



The Prince and the Monk

Shōtoku Worship
in Shinran's
Buddhism

KENNETH DOO YOUNG LEE

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Kenneth Doo Young Lee

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For my family

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Contents

| | |
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| Acknowledgments | ix |
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1. <i>Shinran and Shōtoku</i> | 9 |
| Shinran's Life | 10 |
| Shinran's Dreams | 11 |
| Hymns Dedicated to Shōtoku | 21 |
| Other Writings on Shōtoku | 29 |
| 2. <i>The Legends of Shōtoku</i> | 31 |
| Legendary Shōtoku | 34 |
| Historical Shōtoku | 36 |
| The Cult of Shōtoku | 39 |
| The Shōtoku Conspiracy Theory | 43 |
| 3. <i>Images of Shōtoku in Early Japan</i> | 51 |
| Mythic Images of Shōtoku in the <i>Nihon shoki</i> | 53 |
| Shōtoku as Champion of Buddhism | 61 |
| Shōtoku as Imperial Ancestor | 63 |
| Shōtoku as Father of Japanese Buddhism | 66 |
| 4. <i>Images of Shōtoku in Medieval Japan</i> | 71 |
| Legitimacy and Authority: <i>Honji suijaku</i> Theory | 72 |
| Shōtoku in Chinese, Japanese, and Buddhist | |
| Manifestations: Hui-ssu, <i>kami</i> , and Kannon | 77 |
| The Cult of Shōtoku: Portraits, Relics, and Women | 88 |
| Shōtoku Worship at Mount Hiei, Hōryūji, and Shitennōji | 95 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 5. <i>Shōtoku and Shinran's Buddhism</i> | 107 |
| Gates of Power in Medieval Japan | 108 |
| <i>Mappō</i> | 112 |
| Shinran on Mount Hiei | 114 |
| The <i>Senju nenbutsu</i> Movement | 120 |
| Shinran's Attitude Toward Emperorship | 124 |
| Shinran's Attitude Toward Shintō <i>kamis</i> | 126 |
| Conclusion | 131 |
| Appendix A: Selected Sources on Shōtoku Legends | 141 |
| Appendix B: A Translation of <i>Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan</i> | 147 |
| Notes | 159 |
| Selected Bibliography | 201 |
| Index | 221 |

Acknowledgments

It's 3:00 A.M. on February 9, 2006. I didn't think this time would ever come, but I'm thankful that it finally did. Like tonight, I've spent many long hours like a creature from another planet, immersed in this monumental project of writing my first book. Like a sculptor, I've been chiseling away bits and pieces of words and ideas, then pasting them back, then sanding them down so that the final product would somehow reflect the very image that I had in my mind from its original inception ten years ago, as a graduate student at Columbia University. Since then, I've moved back to Los Angeles, back to New York City, then to Orlando, and then back to Los Angeles. The last ten years flew by quickly, and my life has gone through different chapters of its own, but, like a jealous lover, this book project was always on my mind. Through all the long hours of research, brainstorming, writing, and editing, I've learned so much and have matured as a person and scholar. The satisfaction of finishing this project to the best of my ability is a personal reward, which I'll always be proud of. As I look back and remember the various faces during my ten-year journey of working on this project, I want to express my deep appreciation to those people whose guidance, encouragement, and support enabled me to complete this book.

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K. LEE
Pasadena, CA

Introduction

Shōtoku Taishi¹ (574–622), or Prince Shōtoku, was an imperial regent traditionally regarded as a cultural hero of Japan and the father of Japanese Buddhism. A member and representative of the Soga clan, the powerful Japanese court family that rose to prominence with the accession of the Emperor Kimmei in 531 C.E., Shōtoku, whose name means “sovereign moral power,” is recognized for his pivotal role as the imperial regent (593–622) under Empress Suiko in the enhancement of Japanese politics and culture during the Asuka period (538–710). At this time, the Japanese government launched an exhaustive campaign to unify, reform, and modernize Japan by adopting Buddhism and instituting governmental and cultural reforms based on Chinese models. These included the promotion of the Confucian ideal of emperorship under the “mandate of heaven” concept,² establishment of the twelve official ranks at court, and implementation of the Chinese written language, the Chinese calendar, the practice of recording history, the use of coins, and the standardization of weights and measures. Although Japan was culturally backward and conservative at the time of Shōtoku’s birth in 574, by the time of his death in 622 Japanese political, economic, and religious infrastructures had been drastically and fundamentally changed by the impact of Chinese and Korean culture. As a result of his significant contributions to the governance of the Japanese nation and the promotion of Japanese Buddhism, Shōtoku became a legendary figure over time, so much so that the character of the actual man had been lost. Following his death, Shōtoku continued to be so highly venerated by all Japanese people that he was worshiped as a *kami*³ and an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon.⁴ For centuries, imperial authorities and temple establishments have worked together to successfully promote the image of Prince Shōtoku as an ideal regent and Buddhist saint.

This book addresses the historical development of the political and religious myths surrounding the legend of Shōtoku Taishi and the role of faith in this figure for Shinran (1173–1262), the well-known founder of one of the Pure Land schools (*Jōdo Shinshū*) of Buddhism in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). This study examines the development of Shōtoku legends in

Japan and the importance of Shōtoku worship in Shinran's Buddhism, analyzing Shinran's liturgical text, his dream of Shōtoku's manifestation as the *guze* Kannon (world-saving bodhisattva of compassion), and other relevant events surrounding his life. Additionally, this study shows that Shinran's Buddhism was consistent with the *honji suijaku* culture—the synthesis of the Shintō and Buddhist pantheons—that existed in *kenmitsu* Buddhism,⁵ the dominant Buddhist establishment during the medieval period.⁶ In other words, Shinran's worship of Shōtoku as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon was synonymous with devotion to Shōtoku as a powerful *kami*.

My thesis is that Shinran's thought has been misunderstood among nearly all the major branches of Buddhism he founded precisely because his heirs in the dharma failed to appreciate the central importance of his worship of this historical and legendary figure of Shōtoku. I believe that this is, in fact, the key element that helps us to better understand and appreciate the uniqueness of Shinran's religious views. Traditional understanding of Shinran's teaching by Western Shin scholars, such as the work by Dennis Hirota and Alfred Bloom, generally focuses on Shinran's doctrinal teachings regarding the practitioner's birth in the Pure Land through the primacy of *shinjin*⁷ (sincere mind entrusting), and in reliance on Other-power (*tariki*) over self-power (*jiriki*). However, there is hardly any mention of Shinran's worship of Shōtoku, which I believe needs further examination since Shōtoku figures prominently in the many liturgical hymns written by Shinran. Among the over 500 *wasan* (hymns) he composed, Shinran dedicated 190 of them in praise of Shōtoku after he experienced a revelatory event connected with Shōtoku that formed an important part of Shinran's religious identity. But since Shinran fails to discuss Shōtoku in any significant way in his doctrinal writings, the role of his reverence or devotion for Shōtoku is not clear.

The reasons why this problem has not been given much attention by Japanese scholars, and almost entirely ignored outside of Japan, center on two points. First, the cult of Shōtoku (*Taishi shinkō*) was quite widespread in Japan at the time, so Shinran's view does not seem particularly noteworthy. Second, one simply does not see faith in Shōtoku in the religious doctrines and social values professed or embodied in Shinran. Shinran was one of a great many disciples of his teacher Hōnen, and involved in the complex and often heated doctrinal debates that occurred at that time. These usually centered on issues raised by Hōnen, such as the importance of continuous recitation of nembutsu to assure one's birth in the Pure Land. The cult of Shōtoku was simply not relevant in these circles, and Shinran's own writings generally reflect this. Moreover, scholars may have ignored the importance of Shōtoku worship in Shinran's writings because of the subjective nature of Eshinni's account concerning Shinran's conversion experience at Rokkakudō. While there is no way of verifying

Shinran's dream accounts, I contend that the fact that Shinran himself expressed a deep devotion to Shōtoku in his hymns is significant evidence that Shōtoku worship was at the heart of his doctrine.

Some Western Shin scholars, like Alfred Bloom, have traditionally studied Shinran's Buddhism within the historical context of the tumultuous Kamakura period and focused on the rise and development of Pure Land Buddhism in relation to the older and traditional eight schools of Buddhism.⁸ Their discussions often revolve around the comparison of "Old Buddhism" (*kyū bukkyō*), referring to the eight schools of Buddhism from the Nara and Heian period, with "New Buddhism" (*shin bukkyō*), the new schools of Buddhism that arose during the Kamakura period. Bloom and other modern scholars, such as Ueda Yoshifumi and Dennis Hirota—following the lead of early traditional Japanese sectarian scholars, such as Iyenaga Saburō, Sonoda Kōyū, and Inoue Mitsusada—study the lives and thoughts of the founders of the New Buddhist schools in medieval Japan, such as Hōnen, Eisai, and Shinran, as a central task to understand Kamakura Buddhism as a whole.⁹ However, these studies, such as Bloom's analysis of Shinran's Buddhism, provide a rather simplified view of the religious developments that took place during the medieval period.¹⁰ Other notable Japanese scholars, such as Akamatsu Toshihide, Shigematsu Akihisa, and Fujii Manabu also approach their study of Kamakura Buddhism from a sectarian textbook perspective,¹¹ engaging the traditional discussion that revolves around the distinction between Old and New Buddhism.

In response to the sectarian textbook approach to the study of Japanese Buddhist history, modern scholars such as Ishida Yoshito, Imai Masaharu, Takagi Yutaka, Ishimoda Tadashi, and Kuroda Toshio have offered a more comprehensive analysis that involves a closer examination of internal developments within the old schools that had begun in the late Heian period.¹² Among these revisionist scholars, Kuroda is unique. His study of monastic institutions during the medieval period helps us to better understand the uniqueness of Shinran's Buddhism as he redirects our attention to highly relevant internal events that took place within the sangha (Jpn. *sōgya*: Buddhist community). Kuroda's theory of *kenmitsu taisei*—the system of Buddhist doctrine and esoteric ritual that pervaded the Tendai, Shingon, and Nara schools—corrected the distinction between Old Buddhism and New Buddhism of the Kamakura period that had previously been drawn by sectarian textbook scholars and replaced it with the distinction between heresy and orthodoxy. Kuroda explains that New Buddhism of the Kamakura period—Pure Land, Zen, and Nichiren—were peripheral throughout medieval times and that Old Buddhism was the true representative of religious culture, as evidenced by the mentioning of old schools in most medieval documents. Therefore, Kuroda classified Pure Land Buddhism not as New Buddhism but as Old Buddhism, since it was integrated

into the established religious order of the period. Kuroda regards that order, with its multiplicity of religious expressions and its variety of institutions, as the dominant religious motif of medieval Japan, and he views the new schools as divergent movements that became consequential only in late medieval times. For Kuroda, the importance of Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren rests not in their sanctified status as the founders of particular schools, but in their representing the break with and critique of the center, a dissension that provides rare insight into the nature of the hegemonic regime.¹³ Thus, Kuroda considers Shinran's Buddhism as heresy (*itan*), in accordance with the imperial decree that banned Shinran's teaching as heresy in 1207. Kuroda explains that Shinran began his career with the traditional study of Buddhism within *kenmitsu* Buddhism, but his struggles with the words, phrases, and logic of the orthodox scriptures raised doubts within him, and he ended up taking a stand against the orthodox view. Although Kuroda's *kenmitsu* theory offers a refreshing and comprehensive approach to the study of Japanese Buddhist history during the Kamakura period, I argue that his reinterpretation of the New Kamakura Buddhism under the orthodoxy-heresy distinction incorrectly casts Shinran's Buddhism and the 'exclusive nembutsu' (*senju nenbutsu*)¹⁴ teaching as heresy.

In support of Kuroda, Satō Hiroo and Taira Masayuki have closely examined Buddhism's involvement in medieval Japanese statecraft and the religious role of the emperors of the late Heian period and of the Kamakura shogunate in maintaining the *kenmitsu* regime.¹⁵ I will reexamine their observations since they shine light on the internal court politics that were involved in the persecution of *senju nenbutsu* teachers. Satō's study on the *honji suijaku* culture in his *Shinbutsu ōken no chūsei* (The Theory of Divine Rights of Shintō Deities and Buddhas in the Medieval Period) is particularly important because it highlights the synthesis of the Shintō-Buddhist pantheon during the medieval period.¹⁶ Specifically, Shinran's worship of Shōtoku as a manifestation of Kannon was synonymous with his devotion to Shōtoku as a powerful *kami* who appeared during *mappō* (the age of degenerating dharma).¹⁷ Moreover, the Shōtoku worship that is integral to Shinran's Buddhism provides a challenge to modern Shin school proponents, who have suppressed the element of *kami* worship in Shin Buddhism in their effort to present their school as free of native religious cults.

This study argues that Shinran's Buddhism cannot be considered as heresy because it contained the common aspect of *kami* worship prevalent in *kenmitsu* Buddhism in the context of the *honji suijaku* culture of the medieval period. In fact, the core of Shōtoku worship in Shinran's Buddhism most likely originated from Shinran's rigorous religious discipline within *kenmitsu* Buddhism. By incorporating the aspect of Shōtoku worship in his teachings, Shinran simply participated in the prevailing and widely accepted practice of promoting and

legitimizing his innovative teachings through the worship of Shōtoku as a *kami* and manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon. In other words, the *honji suijaku* culture remained influential throughout the medieval period because it was the ideology that legitimized the claims of ruling authorities. I contend that Shinran's innovative teaching is legitimate because of its roots in the medieval Shōtoku cult—the same way that the *kenmitsu* establishment, consisting of the Fujiwara court, Kamakura shogunate, and powerful temples, legitimized its power within the fabric of *honji suijaku*.

This book has five chapters. In chapter 1, I discuss the importance of Shōtoku worship for Shinran. How and why did Shōtoku come to be an important figure for Shinran? To begin, I analyze two main areas in which we can clearly see Shinran's personal devotion to Shōtoku Taishi: the liturgical tradition represented by his many hymns composed in praise and worship of Prince Shōtoku, and his dream about Prince Shōtoku as manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon. Eshinni's account of Shinran's dream of Shōtoku may seem speculative due to its subjective nature and in light of the popular trend of Shōtoku worship during the medieval period, but for this study it serves as an important piece of evidence from Shinran's wife, who was simply recounting her husband's devotion to Prince Shōtoku, a devotion revealed in his own writings. Shinran's description of Shōtoku as '*guze* Kannon' or 'the world-saving bodhisattva of compassion' of Japan confirms that Shōtoku, for Shinran, was more than a historical and legendary figure—Shōtoku was his personal savior.

In chapter 2, I investigate the historical and legendary status of Shōtoku Taishi. Did Shōtoku truly exist as a historical figure? How and why was he promoted to such legendary status? Although some scholars have debated these issues, I believe that examining the second question in particular will help us better understand the reasons behind the evolutionary process of Shōtoku deification. In this chapter, I examine the life of Shōtoku Taishi by taking a closer look at his regency, his Buddhist outlook, and his contributions to promote Buddhism through the building of many temples. For instance, a closer examination of the Seventeen-Article Constitution (*Jūshichijō kenpō*, 604) reveals that Shōtoku attempted to restore the notion of the absolute authority of the emperor and promote Buddhism as the official religion. In later periods, the Seventeen-Article Constitution became an important source among ruling authorities, the shōgun, court, aristocracy, and temple establishments who promoted Shōtoku worship to legitimize their claims to authority. During his regency, Prince Shōtoku instituted important reforms that laid the ideological foundations for a Chinese-style centralized state under the authority of the emperor. In particular, an in-depth analysis of the Constitution discloses ideologies that served to legitimize the ruling class's claims to authority in medieval Japan. For instance, in Article II, Shōtoku's injunction to rely on the Three

Treasures was especially significant because it officially promoted Buddhism in Japan and honored Shōtoku as the father of Japanese Buddhism.¹⁸

In chapter 3, I discuss the provenance of Shōtoku legends in early Japan. Who encouraged Shōtoku worship in early Japan and why? Earliest sources indicate that the promotion of Shōtoku worship was initiated by the imperial family, particularly through two significant historical books, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712) and the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720), and was sanctioned by imperial command. Through the prevalent Shintō mythology linking the imperial descent from the goddess Amaterasu and simply elevating the charismatic Prince Shōtoku as patron, ideal regent, and *kami* status, the imperial court successfully promoted Shōtoku as imperial ancestor and national hero. Shōtoku served as an ideal figure, particularly because not only did he represent the imperial family through his regency, but he was also regarded as the father of Japanese Buddhism in his role as progenitor of Buddhism in Japan. The uniqueness of Shōtoku's dual role and significant contributions to the Japanese nation and Japanese Buddhism naturally and quite easily elevated Shōtoku as more than a historical figure; by virtue of his charisma and popular influence he rose to the level of *kami*. The effort to promote Shōtoku to a legendary status was effectively conducted, given the fact that the state and Buddhism enjoyed a close and interdependent relationship in early Japan, as evidenced by the many state-sponsored temples and saturation of Buddhism at the capital of Nara. Interestingly, hardly any early accounts of Buddhist sources on Shōtoku worship exist because the imperial authorities were also serving in the dual capacity as religious authorities, or, at the least, regulated or censored Buddhism to support the interests of the state. Not surprisingly, when we examine sources in early Japan regarding Shōtoku, we see Shōtoku portrayed primarily as an imperial ancestor and *kami*, rather than as a Buddhist divinity; that status would follow later during the medieval period when Buddhist institutions began to assert their independence from the imperial court.

In chapter 4, I examine the medieval Japanese cult of Shōtoku worship and the continual evolutionary process of deification of Shōtoku. How did Shōtoku worship continue to evolve during medieval Japan? How did the changing climate of the medieval period affect the promotion of Shōtoku worship through the effort of imperial and religious authorities? During the volatile medieval period and changing of ruling powers, the imperial court and Buddhist institutions did not enjoy as close a relationship as they did in the early period of Japan. The Fujiwara family was more concerned about survival than in finding ways to strengthen their strong rule through their royal Shintō mythology based on Shōtoku worship as a *kami* and imperial ancestor. *Daimyōs* (local warlords) waging war and vying for control were not interested in such mythology

so long as they were able to wield power for themselves. Meanwhile, as Buddhist institutions gained more independence as a result of the weakening ties with the imperial court, as evidenced by various *engis*—the quasihistorical accounts of miraculous events of distinctions that surrounded them—they began to promote Shōtoku in different ways, according to their own interpretations and elevation of Shōtoku primarily as a Buddhist saint or deity. A key element that helped to effectively facilitate the promotion of Shōtoku not only as a *kami* but also as a Buddhist figure was easily accomplished through the *honji suijaku* context of the medieval period. During medieval Japan, the unique phenomenon of *honji suijaku* enabled a smooth proliferation of Shōtoku worship as a Buddhist figure. Within the fabric of *honji suijaku* culture, Shōtoku worship continued to evolve through the gradual development of legends that now portrayed Shōtoku not only as a powerful *kami*, but also as a reincarnation of Tendai Eshi,¹⁹ as a manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon, and later, as Amida Buddha and even Shinran himself. Interestingly, while the men were at war and involved themselves in political affairs, women in the court played a significant role in promoting Shōtoku worship, as we will examine in the case of the Hōryūji temple.

Finally, in chapter 5, I examine Shinran's appropriation of Shōtoku worship in his Buddhism within the fabric of the *honji suijaku* society. How and why did Shinran emphasize Shōtoku worship in his writings? How did Shinran successfully promote his innovative teaching by using Shōtoku? Like most people in medieval Japan, Shinran revered Shōtoku Taishi as a cultural and religious icon, but as a result of his conversion experience at Rokkakudō, his worship of Shōtoku went beyond the religious and political role of Shōtoku. Shinran worshiped Shōtoku as his personal savior, as evidenced by his devotional hymns in praise of Shōtoku following his Rokkakudō experience. After twenty years of religious training at Mount Hiei, Shinran left the establishment and shortly met his master Hōnen, who took him as his apprentice to learn the *senju nenbutsu* teaching. When both Hōnen and Shinran were exiled after the execution of two nenbutsu proponents, Gyōku and Junsai,²⁰ Shinran became “neither monk nor layman” (*sō ni arazu zoku ni arazu*) and took on a wife, Eshinni, who was a daughter of the provincial governor in Echigo. Although the practice of a monk living with a woman was not new, Shinran was the first Buddhist monk who openly married and had children. On the surface, it may seem as though Shinran apostasized when he rejected his clerical vows of celibacy, but closer examination of Eshinni's account of Shinran's dream reveals his rationale for marrying Eshinni and his profound worship for Shōtoku. In his dream, Shōtoku, who appeared to Shinran as a manifestation of Kannon, assured Shinran that “she” would incarnate herself as Eshinni, thereby permitting Shinran to marry Eshinni with the implication that he would actually be marrying Kannon.

In conclusion, Shinran's Buddhism may be understood as one of the many expressions of Buddhist practice that incorporated and participated in the rich *honji suijaku* culture, and not as the single path advocated by the Shin school. Thus, instead of ignoring the aspect of Shōtoku worship in Shinran's Buddhism, Shin scholars should take a closer look at Shinran's writings in order to better appreciate the profound nature of Shinran's teachings within the cultural context of the medieval period. Consequently, by showing an openness toward a fuller understanding of Shinran's teachings in this way, Shin proponents do not necessarily have to commit a total surrender of their strong, exclusive, and conservative doctrinal position. Rather, traditional Shin scholars may come to better appreciate other expressions of Buddhist practice that emerged during the same period within the same *honji suijaku* cultural context, particularly those expressions found in Zen and Nichiren Buddhism, by incorporating a sophisticated understanding based on the acknowledgment of the importance of Shōtoku worship in their master's writings. Consequently, I hope that this study will encourage further "digging," as my own work relies and builds on the works of nonsectarian scholars such as Kuroda Toshio and Satō Hiroo, to provide a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the unique and rich historical context of the medieval period in Japan.

Chapter 1

Shinran and Shōtoku

Revered as the founder of *Jōdo Shinshū* Buddhism, Shinran is one of the most interesting and controversial figures in medieval Japan because his version of Buddhism appears to represent a qualitative departure from the traditional teachings of Buddhism. Buddhist teaching in general does not aspire to a belief in a deity or worship of a god, but Shinran's Buddhism is clearly marked by the veneration of Amida Buddha. When Buddhism entered Japan via Korea in the sixth century, about 1,000 years after its inception in India, the Japanese people inherited a developed form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which included the worship of the Buddha in various forms. In particular, the Mahāyāna Buddhist interpretation of the 'three bodies of the Buddha' (Sk. *trikāya*; Jpn. *sanshin*) included the practice of chanting the name of Amida Buddha—viewed as one of the “bodies of bliss” (Sk. *sambhōgākāya*) of the Buddha—in Pure Land Buddhism. Because the Amida Buddha and other Buddhist deities, such as the bodhisattva Kannon, were associated with the attribute of compassion and played a salvific role in assisting practitioners toward enlightenment, these Buddhist figures naturally became objects of veneration over time. Moreover, in Pure Land Buddhism, the salvific role of Amida Buddha and the bodhisattva Kannon was further strengthened with the notion that Japan entered *mappō* (the age of degenerating dharma). I focus on Shinran because his brand of Buddhism contains a worship element that seems to contradict the traditional Buddhist teaching, yet is regarded as an orthodox branch of Buddhism. Previous patriarchs, including Shinran's master, Hōnen, did not emphasize a worship component in their practice. Even among Indian and Chinese masters of

the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, Pure Land Buddhist practice focused on techniques, such as visualizations and chanting nembutsu, rather than a worship of a Buddhist figure, whether Amida Buddha or Prince Shōtoku as a manifestation of Kannon. In this chapter, I examine how and why Shōtoku come to be an important figure for Shinran through a closer examination of Shinran's liturgical text, his dream of Shōtoku's manifestation as the bodhisattava Kannon, and other relevant events surrounding his life.

SHINRAN'S LIFE

Born in 1173, Shinran (1173–1263)¹ was the son of Hino Arinori, a middle-rank nobleman.² According to tradition, in 1182, at the age of nine, Shinran was taken by his foster father Hino Noritsuna to Shōren'in, a branch temple of Enryakuji, where he was initiated into the monkhood by Jien.³ After he had diligently studied the major Buddhist sutras and practiced the traditional forms of nembutsu for twenty years, Shinran voluntarily left Mount Hiei because he was dissatisfied with the growing corruption of the *sangha* due to the promotion of state Buddhism. He left in search of an alternative way toward enlightenment.

Upon leaving Mount Hiei, Shinran undertook a one-hundred-day seclusion at Rokkakudō, a hexagonal temple in Kyoto containing an image of Kannon and supposedly founded by Shōtoku Taishi. During his seclusion, he prayed for divine inspiration and guidance. After ninety-five days, Shinran had a vision of Prince Shōtoku, who appeared to him in a dream as a manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon and told him that he would meet a great person. Soon after, Shinran met his master, Hōnen, and became his disciple.⁴ From 1201 to 1207, Shinran studied under Hōnen. The fact that, in 1205, he was allowed to copy Hōnen's *Senjakushū* (Collection of Passages Concerning the Nembutsu of the Selected Original Vow, 1198) along with a portrait of the master indicates Hōnen's recognition and approval of Shinran's grasp of the *senju nenbutsu* teaching that was based on simply invoking the name of Amida for individual salvation.⁵ Together, Hōnen and Shinran actively and successfully spread the *senju nenbutsu* teaching to people in the countryside, especially to poor farmers in nearby villages.

When news of the popularity of *senju nenbutsu* teaching reached the mainstream Buddhist leaders at Mount Hiei, Jōkei drafted a petition, the *Kōfukuji sōjō*, to ban its teaching on the grounds of heresy and its threat to the status quo of the nation. Leaders of mainstream Buddhism appealed to the retired emperor, who was regarded as the official representative of the sangha, and the imperial and political authorities subsequently approved the petition to ban *senju nenbutsu* teaching and exiled Hōnen, Shinran, and some of their active

disciples. In 1207, Shinran was sent to Echigo, a distant province near the sea, where he quietly spent the next seven years practicing Buddhism and reaching out to the peasants there.⁶

After the exile was lifted in 1214, instead of returning to the aristocratic lifestyle of the Kyoto capital and reuniting with his master Hōnen, Shinran moved to another rural region, the Kanto area in the Hitachi province, and continued to teach among the simple folk of Japan. Shinran had a genuine desire to meet the needs of the poor farmers. Hirota remarks that the common people of Japan were one of the strongest inspirations in Shinran's life, and he sought "to deepen his own self-awareness and his insight into the dharma by sharing it with the people of the countryside."⁷ In Kanto, Shinran established *dōjōs*, places where all people could gather to hear him preach the dharma. These were different from the traditional temples' *dōjōs*, which were intended primarily for use by monks. As a well-educated monk who was fluent in classical Chinese, Shinran wrote and translated many works on Buddhism into simple Japanese for the benefit of the commoners, who were mostly illiterate. In these ways, Shinran tried to bring the message of Buddhism to those who had been traditionally shut out.

The message of Buddhism that Shinran taught was radically different from the traditional one in that he preached the possibility of Buddhahood for all believers. Shinran taught that the key to enlightenment was *shinjin*.⁸ He preached that one did not need to become a monk, build grandly ornamental stupas (shrines housing Buddha's relics), or say the nembutsu one thousand times to attain salvation. Shinran explained that when Amida Buddha took his Eighteenth Vow,⁹ he promised access to the Pure Land to all sentient beings who placed their faith in him. Since money and education were not necessary for Buddhahood, "people of the countryside, who did not know the meanings of characters and who were painfully and hopelessly ignorant . . . easily grasped the essential meaning."¹⁰

For the next seventeen years, Shinran devoted much of his time to completing the *Kyōgyōshinshō* and other writings, including various hymns (*wasan*) and personal letters. He continued to teach among the villagers and steadily gained followers in the Kanto area. Then, in 1231, with the imminent threat of persecution due to the issue of another official decree to ban *senju nembutsu* teaching in the countryside, Shinran returned to Kyoto. There he lived the rest of his life, writing a series of *wasan* and apologetic letters while being cared for by his youngest daughter, Kakushinni.¹¹ He died in 1263 at the age of ninety.

SHINRAN'S DREAMS

Dreams played an important role in Shinran's religious development. However, due to the subjective nature of dream accounts, most traditional *Jōdo Shinshū*

scholarship from both English and Japanese writers tends to overlook the significant part that dreams had in Shinran's life and religious development, particularly after his one hundred days of seclusion at Rokkakudō. These dream accounts may have been ignored because of the mistrust of sectarian theorists who use mythical anomalies to establish Shinran as the charismatic founder of the *Jōdo Shinshū* Buddhism. Although sources may not draw attention from skeptical scholars, they may help us to understand certain meaningful motifs that seem to emerge from Shinran's teachings and writings. After examining Shinran's life path before as well as after the time of his one-hundred-day seclusion at Rokkakudō, I conclude that there is no doubt that Shinran experienced a paradigm shift, a "conversion experience," that played a meaningful role in shaping Shinran's Buddhism.

For the twenty years prior to the time of his retreat at Rokkakudō, a temple dedicated to the bodhisattva Kannon in Kyoto city, Shinran was engaged in *dōsō*¹² practice at Mount Hiei and consequently reached some degree of spiritual attainment. However, he did not undergo the climax of his profound awakening of faith.¹³ Moreover, the development of Pure Land thought in Shinran teaching focuses on the important notion of faith; therefore, a "conversion" to a central belief in the Pure Land path would have had to happen at some point. If Shinran were exposed to Pure Land sutras on Mount Hiei, then he would have been motivated to seek Hōnen's teaching, based on his philosophical identification with the Buddhist values of Shōtoku Taishi and his interest in the Pure Land path.¹⁴ Shinran's conversion experience to the Pure Land faith must have taken place either before he met Hōnen or during his discipleship. In this context, the Rokkakudō dream assumes its importance in the course of Shinran's spiritual development.

Also, in the dream, the bodhisattva Kannon gave Shinran permission to marry Eshinni, claiming that Kannon would incarnate herself as Eshinni. Through the dream and the truth of the prophecies, according to Eshinni, Shinran came to believe that Shōtoku was his personal savior. After receiving divine inspiration at Rokkakudō, Shinran soon met Hōnen by way of fate, according to the dream account, and set out on an active campaign to spread the Buddhist message of salvation in the name of the Amida Buddha among the countryside masses. Although we may not be able to ever verify the authenticity of Shinran's dream account due to its subjective nature, the fact that Shinran took a different approach toward life and Buddhism from that point on speaks for itself as evidence that the inspiration he received from the dream spurred his religious metamorphosis. For instance, with a closer examination of Shinran's dream at Rokkakudō, we gain an insight into his personal worship of Prince Shōtoku as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon. The significance of his dream was that he personally received the word from Shōtoku Taishi, whom he considered the bodhisattva Kannon. In his dream, the bod-

hisattva Kannon says, “I will adorn your life and guide you to attain birth in the Pure Land.”¹⁵ These words of reassurance became an important source of legitimization for Shinran’s innovative teaching, which emphasized Shōtoku worship. Moreover, Shinran also believed that Amida Buddha himself authorized his marriage to Eshinni and that she was an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon.

The account of Shinran’s dream at Rokkakudō is found in several places: in his *Kyōgyōshinsbō* (Teaching, Practice, Faith and Enlightenment), Eshinni’s letters, Kakunyo’s *Honganji no Shōnin Shinran denne* (Illustrated Biography of the Master Shinran of the Honganji Temple), and in the *Shinran muki* (Shinran’s Dreams).¹⁶ In his dream, Prince Shōtoku appeared before Shinran as bodhisattva Kannon and conveyed a message to him in verse form.¹⁷ Significantly, in a verse entitled *Taishi byōkutsu-ge* in his *Jōgū Taishi gyoki* (The Record Honoring the Prince of the Higher Palace),¹⁸ Shinran describes the words of Shōtoku, which appear in a slightly varied form in Shinran’s *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* (Hymns of Respect to Imperial Prince Shōtoku; see Appendix B for my translation).¹⁹

1

Give reverence to Prince Shōtoku of the country of Japan!
Out of his deep compassion,
Prince Shōtoku brought the profound Buddhist teachings to the
people
And was responsible for the spread of Buddhism in Japan.

2

After he ordered the construction of the four sub-temples of
Shitennōji,
Prince Shōtoku went into the mountainous forest
In Ōtagi (Kyoto) and made a proclamation.

3

Prince Shōtoku stated that the imperial capital
Would surely be established there sometime in the future.
To commemorate the event,
A hexagonal platform was built on that land.

4

Inside the hexagonal temple (Rokkakudō),
A three-inch-tall, Jambūnada²⁰ golden statue of the world-saving
Bodhisattva of compassion (*guze* Kannon),
Was placed there for security and protection.

5

After spending several decades in the imperial capital
Of Nanba in the Settsu province,
Prince Shōtoku moved to Tachibana,
Where he built the Hōryūji.

6

From the capital of Tachibana, Prince Shōtoku moved again to Nara,
Where he built many more temples
And continued to spread the Buddha's teaching.

7

After the reign of four emperors in Nara,
The capital was moved to Nagaoka for fifty years
And then moved again to Ōtagi.

8

During the reign of Emperor Kammu, in Enryaku 6 (787),
When the capital was being built,
The world-saving bodhisattva of compassion (*guze* Kannon),
Performed miraculous signs for people to behold.

9

The Hōryūji was constructed on the first site,
Which marked the spread of Buddhism in Japan and
Prince Shōtoku's building of many temples and pagodas in various
places.

10

In observance of Prince Shōtoku's orders,
The people, along with the imperial family and court officials,
Gave homage and paid their respects at the hexagonal temple.

The above ten hymns recount, in Shinran's own words, the place where Prince Shōtoku visited him in a dream as a manifestation of *guze* Kannon. This appearance gave him the inspiration to build many Buddhist temples as an expression of the immense gratitude for the proclamation of the Buddhist teaching in Japan. Additionally, as hymns 3–7 indicate, Shinran claims that Prince Shōtoku possessed divine powers, namely, the ability to predict the