Ryōgen’s Place in the History of the Tendai School

The Japanese Tendai school is based on T’ien-t’ai teachings systematized by the Chinese meditation master and exegete Chih-i (538–597). However, the institutional base of Chinese T’ien-t’ai was generally not very strong in the T’ang dynasty (618–907); as a result the T’ien-t’ai tradition is closer to a school of thought than a religious institution in Chinese history. In fact, much of Chinese T’ien-t’ai literature was lost during the T’ang dynasty as a result of the 845 persecution of Buddhism in China and later had to be brought back to China from Japan and Korea. However, T’ien-t’ai was revived during the Sung dynasty (960–1279).

The situation in Japan was quite different. Tendai quickly came to dominate medieval Japanese religious life in both institutional and intellectual senses. A Japanese Tendai school with institutions and an unbroken lineage came to exist; such schools were generally not found in China. As Japanese Tendai developed, many interpretations, teachings, and practices unknown to Chih-i were introduced into the school. In fact, for much of its history, once the initial transmissions of texts had taken place, Japanese Tendai developed without much direct input from Chinese monks. The purpose of this study is to examine the development of the Tendai school during the tenth century and thereby elucidate some of the factors behind Tendai’s rise to its preeminent position in Japan.

This study focuses on institutional history rather than doctrinal history. Ryōgen wrote few texts on doctrine that can be decisively attributed to him. Those that are extant are debate manuals or short commentaries and will be briefly mentioned in chapters 4 and 8. Among the texts on doctrine that survive are short texts on topics such as Pure Land and path structure. However, Ryōgen’s doctrinal positions can be best considered in the context of extended discussions in which his
positions are contrasted with those of other medieval monks. A detailed consideration of their contents would require the investigation of similar works by other monks and would be tantamount to writing another study.

The dramatic rise of Tendai power during the tenth century can be highlighted by considering two images: the school at the time of the death of its founder Saichō (766/767–822) and Tendai late in Ryōgen’s (912–985) life. When Saichō first established the Tendai school in the first two decades of the ninth century, it consisted of a small group of monks sequestered on the top of a mountain to the northeast of the capital at Kyoto. According to a register of the monks of the Tendai school compiled near the end of Saichō’s life, more than half of the Tendai yearly ordinands (nenbudosha), monks ordained with official permission and support, had left Mount Hiei, leaving fewer than a dozen officially sanctioned monks. Because Saichō was also willing to accept monks from other schools, the total number of monks and novices on Hiei may have added up to several dozen at Saichō’s death. The educational system that Saichō had set up for his monks was on the verge of collapse. Saichō had devoted substantial energy toward developing a training program in Esoteric Buddhism (mikkyō) that would be in agreement with and equal to training in T’ien-t’ai meditation. Saichō’s early death at about the age of fifty-four before he could define his training program left his followers without a visionary teacher and a prestigious guide. Records dating from the decade after Saichō’s death suggest that simply feeding the monks on Mount Hiei was a major problem. In addition, Saichō’s successors argued among themselves over issues such as the leadership of the school and the balance between Esoteric Buddhism and traditional T’ien-t’ai doctrine, further weakening the school.

Within 150 years, the Tendai school had overcome almost all of these problems and emerged as one of the major monastic institutions in Japan. By the end of the tenth century, several thousand Tendai monks lived on Mount Hiei. Tendai monks were valued for their ability to perform rituals to ensure the prosperity and longevity of their patrons. Mastery of Tendai Esoteric rituals enabled practitioners to occupy important posts at court as guardian monks for court chaplains (naigubu) and guardian monks (gojisō) for emperors; in addition, Tendai monks dominated the Office of Monastic Affairs (Sōgō), an institution that Saichō had rejected. Tendai monasteries had begun to acquire important land holdings in the form of manors (shōen). Eventually nobles and the im-
perial family had to consider Tendai power when they made their po-
litical decisions. The Tendai educational program produced impressive
scholars who were able to compete successfully with monks from other
schools. In fact, Tendai educational institutions played major roles in
the cultural life of Japan, eventually training most of the founders of
the new Buddhist schools of the Kamakura period.

These shifts in Tendai fortunes coincide with major changes in Japa-
nese political life. During much of Saichō’s life, emperors such as
Kanmu (737–806; r. 781–806) had been active in administering their
domains. The Ritsuryō state, influenced by Chinese models, was still
influential and administered much of the land. By Ryōgen’s time, the
emperor was gradually losing power to Fujiwara regents who would ef-
fectively control the throne. The centralized bureaucracy that had ad-
ministered taxation was being replaced by a web of arrangements be-
tween officials and administrators of manors, with a resultant loss of at
least some tax revenues for the court. Many of the families who had ac-
quired wealth in the provinces had come to the capital; they were re-
placed by new administrators who represented those who had moved
to the capital. The tenth century has been called a time of transition as
the form of government was shifting. Only a skilled leader would be
able to guide the Tendai school through such perilous times.

Reasons for Choosing Ryōgen as the Focus
of a Study of the Transformation of the Tendai School

Traditional Japanese scholarship on the history of Buddhism has tended
to focus on the founders of schools. The educational system that pro-
duces the modern monk tends to revere the founder and directs young
scholars to focus on the founders of their schools. Although historians
such as Kuroda Toshio have called for efforts to place Buddhism within
the broader context of Japanese history and society, simply perusing the
entries in bibliographies of Japanese Buddhist scholarship reveals the
preponderance of studies and books on the founders. In contrast, later
figures have often been neglected even though they sometimes played
as important a role as the founder. In the case of Tendai, Ryōgen’s bi-
ography reveals as much about later Tendai institutions as Saichō’s bi-
ography discloses about the origins of the Tendai School.

A thorough study of the evolution of the Tendai school during the
ninth and tenth centuries would include a discussion of such early
Tendai thinkers and administrators as Ennin (794–864), Enchin (814–
891), Henjō (816–890), Annen (841?–915?), and others. In addition, it would consider parallel developments in other institutions such as Kōfukuji and Tōdaiji in Nara and Kongōbuji on Mount Kōya. Discussions of the economic and institutional reasons for the decline of some of the major temples in Nara during this period would provide a useful contrast to the more successful institutions. Such a broad study is difficult at the present time because of the number of institutions that would be involved as well as the many lacunae in the primary sources. Consequently, I have chosen to focus on one figure, Ryōgen, the eighteenth head (zasu) of the Tendai school.

For several reasons, the biography of Ryōgen provides a useful framework for investigating many of the changes that occurred within the Tendai school. First, because many documents from the Tendai school were destroyed in fires and conflicts with other monastic institutions and governmental authorities, many of the developments in the school are difficult to trace in very much detail. However, two major biographies of Ryōgen exist, providing a detailed and usually reliable account of his activities. Although the researcher might wish for more plentiful sources, when these biographies are supplemented with other sources, they provide a rich source for the investigation of Ryōgen’s biography and the social forces that led to the transformation of the Tendai school. These biographies will be discussed in more detail below.

Second, Ryōgen lived during a period when the institutional character of the Tendai school underwent many changes, and Ryōgen played an active role in the implementation of many of them. Under his leadership, alliances were forged with certain factions of the nobility. Sons from the ruling classes were ordained, granted special privileges, and given leading roles to play within school. As the Tendai school became involved in secular politics and factionalism, the rivalries between cliques in the school were exacerbated. In addition, the Tendai school acquired a number of large manors that were contributed by members of the ruling class. However, the families of the donors often maintained control over these manors and used them in ways that would benefit members of their clan. The strengthening of these alliances between families from the nobility and certain monastic factions provides the background for the vicious factionalism that emerged in the Tendai school during the late tenth century. Around this time, groups of armed monks dedicated to defending the interests of their cliques began to form. The study of Ryōgen’s biography helps to elucidate all of these changes.
Third, late in his life Ryōgen attempted to control many of the changes within the Tendai school that had been set in motion by his activities. A set of twenty-six rules that he formulated provides an excellent source for investigating how some of the more serious religious practitioners within the Tendai school regarded many of the issues. Investigation of these and other issues within the context of Ryōgen’s biography can elucidate the reasons for many of the changes within the school.

Fourth, Ryōgen’s biography contains significant information about monastic biographies and careers during the middle of the Heian period. Ryōgen came from a poor family and lost his major teacher at an early age. Despite these disadvantages, he managed to rise to a prominent position within the school and become head of the Tendai school at the comparatively young age of fifty-three. Ryōgen’s rise was made possible by luck and the shrewd use of the Tendai system of debates and examinations, as well as his mastery of Esoteric Buddhist ritual. Tracing how Ryōgen gradually acquired disciples and lay patrons through these means reveals much about the “ladder of success” of politically active monks. In addition, Ryōgen’s biography provides a background against which the stories of other types of religious and secular practitioners can be placed. Among the figures considered in passing are Buddhist lay believers, reclusive and eccentric monks, and female lay and monastic practitioners.

Finally, Ryōgen’s biography includes information about important developments in religious practice and doctrine during the middle of the Heian period. Ryōgen rose to prominence as a young monk through his skill in debate and later stressed debate as an educational tool when he was the leader of the Tendai school. The investigation of the debate topics yields information about which subjects were important to Tendai monks at this time and helps to elucidate the general shape of monastic education for scholarly monks. The debate system also influenced some texts concerning “original enlightenment” (hongaku) in subsequent centuries. In addition, Ryōgen’s use of Esoteric ritual reveals the importance of Esoteric ritual to lay believers. Ryōgen’s biography reveals details of how monks of different lineages competed with each other to win lay patronage. The appearance of Ryōgen’s written work on Pure Land and the activities of his disciple Genshin (942–1017) indicate that the Pure Land tradition was emerging as a major component of Tendai thought during the latter part of Ryōgen’s life.
Evaluation of Ryōgen’s Place in the History of the Tendai School

Even a brief discussion of Ryōgen’s life calls to mind the work of the prominent Japanese historian Kuroda Toshio. Kuroda’s description of kenmitsu taisei, sometimes translated as “exoteric-Esoteric system,” refers to the institutional and ideological system that both Buddhist monks and court supported in their efforts to wield power in medieval Japan. Statements by Kuroda such as the following indicate the importance that he ascribed to the development of Tendai during the mid-Heian:

> From the tenth century, amidst the development of Pure Land Buddhism, the Tendai school took the lead in developing a system that, in the eleventh century, confirmed the exoteric and esoteric as coexistent entities—either as unified, as perfectly syncretized, or as mutually dependent. This system is referred to in this article as the kenmitsu taisei, with the word “system” signifying not a system of law or administrative control, but rather an ideological order.6

This study would have been very different without Kuroda’s work in calling the attention of scholars to the role of Buddhism and its institutions in Japanese history and society. Kuroda also deserves credit for pointing out the importance of the history of Buddhist traditions after their founders’ deaths. In fact, this study supports Kuroda’s general conclusions by elucidating the burgeoning alliance between Tendai monks and the Japanese nobility as the kenmitsu taisei took form.

However, the study also differs with Kuroda at points. This study was written from the perspective of Buddhist Studies rather than secular and political history. The principal aim of the study was to elucidate developments within Tendai establishments rather than Japanese society at large. Thus, it focuses on the manner in which political and social events affected monasteries rather than on how those monasteries fit into Japanese society at large. The shifting alliances between monks and patrons as well as among monks themselves are a major concern in Ryōgen’s biography. The institutional doctrinal system of kenmitsu taisei was filled with sufficient dissension between the various doctrinal forms that it frequently is difficult to call it a system. Besides a focus that is narrower than that of Kuroda, this monograph has been written with the institutional and doctrinal backgrounds of Buddhism in India and China in mind, even though they do not play an overt role in the study. In fact, the study arose out of my desire to understand the forces that made medieval Tendai different from other forms of Buddhism. The narrower,
and consequently more detailed, focus of the study calls several aspects of Kuroda’s view of *kenmitsu taisei* into question. As Taira Masayuki has noted, Kuroda argued that medieval Japanese Buddhism was dominated by Esoteric Buddhism because the Japanese used Buddhism as a form of magic to advance their interests.\(^7\) Esoteric Buddhism played a crucial role in Ryōgen’s rise to prominence; however, he also used and emphasized exoteric Buddhist teachings throughout his life. The mastery of exoteric Buddhism played a key role both in his rise to power and in the educational system he instituted on Mount Hiei. However, monks were not the only ones interested in exoteric doctrine; the Ōwa debates, which focused on the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*, attracted considerable attention from lay Buddhists. A second area in which a more detailed focus reveals differences with Kuroda’s view of *kenmitsu taisei* is found in the sectarian rivalries with the Hossō school that played a major role in Ryōgen’s life. In many of Kuroda’s writings, *kenmitsu taisei* is portrayed as a monolithic system that dominates and runs through Japanese Buddhism. However, this view at time obscures the serious doctrinal differences that ran through Japanese Buddhism during the Heian period. Such reservations about Kuroda’s view of *kenmitsu taisei* do not indicate that Kuroda’s arguments should be abandoned; rather, they point the way to a more nuanced view of Buddhist history.

My choice of Ryōgen as the central character in this study should not be interpreted as suggesting that Ryōgen can be held solely responsible for seemingly negative changes within the school, such as the seeming deterioration of monastic discipline, the appearance of warrior monks, and an apparent decline in serious scholarship by Tendai monks in the late Heian and Kamakura periods. These trends are found in many of the major monasteries during this period and affected almost every Buddhist school. The Hossō monastery, Kōfukuji, and the Shingon monastery on Mount Kōya, to mention several, eventually maintained warrior monks. The decline in monastic discipline affected virtually every tradition, including the Rishū (Vinaya school), the guardians of the ordination tradition.

In addition, Ryōgen cannot be given sole credit or blame for these developments even within the Tendai school. Many of the issues had emerged decades before Ryōgen appeared. For example, one of the key provisions of Saichō’s educational plan had been to have Tendai monks remain sequestered (*rōsan*) on Mount Hiei for twelve years while they received special training. During this period, they were not to leave the confines of the mountain for any reason. However, Saichō’s most prom-
ising student, Ennin, had to abandon his retreat after only six years. According to his biography, Ennin had announced that he would begin the twelve-year period in 823, the year after Saichō’s death. After only six years, however, the other Tendai monks had asked him to abandon the twelve-year period, arguing that he should spread Tendai teachings beyond the confines on Mount Hiei. In the summer of 828, he traveled to Nara to lecture on the Lotus Sūtra at Hōryūji. The following summer, he lectured on the Lotus and the Jen-wang ching (Sūtra of the benevolent king) at Shitenmōji. Ennin did not abandon his plan to remain in seclusion on Hiei lightly; several years later, he went into seclusion in the Yokawa area of Mount Hiei. Although he made no vow to remain in Yokawa for twelve years, he clearly recognized the value of remaining sequestered on Hiei.

Ennin’s decision to leave Hiei before the twelve-year period had been completed clearly made it easier for those who followed him to ignore Saichō’s educational plan. Relatively little evidence exists that subsequent Tendai monks remained sequestered on Hiei for the full twelve years. One noteworthy exception was Enchin, who received a certificate (iki) attesting to the completion of the twelve-year period in 846.

In 914, two years after Ryōgen’s birth, the deterioration of Buddhist practice was described by Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki (847–918), a high official (taifu) in the Bureau of Ceremonies (Shikibu) in his Twelve Opinions (Iken jūnikajō), a memorial describing his views concerning proper government.

The number of people initiated as yearly ordinands or in special (rinjī) ceremonies permitted by the court has risen to two or three hundred per year. Of these more than half are evil and wild sorts of people. In addition, many people among the farmers privately [without government permission] shave off their hair and wantonly wear monastic robes in order to escape their tax and corvée labor obligations. As the years have passed, their numbers have increased until two-thirds of the population has shaven heads. They all keep a wife and children in their houses. Although they resemble monks outwardly, they eat meat and fish; their minds are like those of butchers. It is even worse when they assemble and behave like a band of robbers or secretly mint their own money. They do not fear punishments from heaven or concern themselves with the Buddhist precepts. If provincial governors try to make them behave according to law, they assemble and become violent. In previous years, when Fujiwara no Tokiyoshi, the governor (kami) of Aki, was surrounded and when Tachibana no Kimiyasu, governor of Kii, was threatened and robbed, it was precisely this type of evil monk who did so... If the edict from the Chancellor’s Office had been late, or the court’s messenger had been
delayed, Tokiyoshi and Kimiyasu might have died terrible deaths. If such monks are not prohibited, then I fear that they may rebel [against the government]. Therefore I ask that when monks behave in such evil ways, they be arrested and forced to return their certificates of initiation and ordination. They shall then be required to [again] wear lay clothing and return to their former occupation. In addition, if privately initiated novices join together in evil groups, then they should be put in restraints and forced to do hard labor.10

Although allowances must be made for exaggerations in Kiyoyuki’s description of the Buddhist order, his testimony describes an order that already was filled with men who had become monks to make an easy living. The gangs that some of the monks and novices had formed probably were the forerunners of the warrior monks who emerged at the end of Ryőgen’s life. Although much of the Twelve Opinions is Confucian in tone, Kiyoyuki was in fact a devout Buddhist. In 902, Tendai monks gave him materials concerning the life of Enchin, one of the most eminent Tendai monks of his lifetime, and asked Kiyoyuki to write Enchin’s official biography. Moreover, he had also had one of his sons ordained by Genshō (844–917), one of Ennin’s students. In 907, Kiyoyuki wrote an account of the formation of a nenbutsu (repetition of the Buddha’s name) organization for the Tendai monk Rinsei.11 Thus, his statement should be read as an effort to reform the Buddhist order rather than discredit Buddhism.

Ryőgen is often criticized for the vicious factionalism that arose within the Tendai school at the end of his life and in the decades following it. Because this issue decisively affects any evaluation of his biography, two chapters are devoted to the topic. Chapter 2 sets the background for Ryőgen’s biography by tracing factionalism from its inception shortly after Saichō’s death to the the situation during Ryőgen’s youth. Chapter 11 is a discussion of factionalism during Ryőgen’s lifetime. By treating this issue in detail, I demonstrate that factionalism had its origins long before Ryőgen’s administration of the Tendai school.

Just as Ryőgen cannot be assigned the sole responsibility for the problems that arose within the Tendai school, he also cannot be given sole credit for positive developments in Tendai practice. The academic quality of the educational institutions on Mount Hiei, an issue in which Ryőgen was vitally interested, had its origins in the activities of earlier monks such as Saichō and Ennin. In addition, Ennin pioneered the effective use of Esoteric Buddhist ritual to create alliances with patrons. Efforts to strengthen monastic discipline, another topic that concerned Ryő-
gen, are reflected in the sets of rules composed by earlier Tendai monks. Ryōgen was well aware of the efforts of his predecessors and frequently referred to them. To set Ryōgen’s activities in their proper context, such precedents must be noted.

Sources for Ryōgen’s Biography

One of the major reasons for focusing this investigation of Tendai during the middle of the Heian period on Ryōgen is the quality of the early biographies concerning him. Much of the biographical detail of many Tendai figures from the eleventh century onward is incomplete. False attributions of texts further complicate the situation. In Ryōgen’s case, two early biographies give us material that is usually trustworthy.

Ryōgen’s immediate disciples contributed to the compilation of each. The first, the Jie daisōjo (Biography of the grand archbishop Jie), was composed from materials brought together by some of Ryōgen’s disciples, especially Kakuun (953–1007). Because Kakuun died in 1007, twenty-four years before the final compilation of the biography, the materials presumably were ignored for a time before Tadanobu edited them into their final form. After several years, these primary source materials were then edited and polished by a layman, Fujiwara no Tadanobu (967–1035), who was probably chosen for his literary abilities and because he was Jinzen’s nephew.12 This procedure had been followed in the composition of earlier biographies. For example, the most authoritative biographies of Chien-chen (J. Ganjin) and Enchin had both been compiled first by the monk’s disciples and then refined into a more literary style by laymen.

The Jie daisōjo was probably a public document; it was edited by a high government official and was intended to be source material for the compilers of official biographies.14 Because of the official bias of
the compiler, the *Jie daisōjōden* includes much information about Ryōgen’s relations to emperors and regents, as well as about Ryōgen’s appointments to the Office of Monastic Affairs. It does not include detailed information about such issues as Ryōgen’s personality and his efforts to rebuild the Tendai monastic complex on Mount Hiei or about the rise of factionalism within the Tendai school.

These lapses were a source of dissatisfaction to Bonshō (964?–1032?), one of Ryōgen’s disciples. To supplement the *Jie daisōjōden*, Bonshō wrote the *Jie daisōjō shūiden* (Gleanings for the biography of the grand archbishop Jie), a text that collected episodes and information that had been left out of the biography Tadanobu had edited. Bonshō included detailed information about internal Tendai affairs, such as the rebuilding of the monastic establishment on Mount Hiei and the factionalism that arose between the successors of Ennin and Enchin. In addition, Bonshō included a number of episodes that were based on the reminiscences of Ryōgen’s disciples and that tended to be more hagiographic than the events recorded in the *Jie daisōjōden*. Although Bonshō was more interested in Ryōgen’s religious aspirations than Tadanobu was, neither biography included very many entries from Ryōgen’s writings. Consequently, Ryōgen’s intentions and spiritual life are often unclear.15

**Structure of This Study**

Mid-Heian biographies of monks differ from what the modern reader expects from biographical writing. Medieval Japanese biography often focused on the external trappings of a career or on hagiographic stories rather than the inner struggle of the religious man. Many of the biographies consist of lists of the important people with whom a monk associated and the official honors he received, along with a few hagiographic details. While medieval biographies may seem disappointing at first to the Western reader, a careful investigation of their details sometimes reveals considerable information. In this study, I pay considerable attention to the people and places mentioned in Ryōgen’s biographies, sometimes digressing for considerable portions of my narrative to explain the significance of an event or the people involved. In doing so, I have tried to reveal why Ryōgen’s biographers felt that the mention of certain figures and places was important.

Because such digressions sometimes lead the reader away from the basic narrative, I have chosen to treat some of them as appendixes to
certain chapters. The appendixes contain a number of primary sources for this study. They also contain descriptions of several figures that play important roles in Ryōgen’s biography such as his major patron, Fujiwara no Morosuke, and the reclusive monk Zōga. These accounts have been included to provide the reader with biographies that contrast with that of Ryōgen. For example, although the modern reader may be more inspired by the biography of a reclusive monk such as Zōga, the biography of Zōga seems to have developed partly as a response to that of political monks such as Ryōgen.

A brief survey of the chapters may serve to give the reader an overview of the progression of topics. Although this biography generally proceeds along chronological lines, it is not intended to be a sequential survey of Ryōgen’s life as much as a consideration of key themes in it. It begins with a survey of early Tendai factionalism in chapter 2. Because factionalism both within the Tendai school and with other schools played a major role in Ryōgen’s life, the study begins with a consideration of early factionalism in the Tendai school.

Chapters 3 and 4 are concerned with the ladder of success in monasteries. How did a monk make a name for himself? Thus, the role of debates on exoteric Buddhism and Esoteric ritual are considered to elucidate how Ryōgen used them to build a network of supporters and how they furthered his career. In addition, the significance of Yokawa, an area of Mount Hiei opened by Ennin, is described. Ryōgen took over this underused area and made it the basis for his activities. Through the skillful use of such resources Ryōgen was able to gain the attention of a powerful patron, Fujiwara no Morosuke, the most powerful political figure in Japan during Ryōgen’s life.

Chapter 5 considers the relationship between Ryōgen and Morosuke and what each obtained from it. Of particular importance was the ordination of two of Morosuke’s sons and what each brought to the Tendai school. The differing circumstances of these ordinations reveals the political agendas of both Ryōgen and Morosuke. Morosuke’s early death left Ryōgen without a patron and forced him to rely upon other figures to further his career and establish the Tendai school as the dominant force in Japanese religious life.

Chapter 6 is a study of the Ōwa debates, a dramatic set of discussions held between Tendai and Nara monks at the court. The debates are of interest not only because they reveal lay interest in exoteric doctrine and what topics were of particular interest, but also because they call the whole issue of “winners” and “losers” in such debates into question.
In fact, many of the “losers” in the debates went on to have successful careers. At the same time, some monks refused to participate; they represent a more reclusive and seemingly more spiritual group uninterested in Ryōgen’s political use of ritual and debate. However, their biographies often exaggerate their spirituality, perhaps as a way of indirectly criticizing politically active monks such as Ryōgen.

The next five chapters all concern aspects of Ryōgen’s tenure as head of the Tendai school. Chapter 7 examines his controversial appointment as head and the reactions of the Tendai monks who opposed him. In addition, the growing importance of Tendai appointments to the Office of Monastic Affairs is considered; although Saichō had fiercely criticized this institution, Tendai monks came to dominate it; their ascendancy would mark their mastery of the Japanese religious world at that time.

Chapter 8 is a study of the examinations used in the Tendai monastic education system. While this chapter begins with Ryōgen’s reformation of the educational system, it considers developments both before and after Ryōgen. The Tendai monastic education system provides the institutional background for the innovations in Tendai doctrine that would later be characterized as hongaku. It also sheds light on how scholarly monks were trained in medieval Japan. The rigor found in the examinations suggests that claims that scholarship declined in medieval Buddhism should be questioned.

Chapters 9 and 10 examine the process of rebuilding the Tendai complex on Mount Hiei after a disastrous fire. The order in which buildings were reconstructed reveals their usages and the structure of the ritual year and leads to insights into which practices were popular among Tendai monks.

Such a major rebuilding project required major contributions, the focus of chapter 10. The need for such support was a major factor in strengthening Tendai ties with certain factions of the nobility. It also led to the acquisition of manors and the strengthening of ties with other temples and shrines. The acquisition of land required monks skilled in administration; in addition, monks who could defend Tendai holdings were needed to defend Tendai interests against competing claims. The concluding section of chapter 10 concerns the role of women in financing monasteries. Although little evidence for direct contributions by women exists, a number of rituals seem to have been directed toward them and probably resulted in contributions through male relatives.

Chapter 11 returns to the theme of factionalism and to traditional claims that Ryōgen bears the responsibility for the advent of warrior-
monks (sōhei). The end of Ryōgen’s career was marked by bitter factionalism between several groups of Tendai monks, a development that would haunt the Tendai school for centuries. It has led some scholars to question his effectiveness late in life. However, the factionalism evident in the political life of the patrons of monasteries, the earlier history of factionalism within Tendai, the early experiences of Ryōgen’s life, and the need for finances and patronage to rebuild a devastated monastic complex lead to a more charitable evaluation of Ryōgen. The death of Ryōgen is also considered in this chapter.

Chapter 12, a discussion of nuns, could be considered a digression from the main focus of this book. However, it arose while I considered a question as I wrote the study: the absence of nuns in Ryōgen’s biography even though he paid extravagant attention to his mother. To investigate Ryōgen’s treatment of his mother, the chapter provides a background for understanding the position of nuns during Ryōgen’s lifetime. The chapter thus provides a view of a group of Buddhist practitioners that was very different from that of Ryōgen and his politically active allies.

The final chapter is a consideration of Ryōgen’s posthumous career. A virtual cult arose around Ryōgen, making him the most commonly enshrined monk in Tendai circles. He was said to be responsible for the protection of the Mount Hiei complex, as well as for helping individual believers. The wide-open eyes of many images of Ryōgen reflect his role as a protector of those who believe in him and provide a marked contrast with images of other monks, in which downcast eyes reflect deep meditative states.