

# Is There Still Buddhism Outside Japan? Some Thirteenth-Century Perspectives

Jacqueline I. Stone

In the winter of 1202-3 and again in 1205, the monk Myōe 明恵 (1173-1232) twice attempted to organize a pilgrimage to India, to revere the sacred sites of the Buddha's lifetime. No Japanese had ever traveled that far, and Myōe had to rely for information on the travel records of Chinese monks such as Faxian 法顯 (c. 337-422) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), who, centuries before, had sought the Dharma in the western regions.<sup>1</sup> A document survives in his own hand, giving estimates of distance. Myōe calculated that, from the Tang capital of Chang'an 長安, he could walk to Rajāgrha in 1,600 days. "Oh, how I long to go there!" he wrote.<sup>2</sup> Myōe lamented his birth in an era of decline, long after the Buddha's lifetime and in a remote country far from Buddhism's birthplace. His projected journey to India expressed his yearning to "go back," as it were, to the ideal age of Śākyamuni Buddha.

Myōe never made his pilgrimage. His biography, composed sometime after his death by his disciple Kikai 喜海 (1178-1251), says that he abandoned his plans when the great deity of the Kasuga Shrine, the Kasuga *daimyōjin* 春日大明神, spoke to him through a medium and begged him not to leave Japan. On a visit to Kasuga to ascertain the truth of this oracle, Myōe saw in a vision that the shrine precincts were transformed into Sacred Eagle Peak; before his eyes, he beheld the living Śākyamuni Buddha and his holy assembly. "It has been handed down," says the biography, that the Kasuga *daimyōjin* is in fact none other than Śākyamuni himself, who has assumed the guise of a *kami* 神 or local deity for the sake of beings in this defiled, evil era. The vision revealed to Myōe represents "a wonder of the last age, a superior fact of our country."<sup>3</sup>

This famous story of Myōe's encounter with the Kasuga deity juxtaposes two diametrically opposed tropes about Japan and its relation to the Buddha-Dharma. On one hand, Japan is represented as profoundly disadvantaged in soteriological terms, far from Buddhism's birthplace in India and removed from the Buddha's time; on the other hand, Japan is said to enjoy a superior, even unique connection to the Dharma—in this case, mediated by its *kami* or local deities—that cancels out physical and temporal separation from the historical Buddha, rendering it irrelevant. These tropes each had a long history. The tension between them represents a recurring feature of Buddhist discourse especially during the latter twelfth and thirteenth centuries—roughly, the late Heian (794-1185) and Kamakura (1185-1333) periods—when they were repeatedly and deliberately juxtaposed for a range of polemical agendas. Buddhist discourses about Japan enabled educated Japanese to imagine a world beyond the Sinitic sphere and stimulated both historical consciousness and a sense of Japanese identity. At the same time, ideas about Japan's location in time and space became key issues in how Buddhist teachers and institutions promoted their rival claims. This essay focuses on how early medieval discourses about Japan were deployed to define what constitutes normative Buddhist practice. The first part provides some historical background and shows that, despite awareness of its marginal location, Buddhist thinkers often depicted Japan as an exemplary Buddhist country. The second and thirds parts explore how this picture was complicated by the rise in the latter Heian period of notions of Japan as a remote backwater in an age of decline. Drawing on examples from the writings of four diverse figures of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries—Kakuken, Kamo no Chōmei, Eisai, and Nichiren—these sections analyze how the tension between these contrasting representations of Japan was leveraged both in support of traditional practices and to legitimate innovation. The fourth part returns to the story of Myōe and argues that the element of his abandoning his planned journey to India foreshadowed an epochal

shift, stimulated by both intellectual trends and the failure of the Mongol invasion attempts, in which Japan came to be seen as the center of the Buddhist world.

## Imagining Japan in the Buddhist World

From the time of Buddhism's formal introduction to Japan in the sixth century, its interpreters were keenly aware of Japan's marginal position on the extreme eastern edge of the Buddhist world. At the same time, they took pride in its embrace of the Buddha-Dharma. Early on, Japan's location was schematized both geographically and historically in terms of Buddhism's "eastward transmission through three countries" (*sangoku denrai* 三国伝来): India, China, and Japan.<sup>4</sup> The term "three countries" is said to have originated with Saichō 最澄 (766/767-822), the Japanese Tendai patriarch, who employed it to assert the legitimacy of his newly established Tendai Lotus school (Tendai Hokkeshū 天台法華宗) by tracing its lineage back through China to Śākyamuni Buddha's preaching on Eagle Peak 靈鷲山 in India. India had transmitted the sūtras, Saichō said, and China had produced lineages, but this had not yet been done for the Tendai school based at Enryakuji 延暦寺, the monastery he had founded on Mt. Hiei 比叡山. He wrote: "Now humbly I have constructed a lineage of transmission through the three countries, showing the later development of our school."<sup>5</sup>

This statement appears in Saichō's *Naishō buppō sōjō kechimyaku fu* 内證佛法相承血脈譜, which he submitted to the court in 820 along with his treatise *Kenkai ron* 顯戒論 (Clarification of the precepts). The *Kenkai ron* countered objections from the Office of Monastic Affairs (*sōgō* 僧綱) to Saichō's earlier petition to ordain monks using the Mahāyāna precepts; the *Kechimyaku fu* helped legitimize this request by establishing the roots of his lineage in India.<sup>6</sup> Saichō also invoked the authority of India in the *Kenkai ron* itself, where he

argued, citing the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 or *Sūtra for Humane Kings* and its commentary by the Tang scholar-monk Liangben 良賁 (717-777), that the birthplace of Buddhism had never had a monastic register or an Office of Monastic Affairs, thus bolstering his efforts to keep Tendai ordinands independent of *sōgō* oversight.<sup>7</sup> The connection to India established through the notion of “three countries” thus initially served a specific legitimating purpose for the Tendai school.

Also in connection with the Tendai school, Saichō elsewhere stressed the unique status of Japan. Japan, he claimed, enjoys a special karmic connection to the *Lotus Sūtra*, which occupies the highest place in the Tendai system of scriptural classification (*kyōhan* 教判). “Throughout the realm of Japan, faculties suited to the perfect teaching (*enki* 円機) have matured,” he declared. “The perfect teaching has already arisen.”<sup>8</sup> By the “perfect teaching” (*engyō* 円教), Saichō meant the all-encompassing one vehicle that in Tendai doctrine constitutes the buddha wisdom and is fully expressed only in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The perfect teaching, in his understanding, by definition embraced even those of the very lowest capacity; thus Saichō was not asserting the spiritual superiority of the Japanese, as some have suggested, but rather, the power and authority of the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, Saichō may have been the first to apply the idea of “capacity” to an entire country, rather than specific individuals.<sup>10</sup> By claiming for Japan a particular receptivity to the *Lotus*, Saichō was in effect both promoting his Tendai institution and according Japan, the land where it was based, a special significance within the Buddhist world.

In a later generation, the Tendai scholar-monk Genshin 源信 (942-1017) would expand this notion of Japan and write: “Throughout the land of Japan, faculties suited to the perfect teaching are pure and uniform. At court and in the countryside, far and near, all alike take refuge in the one vehicle. Monastics and laity, high and low, all aspire to buddhahood.”<sup>11</sup> For Genshin, like Saichō before him, the “perfect teaching” meant the *Lotus Sūtra*, and Genshin’s

statement was intended to promote the one-vehicle teaching over and against the three-vehicle position of the Hossō school, as Saichō himself had done.<sup>12</sup> Over the next three hundred years, however, this passage would be widely cited across sectarian lines to legitimize a range of doctrinal positions.<sup>13</sup>

The India-China-Japan framework was next ingeniously appropriated by Gomyō 護命 (750-834), a scholar-monk of the Hossō school 法相宗 who, as head of the Office of Monastic Affairs, led the opposition to Saichō's plans for ordaining monks using the Mahāyāna precepts. Gomyō's use of the "three countries" schema appears in a work he composed in 830, in response to imperial command that the several Buddhist schools submit statements of their basic doctrines. With Gomyō, *sangoku* became a framework for positioning Japan within the larger Buddhist world.<sup>14</sup> Of the three countries, he asserted, India had many followers of heterodox ways and of the lesser vehicle, while China was filled with Daoists who slander the Buddha-Dharma. "Our Japan, with its august rule, is in no way like them," he concluded. Japan was a purely Mahāyāna realm, whose imperial line had donated lands and established temples and monasteries.<sup>15</sup> Where Saichō had invoked a connection to India via the "three countries" to legitimate the specific transmission of his Tendai school, Gomyō used the same framework to assert Japan's superiority among Buddhist countries. This inversion of status, in which Japan takes primacy over India and China, has sometimes been credited to Annen, discussed below.<sup>16</sup> To an extent, however, its beginnings are already present in this brief passage by Gomyō.

Gomyō may also have been the first to position Japan within the classic Buddhist cosmology that had originated in India. According to this model, at the center of the world towers great Mt. Sumeru, surrounded by eight concentric mountain ranges separated by eight concentric seas. In the outermost sea lie four great continents, to the north, south, east, and west, each flanked by two subcontinents. The southern continent of Jambudvīpa, where Buddhism spreads, was said to consist of sixteen major countries, five hundred middle-sized

countries, and ten thousand minor countries.<sup>17</sup> This cosmological model was known in Japan from ancient times. In 612, the empress Suikō 推古天皇 had a miniature stone model of Mt. Sumeru constructed in her garden by an artisan from Baekje.<sup>18</sup> Similar models were sometimes built on temple grounds, and an abbreviated depiction appears on the plinth of the famous Tamamushi shrine 玉虫厨子. A representation of the Mt. Sumeru cosmology was also famously engraved on the pedestal of the great buddha image at Tōdaiji, cast in 749.<sup>19</sup> None of these examples, however, placed Japan within that world picture.

Gomyō explicitly posed the question where exactly in Jambudvīpa Japan was located. He considered—and rejected—the possibility that Japan might be one of many “small countries” on Jambudvīpa’s periphery. The small countries, he said, either had no human inhabitants, or were inhabited by non-human beings, or were completely empty. Accordingly he placed Japan within Cāmara (J. *shamara* 遮末羅), one of Jambudvīpa’s two island subcontinents.<sup>20</sup>

Buddhist exegetes of later generations would echo and elaborate on the comments of Saichō and Gomyō. Annen 安然 (841-?) in particular, known for his role in systematizing esoteric Tendai thought, asserted that Buddhism is divided into nine schools that “rise and fall according to the time.” Among the “three countries”—India, China, and Japan—“only in Japan do all nine schools prosper simultaneously,” Annen said.<sup>21</sup> “Schools” (*shū* 宗) here refers not to independent institutions, as the term would later come to mean, but to schools of Buddhist thought, each with its own body of scripture and commentary, patriarchal lineage, and comparative classification schema of the Buddhist teachings, showing the place of its particular doctrine within in the whole. The flourishing of “all nine schools”—here, the six Nara schools plus Tendai, Shingon, and Zen—thus indicated that the entirety of the Buddhist teachings and their hermeneutical traditions were fully represented. For Annen, this superior feature of Japan among the three countries was embodied specifically by his own institution, the Tendai monastery on Mt. Hiei, where, in addition to exoteric

Tendai doctrine and practice, the Zen and esoteric teachings were also practiced. “These three traditions exist together only on our mountain. India and China have never known such [Buddhist] prosperity,” he claimed.<sup>22</sup>

Annen also invoked the “three countries” framework to promote Saichō’s ideal of ordaining monastics and lay people alike with the bodhisattva precepts. He wrote:

Truly one should know that those with the capacity to receive the bodhisattva precepts are extremely rare. In the land of India, there are still followers of heterodox ways who do not believe in the Buddhist Way. There are also Hīnayāna followers who do not have faith in the Mahāyāna. And in the great country of the Tang [China], there are Daoists who will not tolerate the Buddhist teachings, and Hīnayāna adherents who oppose the Mahāyāna. In Japan, all have faith in the Mahāyāna; there is not a single person who does not aspire to buddhahood. The *Yuqie lun* 瑜伽論 (Skt. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*) states, “In the northeast is a land whose inhabitants are suited solely to the Mahāyāna.” Does this not refer to our own country?<sup>23</sup>

Here Annen clearly echoes the assertions of Saichō and Gomyō that Japan is a wholly Mahāyāna country. And like Gomyō, whom he cites specifically, Annen identifies Daoists as the enemies of Buddhism. Both Gomyō and Annen no doubt had in mind the successive Daoist ideologues whose calls to suppress Buddhism had helped trigger anti-Buddhist persecutions in the Northern Wei (386-535) and Northern Zhou (557-581) dynasties. Annen may also have been influenced by his teacher Ennin 円仁 (794-864), who had traveled extensively in China and witnessed firsthand the Huichang 会昌-era (841-845) persecution of Buddhism under Emperor Wuzong 武宗 of the Tang.<sup>24</sup>

The “three countries” as the dominant framework for envisioning the world and history would persist throughout the medieval period and beyond. It posed a challenge to an earlier, Sino-centric world model in which China represented

both the geographic center and the source of high culture while Japan lay on the margins. The Nara polity (710-794) was modeled on that of Tang China; Chinese was used for official documents; and Japanese attempts at historiography, beginning with the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Record of ancient matters, 712) and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Chronicles of Japan, 720), followed Chinese precedent, being organized according to reigns and era names and thus closely tied to the imperial house.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, the concept of “transmission through three countries” linked Japan to India, a realm beyond the Sinitic sphere, and thereby undermined China’s central status. Its parameters were Buddhist: History began, not with the founding of a royal lineage, but with the Buddha’s advent in the world, and its geography was coextensive with those regions where his Dharma had spread.

Being defined by a religion that had crossed geographic, linguistic, and cultural borders, the *sangoku* construct made possible an awareness of Japanese participation in a universal tradition. Yet at the same time, by enabling comparison with other Buddhist countries, it encouraged the rise of particularistic thinking about what distinguished the Buddhism of Japan. Throughout much of the Heian period, the “three countries” framework was often deployed in ways that enhanced Japan’s status as a Buddhist country. In addition to the pronouncements of prominent figures like Saichō, Gomyō, Annen, and Genshin, more diffuse strands of discourse maintained that, despite its small size and marginal location, Japan was a superior Buddhist realm. Eminent masters of the continent were said to have been reborn there,<sup>26</sup> and sacred sites from Buddhist scripture were transposed onto the Japanese landscape.<sup>27</sup> The early twelfth-century *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 (Tales of times now past), a massive collection of Buddhist didactic tales, was organized according to the “three countries” model and stressed the vitality of Japanese Buddhism and the resourcefulness and ability of its clerics.<sup>28</sup> The famous Seiryōji 清涼寺 image of Śākyamuni Buddha brought back from China by the monk Chōnen 奝然 (938-



1016) was later said to have been the original buddha image created by King Udayana during the Buddha's lifetime and to have deliberately made its way from India through China to Japan, becoming celebrated as the "Śākyamuni transmitted through three countries" (*sangoku denrai no Shaka* 三国伝来の釈迦).<sup>29</sup> Connections to Buddhism's point of origin in India also served to relativize Japan's immense debt to Sinitic culture. Native *waka* poetry was termed the "dhāraṇi of Japan," said to be fully as efficacious as Sanskrit mantras in evoking numinous responses.<sup>30</sup> Positive evaluations of Japan's place within the *sangoku* spilled over, as it were, into real-world affairs, as Japanese monks visiting or in communication with the continent realized they could more than hold their own against their Chinese counterparts in doctrinal understanding and ritual performance.<sup>31</sup>

It should be noted that *sangoku* thought structured the world, not for sailors, traders, or diplomats—persons with concrete knowledge of lands outside Japan—but primarily for Buddhist scholar-monks and other literati. It denoted, in Ichikawa Hirofumi's words, an "inner three countries" 内なる三国, a subjective, ideological space, sometimes connected only tenuously to geographical and historical realities.<sup>32</sup> For example, as the historian Takagi Yutaka first noted, the "three countries" construct describes the transmission of Buddhism as "occurring within a historical space formed by eliding the Korean peninsula," despite the fact that Buddhism was officially introduced to Japan from Baekje and that Korean immigrants had played formative roles in establishing it.<sup>33</sup> Why the Korean kingdoms were excluded from the *sangoku* formulation, and whether that represents a deliberate obscuring of origins, will bear further research.<sup>34</sup> Since the implications of the "three countries" framework changed over time and according to context, there may not be a unitary explanation. Whatever the case, the omission in effect collapsed the Korean kingdoms into the larger Sinitic sphere, allowing exegetes to place Japan on the same level, and variously to compare and contrast it, with the "great countries" of India and

China.

From the late tenth century, one finds claims that the Dharma had declined in India and China and now flourished only in Japan. An early, striking instance occurs in the 984 *Sanbōe* 三宝絵 (The three jewels) by the scholar-bureaucrat Minamoto no Tamenori 源為憲 (d. 1011), who concluded that Buddhism in those lands had grown “weak and superficial.” Tamenori cites Xuanzang’s mention in his travel account of the decay of sacred sites in India. At the monastery at Bodh Gaya where Śākyamuni Buddha had realized awakening, two seated images of the bodhisattva Kannon 觀音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara), erected by various kings to mark the site, had sunk into the ground so far that they were visible only from the shoulders up; elders said that when the images were buried altogether, the Buddha’s teachings would be lost.<sup>35</sup> More than 360 years had passed, Tamenori notes, since Xuanzang’s visit, and “those images have no doubt disappeared.” More than 140 years had passed since the Huichang-era suppressions of Buddhism, and “it is unlikely that much of anything is left of Buddhism in China.” He continues:

But behold, the Buddha’s teachings have spread to the east and have come to rest here in our land, where they now flourish! Many sages have appeared here and left their marks, and our sovereigns have continuously fostered the spread of Buddhism. It is no slight affinity that allows us here and now to be witnesses to the words of the Mahāyāna scriptures, which, it is said, are rarely found among all the lands in the ten directions, rarely heard in countless kalpas.<sup>36</sup>

The use of *sangoku* thought to elevate Japan’s position in the Buddhist world was in part prompted, as in Tamenori’s case, by reports such as Xuanzang’s of Buddhist decline in India and knowledge of anti-Buddhist persecutions in China. Historian Uejima Susumu has argued that a more fundamental reason may be found in the fall of the Tang dynasty (907), upon which the *ritsuryō* 律令, Japan’s early centralized political system, had been modeled. The collapse of the

Tang undermined Sinocentric orientations and demanded a reevaluation of the basis of Japanese rule. Court literati reworked the founding myths of Japan's ancient chronicles and produced new genealogies of the *kami*, firmly establishing the imperial line as descended from the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神. These endeavors placed the origins of Japan's imperial house before the beginnings of Chinese polity and roughly coeval with the Buddha's advent in India. They stimulated the notion of Japan as a "divine land" or "land of the *kami*" (*shinkoku* 神国) and were incorporated into Buddhism via the concept, discussed below, that Japan's deities were the local avatars of universal buddhas and bodhisattvas.<sup>37</sup>

However, with rise in the late Heian and Kamakura periods of concerns about the decline of the Dharma, criticisms were voiced about the state of Japanese Buddhism itself. The history of the "transmission of Buddhism through three countries" became identified with alienation from the imagined ideal time of the Buddha, and Japan's own peripheral position on the farthest edge of the Buddhist world assumed disturbing implications.

### "A Marginal Land in the Last Age"

Buddhist exegetes of early medieval Japan maintained that the world had entered, or was about to enter, the end stage in schema of progressive degeneration following the passing of Śākyamuni Buddha, a period referred to as the Final Dharma age (*mappō* 末法) or simply the "latter age" (*masse* 末世). Buddhist scriptures predict that, after Śākyamuni Buddha's passing, human capacity wanes and the Buddhist religion will gradually decline. Chinese interpreters divided this degenerative process into three successive stages following the Buddha's death—the True, Semblance, and Final Dharma ages. These were often defined in terms of the three elements of teaching, practice, and "proof" (教・行・証), or the enlightenment gained from practice. During the

True Dharma age (*shōbō* 正法), people practice the Buddha's teachings correctly and achieve liberation. In the Semblance Dharma age (*zōbō* 像法), the outward forms of practice are maintained, and a few persons may reach enlightenment, but overall, results diminish. In the Final Dharma age (*mappō*), only the teaching remains; true practice is lost, and liberation is all but impossible to achieve.<sup>38</sup> Opinion varied as to the length of the preceding two periods, but *mappō* itself was said to last for "ten thousand years." References to *mappō* occur in Japanese texts from very early on, but not until the latter Heian period did the concept truly seize hold of the religious imagination. Although chronologies differed, one influential view placed the onset of the Final Dharma age in 1052. Strikingly, this chronology was shared by the Liao dynasty or Khitan state in northern China and possibly also by the Korean kingdom of Goryeo, suggesting a need to grasp Japanese Buddhist decline theory within a larger East Asian context.<sup>39</sup>

Discourses about the Final Dharma age flourished especially from the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. *Mappō* became a rhetorical center around which multiple anxieties coalesced.<sup>40</sup> Courtier diaries attributed unrest in the provinces, natural disasters, inauspicious omens, and monastic violence to the decline of the times, while Buddhist leaders pointed to the Final Dharma age as an underlying cause of laxity in precept observance. Within the "three countries" schema, Japan's position at the easternmost terminus of the Buddhist world came to be seen as a projection into the spatial dimension of separation in time from the Buddha's ideal age and the nadir in a long trajectory of decline in human receptiveness to the Dharma. This conflation of Buddhism's eastward movement across geographic space with the temporal process of its decline has been aptly termed "the *sangoku-mappō* construct."<sup>41</sup> Japan was a "peripheral land in the last age" (*masse hendo* 末世辺土) —a negative epithet expressing both cause and rationale for contemporary ills and the difficulty of making progress on the Buddhist path. Myōe, as we have seen, "longed above all for the

[Buddha's] traces in the western regions and abhorred profoundly the evils of this eastern land."<sup>42</sup> Myōe's contemporary, the monk Jōkei 貞慶 (1155-1213), wrote:

Having been born after the passing of one buddha and before the advent of the next, I am without the causes and conditions for liberation. Living in Japan, a country small as a grain of scattered millet, I am lacking in the practices for upwardly seeking wisdom or downwardly benefitting living beings. Greater than all griefs is the grief of not having been born in the Buddha's lifetime....From long kalpas past until the present, ...I have already been spurned from the buddha lands in the ten directions...and, accumulating still heavier karmic hindrances, have at last come to this peripheral country where the five defilements prevail.<sup>43</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century, in the decades following the Pacific War, the dominant narrative of Japanese scholarship identified "*mappō* consciousness" as a pervasive sense of crisis and despair, arising in the wake of natural disasters, armed strife, and social change accompanying the decline of the centralized bureaucratic state and the rise of rival power blocs (*kenmon* 権門). However, more recent work has challenged this picture of widespread anguish and focused instead on rhetorical and ideological uses of *mappō* discourse. Research in this vein has shown how temples and teachers across lineages and sectarian traditions invoked the Final Dharma age to promote their own practices and institutions.<sup>44</sup> Many leading Buddhist figures maintained that, even in this deluded age, earnest devotion to the Buddhist divinities would still evoke awesome responses. Jōkei, even while regretting his birth in an age of decline, insisted: "The buddhas and bodhisattvas, in order to save us, beings bound by the five defilements...have emerged from the capital city that is the Dharma nature in order to mingle with this land filled with evil and impurity. Their marvelous responses and benefits stand before our eyes and fill our ears; gods and buddhas with numinous powers are everywhere....When one approaches

them with sincerity, how could they not respond?”<sup>45</sup> Preachers and guides encouraged a remarkable growth in pilgrimage by extolling the benefits of worship at particular temples and shrines, even in an evil age, and their accounts of wondrous responses circulated in didactic tales.<sup>46</sup> Temple administrators cited the need to stave off decline of the Dharma in their appeals for court funding for ritual programs and building projects.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, decline discourse may have helped stimulate the remarkable flourishing of Buddhist thought and ritual culture that characterized this period. It would be misleading, however, to see *mappō* discourse solely in terms of institutional self-promotion: ideological commitments and soteriological concerns were deeply intertwined, and not a few Buddhist thinkers wrestled earnestly with the problem of how to pursue the path in an era seen as greatly disadvantaged.

This intertwining of polemical and soteriological concerns is especially obvious in the creative ways by which decline rhetoric was woven into the tension between the two contrasting tropes of Japan introduced above: Japan as a hinterland on the easternmost edge of the Buddhist world, and Japan as a superior Buddhist country. The next two sections of this essay offer examples of this development in the thought of four individuals: Kakuken and Chōmei, representing conservative positions, and Eisai and Nichiren as exponents of new teachings.

### Kakuken's Call to Preserve the Dharma

An early example of the deliberate juxtaposition of decline theory with the two contrasting tropes of Japan appears in *Sangoku dentōki* 三国伝灯記 or “Record of the transmission of the lamp through the three countries,” by the Hossō scholar-monk Kakuken 覚憲 (1131-1212) of Kōfukuji 興福寺, the temple of the politically powerful Fujiwara family. The text is based on a lecture that Kakuken delivered on the ninth day of the eighth month of 1173, the year of Myōe's birth, as part of the ceremonial events marking the installation at

Kōfukuji of a portrait of the Fujiwara patriarch, Kamatari 藤原鎌足 (614-669). While the second of the text's three fascicles has been lost, Kakuken's overall intent is clear: to detail the entire history of Buddhism as a transmission passing from India, to China, and to Japan. *Sangoku dentōki* is the first history of Buddhism to employ the "three countries" as its organizing framework, a device also adopted by later chroniclers such as the more famous Gyōnen 凝然 (1240-1321).<sup>48</sup> It is also the earliest work to use the term *sangoku* in its title.

In a section titled "A Consideration of the Country and the Age" (*kokudo jidai ryōken* 国土時代料簡), Kakuken identifies Japan as "the most marginal of marginal lands, the smallest of small countries." Japan is also far removed in both time and space from Buddhism's origins in India. "Even China," he states, "is separated from India by a million *li* of billowing waves... [And as for Japan,] one has never heard of a single monk from our country reaching India. That is what makes it a marginal country."<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, echoing Gomyō and Annen, Kakuken depicts Japan as a superior Buddhist country, free from the heterodox teachers and Daoist opponents who have plagued the Buddha's followers in India and China. Japan is "a realm where people have Mahāyāna faculties"; among the five natures, they possess only the untainted seeds of the bodhisattva. Despite its small size and peripheral location, Japan, it would seem, is the very place where Buddhism could best prosper. And indeed, Kakuken continues, in the 622 years following the introduction of Buddhism in the time of Emperor Yōmei 用明天皇 (540-587), the Dharma flourished under the patronage of successive sovereigns; every province cherished the Mahāyāna; every household sought the buddha way.<sup>50</sup>

However, just as the Dharma endures and flourishes through human effort, it is also through human neglect that the Dharma can decline and be lost. In Japan at present, Kakuken asserts, the glories of Buddhism are fast vanishing. Here he launches into a critique of contemporary practitioners: lay men and women lack faith and fail to value the three treasures (Buddha, Dharma,

Śaṅgha), while monastics think only of acquiring fame. Although they mount the ordination platform and put on the appearance of monks, inwardly they are no different from lay persons. What is more, armed attacks on rival temples have interrupted doctrinal study, cost many lives, and set in motion the causes for karmic retribution in the hells.<sup>51</sup>

Kōfukuji in the late twelfth century was embroiled in recurring conflict with its leading rival institution, the powerful Tendai headquarters on Mt. Hiei. Less than two months before Kakuen's lecture, armed Kōfukuji monks had attacked and burned a nearby Tendai stronghold at Tōnomine 多武峰, purportedly to preempt a strike planned by Mt. Hiei on leading temples in the Nara region. This incident—recorded with expressions of dismay in the diary of the imperial regent, Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 (1149-1207)—threatened to engulf Kōfukuji and other Nara temples along with their Tendai opponents in an escalating cycle of violent attacks and reprisals.<sup>52</sup> Kakuen must have understood the realities of *maḥḥō* in this light.

He then proceeds to cite sūtras and commentaries predicting the decline of the Dharma and the timetable it will follow. Kakuen himself adopted a chronology particular to the Hossō school, which placed the passing of Śākyamuni Buddha in 609 B.C.; since then, he notes, 1,718 years had passed.<sup>53</sup> He accordingly placed his present time at the end of the Semblance Dharma age. By his calculation, the Final Dharma age itself would not arrive until 1392, yet its coming was plain to see in the decline of monastic standards and the worsening of armed strife among leading temples. “The śaṅgha is in conflict, and the realm is disordered. The Buddha-Dharma of our country is on the point of extinction,” Kakuen warns.<sup>54</sup> His juxtaposing of Japan's unique potential as a solely Mahāyāna country with the current deplorable state of its Buddhism and the inexorable approach of the Final Dharma age serves to amplify the sense of urgency.

To counter decline, Kakuen urged renewed effort to preserve the Dharma.



As Takagi Yutaka notes, Kakuken seems to have understood such efforts as entailing the three aspects of seeking the Dharma, protecting the Dharma, and cultivating faith and wisdom.<sup>55</sup> As exemplars, Kakuken first cites two of Śākyamuni Buddha's prior lifetimes, when, as an ascetic practicing in the snow mountains, the Buddha-to-be offered his life to a demon in exchange for half a verse of a Buddhist teaching, and when, as a king, he abandoned his throne and sought the Mahāyāna teachings throughout the four quarters, giving himself in menial service to a seer who promised to instruct him.<sup>56</sup> Kakuken then praises the courage and resolve of Buddhist figures like Xuanzang and Yijing, who had sought the Dharma in India, or Dōshō 道照 (639-700), Dōji 道慈 (d. 744), Saichō, and Kūkai 空海 (774-835), who had risked the sea voyage to China in order to acquire and transmit the exoteric and esoteric teachings to Japan. These sets of examples evoke respectively the origins and transmission of Buddhism through the "three countries," leading up to the present. At this juncture, Kakuken suggests, the same seeking spirit is expressed by cultivating both faith and wisdom in order to protect the Dharma; one or the other alone will not suffice. "Men and women, laity and clerics, all must practice and study the Buddhist teachings," he insists.<sup>57</sup>

More specifically, Kakuken sought to bolster the position of Kōfukuji, which he saw as foundational to the prosperity of Japan's Buddhism; he praises its founder and the family ancestor, Fujiwara no Kamatari, as Vimalakīrti reborn and an avatar of the Golden Grain Tathāgata (Gonzoku Nyorai 金粟如來). Japan had first embraced Buddhism due to the influence of Prince Shōtoku, he said, but its continued survival was due to the power of the protective vow made by this Fujiwara progenitor.<sup>58</sup> Kakuken saw the perceived crisis of imminent Dharma extinction in terms of the threat posed to his own temple, Kōfukuji, and his concept of "preserving the Dharma" centered on perpetuating Kōfukuji-based Hossō influence, its ritual programs, and the power of its Fujiwara patrons. What is noteworthy and innovative in the *Sangoku dentōki* is Kakuken's

use of the trope about Japan's unique status among the three countries to stress by contrast both the gravity of present decline and the possibility of its reversal.

### Kamo no Chōmei Urges Reverence for the *kami*

Another, structurally similar juxtaposition of *mappō* thought with the two tropes about Japan centered around notions of “origins and traces” (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹), which held that the buddhas and bodhisattvas, out of compassion, had manifested themselves in Japan in the culturally more accessible form of the local deities or *kami*. *Kami*, in other words, were the avatars or local trace manifestations (*suijaku*) of the universal buddhas and bodhisattvas, who were their hypostases or original ground (*honji*).<sup>59</sup> One example has already been mentioned above in connection with Myōe's biography, where the deity of the Kasuga shrine is revealed to be a manifestation of Śākyamuni Buddha himself. Discourses of this kind grew out of efforts to assimilate *kami* cults—doctrinally, ritually, and institutionally—within a Buddhist interpretive frame. What in later medieval times would emerge as an independent Shintō tradition was at this point developing largely as a branch of Buddhism, and ideas about the *kami* were integrated into Buddhist thinking about Japan's position within the three countries.

A noteworthy example occurs in the *Hosshinshū* 発心集, a collection of Buddhist didactic tales by the poet-monk Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1153/1155-1216). Chōmei had been born into a hereditary shrine family—his father was a senior priest of the lower Kamo shrine 下鴨神社 in the capital—and he was knowledgeable about *kami* lore. He excelled as a poet and musician and became an official at the court Bureau of Poetry. Thwarted, however, in his hopes of succeeding to his father's position and establishing himself in the shrine world, he took Buddhist vows and entered a life of literary seclusion.<sup>60</sup> At the end of his *Hosshinshū* collection, Chōmei notes that, because of his past associations, *kami*

matters come inevitably to mind, and he uses the work's conclusion to stress the gods' undiminished power even in the *mappō* era. He writes:

Two thousand years have passed already since Śākyamuni Buddha entered nirvāṇa, and India is many tens of thousands of *li* away. Although a few of the sacred teachings have been transmitted here, the True and Semblance Dharma ages have already passed; those who practice the Dharma are rare, and its effects are seldom seen. Thus the buddhas and bodhisattvas, taking thought for the beings born in an evil era in this marginal and lowly realm, lost and wandering in an age with no buddha and no way to achieve liberation, have manifested themselves in accordance with our capacity, in the base forms of gods and demons...This is none other than their skillful means for benefitting sentient beings.<sup>61</sup>

Chōmei saw such protection as especially necessary in Japan's case. He elaborates:

As for the state of our country, without the aid of the deities, how could the people be secure and the land at peace? Being a small, marginal, and inferior realm, the country is weak and its people foolish. Inwardly, they are harassed by the demon king; outwardly, they have been dominated by the rulers of great countries, never knowing peace. Although the Buddha-Dharma has been transmitted here, the evil demons obstructing it remain strong, and it would be all but impossible for it to spread in this defiled era.<sup>62</sup>

It is not obvious whom Chōmei may have had in mind by "the rulers of great countries" who had dominated Japan. It is clear, however, that he represents Japan as seriously disadvantaged in terms of its peripheral location, the deluded state of its inhabitants, and the evil of the age itself. Yet precisely for that reason, he asserts, it is the object of special consideration by the Buddhist enlightened beings, who have manifested themselves as local deities as a salvific means. That salvific means in fact distinguishes Japan from other countries:

Although India is located in the very center of the southern continent [Jambudvīpa] and is truly the land where the Buddha appeared, since the end of the Semblance Dharma age, the protection of its deities has steadily declined, and Buddhism has all but vanished. Eagle Peak of old [where the Buddha preached the Dharma] has become home to tigers and wolves, and of the Jetavāna Monastery, only foundation stones remain. However, from [the time of the divine primal couple] Izanami and Izanagi no Mikoto, and for the reign of a hundred successive sovereigns, our own country has been the land of the *kami*, whose protection still continues. Though Japan may rank below such powerful countries as Silla, Goguryeo, China, and Baekje, and though the five defilements are rife... [here] the Buddha's law and the ruler's law will not decline; the people will be at ease and the land peaceful.<sup>63</sup>

Several points merit comment here. Chōmei's remarks about the decline of Buddhism in India echo those of Tamenori two centuries before and reflect a growing sense that the religion was vanishing from its place of birth. This passage also shows how notions of the *kami*'s special protection could be mustered to invert the negative connotations of Japan's spatio-temporal location as a marginal land in an age of decline and to assert that, precisely because of this special soteriological device, Japan was a place where the Dharma enjoyed unique stability and protection. Readings such as Chōmei's would gain prominence with the failure of the Mongol invasion attempts in 1274 and 1282.

One also notes Chōmei's mention of "Silla, Goguryeo, China, and Baekje," showing that Korea was not always overlooked. However, Baekje and Goguryeo no longer existed in his time, having been defeated in 668 and absorbed by a Silla-Tang alliance. The three Korean kingdoms appear here frozen, as it were, in the imagination as they were at the time of Buddhism's introduction to Japan in the sixth century—another reminder that medieval Japanese Buddhist discourses about the archipelago's place in the Buddhist world demarcated an

“inner space” not necessarily connected to historical realities.

Chōmei’s attitude toward the Final Dharma age lacks the sense of crisis seen in Kakuken’s *Dentōki*. True, Japan is a backwater, its people deluded, and the age inauspicious, but these obstacles can be overcome, he suggests, through reliance on the power of the *kami* who are the compassionate manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, Chōmei urges, one should pray to the *kami* in all things, both for affairs of this world and one’s wellbeing in the life to come.<sup>64</sup> Chōmei’s views are consistent with a widespread and perhaps even the dominant approach toward countering *mappō*: The times are unpropitious, but hindrances can be overcome by reliance on the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and *kami*, who are still active in this world. Here again we see an ambivalent reading of Japan stressing its marginal, deluded status in order to emphasize by contrast the importance of its privileged Dharma connection—defined in this case as the benevolent workings of its local deities.

### Japan, *Mappō*, and Innovative Teachings

In her study of Buddhist decline theory, Jan Nattier suggests that, in East Asia, ideas about the Final Dharma age evoked two broad responses. The first, which she terms the “we try harder” approach, called for redoubled efforts in Buddhist practice within traditional frameworks, while the second put forth new modes of practice claimed to be specifically suited to the present degenerate era.<sup>65</sup> Kakuken and Chōmei fall within the former category; both juxtaposed Japan’s marginal position and the obstacles posed by the Final Dharma age with claims for Japan’s superior Dharma connection in order to encourage established practices: Kakuken, to promote both practice and study overall but more specifically the rituals and institutions of Kōfukuji, and Chōmei, to encourage reverence for the *kami*, understood as the manifestations of Buddhist holy beings. Let us turn now to two representatives of Nattier’s second

approach, Eisai and Nichiren, who appropriated a similar rhetorical strategy to promote new teachings.

Both Eisai and Nichiren began their careers as Tendai monks and had inherited Tendai claims about Japan's unique connection to the one vehicle, as well as broader received notions about the eastward spread of Buddhism through the three countries and Japan's spatio-temporal location as a "marginal land in the last age." Both appealed to the authorities to gain a hearing for new teachings: Eisai for Zen, and Nichiren for his *Lotus* exclusivism. Eisai succeeded in winning official support and became part of the mainstream Buddhist establishment while Nichiren did not, but what stands out in comparing the two is the contrasting ways in which they position Japan in the larger, contemporary world of Buddhist practice.

### Eisai Promotes the Cause of Zen

Eisai 栄西 (or Yōsai, 1141-1214) began his career as a Tendai monk. Recent scholarship has brought to light his accomplishments as an esoteric thinker. However, he has chiefly been celebrated as the founder of Japanese Rinzai Zen 臨濟禪, and his role as a Zen teacher is what concerns us here. Eisai's intent was not to establish an independent Zen institution but to use Zen to reinvigorate Tendai, and indeed the whole of Japanese Buddhism, especially by renewing emphasis on the monastic precepts.<sup>66</sup> Eisai made two trips for study to China, for five months in 1168 and again from 1187 to 1191. On the second trip in particular, Eisai seems to have been prompted by a desire to visit India. When Chinese officials denied his request for travel permits, Eisai took the opportunity to study Chan (Jpn. Zen), which was flourishing in Song China.

After his return, in attempting to promulgate Zen in Kyoto, Eisai faced initial opposition from both civil authorities and Mt. Hiei, prompted in large measure by concerns over the antinomian activities of the short-lived Daruma school 達磨宗 of the Zen teacher Dainichi Nōnin 大日能忍 (fl. late 12<sup>th</sup> cent.).<sup>67</sup> Around

1198, Eisai wrote a counterargument called *Kōzen gokoku ron* 興禪護国論 (On promoting Zen for the protection of the country). In this treatise, he was careful to align himself with Tendai, noting that the Tendai founder Saichō himself had introduced Zen practice to Japan, and the work's emphasis on precept observance is in part aimed at distinguishing Eisai's Zen from that of the Darumashū. However, Eisai also saw Zen and the precepts as inseparable, and maintained that the pure conduct of Zen monks would make their performance of nation-protecting rites particularly efficacious. Let us consider some excerpts from fascicle nine of Eisai's text, called *Daigoku settamon* 大国説話門 or "Accounts of the major countries," which purports to describe the contemporary status of Buddhist monastic practice in India and China. Here, to counter claims that Zen is unsuited to persons of the degenerate, latter age, Eisai asserts that there exists in the "major countries" of the Asian continent a vibrant world of exemplary Buddhist practice, which Japan can join by embracing Zen.

First, Eisai relates four reports that he had heard related to the "western regions" (*saiten* 西天). The first three concern the behavior of monks from those lands who had sojourned in China. Like Myōe, Eisai had originally planned to travel to India but was unable to realize his hopes. Thus his accounts are at best second-hand. Their significance, however, lies, not in their factual accuracy, but in an idealized image of Indian monasticism that Eisai seeks to convey. His second narrative, for example, reports what he heard about a certain monk from the western regions who had visited Lizhou in 1174:

He had mastered supernatural powers, and when he recited spells, light emanated from his mouth and those who heard him were cured of disease. Around his lower body, he wore a single half-robe, with one single-layer robe over that. In the severe cold of the winter months, [local] monks tried to give him quilted robes, but he would put up a hand in refusal, saying that the Buddha had not permitted it. The next year he returned to India, as he feared to risk violating the precepts [if he remained another winter in

China].<sup>68</sup>

The scrupulous observance of the monastic rule and supranormal abilities displayed by this monk were closely related for Eisai, who saw exemplary precept observance as conferring thaumaturgical powers. Eisai's three accounts of monks from the western regions all mention their refusal to transgress the rule against wearing more than three robes, even in harsh Chinese winters. Such monks are *bonsō* 梵僧 in both senses of the term: Indian monks, and monks of pure conduct.

Eisai's fourth report relates what he had heard from Zuyong 祖詠 (d.u.), abbot of the temple Xiuchansi 修禪寺 on Mt. Tiantai 天台山, about the purported flourishing of Buddhism in India. In Vaiśālī, he writes, Vimalakīrti's hut still stands. The great Nalanda monastery houses five thousand monks, and many monks make pilgrimages to worship at the bodhi tree and other holy spots commemorating the Buddha's life. Holy relics, such as the Buddha's begging bowl and the robe of the third patriarch Śaṅkavāsa 商那和修, still exist. "All this," Eisai asserts, "pertains to the present day."<sup>69</sup> Where Myōe had expected to find only the ruins of Buddhist sites, Eisai represents India as a place where Buddhism still thrives.

In so asserting, however, Eisai had to counter the very different understanding of his contemporaries. He acknowledges that "people in Japan always say that Buddhism has died out in India and China; only in our country does it flourish,"<sup>70</sup> a view already noted in Tamenori's *Sanbōe* and in Chōmei's *Hosshinshū*. There was also the problem of recorded eyewitness testimony. Xuanzang's travel record does indeed describe—in the seventh century—the flourishing of the Nalanda monastery and the throngs of pilgrims who gathered to pay homage at Buddhist sacred sites. But, as noted above, Xuanzang had also sadly noted unmistakable signs of decay, which he attributed to the decline of the Dharma. Eisai strains, somewhat unconvincingly, to resolve this difficulty. He acknowledges Xuanzang's report that, at Bodh Gaya, one of the two seated



statues of the bodhisattva Kannon erected to mark the site of the Buddha's enlightenment was now buried in earth up to its chest, and the arhat Śāṅakavāsa's robe, preserved at a monastery southeast of the Great Snow Mountains, had become slightly damaged. Local traditions held that, when the statues became completely buried, and the robe, decayed, that would signal the end of the Buddha-Dharma.<sup>71</sup> Tamenori, as we have seen, assumed that the Kannon statues would have been completely buried by his time. Eisai, however, calculates that 1,600 years had passed between the Buddha's parinirvāṇa and Xuanzang's visit. If so little decay had befallen these sacred artifacts in 1,600 years, he argues, they could not possibly have been lost in the mere 400 and some additional years that had passed between Xuanzang's visit and the present day; thus the Dharma must still be alive and well in India. Even to debate the matter is laughable, Eisai insists. How could Buddhism have perished while the holy site of the Buddha's awakening yet remains?<sup>72</sup>

As for China, Eisai details twenty praiseworthy features of the Song. Although he had spent several years in China, Eisai's account of Chinese Buddhism is scarcely less idealized than his description of the Indian monks whom he had never seen. First, China is a place of extraordinary numinous manifestations. Mañjuśrī appears, riding his lion, on Mt. Wutai, and a living arhat (Ch. *lohan* 羅漢) has been seen on Mt. Tiantai, where his footprints still emit light.<sup>73</sup> Other remarkable features concern the exemplary conduct and unusual powers of Chinese monks. Their deportment is never careless or disordered. It is quiet in the monasteries. Buddha halls are maintained as though the Buddha were in residence. Many monks immolate themselves, and others know the time of their death in advance.<sup>74</sup> Other features Eisai enumerates suggest that, in China, precept observance enjoys wide support from, and in turn benefits, the larger society. Lay Buddhists keep the bodhisattva precepts. The imperial sovereign invariably receives the bodhisattva precepts. Both monks and laity are selfless. Domestic animals often have human feelings, and the laws do not

oppress the people. Song China is virtually a buddha land. In short, Eisai depicts for his polemical purposes the existence of a thriving Buddhist world outside Japan, one with higher standards of monastic conduct and superior spiritual manifestations.

“If this is so,” his hypothetical questioner asks, “can the same become true of Japan?” “Indeed it can,” Eisai replies. His interlocutor persists: “India and China are superior lands. People in whom the karma to realize buddhahood has matured are born there. Japan is a marginal land. Families given to evil are born here. And because precepts and practice are lacking, it will be all the more impossible [for Buddhism to flourish].” Eisai responds by citing the larger *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* to the effect that, at the beginning of the Final Dharma age, this sūtra and others like it will accomplish the Buddha’s work in the northeast. “The northeast,” Eisai says, “means Japan.”<sup>75</sup> He also quotes Genshin’s statement that all in Japan “alike take refuge in the one vehicle” and other sources to assert that Japan is a purely Mahāyāna country with a superior Dharma connection. Even if Japanese monks are unable to uphold the monastic rule in full—for example, even if they must wear extra robes in winter—by observing the four major prohibitions, they can still elicit wondrous responses.<sup>76</sup> Eisai concludes:

This [country of Japan] is also a superior realm, a place where the Buddha-Dharma spreads. If you diligently cultivate Zen, the Tathāgata will rejoice, and the fruits of awakening will be forthcoming. You should not argue over whether Buddhism is flourishing or declining in India and China. If you cultivate the insight of non-self, you will make the Buddha-Dharma of this country prosper.<sup>77</sup>

Eisai’s rhetorical strategy is one of subsume and conquer. Playing on the double meaning of *zen* both as meditative practice and as a specific lineage, he argues that Zen encompasses the whole of Buddhism. It is because of Zen, Eisai says, that the diverse practices of the eight schools all lead to awakening, and

because of Zen that the chanted *nenbutsu* brings about birth in Amida's Pure Land. He cites the Tiantai patriarch Huisi 慧思 (515-577), that those who despise and abuse Zen (i.e., meditation) practitioners commit a sin comparable to that of killing all persons in the trichiliocosm.<sup>78</sup> What is more, Eisai adds—alluding to the saṅgha's traditional role in protecting the realm—such persons “have nothing of merit to offer the imperial house.”<sup>79</sup> By promoting Zen, however, Japan can fulfill its potential as a Buddhist country and stand side by side with the major countries, India and China, in the larger, flourishing Buddhist world. Here we see how Eisai juxtaposed the two received tropes about Japan as both a marginal land in the last age *and* a country with a strong Dharma connection, to promote the particular cause of Zen.

#### Nichiren and the Rise of the *Lotus Sūtra*

Now let us turn to Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-1282), a slightly later figure, known for his teaching of exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* and for the particular form of *Lotus Sūtra* practice that he advocated for the *mappō* era: chanting the *daimoku* 題目 or title of the sūtra in the mantric formula, *Namu Myōhō-rengēkyō* 南無妙法蓮華經. For Nichiren, this practice encompassed the entirety of the sūtra, and indeed, the whole of the Buddhism, and contained all merits within itself.

Nichiren, like Eisai, was originally a Tendai monk, and his emphasis on the *Lotus* drew on longstanding Tendai tradition beginning with Saichō that the Japanese have faculties uniquely suited to the perfect teaching. But where Eisai had rhetorically subsumed the whole of Buddhism within Zen, Nichiren's stance was oppositional and exclusionary: Now in the Final Dharma age, he insisted, only the *Lotus Sūtra* leads to awakening; all other teachings must be set aside as provisional. “Japan is a country,” he wrote, “where people have faculties related solely to the *Lotus Sūtra*. If they practice even a phrase or verse of it, they are certain to attain the Way, because it is the teaching to which they have

a connection...As regards the *nenbutsu* and other good practices, it is a country without connections.”<sup>80</sup> Eisai’s criteria of authentic Buddhist practice—strict monastic observance and the power to manifest extraordinary signs—were for Nichiren soteriologically irrelevant if not grounded in the *Lotus*. To reject the *Lotus Sūtra* in favor of lesser, provisional teachings such as Pure Land or Zen amounted in his eyes to the sin of disparaging or slandering the Dharma (*hōbō* 謗法), and to this error he attributed recent natural disasters afflicting the populace—famines, epidemics, and earthquakes—as well as political upheavals and the threat of foreign invasion. Nichiren famously argued this point in his admonitory treatise *Risshō ankokū ron* 立正安国論 (On establishing the true Dharma and bringing peace to the country), submitted to the Kamakura Bakufu 幕府 or military government in 1260. There he asserts his lifelong conviction that the spread of faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* would transform the present world into a buddha land. Nichiren left a larger corpus of writings than did Eisai, and his thinking about the categories of “country” and “Japan” is extensive and complex.<sup>81</sup> This section focuses specifically on how he addressed the intersection of *mappō* thought with the opposing views of Japan as both a benighted hinterland and a superior Buddhist country, to offer a comparison with Eisai.

Nichiren upheld received notions about progressive decline in the reception of Buddhism as it had traveled eastward and Japan’s disadvantaged position on the edge of Buddhist world but interpreted them in light of his *Lotus* exclusivism. *Mappō* for Nichiren represented a confusion of provisional and perfect teachings, and thus, rejection of the *Lotus Sūtra*. He wrote:

Ever since the sun of Buddhism sank beneath the western mountains, with only its afterglow illuminating the eastern regions, the wisdom lamp of the four ranks of saints diminished by the day, while the Dharma stream of the *tripiṭaka* masters grew more polluted by the month. Authors of treatises [in India] deluded as to the true sūtra have obscured the moon of the true

principle, while translators attached to provisional sūtras have smashed the jewel of the true sūtra into the rubble of the provisional sūtras. How much greater are the errors in the sectarian doctrines of the teachers in China! How much still greater error, and less truth, is to be found among later scholars in the marginal land of Japan!<sup>82</sup>

For Nichiren, all teachings other than the *Lotus Sūtra*, being provisional, were no longer efficacious in the Final Dharma age. As is well known, his strident criticisms of other forms of Buddhism provoked the wrath of religious leaders and government officials; he himself was exiled twice and his followers repeatedly arrested, banished, and subjected to property seizures. Nichiren characterized such opposition as a sign of Japan's dismal condition as a peripheral land in the last age. On the eve of his second exile in 1271, to the bleak island province of Sado in the Sea of Japan, he wrote that even such noble patriarchs as Āryadeva, Āryasiṃha, Buddhāmitra, and Nāgārjuna had met persecution for the Dharma's sake, and added: "It was like that even in the True and Semblance Dharma ages, and in a central country [India]. Now we live in a marginal country, in the Final Dharma age, and I have expected such things to happen from the outset."<sup>83</sup>

Nichiren also saw neglect of the *Lotus Sūtra* as the underlying cause of the Mongol conquests that had subjugated the East Asian mainland and also threatened Japan in his day. Shortly after the arrival in 1268 of envoys bearing Kubilai Khan's initial demand for Japanese submission to Mongol hegemony, Nichiren first articulated what would become a recurring theme for him, that the gods—the Buddhist tutelary deities Brahmā and Indra, as well as the imperial progenitrix Amaterasu and other *kami* of Japan—could not be relied on for protection; rather, these deities had deliberately instigated the Mongol attacks in order to reprove Japan's slander of the *Lotus Sūtra*. "The whole country," he wrote:

has now become the enemy of buddhas and *kami*...China and Korea,

following the example of India, became Buddhist countries. But because they embraced the Zen and *nenbutsu* teachings, they were destroyed by the Mongols. The country of Japan has been a disciple to those two countries. Now that they have been destroyed, how can our country remain at peace?...All the people in Japan will fall into the Avīci Hell.<sup>84</sup>

Where Eisai had expressed hope that Japan would join the company of flourishing Buddhist “major countries” on the Asian mainland, Nichiren, writing about seventy years later, when the southern Song was beleaguered by Mongol forces, represented China and Korea as reeling under the consequences of their offenses against the Buddha-Dharma, and Japan, as about to suffer the same fate. In his 1273 essay *Kenbutsu mirai ki* 顕仏未来記 (Clarification of the Buddha’s prophecy), written during his exile to Sado, Nichiren states unequivocally that Buddhism has died out on the Asian continent:

The Great Teacher Miaole 妙樂大師 [Zhanran] said, “Has not the Dharma been lost in India, so that they are now seeking it throughout the four quarters?” This passage demonstrates that Buddhism no longer exists in India. In China, more than a hundred fifty years ago, during the reign of Emperor Gaozong 高宗皇帝, northern barbarians captured the eastern capital, and both the Buddha-Dharma and the ruler’s dharma came to an end.<sup>85</sup> Within the great repositories of China not a single Hinayāna sūtra remains, and the vast majority of the Mahāyāna sūtras have also been lost....Therefore Zunshi said, “[These teachings] were first transmitted from the west, where the moon appears. But now they return from the east, where the sun rises.”<sup>86</sup>

Nichiren here performs a complex rhetorical maneuver. In their original contexts, the quotations from the Tiantai monks Zhanran 湛然 (711-782) and Zunshi 遵式 (964-1032) refer only to specific texts. Zhanran is referencing a request reportedly made to the esoteric master Amoghavajra (Ch. Bukong 不空; 705-774) to translate and send to India the writings of the Tiantai patriarch

Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597).<sup>87</sup> Zunshi for his part is referring to the fact that the monk Jakushō 寂照 (c. 964-1034) had brought from Japan copies of two works, by the Tiantai patriarchs Huisi and Zhiyi respectively, that had been lost in China.<sup>88</sup> Nichiren reads these statements synechdochally, so that the particular works in question are made to stand for the whole of Buddhism: Just as Korea has fallen, the great Song nation is beleaguered, and Japan now stands alone against the Mongols, so Buddhism has now been wiped out in those countries and survives only in Japan. Nor, he continues, is Buddhism to be found in any of the other three continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru—not in Purvavideha, Aparadogāniya, or Uttarakuru. This leaves Japan, within the entire world system, as the only place where the true Dharma is upheld, in the persons of Nichiren and his followers.

Nichiren's representation of Japan as the sole locus of the Buddha-Dharma homologizes three sets of oppositions: the uniqueness of the *Lotus Sūtra* over and against other teachings; Japan's isolation in confrontation with the Mongols; and Nichiren's own opposition to the Kamakura-era Buddhist establishment and its patrons in government. It was closely linked to Nichiren's growing conviction of his personal destiny to spearhead the propagation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, as the sūtra itself predicts, at the beginning of the Final Dharma age. And, as he goes on to argue, if Japan is the last place where the true Dharma remains, it is also the place from which, through his own actions, the "Lotus lineage" (Hokkeshū 法華宗) that he had inherited from Śākyamuni of India, the Tiantai master Zhiyi of China, and Saichō of Japan would spread.

As reflected in his frequent citing of Zhanran's assertion, "The higher the teaching, the lower the capacity [of the people it can save],"<sup>89</sup> Nichiren saw the historical process of decline represented by *mappō* thought as necessitating the spread of increasingly more profound teachings. In the True Dharma age, because of the nature of their past karmic connections to the Dharma, people had been able to reach enlightenment through the relatively shallow Hīnayāna

teachings that had spread in India, while during the Semblance Dharma age, the teachings of provisional Mahāyāna had spread in China and brought people to liberation. But in the Final Dharma age, only the highest of all teachings can be efficacious; thus, as a matter of historical necessity, *mappō* was the very time when the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra* embraced by Nichiren and his followers would spread. Especially in Nichiren's later thought, the Final Dharma age, widely characterized as unpropitious, undergoes radical redefinition as the best possible moment to be seeking enlightenment. "Rather than be great rulers during the two thousand years of the True and Semblance Dharma ages, those concerned for their salvation should rather be common people in the Final Dharma age," he wrote. "It is better to be a leper who chants Namu Myōhōrenge-kyō than to be chief abbot of the Tendai school."<sup>90</sup>

Nichiren's inversion of the significance of *mappō* also entailed a reversal, both of Japan's status as a peripheral land and of the historical direction of Buddhism's flow. Thus he writes:

The moon appears in the west and illuminates the east. The sun appears in the east and illuminates the west. The same is true of the Buddha-Dharma. In the True and Semblance Dharma ages, it moved from west to east, but in the Final Dharma age, it will return from east to west....In the last [of the five] five-hundred-year periods [that begins the *mappō* era], the Buddha-Dharma will surely emerge from the eastern land of Japan.<sup>91</sup>

Here again, we see the same two opposing tropes, this time deployed in a *Lotus Sūtra*-centered mode: Japan is a *masse hendo*, a remote land in the last age, and the present condition of its Buddhism has reached a nadir; nonetheless, Japan has a privileged connection to the Dharma and, by embracing the *Lotus Sūtra*, will become the source of Buddhist regeneration.

Nichiren's declaration that in *mappō* the Dharma would, like the sun, "return from east to west" alludes both to Zunshi's statement, cited above, and to an earlier passage from Saichō, through whom Nichiren traced his historical



Dharma lineage. Saichō, predicting the spread of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the approaching Final Dharma age, had written: “The age of the provisional teachings has already drawn to a close, [like the sun] setting in the west. The sun of the true teaching will now arise in [this] eastern land.”<sup>92</sup> Nichiren retains Saichō’s imagery of the rising sun but suggests a striking inversion: *Mappō* becomes the moment when the eastward flow of Dharma transmission reverses and spreads back in the direction it had come, emanating from Japan as source to other countries as recipients. Nichiren may have been among the first to suggest such a reversal. As we shall see below, claims that the Dharma had originated in Japan and spread westward to benefit China and India appear from around the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. But they occur chiefly in the context of *shinkoku* (“divine nation”) thought and are not related to Nichiren or the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Both Eisai and Nichiren invoked the “three countries” framework in promoting new teachings. Yet at the same time, one notes a diametric opposition between them in their depictions of the current state of Buddhism outside Japan. It might be tempting to account for this difference on biographical grounds and to assume that Eisai, having spent time in China, might have been expected to hold a higher estimation of Song Buddhism than Nichiren, who had never left Japan, or that Nichiren’s views about the extinction of Buddhism on the continent were shaped by his knowledge of Mongol conquests. However, neither Eisai nor Nichiren’s depiction of the larger Buddhist world need be taken as reflecting their factual knowledge of the Asian continent; both are polemical arguments, in the service of their Buddhist agendas. What is striking, in fact, is how closely their representations of Japan’s place among the “three countries” reproduce the structure of their respective arguments: Eisai, who saw Zen and precept observance as encompassing the whole of Buddhism, envisioned Japan entering into and taking its place alongside India and China in a larger, flourishing community of Buddhist “major

countries,” while Nichiren, who understood the *Lotus Sūtra* as the only true teaching, superseding all other, provisional teachings that had outlived their efficacy, depicted India, China, and Korea as places where Buddhism had been lost, and Japan, in contrast, as the one remaining place where the Dharma was still upheld, in the persons of himself and his disciples.

Eisai’s *Kōzen gokokuron* and Nichiren’s teaching have both been termed “nationalistic” due to their explicit concern with Japan. As we have seen, *sangoku* thought provided a conceptual framework that encouraged comparison of Japan’s Buddhism with that of India and China. However, as the cases of both Eisai and Nichiren demonstrate, early medieval Buddhist discourse about the “three countries” was often only secondarily about Japan; “Japan” served rather as a foil or shared reference point against which to advance particular norms of Buddhist thought and practice.

### After the Mongol Threat

The common structure of argument employed by Kakuken, Chōmei, Eisai, and Nichiren was particularly characteristic of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It assigns Japan an ambivalent position: On one hand, Japan is a benighted, peripheral land where Buddhism is in grave decline, but on the other, Japan enjoys a strong, even superior Dharma connection. Thus if only such-and-such lineage, institution, teaching, or practice is supported, Japan will become an exemplary, perhaps even *the* exemplary, Buddhist country. This structure occurs across the divisions of “old Buddhism” or “new,” mainstream or heterodox. It could be deployed in a preservationist mode, as in Kakuken’s equation of perpetuating the Dharma with the continued influence of Kōfukuji, while the arguments of Eisai and Nichiren employ the same polemical structure to promote innovation in Buddhist practice. In Nichiren’s case, it is even directed in critique of the Buddhist establishment and of government officials for

patronizing it.

And then, it recedes. Nichiren was the last major figure to deploy an ambivalent reading of Japan—both as a marginal country in an age of decline *and* as possessing a superior Dharma connection—to promote a specific Buddhist agenda. A turn away from this rhetoric of ambivalence appears, for example, in a comprehensive history of Buddhism compiled in 1311 by Gyōnen, mentioned above. Gyōnen famously employs the schema of “transmission through three countries” as a narrative frame, but he does not represent Japan as a marginal country, nor its Buddhism as in decline. Rather, echoing Annen, he represents Japan as preserving the whole of Buddhism (the “eight schools”); on the Asian mainland, it has deteriorated. In China, concerning the Lüzong 律宗 or Vinaya School, Gyōnen writes, “Since the Mongol incursions, vinaya observance has declined. The rules are still lectured upon but are no longer practiced as prescribed....When I inquired of those who had crossed the sea, that is what they reported.”<sup>93</sup> By Gyōnen’s time in the early fourteenth century, a conceptual shift was underway, and the *masse hendo* trope was displaced by a re-imagining of Japan as the very center of the Buddhist world.

How did this happen? A detailed answer would require a separate study.<sup>94</sup> Here we can only touch on some key factors, which will return us to the story of Myōe. In that narrative, it is no accident that Myōe was vouchsafed a vision of the living Śākyamuni Buddha—and thus persuaded to remain in Japan—by the Kasuga *daimyōjin*, a *kami*. We have already seen, in the example of Kamo no Chōmei, writing around 1215, how notions of local deities as the avatars of buddhas and bodhisattvas were assimilated to the rhetorical structure juxtaposing opposing views of Japan as a benighted marginal land and as an exemplary Buddhist country. However, unlike the claims of Kakuken, Eisai, or Nichiren, being focused on the *kami*, *honji suijaku* thought cut across sectarian divisions and thus proved capable of destabilizing the *masse hendo* trope in a way that more specific Buddhist agendas could not. That is, notions of the *kami*

as a salvific device, specifically tailored to Japan's soteriologically disadvantaged situation, were easily inverted to suggest that, precisely *because* of this distinctive “skillful means,” even in the Final Dharma age, Japan was a uniquely sacred and protected realm.

This inversion was aided, first, by several intellectual developments. An early influence, argued by Uejima and noted above, was renewed court interest in Japan's origin myths and the reworking of *kami* genealogies that placed the origins of the Japanese polity before those of China. Over the course of the latter Heian and Kamakura periods, these ideas were incorporated into Buddhist circles as a part of the “origins and traces” discourse. Recorded oral transmissions (*kuden* 口伝) regarding *kami* as the manifestations of Buddhist holy beings formed a substantial subset of the vast corpora known as “sacred teachings” (*shōgyō* 聖教), collections of initiatory knowledge concerning doctrine, ritual, and other subjects transmitted through lineages of elite Buddhist scholar-monks. Within these transmissions, the *kami*, originally subordinated to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, came to be understood as emanations of Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 (Skt. Mahāvairocana), the omnipresent buddha of the esoteric teachings, and identified with esoteric divinities. *Kami* were also interpreted in terms of the influential Tendai doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku hōmon* 本覚法門), which valorizes concrete phenomena over abstract principles and identifies the realm of quotidian experience as precisely the locus of enlightenment. These doctrinal orientations worked to shift scholarly attention from the *honji*—the abstract, universal buddhas and bodhisattvas—to their *suijaku*, the *kami* who actually manifest in the world. Seen from these perspectives, the *honji suijaku* polarity reverses: The *kami*, who appear in this world, were identified as the origin or true ground, and the transcendent buddhas and bodhisattvas, as their provisional traces.<sup>95</sup>

These nominally secret teachings were propelled beyond the Buddhist scholarly world and into broader arenas by the ritual defense against the

Mongols, which for the last three decades of the thirteenth century mustered the efforts of temples and shrines throughout the archipelago to offer prayers for enemy defeat and Japan's protection. In this context, *kami* were seen as the Buddha's strongmen, who chastise enemies of the Buddha-Dharma, and the failure of the invasion attempts was widely attributed to the *kami*'s protection. In its wake, representations of Japan as a benighted marginal country gave way to claims for a cosmic repositioning in which Japan became the world center. *Keiran shūyō shū* 溪嵐拾葉集, an early fourteenth-century compendium of scholastic transmissions, asserts: "Our country of Japan is the center of the trichiliocosm. Because it is protected by the gods who are the mind-essence (*shinnō no shinmei* 心王の神明), it could not be invaded by a foreign country."<sup>96</sup> Jihen 慈遍 (fl. early fourteenth century), a Tendai monk versed in *kami* traditions, writes: "Japan is the root of the three countries...The origin lies in the land of the *kami* [Japan]. China acquired its leaves and branches; India obtained its flowers and fruit. When flowers fall, they return to the root. One should not speak of [Japan as] having received an [eastward] transmission."<sup>97</sup> A century later, this tree metaphor would be famously elaborated by Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼俱 (1435-1511), architect of Yuiitsu Shintō 唯一神道 ("One-and-only Shintō"), who described Shinto as the seed, Confucianism as the branches, and Buddhism as the flowers. "When flowers fall, they return to their root. Thus the Buddha-Dharma has now gradually come east, in order to show that Japan is the root of the three countries."<sup>98</sup>

This reversal somewhat resembles Nichiren's idea that, in the time of *mappō*, the sun of the true Dharma would rise from Japan and sent its light back toward the west. However, Nichiren's idea was specific to one Buddhist tradition and represented a vision for the future, in which the *daimoku* of the *Lotus Sūtra* would spread worldwide. In contrast, the post-Mongol resituating of Japan seen in comments such as Jihen's are retrospective inversions of history that place Japan firmly at the world center as the source and origin of the

entire Buddhist tradition.

This inversion is foreshadowed by the story of Myōe's encounter with the Kasuga deity, introduced at the beginning of this essay. On one hand, that episode in his biography reflects the tension between two contrasting tropes about Japan: as a peripheral land in the last age, where opportunities for liberation are unfavorable, and as a land that, nonetheless, enjoys a privileged connection with the Dharma. But the story can also be read as a collapse of the tension and the ultimate triumph of one pole of the argument over the other. Myōe's longing for India, while seen as admirable, is also shown to be ultimately misguided, and it is the Kasuga deity who reveals the deeper truth: The seemingly marginal land of Japan is the very place where, under the protection of the *kami*, Buddhism flourishes without diminution. The story captures as it were an initial moment when—although they would remain part of Buddhism's rhetorical repertoire—early medieval concerns about the age of decline and Japan's marginal position in the Buddhist world ceased to be compelling issues or to hold a prominent place in Buddhist discourse. Eventually, the Japan-centered “three countries” worldview would break free of its original Buddhist context and, especially in conjunction with *shinkoku* thought, become an influential element of political ideology, into late medieval and even early modern times.<sup>99</sup>

## Summation

For roughly some five hundred years, “three countries” thought structured the world both geographically and historically in Buddhist terms. It embraced Japan within the compass of a universal principle transcending regional, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Notions of continuity with India, the Buddha's birthplace, also relativized Japan's great debt to Sinitic culture. At the same time, the *sangoku* framework encouraged comparison among the three countries

as well as notions of a superior, and specifically Japanese, Buddhist identity: Despite its small size and peripheral location, Japan alone was a “purely Mahāyāna country.” Descriptions in travel records such as Xuanzang’s of Buddhism’s decline in India, reports of anti-Buddhist persecutions in China, and eventually, the fall of the Tang dynasty all fostered suspicions that Buddhism was waning on the continent and flourished chiefly if not exclusively in Japan.

Yet even while fostering notions of specifically Japanese Buddhist identity, the “three countries” framework also provided a structure for reflection on the history of Buddhism itself and what forms of Buddhist discipline were appropriate to the present time and place. “Japan” thus became a foil or reference point for arguing the relative merits of specific teachings. This development is particularly evident during the Kamakura period—the long thirteenth century—when understandings of Japan’s peripheral location on the edge of the Buddhist world merged with notions of the Dharma’s decline in the “*sangoku-mappō* construct.” Buddhist thinkers juxtaposed disquieting images of Japan as a deluded “marginal land in the last age” with opposing notions of Japan’s superior karmic connection to the Dharma, in order to promote particular norms of practice. As explored in the main body of this essay, some, such as Kakuken, deployed this tension in a preservationist mode, to argue for revitalizing traditional disciplines, while others, such as Eisai and Nichiren, used it to advocate new teachings held to be particularly or even uniquely suited to Japan at the present time.

Within the Buddhist mainstream, a prevalent approach to countering the difficulties of *mappō* appears to have been renewed devotion to the buddhas and bodhisattvas and the *kami* who are their avatars, as encouraged in Chōmei’s *Hosshinshū*. Over the course of the Kamakura period, Buddhist theoretizing about Japan’s *kami* increasingly identified them with esoteric Buddhist deities and ideas of original enlightenment; the failure of the Mongol attacks also seemingly testified to their undiminished protection, even in the latter age. As a

consequence, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, ambivalence about Japan's status receded from Buddhist discourse. Within the "three countries" construct, this small archipelago on the eastern edge of Asia underwent, as it were, a polar shift and was repositioned at very center of the Buddhist world.

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- DNBZ* *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書. 100 vols. Edited by Suzuki Gakujuutsu Zaidan 鈴木學術財団. Tokyo: By the editor, 1970-1973.
- KT* *Shintei zōho kokushi taikai* 新訂増補國史大系. Edited by Kuroita Katsumi 黑板勝美. 66 vols. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1929-1966.
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- NST* *Nihon shisō taikai* 日本思想体系. 67 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970-1982.
- ST* *Shintō taikai* 神道大系. *Ronsetsu hen* 論説編. 28 vols. Edited by Shintō Taikai Hensankai 神道大系編纂会. Tōkyō: By the editor, 1978-1993.
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\*This essay is part of an in-progress project on Buddhism and premodern Japanese identity formation. The author welcomes comments and suggestions.

- 1 The prince-prelate Takaoka 高岳 (monastic name Shinnyo 真如, 799-?), son of Emperor Heizei 平城天皇, went to Chang'an in 865 and departed for India the year after. A report reached Japan in 881 that he had died in the southern part of the Malay peninsula (Shimizu, "Takaoka, Priest Imperial Prince Shinnyo"). For the report of Shinnyo's death, see *Sandai jitsuroku* 三代実録, Gangyō 元慶 5 (881), 10/13, *KT* 4:503-4.
- 2 *Indo gyōtei ki* 印度行程記, reproduced in Tanaka, *Myōe*, 76-77. On Myōe's attempted journeys, see Tanaka, 65-66, 74-75, and Morrell, *Early Kamakura Buddhism*, 103-7.
- 3 *Kōzanji Myōe Shōnin gyōjō* 高山寺明恵上人行状 2, *MSS* 1:113. On literary treatments of this episode, see Morrell, *Early Kamakura Buddhism*, 107-11.
- 4 These modern names are used for convenience throughout but do not precisely correspond to their premodern Japanese equivalents. India and Central Asia were called Tenjiku 天竺, *saiten* 西天 ("western realms") or *saiiki* 西域 ("western regions"), while "China" was variously designated by Shintan 震旦, Da Tang 大唐 ("Great Tang"), Kando 漢土 ("land of the Han"), or other names.
- 5 *DDZ* 1:199. This is Saichō's sole reference to the "three countries" in this sense. Elsewhere he writes that the "three countries" of China, Silla, and Japan have produced only Mahāyāna writings (*Hokke shūku* 法華秀句 1, *DDZ* 3:41). In other words, for Saichō, the term *sangoku* seems to have functioned chiefly as a counter and did not necessarily have fixed content.
- 6 Ichino, "Heian bukkyō keiseiki," 74. For the controversy over the bodhisattva precepts, see Groner, *Saichō*, 107-65.
- 7 *Kenkai ron* 顕戒論 3, article 52, *DDZ* 1:179-80; Ichino, "Heian bukkyō keiseiki," 74-75.
- 8 *Ehyō Tendai shū* 依憑天台集, *DDZ* 3: 343.
- 9 Asada, "Enki ijuku shisō"; see also Groner, *Saichō*, 180-83.
- 10 Groner, *Saichō*, 181. On Saichō's concept of capacity, see also Ishida, "Jiki sō no ronri," 131-46, and Hayami, *Heian bukkyō to mappō shisō*, 203-6.
- 11 *Ichijō yōketsu* 一乗要決 2, *T* no. 2370, 74:351a3-4.
- 12 On this dispute, see Groner, *Saichō*, 97-101; Rhodes, "Genshin and the Ichijō yōketsu," 288-95.
- 13 Operetto, "*Ichijō yōketsu* no juyō."
- 14 In their travel records, the Chinese pilgrims Xuanzang and Yijing 義淨 (635-713) had observed that in some countries only the lesser vehicle (Hīnayāna) was pursued, while other countries were devoted solely to the Mahāyāna, and in still others, both were practiced; Saichō had cited these accounts to promote monastic ordination using the Mahāyāna precepts (*DDZ* 1:37-56). Xuanzang in particular had listed in detail the various countries through which he traveled and whether they pursued the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, or both. Gomyō, however, assimilated this threefold categorization to Saichō's own "three countries" framework, which he then deployed in a different sense than Saichō had.
- 15 *Daijō Hossō kenjinshō* 大乘法相研神章 1, *T* no. 2309, 71:2b2-7. Ichino argues that Gomyō was not merely asserting Japanese Buddhist superiority or flattering the court by referencing its past history of Buddhist patronage but rather indirectly appealing for

- renewed support for the Nara schools, at a time when weakening of the central bureaucratic state had begun to compromise their economic base (“Heian bukkyō keiseiki,” 77-80).
- 16 Sueki, “Bukkyōteki sekaikan,” 109; Uejima, *Nihon chūsei shakai*, 97.
- 17 On the Mt. Sumeru cosmology, see Sadakata, *Buddhist Cosmology*, 25-36. The number of countries in Jambudvīpa appears in the *Renwang bore boluomi jing* 仁王般若波羅蜜經 2, *T* no. 245, 8:832b27-28.
- 18 *Nihon shoki* 日本書記 22, Suiko Tennō, year 20, *NKBT* 68:198.
- 19 For these and other early examples, see Sasaki, “Sangoku bukkyō shikan,” 279-82.
- 20 *Daijō Hossō kenjinshō* 1, *T* 71:2a22-27.
- 21 *Kyōjishō* 教時諍, *T* no. 2395A, 75:355b7-8. On Annen’s understanding of Japan within the three countries, see Sueki, “Bukkyōteki sekaikan,” 109, and Ichino, “Heian bukkyō keiseiki,” 81-87.
- 22 *Kyōjishōron* 教時諍論, *T* no. 2395B, 75:364a25-26. By “Shingon” Annen designates not Kūkai’s Shingon school but the esoteric teachings more broadly.
- 23 *Futsū ju bosatsukai kōshaku* 普通授菩薩戒廣釋, *T* no. 2381, 74:757c19-25. The passage cited does not occur in extant versions of the *Yuqie lun*.
- 24 Ichino, “Heian bukkyō keiseiki,” 86-87. For the persecutions of Buddhism in China, see Shi, “Buddhism and the State.”
- 25 Thompson, “Returning to the Founder,” 51-52. Thompson also draws on Satō Masayuki, who sees the “three countries” model as a fusion of the Indocentric Mt. Sumeru cosmology and the Sinocentric worldview (*Rekishī ninshiki no jikū*, 128-29. Satō discusses the Sino-centric worldview and its Japanese adoption from the standpoint of cartography at 140-43).
- 26 An early example is the tradition that the Chinese Tiantai patriarch Nanyue Huisi 南嶽慧思 (515-577) had been reborn as Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (see Como, *Shōtoku*, 142-51).
- 27 Mt. Hiei, for example, was often identified with Eagle Peak 靈鷲山 in India and Mt. Tiantai 天台山 in China (see for example Thompson, “Returning to the Founder,” 187-216). Kinpusen 金峯山 and Kumano 熊野 were said actually to have flown to Japan from China and India respectively (Grapard, “Flying Mountains,” 218).
- 28 Maeda, “Sangoku kan,” 130-40; Harima, “*Konjaku monogatari*shū no sangoku ōrai setsuwa.”
- 29 Thompson, “Returning to the Founder,” 55-65.
- 30 Itō, “Bon, kan, wago dōikkan”; Kimbrough, “Reading the Miraculous Powers,” 4-11.
- 31 See for example Borgen, “Japanese Nationalism”; Sasaki, “Sangoku bukkyō shikan,” 289-92; and Uejima, *Nihon chūsei shakai*, 101-2.
- 32 Ichikawa, *Nihon chūsei no hikari to kage*, 11-12.
- 33 *Kamakura bukkyōshi*, 187.
- 34 Ichikawa attributes the omission of Korea to anti-Korean prejudice and “nationalist” tendencies on the part of the Japanese, and as linked to ideas of Japan as a *shinkoku* 神国 or “divine nation” (*Hikari to kage*, 13). Blum sees it as linguistically based: “India” represented Buddhist texts in Sanskrit while “China” represented Buddhist texts in

- Chinese. Since Korean scholar-monks also used Chinese for writing Buddhist works, Blum argues, their countries would not have had an independent status within the *sangoku* concept (*Origins and Development*, 88-89).
- 35 Xuanzang's description is at *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 8, *T* no. 2087, 51:915b22-26; Rongxi, *Record of the Western Regions*, 216. Xuanzang says only that the image at the southern end of the site had become buried up to its chest.
- 36 *DNBZ* 90: 241b-c; Kamens, *Three Jewels*, 166.
- 37 Uejima, *Nihon chūsei shakai*, 80-106. While it goes beyond the scope of this essay, identification of Amaterasu with Dainichi, the omnipresent Dharma-body buddha of the esoteric teachings, was especially important. This identification not only legitimized imperial power but also identified Japan's preeminent *kami* with the ontological source of all things, a key element in medieval Shinto thought.
- 38 Nattier, *Once upon a Future Time*, 65-118.
- 39 Yiengpruksawan, "Countdown to 1051."
- 40 Moerman, "Archaeology of Anxiety," 267.
- 41 Blum, "The *Sangoku-Mappō* Construct."
- 42 *Kōzanji Myōe Shōnin gyōjō 2*, *MSS* 1:111.
- 43 *Gumei hōsshinshū* 愚迷發心集, *NST* 15:15.
- 44 Representative studies include Satō, "Nihon ni okeru mappō shisō"; Hayami, *Heian bukkyō to mappō shisō*; and Taira, *Nihon chūsei no shakai to bukkyō*, 110-54. For an overview, see Stone, "Age of Decline."
- 45 *Gumei hōsshinshū*, *NST* 15:28
- 46 Hayami, *Heian bukkyō to mappō shisō*, 199-203, 288-313.
- 47 Taira, "Nihon chūsei no shakai to bukkyō," 121-24.
- 48 On Kakuken, see Takagi, *Kamakura bukkyōshi*, 187-94; Ichikawa, *Hikari to kage*, 70-86; Blum, "Sangoku-Mappō Construct," 38-39. The third fascicle of Kakuken's text, the one relevant here, is reproduced in Nakamura, "Ryūoku daigaku zō *Sangoku dentōki* gekan," 56-61.
- 49 Nakamura, "Ryūoku daigaku zō," 57.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 57-58.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 52 Ichikawa, *Hikari to kage*, 53-55.
- 53 Kakuken's calculation here appears to be slightly off. See Takagi, *Kamakura bukkyōshi*, 190.
- 54 Nakamura, "Ryūoku daigaku zō," 58.
- 55 *Kamakura bukkyōshi kenkyū*, 193.
- 56 These are the stories, appearing in the *Nirvāṇa* and *Lotus* sūtras respectively, of the Buddha's past austerities as the "Youth of the Snow Mountains" 雪山童子 (*Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 14, *T* no. 374, 12:449b8-451b2) and during his thousand years of service to the seer who was his cousin Devadatta in a prior lifetime (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 4, *T* no. 262, 9:34b24-35a1).

- 57 Nakamura, "Ryūoku daigaku zō *Sangoku dentōki* gekan," 59.
- 58 Ibid., 60. Gonzoku Nyorai is a prior incarnation of Vimalakīrti. See *Weimojing xuanshu* 維摩經玄疏 4, *T* no. 1777, 38: 546c12.
- 59 Teeuwen and Rambelli, *Buddhas and Kami*, 1-53.
- 60 On Chōmei's life, see Pandey, *Writing and Renunciation*, 56-81.
- 61 Miki, *Hosshinshū*, 382.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Ibid., 383.
- 64 Ibid., 381, 384-85.
- 65 *Once Upon a Future Time*, 137-38. Satō makes a similar division in his "Nihon ni okeru mappō shisō."
- 66 On Eisai's thought, see Taga, *Eisai*, 218-96; Yanagida, "Eisai to *Kōzen gokokuron*"; Welter, "Zen Buddhism as the Ideology of the Japanese State"; and Mano, "Yōsai and the Transformation of Buddhist Precepts," which highlights Eisai's esoteric side.
- 67 Taga, *Eisai*, 88-97. On the Daruma school, see Faure, "The Daruma-shū, Dōgen and Sōtō Zen."
- 68 *Kōzen gokokuron*, NST 16:87.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid., 89.
- 71 *Da Tang xiyu ji* 1 and 8, *T* 51:873b22-c8, 915b22-26; Rongxi, *Record of the Western Regions*, 32, 116. For Xuanzang's observations of decline, see also Brose, *Xuanzang*, 31-33.
- 72 *Kōzen gokokuron*, NST 16: 89, 90.
- 73 On the tradition of arhats at Mt. Tiantai, see Joo, "The Arhat Cult in China," 174-230.
- 74 Both would have been considered signs of superior attainments.
- 75 *Kōzen gokokuron*, NST 16:90-91. Eisai paraphrases the *Bore boluomiduo jing* 般若波羅蜜多經 97, *T* no. 220, 6:539a17-18.
- 76 *Kōzen gokokuron*, NST 16:91.
- 77 Ibid., 92.
- 78 *Zhufa wuzheng sanmei famen* 諸法無諍三昧法門 1, *T* no. 1923, 46:630a15-18.
- 79 *Kōzen gokokuron*, NST 16:93.
- 80 *Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō-dono gosho* 南条兵衛七郎殿御書, *Teihon* 1:324.
- 81 See for example Satō, "Nichiren's View of Nation and Religion."
- 82 *Shugo kokka ron* 守護国家論, *Teihon* 1:89.
- 83 *Tenjū kyōju hōmon* 転重軽受法門, *Teihon* 1:507-8.
- 84 *Hōmon mōsarubekiyō no koto* 法門可被申様之事, *Teihon* 1: 454-55.
- 85 This refers to the fall of Kaifeng to Jurchen invaders in 1127.
- 86 *Kenbutsu mirai ki* 顯佛未來記, *Teihon* 1:741.
- 87 *Fahua wenju ji* 法華文句記 10C, *T* no. 1719, 34:359c15-18. Note that Zhanran, like Nichiren, reads this episode synechdochally, to mean that Buddhism has been lost in India.
- 88 These were Huisi's *Dasheng shiguan famen* 大乘止觀法門 (*T* no. 1924) and Zhiyi's *Fangdeng sanmei xingfa* 方等三昧行法 (*T* no. 1940). The quote from Zunshi appears in his

preface to the *Dasheng shiguan famen*, *T* 46:641c11-12. Jakushō's arrival in 1003 in fact coincided with a period of Tiantai restoration and renewed exchange between Tiantai monks, first of the Wuyue 吳越 kingdom and then during the Song, and their counterparts in Japan and especially Korea; many Tiantai texts, lost in the turmoil precipitating the fall of the Tang, were restored from those countries (Brose, "Buddhist Empires," 287-327; Nishioka, *Bunkashi no kenkyū* 1:199-224. For Jakushō specifically, see Brose, 315n598, and Nishioka, 1:229-68).

- 89 *Zhiguan fuxing zhuan hongjue* 止觀輔行傳弘決 6-4, *T* no. 1912, 46:353b5-6.
- 90 *Senji shō* 撰時抄, *Teihon* 2:1009.
- 91 *Kenbutsu mirai ki*, *Teihon* 1:741, 742. Similar passages appear in "Sōya Nyūdō-dono gari gosho" 曾谷入道殿許御書, *Teihon* 1:909, and *Kangyō Hachiman shō* 諫曉八幡抄, 2:1850.
- 92 *Shugo kokkaishō* 守護国界章 1B, *DDZ* 2:234. On Saichō's views of the *Lotus Sūtra* and Japan, see also Groner, *Saichō*, 170, 174-76, 181-82.
- 93 *Sangoku buppō denzū engi* 三国仏法伝通縁起 1, *DNBZ* 62:9b.
- 94 I discuss this in a forthcoming paper (Stone, "Aftermath of the Divine Winds").
- 95 Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 41-42, 165-66.
- 96 *T* no. 2410, 76:518c19-20.
- 97 Introduction to *Kuji hongī gengi* 旧事本紀玄義, *Tendai Shintō* 天台神道 1, *ST*, *Ronsetsuhen* 3:69. From the Kamakura period on, this metaphor was often retrospectively attributed to Prince Shōtoku. On Jihen, see Sueki, "Bukkyōteki sekaikan," 117-19.
- 98 *Yuiitsu Shintō myōbō yōshū* 唯一神道名法要集, *NST* 19:234.
- 99 Asao, "Higashi Ajia ni okeru bakuhan taisei," 113-18; Takaki, *Shōgun kenryoku to tennō*, 21-52.