

Ennin and Chusonji

The Japanese monk Ennin (794–864) traveled to the Tohoku region around the year 829 to spread the teaching of Tendai Buddhism. Ennin was a disciple of Saicho (767–822), the founder of the Tendai sect headquartered at Enryakuji Temple on Mount Hiei in Shiga Prefecture. After Saicho's death, Ennin became the third chief priest of the Tendai sect.

In the early ninth century, most of the Buddhist temples in Tohoku belonged to the Nara-based Hosso sect. The Hosso sect's doctrine asserted that one's world was created by their own intellect, placing emphasis on philosophical thought and scholarship. While traveling in Tohoku, Ennin founded Chusonji and Motsuji, which the Oshu Fujiwara clan later developed and thus played an important role in the expansion of Tendai Buddhism into northern Honshu. The Tendai sect asserts that everyone can achieve enlightenment. This was appealing and many people around the country embraced these ideas.

Hosso Buddhism remained the dominant sect in Tohoku until the establishment of Chusonji Temple by Fujiwara no Kiyohira (1056–1128) at the beginning of the twelfth century. Chusonji was the first temple in Tohoku to genuinely follow Enryakuji-style Tendai Buddhism, whose core teachings are based on the Lotus Sutra and Pure Land Buddhism. The Oshu Fujiwara clan, who supported the construction of Chusonji and the other temples of Hiraizumi, is remembered as a ruling family who helped develop Hiraizumi into a peaceful city that was run based on Buddhist teachings.