.

<sup>3</sup> 三乘五性; lit. the three vehicles (*śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*) and the

enter the great sea of Thusness which has a single flavor 真如一味の大海, to protect the nation by having all beings follow the path of goodness, and thus increase the renown of the nation. These themes run throughout Saichō's work such as the *Hokke shūku* 法華秀句 (DDZ 3, pp. 1–280) and the *Shugo kokkai sho* 守護国界章 (DDZ 2, pp. 151–684).

This Japanese Tendai school, which advocates a comprehensive and unified Buddhism based on the integrative T'ien-t'ai teachings and incorporates all elements from the above four traditions, is a grand accomplishment, the likes of which, as the Tendai patriarch Annen 安然 (9th century) said, cannot be seen in either India or China. In any case it has played a significant role in Japanese history, contributing greatly to the religious life of the people and advancing the ideal of unity and harmony on a national level. Mt. Hiei was the center for Buddhist studies in Japan, and all of the "new" religious movements of the medieval era were offshoots of the Tendai school. It cannot be denied that the comprehensive Buddhism founded and advocated by Saichō played a major role in the history of Japanese Buddhism.

There is no clear record of the details concerning the transmission of the Zen tradition by Saichō, unlike his transmission of the other three traditions. There are many reasons for this, but in any case the two elements which dominated the Buddhism of Mt. Hiei were the two teachings of T'ien-t'ai proper and esoteric Buddhism. "T'ien-t'ai proper" refers to the so-called "Perfect teachings" (*engyō* 円教) of the T'ien-t'ai school based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, and esoteric Buddhism refers to the tantric tradition also represented by the Shingon school. These are referred to by Saichō in his *Gakushōshiki* 学生式 (DDZ 1, p. 2) as *shikangō* and *shanagō*, respectively. *Shikangō* referred to the area of speciality wherein one would concentrate on the study and practice of the T'ien-t'ai Lotus tradition, particularly the *Mo ho chih kuan* 摩訶止觀 (T. 46, 1–140), Chih-i's *magnum opus* on the theory and practice of Buddhist meditation. *Shanagō* referred to specializing in the study and practice of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* 大日經 (T. 18, 1–54). These two courses were essential parts of the Tendai school and together provided two of the three elements required by Buddhist tradition, that of concentration (定 *samādhi*) and wisdom (慧 *prajñā*). The third element, the precepts (戒 *śīla*), was fulfilled by all through adherence to the bodhisattva precepts. The two elements of the Perfect teaching and the esoteric teachings were considered of equal value and fundamentally the same, based on the belief of the unity of exoteric and esoteric Buddhism.

This viewpoint is reflected in the saying, "Shingon (esoteric Buddhism) and (T'ien-t'ai) *shikan* are essentially one; therefore both traditions are

five *gotras* (the five inherent "natures"; those tending to be śrāvakas, those tending to be pratyekabuddhas, those tending to be bodhisattvas, those without a predetermined nature, and those with no nature (*agotra*).

propagated on one mountain.”<sup>4</sup> However, the “Perfect Teaching” of T’ien-t’ai based on the *Lotus Sūtra* teaches the threefold truth that ultimate reality is simultaneously empty and conventionally existent 三諦実相の妙理 and that this is realized through an insight into reality which transcends the duality of object and subject 無相の理観. Esoteric Buddhism teaches the achievement of integration with the Buddha and all aspects of existence, symbolized by the six elements and four types of maṇḍalas 六大四曼,<sup>5</sup> through verbal intonation of *mantras*, physical performance of *mudrās*, and mental concentration. The first, T’ien-t’ai practice, is not concerned with performing formulaic ceremonies, but seeks contemplative wisdom and insight into the true aspects of reality in a single thought through simple sitting in meditation or contemplation. The later, Shingon practice, utilizes various devices and ceremonial activities, the performance of numerous *mudrā* with one’s hands and the intonation of *mantras*, or the contemplation of a wide variety of phenomena, to awaken a realization of or integration with the Dharma body of the Buddha. In this sense it appears that the two teachings are very different. However, the intent behind these apparent differences is to provide for the various capacities and potentials among sentient beings. In this sense the teachings of the true aspects of manifold existence 三千実相 as explained in the Perfect teaching of T’ien-t’ai Buddhism, and the multitudinous phenomena and the unity of the ten realms of existence 十界輪円 symbolized by the maṇḍalas of esoteric Buddhism, share a fundamental agreement. Tendai claims that the Buddhas which represent these two teachings, Śākyamuni and Vairocana, are one and the same (*ittai* 一体), and this is a major difference from the claims of Shingon esoteric Buddhism, which teaches that the teachings of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra* and the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* 金剛頂經 (T. 18, 207-22) are superior to that of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and that the Buddha Vairocana is distinct from and preeminent to Śākyamuni. There are other disagreements between Tendai esotericism (*taimitsu* 台密) and Shingon esotericism (*tōmitsu* 東密), such as reliance on different sutras and texts, and variant lineages, but a characteristic of Tendai Buddhism is its insistence that the Tendai Lotus teachings and Shingon esotericism are in fundamental agreement.

In the area of practice, Saichō promoted the bodhisattva precepts and established an independent Mahāyāna precepts platform (see Groner 1984, pp. 107ff.). These bodhisattva precepts were based on principles in harmony with all four of the traditions incorporated by Japanese Tendai, and were a teaching appropriate to the Japanese people. They transcended the categories of

<sup>4</sup> See Shōshin’s *Tendai Shingon nishū dōi shō* (T. 74, 418a8-9).

<sup>5</sup> The six elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness 地水火風空識 represent the entirety of existence, and the four maṇḍalas are the four types of maṇḍalas taught in Shingon Buddhism which together express all aspects of phenomenal and noumenal reality.

the formerly adhered to precepts, and provided an aspect which was not only central to the Tendai school but also became characteristic of Japanese Buddhism as a whole.

The basic reason that Saichō established the independent bodhisattva precepts is that the two fields of concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) were available in the Mahāyāna Buddhism of Japan, and it was only appropriate that Mahāyāna precepts be incorporated for the adherents of Mahāyāna. This would consummate the three aspects required for a complete Mahāyāna Buddhism, and also contribute to reforming the Buddhism of that time and to protecting the nation. Therefore the incorporation of the bodhisattva precepts was also based on the ideal of establishing a complete and all-inclusive Buddhism, and on the belief that the three fields of concentration, wisdom, and precepts have a single foundation.

Another important point is the situation and tendencies of the Japanese people, and the belief that their days were the degenerate age of the Latter Law (*mappō* 末法). Saichō wrote that “the Perfect Teaching thrives in our country of Japan because the conditions are perfect (*enki* 円機) and already ripe” (*Ehyō Tendai-shū*, DDZ 3, p. 343), and “the propensities 人機 of the people (of Japan) have been converted and none have a propensity towards Hīnayāna; the ages of the Correct Law and Counterfeit Law are approaching their end and the age of the Latter Law is nearly upon us. It is truly the appropriate time for the *ekayāna* teaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*” (*Shugo kokkai-shō*, DDZ 2, p. 349). This is Saichō’s observation concerning the tendencies of the Japanese people and the times, and is also an expression of Saichō’s own experience as a Japanese. What he means is that it is useless for the Japanese to rely on Hīnayāna Buddhism for salvation and liberation, and that all Japanese are naturally inclined towards the way of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva. Therefore it was the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism which spread and took root in Japan. There was no need for Hīnayāna Buddhism or the Hīnayanistic precepts, and it was only appropriate that the precepts of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva alone be instituted. In other words, Mahāyāna Buddhism fits the needs and tendencies of the Japanese people, and all Japanese should practice and follow the great way of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The people must rely on purely Mahāyāna teachings, especially in the degenerate days of the age of the Latter Law. The *Lotus Sūtra* says that “in the days of the Latter Law the Hīnayāna is not to be taught, but only the Mahāyāna.”<sup>6</sup> Saichō realized and believed that his age was at the end of the age of the Counterfeit Law and about to enter the age of the Latter Law. Therefore a supernatural ideal should be offered to the faithful rather than forcing them

<sup>6</sup> A more literal rendering of the *Lotus Sūtra* is, “in the days of the Latter Law, . . . if there are objections or queries, one is not to answer them by resort to the dharmas of the Hīnayāna, but one is to explain only in terms of the Mahāyāna . . .” See T. 9, 37c29–38a7; Hurvitz 1976, pp. 213–14.

to practice the complicated exercises required by the Hīnayāna tradition. He thereupon founded the Tendai school as a synthesis of the above four traditions and promoted the bodhisattva precepts.

A traditional teaching of Mahāyāna Buddhism claims that the realm of human beings is the dwelling place for three types of saints 三乘同居士, the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas, as well as the dwelling for beings with a variety of capacities and propensities. Therefore both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna teachings were provided. A large number of major and minor precepts were given for monastics to keep, and for a long time even those who adhered to the Mahāyāna teachings were expected to strictly maintain the Hīnayāna precepts. Indian and Chinese Buddhism continued this practice, and at first the Buddhism of the Nara period in Japan was no different. This Buddhism was dominated by the traditions and thought transmitted from India through China, and all types of Buddhists were expected to follow these precepts. Saichō, however, claimed that this tradition ignored the propensities of the Japanese people and did not take into account their innate nature. Saichō believed that Japanese people were ready for, or were more inclined toward, the "Perfect" teachings of Mahāyāna as interpreted in the T'ien-t'ai tradition, and promoted the bodhisattva precepts as an appropriate adjunct to these teachings. His establishment of these bodhisattva precepts independent of the Hīnayāna precepts was an epochal achievement. In fact Saichō's espousal of independent bodhisattva precepts was attacked vociferously by the representatives of the Nara schools who represented and supported the traditional interpretation of the precepts, such that he was forced to spend his last years defending this position. This further illustrates the fact that Saichō's espousal of bodhisattva precepts was without precedent in the history of the precepts, and was a truly unique Japanese development.

One can go so far as to say that Saichō's vision in establishing a fully Mahāyāna Buddhism which included the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts meant the establishment of a truly Japanese Buddhism. The Mahāyāna precepts platform erected as a result of Saichō's inspiration was physically very small, but it symbolized the establishment of a new Japanese Buddhism which would be passed on through the ages with increasing distinction.

The bodhisattva precepts contain many special characteristics, which cannot all be discussed here, including the teachings of "the unity/harmony of the real and the mundane" (*shinzoku ikkan* 真俗一貫) and the "easy" practice of devout faith (*shin'nyū igyō* 信入易行). These positions are also characteristic of the Tendai school. The bodhisattva precepts, unlike the precepts observed by the Nara schools, do not make distinctions between monastic and laity, nor are they legalistic. They are not limited to minute definitions of a formalistic lifestyle for the monastics, but can be adhered to by both monastic and lay people. Through keeping these precepts, everyone can

benefit both oneself and others, and thus advance on the bodhisattva path to supreme Buddhahood. This does not mean that the forms of the bodhisattva precepts are always simple, but they all rely ultimately on three types of “pure precepts” (*sanjūjōkai* 三聚淨戒): the precepts against indulging in evil activity such as murder, theft, pride, anger, and so forth (*shō ritsugi kai* 撰律儀戒); the precepts encouraging good activity, for benefiting oneself (*shō zenbō kai* 撰善法戒); and the precepts encouraging activity which will benefit others (*shō shujō kai* 撰衆生戒). The first category includes the prohibitions against the ten major and forty-eight minor transgressions as explained in the *Bonmōkyō* 梵網經 (T. 24, 997–1010). It also includes general restrictions against any kind of evil activity, whether physical, verbal, or mental. Any and all kinds of moral cultivation are included. The second category entails every kind of good activity, including but not limited to acts associated with the Buddhist categories of keeping precepts, the practice of concentration (*samādhi*), and the cultivation of wisdom. Also included are such worldly pursuits as dedication to scholarly excellence, or any effort aimed at self improvement. The third category refers not only to the effort to help and save all sentient beings through the perfection of the six Mahāyāna virtues (*pāramitā*: charity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom), but also includes such mundane activity as raising one’s children with loving care, living for the sake of others, and dedicating oneself to the good of society.

Thus these “precepts” include all aspects of the moral life and doing good, both for the benefit of oneself and for others. This applies to both monastic and lay people. If a monastic keeps these precepts, they serve as bodhisattva precepts for a monastic; if a lay person keeps these precepts, they serve as bodhisattva precepts for a lay person. Originally the precepts prohibiting evil activity were considered in two categories, a partial observance for the laity and the full observance for monastics. There were other formal differences also, but the underlying principle for the precepts as a whole was the same for both monastic and lay people. Therefore the observance of even one part of these precepts, whether by monastic or lay person, man or woman, means participation in the way of the bodhisattva which leads ultimately to the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood. This is what Saichō meant when he wrote that “These precepts are vast and great, and are appropriate for both the monk and the layperson (*shinzoku ikkan* 真俗一貫)” (*Shijōshiki*, DDZ 1, p. 19). This is a thorough application of the *Lotus Sūtra*’s teaching of “the eternal abiding of all worldly aspects” (*sekensō jōjū* 世間相常住) and the unity of the real and the mundane (*shinzoku ichinyo* 真俗一如) in the realm of the precepts. It is an application relevant for daily life, which encourages one to follow the correct path of Buddhism, and directs all people to lead a bodhisattva-like life style which truly incorporates these ideals.

Saichō broke new ground in developing a philosophy of absolute equality beyond the mundane distinctions between man or woman, rich or poor, monastic or lay, thoroughly incorporating the *ekayāna* spirit of the *Lotus Sūtra* into the realm of practice. This is truly a liberation from the Buddhism of the previous period which insisted on the differences between those of the three vehicles (*śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva*), between those of the five inherent propensities (*gotra*) and between monastic and lay people. Saichō's Buddhism thus had a special significance in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Under the banner of "Buddhahood for all" 一切皆成仏 he clarified the significance of the *ekayāna* philosophy of equality 平等, and argued persuasively for the fundamental equality of all humanity and the absolute dignity of the individual. These points were brought out clearly in his debate with Tokuitsu 徳一 (749?-824-?) of the Hossō school concerning Buddha-nature and whether *ekayāna* or *triyāna* was the fundamental Buddhist position 一三權実.

The position of absolute equality revealed in the *bodhisattva* precepts also has an advantage in that it is not difficult to practice nor difficult to understand. It is easy to accept. These *ekayāna* precepts are based on the *Lotus* teaching of the unity of Buddha and sentient beings 生仏一如, that all have the Buddha nature 真如仏性 and are destined for Buddhahood. The Buddha nature which permeates all things, the fundamental goodness of all beings which is their true nature and the realization of which is the eternal fruit of Buddhahood, is the basis for the *bodhisattva* precepts, consisting of the above three categories of "pure precepts." Once this is realized it is never lost 一得永不失, and one immediately gains the ultimate state of Buddhahood 直往頓悟. Concentration and sitting in contemplation or meditation 觀念坐禪 is all that is required, not intricate knowledge or difficult practice. The important thing is to accept it with faith.<sup>7</sup> Since we are of the same nature and on an equal basis with the Buddha, if we believe and have faith in this identity of sentient beings and the Buddha, accept and follow these *bodhisattva* precepts, and retain them in our hearts and minds, our inherent nature for keeping the precepts will become manifest and efficacious. The essential element is accepting the precepts with faith 信心受戒. Saichō's *bodhisattva* precepts appear to ignore the apparent propensities of human beings for evil and advocates a "supernatural" or supranormal ideal. This simplicity stands in contrast to the extremely complicated and troublesome precepts followed formerly by the Nara schools. It is even in contrast to the methods of contemplation advocated by Chinese T'ien-t'ai, which required complex practices for attaining an intricate understanding of philosophical concepts such as the

<sup>7</sup> This acceptance of precepts with faith 信心得戒 is taught in the *Bonmōkyō*, and the oral tradition of Tendai Buddhism 口伝法門 in particular emphasizes the centrality of faith for the *bodhisattva* precepts.



threefold truth and the integration of the three thousand aspects of reality 三諦三千の妙理.

I have briefly outlined the content and special characteristics of the Japanese Tendai school, but I would like to point out that of the many aspects of this Buddhist school, Saichō placed the greatest emphasis on the aspiration for enlightenment (*dōshin* 道心, *bodhicitta*). Saichō's words that "there is room for food and clothing within an aspiration for enlightenment, but there is no room for an aspiration for enlightenment in (the quest for) food and clothing" (DDZ 1, pp. 640–41) can be taken as the guiding motto for his life. This means that religion is not to be used for the purpose of material or mundane pursuits. It is not a tool for material gain. The primary purpose of religion is the aspiration for enlightenment, the cultivation of a mind which follows the correct Path. Food and clothing are secondary or even tertiary concerns. Saichō's life was an example of this principle. He was not concerned with his own comfort but rather sought to follow the path of Buddhism. He was willing to give his life for this ideal, and taught his disciples to do the same.

Saichō's instructions for disciples on Mt. Hiei prescribe "living in a grass hut and sitting on a seat of bamboo leaves, making little of one's life and taking the Dharma seriously" (*Sange gakushōshiki* 山家学生式, DDZ 1, pp. 11–20). The *Zen'an shiki* 禅菴式, a handbook on practicing in the mountains attributed to Saichō, describes the clothing, supplies, dwelling, bedding, and so forth sufficient to survive, and teaches that one should not crave for any more than these minimum requirements. It also says that "it is not our lot to possess vast tracts of valuable land or large supplies of food, neither are grand temples managed by monastic officials to be our dwelling," indicating that one should maintain a pure life style, yet avoid extreme rigidity. The author of the *Ichigon hōdan* 一言芳談, a 14th century collection of the sayings of various Buddhist masters, attributes the following words to Saichō: "The dwelling of one who aspires for a better rebirth (*gozeshā* 後世者) should not exceed three rooms: one room for a Buddha-image (to keep religious observances), one room for personal living quarters, and one room for conducting worldly business," undoubtedly based on the *Zen'an shiki*. In any case, for Saichō such things as food and clothing are to be used for the sake of following the Buddhist path, and for the sake of the path a minimum of these things are necessary. The essential matter is the primacy of the aspiration for enlightenment.

Saichō also wrote, "What is the treasure of the nation? The aspiration for enlightenment is a treasure, and those who aspire for enlightenment are the treasure of the nation" (DDZ 1, p. 11). Saichō valued the aspiration for enlightenment above all things. This belief sustained Saichō through difficult times in establishing the Tendai school on Mt. Hiei, especially when he

suffered vociferous criticism and attacks from other Buddhist schools. However, the Mahāyāna precepts for which he so resolutely fought would ultimately nurture people with an aspiration for enlightenment, so that “people with an aspiration for enlightenment should inherit the earth, and the way of the sage 君子 will continue forever” (DDZ 1, p. 13).

This emphasis on the aspiration for enlightenment in the Buddhism advocated by Saichō was based on a deep and sincere self-reflection and reconsideration of his inner life. Saichō referred to himself as “the most ignorant of the ignorant, the most mad of the mad, a defiled being, the most ignoble Saichō” and lamented that “I deviate from (the way of) all Buddhas, break the laws of the Emperor 皇法, and lack filial respect 孝礼” (DDZ 1, p. 2). Yet he had the ability to realize his true condition. His guilelessness and humble attitude was an expression of a lofty Mahayanistic spirit. Without this spirit a religion based on aspiration for enlightenment would not be possible. Saichō, who unceasingly sought to perfect this spirit, shunned the vain and deceptive life of the city and searched after a quiet and pure abode in the mountains. Yearning to study and discipline himself in the isolation of the mountains, he ultimately established a Buddhism of the mountains.

The Buddhism in Japan prior to Saichō’s time had gathered too much in urban areas, and as a result had been corrupted by the city. The religious observances by the monks became inextricably entwined with secular affairs, such that “all the temples in the Capital greedily pursued their own profit, possessing houses from which they obtained rent, so that self-profit was their basic motivation.”<sup>8</sup> Saichō personally witnessed this sorry state of affairs, and in the seventh month of 785 he made a firm commitment to climb Mt. Hiei and reject fancy clothing and the craving for sensory pleasures. For twelve years he endured hunger and the cold, while enjoying the peace of the mountains, and dedicated himself to a single-minded pursuit of spiritual training and contemplation. This proved to be the foundation for his mountain Buddhism. His support for this Buddhist life in the mountains, in contrast to the corrupt Buddhism of the Nara capital, was based on his advocacy of the aspiration for enlightenment, an idea which was of revolutionary significance for Buddhism in Japan.

Saichō advocated a religion which emphasizes aspiration for enlightenment, and established a Buddhist center in the mountains (away from the corruption of the city) ultimately for the sake of benefiting or “protecting” the nation and people of Japan as a whole. “Protecting the nation” 鎮護国家 was a slogan advocated by Saichō throughout his life. To him this meant that people, especially people with an aspiration for enlightenment, are the true protectors and the true glory of a nation. People who aspire for enlightenment are the true treasures of a nation. The peace and prosperity of a society

<sup>8</sup> Source unidentified.

depend necessarily on encouraging and fostering people with an aspiration for enlightenment, and treating them as national treasures. It is essential that people with an aspiration for enlightenment “inherit the earth.” In order to nurture a populace concerned with attaining enlightenment, and to encourage the emergence of people with aspiration for enlightenment, the first step is to train bodhisattva-like monks who can lead and teach the people. In order to train bodhisattva-like monks, there is no alternative to establishing a pure environment in the mountains. It was believed that catastrophes such as flooding, fire, strong winds, and other disasters such as wars, epidemics, drought, and so forth could be averted if virtuous monks in the mountains constantly read and chanted the sūtras 転経念誦. This is the reason Saichō advocated a religion of aspiration for enlightenment, and supported the idea that monks should study and train in the mountains.

Saichō believed that his most pressing responsibility was to nurture bodhisattva-like monks who could lead and teach the people, and much of his effort was expended for this purpose. His *Sange gakushōshiki* outlined the system to be followed for nurturing these disciples and contains Saichō’s unique philosophy of education, and the bodhisattva precepts were to be the underlying basis for this training. I will close this essay by introducing the gist of this text.

According to the *Gakushōshiki*, two gifted men were to be appointed annually for a period of six years, during which they were to learn to chant and become familiar with the content of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*, and after passing a test would be ordained as monks 得度 on the seventeenth day of the third month (the anniversary of Emperor Kanmu’s death). First they would receive the ten major (“good”) precepts as taught in the *Bonmōkyō* and become bodhisattva novices. Later they would receive the entire Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts and become bodhisattva monks. From this point they would stay and train for twelve years on Mt. Hiei. They would choose to concentrate on either the *shikan* (Tendai proper) or *shana* (esoteric Buddhism) course. For the first six years they would concentrate on lectures and philosophical studies and train on the side. Each day would be divided into two parts, one for studying Buddhist topics and the other for studying a non-Buddhist topic. The last six years could concentrate on training, with lectures on the side, to diligently nurture spiritual and scholarly mastery. A final test must be passed at the end of twelve years, and an appointment made in accordance with the disciple’s achievements. Since “those who are both good with words and good in deeds” are the true treasure of a nation, those who dwell on Mt. Hiei for a long time could provide leadership for the next generation. Those who were “good with words but not in deed” could become national teachers 国師, and those who were “good in deed but not with words” could serve the nation with good deeds 国用. The state

could appoint these men as lecturers 国講師 or missionaries 伝法師 in posts throughout the country to contribute to the education and social welfare of the people. This is the true meaning of “propagating the Dharma to protect the nation” 興法護國, and was the ultimate aim of the Japanese Tendai school as established by Saichō.

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