

N. MCMULLIN

Buddhism and
the State in
Sixteenth-Century Japan



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NEIL McMULLIN

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*For Sheila, Jim, Irene,
Heather, and Neil*

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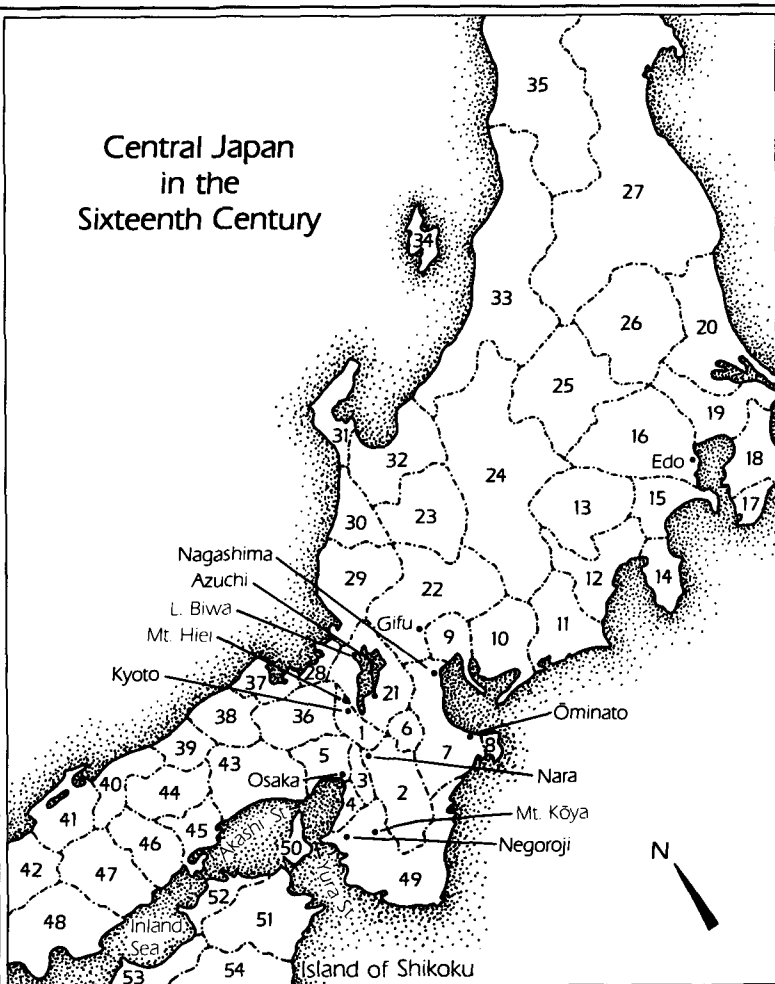
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Buddhism and
the State in
Sixteenth-Century
Japan

Central Japan in the Sixteenth Century



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INTRODUCTION

“... all who prosper are destined to fall.

The proud, like a dream on a spring evening, do not last long.
The mighty too perish in the end like dust before the wind.”

SO OPENS the famous *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike Monogatari*), quoting the words of Gautama Buddha.¹ The author of the *Heike Monogatari* used these words in reference to the fall of the mighty Taira family in the latter decades of the twelfth century. They might also be applied, however, to the fall of another ancient and powerful set of institutions in Japanese history, the Buddhist institutions, in the latter decades of the sixteenth century.

In terms of the history of Buddhism in Japan, the sixteenth century ranks in importance with the sixth and the thirteenth. In the sixth century Buddhism took root in Japan and began its long period of growth and development; in the thirteenth century great religious reformers, notably Hōnen, Shinran, Ippen, Eisai, Dōgen, and Nichiren, established new schools of Buddhism that spread among the populace and furthered the transformation of Buddhism from a religion of the cultured elite into a religion of the masses.

In the sixteenth century, the so-called Country at War (*Sengoku*) period, an extraordinary amount of change took place in all facets of Japanese society: cultural, economic, political, religious, and social. As George Elison points out, “the paramount significance of Sengoku is that it was an age of change: in all of Japanese history, it is rivaled as such only by the Bakumatsu-Meiji ‘Restoration’ period.”² Until recently very little work had been done on the history of the Sengoku period, but in the last few years several studies have given to that period the attention it demands.³ Yet a most fundamental and important set of changes that came about in the social

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revolutions of the Sengoku period has been by and large overlooked, namely, the profound changes that took place in the religious dimension of Japanese society, especially in reference to Buddhism.

In the latter decades of the sixteenth century there appeared in succession three brilliant and powerful figures who strove successfully to unify the Japanese state, which for almost a century had been fractured into scores of autonomous domains ruled by daimyo. The first of those "Three Unifiers" and the driving force behind the movement for unification was Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582).⁴ The unification movement was carried on after Nobunaga first by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) and then by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616), and it resulted in the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, which lasted until 1867.

During this time Buddhism underwent a drastic change, in that the power, wealth, and independence that the Buddhist temples had acquired since the sixth century were radically reduced. In his efforts to unify the country Oda Nobunaga implemented policies that were designed to eradicate the military power of the temples, to suppress or at least take control of their economic power, and to subject them to the authority of the central administration. By the end of the sixteenth century, the temples were weak and docile, Nobunaga having largely achieved his goal.

Oda Nobunaga was certainly not the first, nor was he the last, person in Japanese history to try to suppress the powerful Buddhist institutions. It was not, however, until the latter part of the sixteenth century that there were figures powerful enough to confront and completely eradicate the power of the temples. Although no single individual is solely responsible for eradicating that power, the one individual who was more responsible for that development than anyone else was Oda Nobunaga. The process of suppression to which the Buddhist temples were increasingly subjected from the fourteenth century on took a sharp upswing with Nobunaga and gradually

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subsided over the decades following him as the state solidified its absolute control over the Buddhist institutions.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century Buddhism underwent not just a "quantitative" change, in the drastic reduction of the temples' power, wealth, and independence, but also a "qualitative" change. As a result of policies implemented by Nobunaga and continued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, Japanese society was united and rebuilt on a new ideological foundation that replaced the older, strongly Buddhist one. Buddhism lost the privileged, center-stage position that it had occupied in Japanese society for almost a millennium and was relegated to a minor position in the wings. In other words, there came about a redefinition of the "place" of Buddhism in Japanese society, that is, of the relation between Buddhism and the state. This fundamental change must be understood in the larger context of developments in the history of Buddhism from the sixth to the seventeenth century, a context that will be discussed in chapters I, V, and VI.

The purpose of the present work is to examine, through the lens of Oda Nobunaga's policies toward the temples, the changes that took place in the power of the Buddhist institutions and the place of Buddhism in Japanese society at the end of the medieval period. It addresses issues both in Japanese institutional history and in Buddhist studies, in that the temples were powerful institutions that were (and continue to be) as much a part of the Buddhist tradition as doctrines and rituals. To separate the doctrinal and institutional dimensions of Buddhism, or to consider the former dimension to be more purely Buddhist than the latter, is to impose a false distinction on both the Buddhist and the Japanese traditions. The Buddhist tradition was never, least of all in Japan, simply a set of doctrines and religious practices. Rather, it was a complex economic, ethical, philosophical, political, and social phenomenon that wielded immense influence for over a millennium and that played a part in Japanese civilization that was, in the words of Edwin O. Reischauer, "only slightly less important than Christianity in European civilization."⁵

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The history of the Buddhist temples and the nature and scale of their political, economic, and military power in early and medieval Japan are topics that have been disregarded by most Japan scholars, both historians and Buddhist scholars. The majority of Japanese historians of the past century have focused on the study of the military (*bushi*) class and the form of central political authority (the shogunate, or *bakufu*) established by that class in the latter part of the twelfth century. Historians who deal with the seventh through the twelfth centuries have concentrated mainly on the imperial court and the noble families that composed the ruling elite in that period. Historians of both the early and the medieval periods have generally failed to take into account the power of the Buddhist temples and have all but overlooked the fact that the temples controlled a large fraction of the land, and the people who lived on that land, from the tenth through the fifteenth centuries. Moreover, with but few exceptions, Buddhist scholars have emphasized Buddhist doctrine, literature, aesthetics, and so forth, to the neglect of Buddhist institutions.

The reasons for this rather backward state of research on the power of the Buddhist temples in premodern Japan are complex and may be explained by the following factors: first, source materials on the power of the temples, especially in the Nara (710-784) and Heian (794-1185) periods, are not readily available. To date there has been a scarcity of detailed documentation on such fundamental questions as the number of personnel in the temple communities in the early and medieval periods, the size and location of the temples' landholdings, and the relations between the residents of the temples' lands and the temple officials. The problem, however, is not so much that there is a total lack of source materials on such questions but that scholars have not yet collated and studied the extant materials. Even in Japanese there are very few sophisticated studies of the history of Buddhist temples, and most of those that do exist are sectarian works on various temples and therefore largely unreliable as resource materials.

Second, the state of research on the power of the temples

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is rooted in intricate historiographical issues. Much scholarship on Japanese Buddhism appears to be founded on the premise that the temples ought not to have held the kind and degree of political, economic, and military power that they possessed for so long; there is, consequently, a tendency on the part of scholars to dismiss the political, economic, and military activities of the temple communities as evidence of their corruption, decadence, and/or "secularization." Both Japanese- and English-language works on premodern Japan tend to be critical of and pejorative toward the temples, continually noting if not emphasizing the arrogance and avarice of their clergy. It is somehow deemed fitting that the military class possessed and wielded political, economic, and military power in premodern Japan but inappropriate for the temple communities to have done so. Japanese Buddhist scholarship is still influenced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars who believed that only bushi had the right to take an active part in political affairs. Those scholars, and many of their modern successors, appear to think that religion is, or ought to be, simply and strictly a private affair but that politics is a public one; that religion has to do with some other world but that politics concerns this one; and that religion and politics, Buddhism and the state, should have been separate phenomena in premodern Japan, even though political and religious interests have intermingled from the very beginning of Japanese history.

It might also be argued that modern Western scholarship on Japanese Buddhism has been similarly influenced by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American scholarship on the relation between the Christian church and the state in medieval Europe. The state of historiographical sensibilities on the part of European and American scholars vis-à-vis the power of the temples in the early and medieval periods of Japanese history reflects this research. A number of modern scholars are revising our understanding of the power and role of the church in medieval Europe, but the necessary

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revisions are yet to be made in the case of the power and place of Buddhism in early and medieval Japan.

Third, the majority of Japanese Buddhist scholars have concentrated their research on the so-called reform schools of Buddhism (Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren, etc.) that arose in the early Kamakura period (1185-1333) and have tended to disregard the older schools (Tendai, Shingon, Hossō, etc.) as if they had been replaced by the newer ones and had all but disappeared. Many temples of the older schools, however, maintained their power through the medieval period, albeit at an increasingly reduced level. In fact, those temples continued to wield so much power from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries that several eminent modern scholars, most notably Kuroda Toshio, argue that it is a gross misinterpretation to consider the shogunate to have been the sole or supreme political authority in that period. Kuroda argues convincingly that political power at that time was shared by an informal coalition of "influential parties" (*kenmon*), that is, the military class, the major temples, and the court nobles.⁶

Finally, modern scholars have treated Buddhism and Shinto as if those traditions had been distinct, independent phenomena through the early and medieval periods. According to Okada Seishi, scholars of the Tokugawa (1600-1867) and Meiji (1867-1912) periods treated Buddhism and Shinto as strictly separate entities and thus have left us with an incorrect image of the relation between those traditions in the early and medieval periods.⁷ In fact, during those periods Buddhism and Shinto were amalgamated doctrinally (for centuries the native Japanese deities were believed to be regional manifestations of Chinese and Indian Buddhist divinities, or vice versa), ritually (from the earliest period various Buddhist divinities had a place in Shinto rituals, and Shinto sacred places and objects were celebrated in Buddhist rituals), and institutionally (most Shinto shrines were branches of larger Buddhist temples, and the members of those shrine communities formed part of the larger communities that were associated with those temples). The incorrect treatment of Buddhism and Shinto as though they

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had been distinct entities in premodern Japan is being rectified by such scholars as Okada Seishi and Kuroda Toshio, but much research on this topic remains to be done. For the purposes of the present work it is valid to deal exclusively with Buddhism because it was primarily the place of Buddhism, not Shinto, in Japanese society that was redefined in the late sixteenth century.

In this study of Oda Nobunaga's policies toward the Buddhist temples two primary source materials in particular were used. The first of these is a two-volume work by Okuno Takahiro titled *Oda Nobunaga Monjo no Kenkyū* ("Research on the Documents of Oda Nobunaga").⁸ This is a collection of approximately 1,465 documents, almost 1,000 of which were issued by Nobunaga over a thirty-two-and-one-half-year period between November or December of the year 1549 when he was fifteen years old and June of 1582 when he died at the age of forty-eight.⁹ Okuno arranged those documents in chronological order according to the date of their issuance as far as that could be determined. Most of the documents are accompanied by a short comment by Okuno on the date and occasion of their issuance, their recipients, the identities of the persons and places named in them, their meaning if it is especially unclear, and their significance. The hundreds of documents in the collection that were issued by persons other than Nobunaga are included as "supplements" (*sankō*). The supplementary documents are usually inserted in Okuno's text immediately after documents issued by Nobunaga; their content bears directly on the content of his documents, and thus they contribute to the reader's understanding of those documents. For example, some supplementary documents were issued by various vassals of Nobunaga, and they repeat or elaborate on instructions contained in the documents that were issued by him. The collection concludes with some forty-eight "appended" (*hōi*) documents that were added after Okuno finished the compilation of his work. Undoubtedly all the documents issued by Nobunaga can never be accounted for, but Okuno is confident that the vast majority of Nobunaga's ex-

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tant documents are assembled in the collection, and it is safe to assume that whatever new materials may be found will not critically alter our understanding of Nobunaga's policies toward the temples.

Among the tremendous variety of documents contained in *Oda Nobunaga Monjo no Kenkyū* are personal letters, affidavits, pledges, memos, permits, pardons, thank-you notes, notes that accompanied gifts, imperial rescripts, shogunal edicts, remonstrances, and threats. Since specification of the type of document is not especially relevant to this study, each one will be referred to simply as "document."¹⁰ Just over three hundred of the approximately 1,465 documents in the collection are addressed directly to various temples. Some four hundred others are also concerned with temples in that they contain orders and directions by Nobunaga to his vassal daimyo in their campaigns against temple armies, notices to various parties about those campaigns, reports by temples to their allies about Nobunaga's activities, instructions by Nobunaga in regard to various temples' landholdings, and so on. Thus approximately one half of the collected documents contain material related to Buddhist temples.

The second primary source material that has been used is the *Shinchō-kō Ki* ("Chronicle of Lord Nobunaga"), a biography of Nobunaga that was written at the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century, some twenty-eight years after Nobunaga's death, by Ōta Gyūichi.¹¹ In writing the *Shinchō-kō Ki* (also known as the *Nobunaga-kō Ki* and the *Azuchi Ki*¹²), Gyūichi relied on a series of notes that he had compiled during his years of service under Nobunaga.¹³ There are some doubts about the reliability of the *Shinchō-kō Ki* because Gyūichi recalled Nobunaga as a great master and a heroic bushi, and thus the biography tends to idealize its subject and paint him larger than life. Still, Gyūichi was not unwilling to include in his work some of the less flattering events in Nobunaga's life, and therefore he provides us with a friendly but accurate picture of Nobunaga. Endō Motoo and Shimomura Fujio caution us not to give credence to every detail in the

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Shinchō-kō Ki because it contains a number of factual errors; and yet, as they point out, as a political history of the Sengoku period it is of great value.¹⁴

These primary source materials have been supplemented with many modern works on Nobunaga that are noted in the Bibliography. For material on the history of Buddhism in the early and medieval periods the masterly works by such scholars as Hioki Shōichi, Hirata Toshiharu, Ienaga Saburō, Ishida Ichirō, Kasahara Kazuo, Kuroda Toshio, Tamamuro Taijō, Toyoda Takeshi, Tsuji Zennosuke, and others whose works are noted in the Bibliography were used. Several sixteenth-century materials, notably the *Tamon'in Nikki*, *Tokitsugu-kyō Ki*, and *Tokitsune-kyō Ki*¹⁵ were used indirectly, and in reference to Nobunaga's relations with temples of the Honganji branch of the True Pure Land school of Buddhism, the *Ishiyama Honganji Nikki* was also used.¹⁶

There is considerable inconsistency in the terminology used in English-language works on Japanese Buddhism, that is, what terms to use for the major branches of Buddhism (schools or sects), the Buddhist building complexes (temples or monasteries), and the Buddhist clergy (priests or monks). In this work the various branches of the Buddhist tradition, the entities referred to by the Japanese word *shū*, will be called schools. The eminent Buddhist scholar Leon Hurvitz warns us that the word sect is a mistranslation of *shū*: "The only English word that will do it [*shū*] justice—and rough justice at that—is 'school.'"¹⁷ There are many terms in Japanese—*jil'tera*, *in*, *jiin*, *garan*, and so on—for those Buddhist building complexes that are referred to in English as temples or monasteries. Some of those complexes, especially ones in the earlier periods of Japanese history, are best called monasteries because they housed celibate clerics who lived a communal life. It would be very misleading, however, to use the word monastery to refer to those buildings, especially those of the True Pure Land school, in the late medieval period because they housed no communities of clerics and many of them were very small structures; sometimes they were simple, one-room structures attached to

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the houses of the leading members of the school in the villages scattered throughout the provinces of central Japan. In order to avoid unnecessary distinctions the *jiltera*, *in*, *jiin*, *garan*, and so on will be called temples even though, as Leon Hurvitz points out, this is a rather poor translation.¹⁸ There are also many terms in Japanese for the Buddhist clergy—*sō*, *sōryo*, *bō*, *bōzu*, and so on—for which there is no single adequate English translation. The clergy of some Buddhist schools, especially in the earlier periods, are best called monks. In the late medieval period, however, the period with which this work is mainly concerned, the clergy of many of the Buddhist schools, particularly of the True Pure Land school, were more like priests or ministers than monks: they were not cloistered, and they did not lead communal lives, for most of them were married and had families. Once again, therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary distinctions all Buddhist clerics will be called priests.

This work contains six chapters that are organized into three parts: Part One discusses the power of the Buddhist temples and the place of Buddhism in Japanese society from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries as well as Oda Nobunaga's rise to power in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Part Two analyzes Nobunaga's policies for the suppression and eradication of the power of the temples. Part Three examines the long-term effects of Nobunaga's policies toward the temples and concludes with a consideration of Buddhism's place in Japanese society after the sixteenth century.

PART ONE

The Protagonists

CHAPTER I

The Buddhist Temples

BEFORE proceeding to the main topics of this work, the eradication of the military power and the suppression of the economic power of the Buddhist temples and the redefinition of the relation between Buddhism and the state in sixteenth-century Japan, it is necessary to appreciate both the nature and scope of that power and the development of Buddhism-state relations since the sixth century.¹ Buddhism was officially received in Japan in the year 538, and as John W. Hall points out, its introduction immediately had profound "political as well as religious repercussions."² At first, certain powerful families, notably the Nakatomi and the Imbe who were in charge of the indigenous religious cult, looked upon Buddhism as a threat to their positions and to the political authority of the other ruling families who justified their possession of authority on the basis of the claim that they were the descendants of ancestral "deities" (*Kami*). Therefore they wanted to reject Buddhism. There were other powerful families, however, especially the Soga, who saw in Buddhism a tool that they could use to realize their ambitions to gain more power, and therefore they supported it. For several decades there was a struggle between the pro-Buddhist and anti-Buddhist factions that was settled by a military victory by the former in 587. That victory assured the official acceptance of Buddhism in Japan. Official advocacy of Buddhism is first found in the famous "Seventeen Article Constitution" (*Jūshichijō Kenpō*) that Prince Regent Shōtoku is claimed to have promulgated in the year 604, of which the first part of Article 2 reads: "Fervently revere the Three Treasures. The Three Treasures are the Bud-

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dha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. They are the ultimate refuge of all beings and the absolute norm for all countries."³

Buddhism was attractive to the Japanese ruling elite in the early seventh century because of its sophisticated teachings and magnificent rituals, but especially because of the great powers that it was believed to have, powers that could be used to protect both individuals and the state from sickness and other evils. Buddhism came to be recognized as a powerful force that could be used to "protect the country" (*gokoku*), to justify and support the authority of the ruling regime, and to bring about a degree of social unity theretofore unknown in Japan. It could reinforce political authority in a manner that was parallel to that of the native Shinto ideology but beyond the particularisms of the "families" (*uji*) that formed the basis of the older society.

From the seventh century onward the state began to take over the sponsorship of Buddhism from the families that were originally hospitable to it. By the Taika Reform (*Taika no Kaishin*), which began in 645, the influence of the Soga family was permanently eliminated, and power was concentrated more firmly in the hands of the imperial family. In order to harness Buddhism's power for the good of the new order, the state encouraged the recitation of various sutras, especially the "Sutra of Golden Light" (*Konkomyōkyō*), which promised guidance and protection to any state in which it was read. The state furthered its intimate relations with Buddhism by appointing the priests as government officials with state salaries, by decreeing that Buddhist rituals be performed at official court functions, and by contributing—together with the court nobility and the provincial gentry—laborers, lands, and materials for the building of temples. Evidence of the institutional support that Buddhism received is indicated by the fact that the number of temples multiplied dramatically from sixty-four in the 620s to 545 by the year 690.⁴

The place of Buddhism in Japanese society was defined and given official authorization by the Taihō Code (*Taihō Ritsuryō*), the corpus of penal (*ritsu*) and civil (*ryō*) laws that was

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promulgated in 701 and revised in the Yōrō Code (*Yōrō Ritsuryō*) of 718. These codes officially incorporated Buddhism into the state structure and laid down specific rules for the Buddhist community in the section titled "Rules for Priests and Nuns" (*sōniryō*).⁵

An important development in state sponsorship of Buddhism took place in the Nara period (710-784) when, in the year 737, Emperor Shōmu decreed that in each of the sixty-six provinces there was to be built a state-sponsored "provincial temple" (*kokubunji*) and a "provincial convent" (*kokubun-niji*) at which sutras would be read for the "prosperity and protection" (*chingo*) of the "state" (*kokka*). The state's utilization of Buddhism for its own ends was symbolized by the Daibutsu, a huge statue of Shōshana (Vairocana) Buddha, the supreme Buddha in Kegon Buddhism, that Shōmu commissioned to be built in 747. By that undertaking Shōmu drew a parallel between Vairocana Buddha and the emperor: just as Vairocana was the symbol and guarantor of unity and harmony in the universe, so the emperor was the symbol and guarantor of unity and harmony in the state.⁶

In the Nara period there developed an understanding of the relation between Buddhism and the state according to which those two phenomena mutually supported and reinforced each other. This idea is brought out in the following: "Emperor Shōmu in 749 declared that the laws of the Buddhas and the Imperial edicts and legislation were to be regarded as identical, so that any one guilty of infringing either would surely, irrespective of rank or station, be visited by dire calamities. We have here therefore . . . a very thorough-going amalgamation of Church and State."⁷ Buddhism and the state were wedded in such a way that acts of Buddhist piety and the proper performance of Buddhist rituals were believed to benefit the state by assuring its unity and prosperity; reciprocally, the proper running of the state and acts of service to the state were thought to bring Buddhist spiritual reward. Japanese scholars speak of this development in a variety of ways: Hirata Toshiharu speaks of the development of a "Buddhist State" or

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“Buddhocracy” (*Bukkyō kokka*) in the Nara period;⁸ Kuroda Toshio speaks of the unification of politics and religion and of the doctrinalization of state authority in Buddhist terms;⁹ and Joseph Kitagawa speaks of the “ecclesiastification” of Japanese society and culture.¹⁰ To express the Buddhism–state relation in other terms, terms that were used throughout the early and medieval periods of Japanese history, there was a relation of mutual support between the “Buddhist Law” (*buppō*) and the “Imperial Law” (*ōbō*). It is important to note that the term *buppō* in this context did not designate exclusively a Buddhist as opposed to a Shinto “Law,” for Shinto too provided justification and support for the state. Buddhism and Shinto were so intimately related from the earliest period of recorded Japanese history that the term *buppō* must be understood to have designated a Buddhist-Shinto composite in which, at least on the level of articulation, Buddhist language tended to predominate. Also, the term *ōbō*, translated here as “Imperial Law,” must not be understood as “secular law” in the context of Japanese history: the *ōbō* was not secular in any modern sense of that term because it always had religious sanction, the sanction of the Shinto Kami. In the earlier centuries the relation between the *buppō* and the *ōbō* was one in which the former was subordinate to the latter: the *buppō* was used by and served the *ōbō*. Evidence for this is found in the fact that the members of the *jingikan*, the bureau of religious affairs that was established in the seventh century, had significantly lower ranks than the members of the *dajōkan*, the bureau of state affairs, even though the *jingikan* was, at least on paper, superior to the *dajōkan*.¹¹

In most respects Buddhism’s close relation with the state was very beneficial to the Buddhist community. In the second half of the seventh century over 110 temples were built with state support, and in the Nara period another 361 were built, forty-eight of which were located in the capital city,¹² and at least 25,000 people were ordained.¹³ In the Nara period Buddhist temples received both public and private patronage in return for protection and prestige, with the result that they

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came to amass great wealth, especially in the form of "temple estates" (*jiryō*). The state supported the temples by assigning them tax revenues and, together with the court nobles and the provincial gentry, by making them grants of land and sometimes servants.¹⁴ The state also assigned to the temples quotas of undeveloped lands that they were encouraged to develop and household groups of cultivators to provide labor.¹⁵

From the late Nara period onward there was a huge increase in the numbers of Buddhist clergy. Although the state attempted to control the size of the Buddhist communities by means of a quota system that limited the number of ordinations, many people, especially in the lower class, began to take Buddhist orders privately in defiance of the law. In order to flee the oppressive taxes and levies imposed by the provincial landowners, many people abandoned their lands and went to reside in temples or on lands owned by them. The temples were especially attractive to people of low status because they afforded the only avenue of promotion to positions of high rank and prestige that was open to them.¹⁶ By the end of the Nara period Buddhism was so well established that the high-ranked Buddhist clerics, together with the hereditary nobility, formed the ruling class, and the temples had become a powerful force in the Japanese political world.

The defect of Buddhism's intimate relation with the state was that the Buddhist community had, as Joseph Kitagawa explains, "no opportunity to develop its own integrity and coherence, because from the time of Prince Shōtoku onward 'the state functioned not as a patron (*Schutz-patronat*) but as the religious police (*Religions-polizei*) of Buddhism.'" ¹⁷ In both China and Japan, unlike in India, there was no room in society for a group, religious or otherwise, that followed an "extra-ordinary" societal norm. In a word, the Buddhist clergy did not stand outside the pale of imperial authority. As John W. Hall points out, "The Buddhist priesthood did not acquire a spiritual authority, as did the papacy in Europe, which presumed to be superior to the powers of the secular ruler."¹⁸

The ideal of a mutually supportive Buddhism-state part-

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nership, with the emperor at the head of a state religion defined in Buddhist terms, was not to be realized. The Buddhist institutions that began by supporting the state became formidable counterbalances to it, and they created out of the ideal of Buddhism—state unity a de facto Buddhist institution—state tension.

In the latter half of the Nara period some efforts were made to control and limit the power of the temples, but with little success. Finally, in order to flee the power and influence of those temples, the court left Nara and, in 794, moved to the new “Capital of Peace and Tranquility” (*Heian-kyō*), the modern Kyoto. Although the court strictly forbade the Nara temples to move to Kyoto, it took steps to develop new Buddhist schools that would contribute to the well-being of the state. Early in the Heian period (794-1185), Saichō and Kūkai founded, with imperial support, two new schools of Buddhism: Tendai and Shingon. Unlike their Nara predecessors, Saichō and Kūkai built their temples somewhat away from the center of political authority: Saichō built the Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei to the northeast of Kyoto, and Kūkai built the Kongō-buji on Mt. Kōya, considerably south of the new capital. Like their Nara predecessors, both Saichō and Kūkai declared the “pacification and protection of the state” (*chingo kokka*) to be the primary duty of their schools, and thus the Buddhist Law, the *buppō*, continued to be subordinate to the Imperial Law, the *ōbō*.¹⁹ Ienaga Saburō points out, however, that the new schools of Heian Buddhism gained a degree of independence from the state: although they espoused the *chingo kokka* ideology, “psychologically” (*seishinmen ni*) they were less dependent on the state than were the Nara temples. Moreover, with the weakening of the *ritsuryō* system, the system that had been established by the Taihō and Yōrō Codes, the temples no longer received adequate stipends from the state; therefore they came to depend increasingly on private parties for support.²⁰

From the middle of the Heian period the sons of court nobles and provincial gentry began to swell the ranks of the

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clergy—largely, according to Tamamuro Taijō, because many members of the upper class had become impoverished by that time and therefore they sought wealth and power in the temples²¹—and by the late Heian period even imperial princes took Buddhist orders and became “prince-priests” (*monzeki*). As a result of this so-called “temple aristocratization” (*jiin kizokuka*), by the late Heian period all high posts in the major temples had been taken over by court nobles.²²

In the mid-Heian period some of the larger temples established “branch temples” (*matsuji*), either by building new temples in areas removed from the “main temple” (*honji* or *honzan*) or by absorbing other temples or Shinto shrines. In some cases smaller temples and shrines willingly became branches of larger temples in order to gain the protection of the larger ones against the depredations of provincial authorities and powerful landowners; in other cases powerful temples simply asserted control over smaller and weaker ones. Thus there developed the “main-branch system” (*honmatsu seido*), which continued through the medieval period and by which the major temples extended their spheres of power.²³ Some temples developed vast networks of branch temples that extended into areas far removed from the home temples. The Enryakuji, for example, was the honji of some 370 matsuji that were spread throughout a number of provinces.²⁴

A number of temples had become immensely large institutions by the late Heian period. The Enryakuji, for example, had developed into a huge complex of more than 3,800 buildings that were scattered through the valleys of Mt. Hiei over an area of about twenty square kilometers, and the Onjōji included over 2,000 buildings.²⁵ The major temples housed communities of thousands of priests: the Enryakuji, for example, had some 3,000 priests in residence by the late tenth century, and the Kōfukuji had at least that number, and possibly 4,000 priests in residence.²⁶

From the middle of the Heian period some of the major temples began to maintain large forces of what are commonly called “priest-warriors” (*sōhei*).²⁷ Most of the *sōhei* were lower

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class members of the temple communities who lived in or around the larger temples or on estates owned by them and their branches. In the period from 981 to 1549 there were, according to Tsuji Zennosuke, roughly 250 major "incidents" (*jikō*), or "actions" (*katsudō*), on the part of the *sōhei*:²⁸ within the temples the *sōhei* of one faction fought against those of other factions; *sōhei* from one temple attacked other temples; and the *sōhei* of the larger temples, numbering thousands of armed men, frequently marched on Kyoto to "forcefully petition" (*gōso*) the court or the Fujiwara "Regents" (*kanpaku*) to grant their temples' demands. In 1176, for example, some 6,000 *sōhei* from Mt. Hiei marched on Kyoto to forcefully petition the court to punish the governor of Kaga province for violating lands that belonged to one of the Enryakuji's branch temples in Echizen province.²⁹

The period from the tenth through the fourteenth centuries was the age of private "estates" (*shōen*). Under the so-called estates system (*shōensei*), as Nagahara Keiji points out, "proprietary interests in land had been vested for the most part either in important religious institutions or in nobles of extremely high rank. The right to manage the land, as well as to rule and tax the peasants who inhabited and tilled it, belonged entirely to these proprietors."³⁰ The properties that the major temples owned in the late Heian period were large and numerous. Of the 357 *shōen* in Yamato province, for example, the Kōfukuji owned 267, the Tōdaiji seventy-three, and the Tōji four. Thus ninety percent of all the estates in Yamato were owned by temples.³¹ The temples owned vast tracts of land not just in the central provinces around Kyoto but throughout the entire country. As far away as Kyūshū, for example, temples owned thirty-nine percent of the registered rice lands in the province of Bungo in the late thirteenth century and twenty-nine percent of the registered rice lands in the province of Buzen in the late twelfth century.³² Estimates of the total percentage of land that was owned by the temples in medieval Japan vary widely from twenty to sixty percent, and all estimates are rough at best. Tamamuro Taijō, for in-

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stance, says that according to the best estimates religious institutions owned or controlled somewhere in the vicinity of "several dozen percent" (*sūjū pāsento*) of all lands at the beginning of the medieval period, and Kuroda Toshio estimates that temples and shrines owned sixty percent of the productive land in the early thirteenth century.³³ It is commonly suggested that one half of the land in medieval Japan was held in the form of private estates, and one half was public land, and that the temples controlled approximately the same percentage of public land as they owned private land. Because the majority of Shinto shrines were, in fact, branches of Buddhist temples in the medieval period, it is accurate to say that roughly twenty-five percent, to use Tamamuro's rather conservative and very ambiguous estimate, of the land was owned or controlled by temples.

By the mid-Heian period the temples' *shōen* had come to possess various kinds of immunities. At first this meant freedom from entry into the *shōen* by government surveyors and tax collectors, but eventually it came to include freedom from all economic and administrative control by government officials, including even the police, who were not allowed to enter those *shōen*. The result of this development was that the *shōen* proprietors, many of which were temples, acquired complete jurisdiction over both the land and the cultivators of the land.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries there came about an important change in the definition of the relation between the Buddhist Law, the *buppō*, and the Imperial Law, the *ōbō*. In the Nara and early Heian periods, as explained above, the relation between the *buppō* and the *ōbō* was one in which the former was thought to be subordinate to the latter. As the power of the court waned in the late Heian period, and as the temples became increasingly powerful, however, the status of the *buppō* was gradually elevated, so by the twelfth century it had attained a position of equality with the *ōbō*. This new understanding of the relation between the *buppō* and the *ōbō* came to be symbolized by various images. In 1056, for example, the relation between them was likened to the relation

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between the wings of a bird, the horns of a cow, and the two wheels of a cart.³⁴ Kuroda Toshio refers to this understanding of the relation between the ōbō and the buppō as the “logic of the mutual dependence of the Imperial Law and the Buddhist Law” (*ōbō-buppō no sōi no ronri*).³⁵ According to this thesis, which, explains Kuroda, gradually became the official “orthodoxy” (*seitōsei*), the buppō and the ōbō were considered to defend each other’s rights and strengthen each other’s weak points. Kuroda points out that the buppō did not gain any official political authority by this development, but that it gained an “ideological” (*rinenteiki*) position of equality with the ōbō. The ultimate purpose of the ōbō was to guarantee the dissemination of the buppō, and the buppō, in turn, protected the ōbō.³⁶

The understanding of the way in which the buppō protected the ōbō also underwent a profound change at this time. Inoue Mitsusada says that in the earlier centuries it was believed, on the basis of the chingo kokka ideology, that the state would come to ruin were it not protected by the power of Buddhism; in the late Heian period, however, this understanding was turned inside-out, and it came to be believed that the state would come to ruin if Buddhism were not protected.³⁷ Thus Buddhism changed from that which served mainly to protect to that which was itself to be protected and defended.

By the end of the Heian period the temples had come to enjoy great power and considerable independence from state control: their high-ranked clergy were imperial princes and other nobles who had influence at the court; they collected the annual rents (*nengu*) and various taxes from shōen scattered throughout the provinces and gave little if any of their revenue to the state; and they maintained private armies of sōhei that could sally forth to influence and interfere in the running of the state. The major temples had developed what were, in effect, states within the state and were sometimes referred to, pejoratively, as “fleas on the body of a lion” (*shishi shinchū no mushi*).

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In the twelfth century powerful bushi families, especially the Taira, strove to control the temples by sending their troops to suppress the activities of the *sōhei* and by confiscating a number of *shōen* in the Kinai area that were owned by temples. In the Gempei War of 1180–1185 the Minamoto family defeated the Taira and established the Kamakura shogunate (*bakufu*), which lasted until 1333.

Even though the emperor and the court nobles, the traditional patrons of the temples, lost much of their power in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, the temples continued to thrive by finding new patrons in the *bakufu* and among the bushi.³⁸ The *bakufu* confiscated some temple estates, especially the “separated holdings” (*betsuryō*) or “scattered holdings” (*sanzairyō*), which were located in areas at some distance from the temples’ “central” or “main” holdings (*honryō*). It also established a system under which tax-free lands became a thing of the past; as Takekoshi Yosaburo notes, however, the *bakufu* did not dare to include in that system the estates belonging to temples and shrines, and it made an exception in exempting those lands from the jurisdiction of its “provincial constables” (*shugo*).³⁹ Besides, as Kuroda Toshio points out, in the Kamakura period there were vast tracts of both public and private land over which the *bakufu* exercised little or no control, and in those areas the most powerful institutions—those that imposed organization and structure on society—were the temples.⁴⁰ Even in those areas that were controlled by the *bakufu* the temples continued to own land and to possess considerable power through the medieval period.

The Kamakura *bakufu* patronized and protected many temples, and not infrequently it even reprimanded its *shugo* and “estate managers” (*jūtō*) for interfering with temple estates.⁴¹ The major temples won various guarantees, grants, privileges, and exemptions from the *bakufu*, including especially an exemption called the “right of no entry by the *shugo*” (*shugo fu’nyū-ken*). As Wakita Haruko points out, in the medieval period all proprietors—court nobles, temples, and members of the bushi class—possessed in principle the right to prevent

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intrusion of any kind into their properties and the right of adjudication.⁴² By the possession of the "no-entry right" (*fu'nyū-ken*) temples had the exclusive authority to collect the rents and taxes and to arrest criminals on their "no-entry-by-the-shugo lands" (*shugo fu'nyū-chi*), which the shugo and his agents were forbidden to enter. For example, from the beginning of the Kamakura period the Kōfukuji had police powers through all of Yamato province, and no bakufu officials were allowed to interfere with it. The Kōfukuji was, in effect, the shugo of that province. Similarly, from the early thirteenth century the Tōdaiji had police authority on its many estates and broad powers throughout the province of Bizen, and from 1255 on, the Kongōji, a Shingon temple in Kawachi province and a branch temple of the Ninnaji in Kyoto, had total jurisdiction over its lands and the shugo had no authority over it.⁴³ Wakita Osamu points out that at first the no-entry right was considered to be an exemption freely granted by the bakufu, but gradually it came to be considered a right that certain temples and shrines possessed independent of the authority of the bakufu, an inherent right of those temples and shrines.⁴⁴

As a result of the possession of the no-entry right, some of the larger temples enjoyed, in effect, a considerable degree of extraterritoriality. Over the centuries the Kongōbuji on Mt. Kōya, for example, could grant sanctuary to any and all who sought refuge there.⁴⁵ People who had committed crimes in some other part of the country would evade punishment if they could flee to the safety of the Kongōbuji into whose shōen the pursuing parties would not follow. Ordinarily it was understood that temples that enjoyed the no-entry right would arrest criminals on their lands and hand them over to the bakufu authorities, and thus it cannot be said that the temples possessed a total exemption from police authority.⁴⁶ In any case, most temples could not maintain a high degree of autonomy because they were not powerful enough to resist the interference of the shugo and jitō, and thus the no-entry lands often lost what Jeffrey Mass calls their "local self-government."⁴⁷ Some of the more powerful temples, however,

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like the Kongōbuji and the Enryakuji, were able, by virtue of their armies of sōhei, to maintain a great degree of extraterritoriality from the early Kamakura period until well into the sixteenth century.

In order to suppress the military activities of the sōhei, the bakufu issued a number of decrees that prohibited the bearing of arms by priests and all uprisings on their part, but evidently those decrees were not heeded because the major temples continued to maintain and use their sōhei.⁴⁸ Although the temples were not able to use their sōhei to put pressure on the bakufu to the degree that they did on the Heian court, they continued to use them against one another: for example, in 1242 the sōhei of one temple on Mt. Kōya, the Kongōbuji, fought with the sōhei of another temple there, the Daidenpōin;⁴⁹ and in 1214, 1264, and again in 1317 Enryakuji sōhei attacked and burned down the Onjōji.⁵⁰

In terms of the history of Buddhism in Japan, the Kamakura period is especially important because it was in the early part of that period that the great religious reformers Hōnen, Shinran, Ippen, Eisai, Dōgen, and Nichiren appeared. The development of new, independent, schools—Pure Land (*Jōdo*), True Pure Land (*Jōdo-Shin*), Ji, Zen, and Nichiren or Lotus (*Hokke*)—by those reformers was the most significant event in the history of Japanese Buddhism.⁵¹ Nara and Heian law forbade the establishment of new schools of Buddhism without the authorization of the state and the Ritsu (“Precept”) school of Buddhism in Nara. Therefore when Hōnen, the first reformer, founded his Pure Land school in disregard of this law, the state banned it; eventually, however, the ban was lifted, and the way was opened for other reform schools to be established. With the appearance of the new schools, says Anesaki Masaharu, the pomp and circumstance and, to a great extent, the ritual and mystery of the older Buddhism were passed over in favor of simple piety and spiritual exercises.⁵² Study and doctrine gave way to practice and experience, and it was discovered that faith could provide a basis for group cohesion. On the basis of this faith there developed new, independent,

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organizations that characterized Japanese Buddhism from the thirteenth century on.

Not surprisingly, the older temples, especially the Enryakuji and the Kōfukuji, opposed the development of the new schools. The Enryakuji, for example, argued for the suppression of the Pure Land school by appealing to the traditional understanding of Buddhism's role as protector of the state: it warned that the state would come to harm if the new schools were allowed to spread, because although the older form of Buddhism protected the state, the new forms did not. In Stanley Weinstein's words, Mt. Hiei "tended to regard the home provinces as its private reserve,"⁵³ and therefore it resented the spread of the new schools in that area. The temples of the older schools did not only hurl arguments against the new ones, but they also sent their sōhei to attack them. Such conflicts continued through the early part of the sixteenth century.

With the exception of the Zen school, the relation between the new schools of Buddhism and the state differed to some degree from the relation between the older ones and the state. According to Nagahara Keiji, compared with the Nara and Heian schools the new schools, particularly Shinran's True Pure Land school, developed very few relations with the political authorities.⁵⁴ The members of the True Pure Land school had no feeling of loyalty toward the center, that is, toward Kyoto and the political authorities; their loyalty was directed rather to the Buddha Amida and to the chief priests of the True Pure Land school. Some scholars go so far as to assert that with the development of the new schools, Buddhism and politics became separated. Whalen Lai, for example, says that "structurally . . . the principle of government was gradually becoming detached from the traditional ideal of buddhocracy. Buddhist sanction for governmental rule was no longer deemed necessary." Lai goes on to state that Hōnen shattered the union of religion and politics, which was espoused as the ideal condition in the Nara and Heian periods, and instigated the "sec-

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ularization of politics when he denounced this world as corrupt."⁵⁵

Still, according to Kuroda Toshio, the ideal of ōbō-buppō unity, the ōbō-buppō mutual dependence thesis, was not rejected with the passing away of the Heian aristocratic regime but continued through feudal times. Kuroda argues convincingly that in terms of the relation between Buddhism and the state there was no radical new view in the Kamakura period.⁵⁶ The reformers did not develop a thesis according to which loyalty to the emperor and to the state was separated from loyalty to the Buddha, and, in fact, they took pains to show that their teachings would benefit the state. Kuroda notes, for example, that Eisai, the founder of the Rinzai branch of the Zen school, described the ōbō as the lord of the buppō, and the buppō as the jewel of the ōbō,⁵⁷ and Peter Pardue says that Eisai "felt obliged to justify Zen as conducive to the national welfare," to which end he wrote his "Thesis on the Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the Country" (*Kōzen Gokoku Ron*).⁵⁸ To Shinran, there was no doubt that the authority of the buppō transcended that of the ōbō, but, as Kasahara Kazuo and Inoue Toshio point out, Shinran never proposed that his followers oppose the political authorities.⁵⁹ Nichiren was truly radical in that he considered "everything, even the emperor, as subordinate to the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra,"⁶⁰ and yet time and again Nichiren reaffirmed the unity of the ōbō and the buppō, and he looked forward to the time when the ōbō and the buppō would fuse and thereby introduce a golden age. According to Kuroda, Nichiren had as his premise in writing his "Thesis on the Establishment of Righteousness and the Security of the Country" (*Rishō Ankoku Ron*) the indivisibility of the buppō and the ōbō.⁶¹ Therefore, even in the new schools of the Kamakura period Buddhism was not dissociated from politics. Indeed, as Kuroda points out, in the Kamakura period central political authority was shared among and exercised by the court nobles, the religious institutions, and the bushi.⁶²

In general, the temples prospered in the Kamakura period.

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The temples of the new schools—like their Nara and Heian predecessors, which continued to receive material rewards for Buddhist rituals and whose condition continued relatively unchanged into the fifteenth century—also came to own numerous estates and to wield considerable power independent of bakufu authority. In the early Kamakura period there was a temple-building boom in the hills to the north and east of Kyoto. A number of temples of the new schools were built on the outskirts of the capital, and some were even built in the capital in disregard of the Heian prohibition against the establishment of temples in Kyoto.⁶³ Many of those temples were hardly distinguishable from fortresses because they were surrounded by earthen or stone ramparts and sometimes by moats, and they often had guardtowers. By the middle of the thirteenth century, however, as Nagahara Keiji points out, it was becoming increasingly difficult for shōen proprietors to collect the rents and taxes traditionally paid by the peasantry to absentee owners; and by the late Kamakura period “it was quite possible for a significant proportion of the land within any given shōen to be under the de facto proprietary control of local warriors.”⁶⁴

In the Genkō Revolt (*Genkō no Ran*) of 1331 Emperor Go-Daigo, with the assistance of a number of Buddhist temples, attacked the Kamakura bakufu in an effort to restore imperial power; the Ashikaga family put down the revolt, however, and, in 1333, established the Muromachi bakufu, which lasted until 1573. In the Muromachi period, according to Wakita Osamu, the bushi were at the apex of a political power structure that embraced the temples and shrines.⁶⁵ Still, the Muromachi bakufu did not wield absolute political power because that power continued to be shared by religious institutions and court nobles.⁶⁶

From the Nara through the Kamakura periods agriculture was the main source of wealth: temples that owned large tracts of land were wealthy, that wealth brought power, and power was the necessary ingredient for the maintenance of autonomy and independence. In the Muromachi period fresh sources of

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wealth based on a newly developing commercial economy became available to the temples. By the fourteenth century there had appeared in the cities of central Japan groups of merchants, artisans, and professional entertainers that congregated to form "urban communities" (*machishū*). In these communities there developed trade and craft "guilds" (*za*)—that is, exclusive groups of merchants and artisans that held monopolies on the production and sale of various goods—that carried out their business under the patronage and protection of the old shōen-owning class, that is, the court nobles and the temples of the Nara and Heian schools. As Kawai Masaharu points out, the merchants had especially close relations with the court and the larger temples "for whom they performed a number of services including the collection and delivery of taxes and the sale of goods derived from distant estates."⁶⁷ It was not just the temples of the older Nara and Heian schools that benefited from the growth of a commercial economy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By taking advantage of the new sources of wealth the temples of the newer schools of the Kamakura period as well were able to develop a degree of power that rivaled, and soon surpassed, that of the older schools. Indeed, as Hayashiya Tatsusaburō explains, "The growth of commerce and the rise of the new religions were not discrete phenomena. Commerce spread along routes frequented by adherents of the new faiths; religion was transmitted along routes which merchants had pioneered."⁶⁸

In the Muromachi period many temples were deeply involved in commercial enterprises: in the 1330s, for example, the Enryakuji controlled eighty percent of the sake brewers and moneylenders in Kyoto, and it virtually dominated commerce in the capital area.⁶⁹ By lending out money that it acquired from its shōen and from the guilds that were under its protection, the Enryakuji became one of the major moneylenders in the country. The Tenryūji and the Daitokuji, temples of the Rinzai branch of the Zen school in Kyoto, were also major moneylenders, and many temples developed and controlled guilds: for example, the Gion shrine, which was under

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the control of the Enryakuji, owned a large cotton guild (*wataza*) and the Kōfukuji a prosperous salt guild (*shioza*). Rather than attempt to suppress or eliminate the power of the Enryakuji and other temples in the commercial sector, the Muromachi bakufu imposed a set of taxes and levies on the temples' commercial enterprises, especially the moneylenders and sake merchants, in order to share in the wealth they produced.⁷⁰

In the Muromachi period several other factors contributed to the wealth of the temples. One of these was the development of towns called "towns before the gates" (*monzenmachi*), which began to appear in the provinces in the late Kamakura and early Muromachi periods. The *monzenmachi* developed from communities of lay members of the larger temples who lived "before the gates" (*monzen*) of their temples. In those towns there developed markets—which, by that time, had come to be held once a week or even more frequently at major transportation points and in the *monzenmachi*—and various commercial enterprises. The temple around which a *monzenmachi* developed held proprietary rights over that town, and the merchants who conducted business in the *monzenmachi* paid a fee to the temple for permission to sell their goods there. The temple, in turn, arbitrated and settled disputes among the merchants.⁷¹ Approximately one third of all the towns that developed in the provinces during the Muromachi period started as *monzenmachi*.⁷² Another source of revenue for the temples was the so-called "toll barriers" (*sekisho*). Some temples erected toll barriers on roads that crossed their lands and levied a "barrier fee" (*sekisen* or *kansen*) on all passengers and goods that traveled those roads. The Ashikaga shogunate usually forbade the erection of toll barriers by private parties, but many of the larger temples disregarded the shogunal prohibition and continued to set up and operate them.

In the Muromachi period the traditional *shōen* owners continued to be major landowners. Wealthier even than they, however, were some of the temples of the new schools of Buddhism, particularly the temples of the Gozan branch of

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the Rinzai Zen school, which, thanks to the strong patronage of the Ashikaga bakufu, became the principal landholders in the Muromachi period.⁷³ Although he acknowledges that it is extremely difficult to find specific figures as to the number of shōen that the Gozan temples owned, Imatani Akira estimates that the holdings of all the Gozan temples and their branches taken together would have totaled “several thousand” (*sūsen*) shōen. The Tenryūji, for example, owned thirty-one shōen that were scattered throughout eight provinces, and from those shōen it received 2,402 *koku* of rice, the equivalent of 5,721 *kan* of cash. The imperial family, by contrast, received revenues from its shōen for a total of approximately 4,000 *kan*, and thus just one of the major Gozan temples received over forty percent more income than the imperial family.⁷⁴

The mid-to-late Muromachi period was characterized by increasing difficulties for most temples as the bakufu came to possess what Wakita Osamu calls “power analogous to the power of the state”⁷⁵ and increasingly imposed its authority on the temples. As Suzanne Gay points out, whereas the judicial authority of the Kamakura shogunate was limited to cases involving bushi, the Muromachi shogunate frequently delivered decisions in cases in which no bushi were involved, such as land disputes between temples and court nobles.⁷⁶ The bakufu took a number of steps, including a prohibition against the bearing of arms by Zen priests, to suppress the military power of the temples.⁷⁷ It strove to keep the temples of the Nara and Heian schools under control by appointing a group of officials called “temple magistrates” (*tera bugyō*) who were charged with the supervision of temple affairs, and it also appointed a special group of officials to supervise the Zen temples, especially the powerful Gozan temples.⁷⁸ In addition, the temples began to lose their advantages in the world of commerce: the moneylenders freed themselves from the temples’ control;⁷⁹ new guilds that were independent of the temples gradually appeared;⁸⁰ the markets that had grown up in the monzenmachi got free of temple proprietary control; and the temples even began to lose control of the monzenmachi them-

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selves as groups of elders in those towns gradually took over adjudicative authority from the temples.⁸¹ Thus some of the main sources of the temples' wealth and power began to slip from their hands.

Furthermore, from the fifteenth century on the monopoly over land that had been held by the court nobles and the temples was reduced significantly, and by the late fifteenth century the *shōen* system of land tenure was in ruins. Miyagawa Mitsuru points out that the bakufu took over the right to confirm the temples' ownership of their estates, a right traditionally held by the court, and this put the temples' lands more firmly under bakufu control.⁸² The *shugo fu'nyū-ken*, the right of no entry by the shugo, was lost by all but the most powerful temples, which by virtue of their military might were able to preserve their independence. Moreover, the temples were having increasing difficulties in collecting rents and taxes from their estates: in some cases temples lost control of and access to their estates in areas that had been brought under the control of powerful provincial lords, the *shugo dai-myō*;⁸³ in other cases estate administrators, local bushi, or provincial gentry simply confiscated estates and no longer forwarded the rents and taxes to those estates' absentee temple proprietors; and, with increasing frequency, the temples were having difficulties with the peasant inhabitants of the villages on the lands that they owned, especially the lands in the more prosperous Kinai area. From the fifteenth century the peasants began to organize themselves into "confederations" (*ikki*) in order to pool their strength with the intention of gaining freedom from the proprietors of the lands on which they lived and from the control of the bushi. According to Nagahara Keiji, "by the late medieval period peasant struggles against proprietary authority had developed into open conflict over such issues as the reduction of taxes and corvée or the dismissal of *shōen* administrators who had exceeded their authority. The form of these protests varied, sometimes including litigation, petition under threat of violence (*gōso*), absconding, and revolt."⁸⁴ Some villagers went so far as to

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build moats and earthen embankments around their villages and to acquire arms to defend the villages against all intruders, including agents of the shōen owners. The expanded power of the peasants that was manifested in the confederations and their uprisings shook the very foundations of feudal authority in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁸⁵

Although the major landowning temples of the Nara and Heian schools suffered as a result of the weakening of the shōen system and the rise of autonomous villages in the late Muromachi period, some of the Kamakura schools of Buddhism, particularly Shinran's True Pure Land school, prospered in the village communities and developed widespread bases of power in the provinces, especially in the economically more advanced areas of central Honshū.

Beginning in the thirteenth century the teachings of Shinran "sunk into Japanese society like rainwater on parched earth"⁸⁶ as they spread throughout the populace. By the fifteenth century Shinshū was firmly implanted among the farmers, the local bushi, and the villagers in the central provinces where many of the people had become Shinshū "adherents," or "followers" (*monto*). Large Shinshū temples were built in a number of provinces, and smaller ones were built in many villages; the inhabitants of the villages became members of Shinshū "parishes" (*kyōdan*) that were centered around the village temples. The village *kyōdan* were not simply isolated units but were united with one another to form "monto confederations" (*monto ikki*), which Nagahara Keiji describes as farmer - local warrior alliances mediated by religion.⁸⁷ By the late fifteenth century some of the major Shinshū temples in the area along the Japan Sea coast in central Honshū and in a number of provinces in the Kantō area had managed to bring large numbers of monto into their folds by building branch temples in different provinces and by absorbing many of the smaller temples and making them branch temples.

The moving power behind the transformation of the simple faith preached by Shinran into a powerful, united religious organization was Rennyo Kenju (1415-1499), the "chief priest"