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Reconfiguring Ritual Authenticity The Ordination Traditions of Aristocratic Women in Premodern Japan

It has often been assumed that, following their ninth-century exclusion from state-sponsored monastic ordination platforms, Japanese women had little access to tonsure ceremonies that their contemporaries would have recognized as authentic. This study questions that received narrative by examining the elaborate and formalized Buddhist ordination traditions of elite Heian- and Kamakura-period women. The ceremonies cultivated and maintained by these women were based not on the *vinaya* orthodoxy of the *sangha* but rather on the *nyūdō*, or lay novice, ordination procedures popular at court. Although *nyūdō* ordinations did not render ordinands full-fledged members of the monastic community and, as such, were not deemed “official” by Buddhist institutions, historical records suggest that Heian- and Kamakura-period courtiers preferred the *nyūdō* mode of renunciation to orthodox *vinaya* modes. Placed within the greater context of court culture, then, the tonsure ceremonies of elite women gain a sense of “official-ness” and authenticity not recognized in studies focused on *vinaya* orthodoxy.

KEYWORDS: Women’s ordination – *nyōin* – *nyōbō* – Genshin – Shōshi – Senshi – Ryōnin – Daoshi – *shukke* – *nyūdō* – *jukai* – *shōmyō*

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ACCORDING TO *Eiga monogatari*, members of the Heian court convened for a grand event on the nineteenth day of the first month of Manju 3 (1026). As was the case with all highly anticipated occasions at court, the ladies-in-waiting dressed in stunning attire, and the courtiers and their attendants prepared the venue with great care. They arranged beautifully designed folding screens, laid out gold lacquer cabinets and other precious items, and set up fine seats and blinds. As the time of the ceremony grew near, there was a flurry of activity. People rushed to finish last-minute preparations, while various guests, including messengers bearing gifts of silk and precious garments, began to arrive (EM 27.29–32, vol. 33, 57–63; McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, 712–15).

The event on this day was the tonsure ceremony of Empress Shōshi (Fujiwara no Shōshi 藤原彰子 (988–1074), Michinaga's eldest daughter), who, following her ordination at the age of thirty-nine, received the title Jōtōmon-in 上東門院. Minamoto Tsuneyori's diary *Sakeiki* 左經記 reports that five priests were invited to participate in Empress Shōshi's ordination ceremony. The actual cutting of the hair was performed by Shōshi's cousin, the Senior Priest General Eien 權大僧都永円, who acted as the tonsure priest, or *teishu* 剃手. The other priests who participated in her ordination were of equally high rank: Ingen 院源 (954–1028), Tendai priest and abbot (*zasu* 座主) of Enryakuji, acted as the precepts priest or *kaishi* 戒師, and the remaining three priests all carried Sōgō titles, including Supreme Priest (*sōjō* 僧正), Senior Priest General (*daisōzu* 大僧都), and Junior Priest General (*shōsōzu* 少僧都) (*Sakeiki*, Manju 3 [1026].1.19).¹ On this important day Empress Shōshi had on hand the most eminent representatives of the male monastic community.

Empress Shōshi's ordination ceremony is significant because it points to the fanfare with which many aristocratic women were able to take Buddhist vows. Past research on women's ordinations has focused on the question of whether or not women had access to the handful of *vinaya*-style monastic ordination

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1. Eien's title suggests that he enjoyed considerably high rank in the Buddhist world. As Ryūichi Abé explains, the highest four ranks within the Sōgō, or "Office of Priestly Affairs," to use his translation, included the Supreme Priest, the Senior Priest General, the Junior Priest General, and the *vinaya* Master. See ABÉ 1999, 30.

platforms recognized as official by the state (most notably Tōdaiji in Nara and Enryakuji atop Mt. Hiei). Up until the end of the eighth century, women did have access to certain state-sponsored monastic ordination platforms, but by the ninth century, women were no longer receiving *vinaya*-style ordinations on state platforms (USHIYAMA 1990, 54). Nuns ordained as full monastics according to the rules of the *vinaya* disappeared. As Ushiyama and others have pointed out, the last record of fully ordained nuns serving the state in an official capacity can be found in a *Shoku Nihongi* entry dating to the year 773 (Hōki 4.7 [774–775]; USHIYAMA 1990, 54). Scholars have constructed a number of theories to explain this shift, but with almost no documentary evidence available to clarify the circumstances leading up to the termination of official nuns' ordinations, our understanding of this history has yet to transcend the speculative.²

Unfortunately, emphasis on what women were suddenly unable to do has, for many scholars, overshadowed what they were in fact able to do. That is, commentators addressing women's lost access to state-recognized precepts platforms have tended to interpret this exclusion as evidence that Heian- (794–1186) and Kamakura- (1186–1336) period women were shut out from precisely those Buddhist practices that were deemed most authentic by their society—a narrative of women's loss and estrangement. But the scholarly preoccupation with questions of how and why women came to be denied access to official monastic ordinations has had the regrettable effect of diverting attention away from the many other means by which privileged women continued, throughout the pre-modern era, to partake of Buddhist ordination rituals.³

This study argues that, despite being excluded from official monastic ordination platforms, women actively cultivated alternative, court-centered forms of Buddhist ordination. For aristocratic women of the Heian and Kamakura periods, the ideals of ordination were determined less by the monastic community than by court precedent and by the religious, cultural, and aesthetic trends popular among fellow courtiers. A high-ranking court lady who decided to take Buddhist vows thus modeled her own ordination ceremony not on those of Buddhist priests, but rather on those of the aristocratic laity. Elite women used their wealth and status to commission and maintain their own complex ordination traditions that allowed them to take the vows of lay, bodhisattva, or even novice ordinations in the comfort of their own quarters. The result was a kind of hybrid ordination that captured the dignity of an authentic temple ritual but that was generally not recognized by the monastic order as marking an official entrance into the *sangha*. As a result, such ordinations did not require one to take up life in a monastic institution; from the view of the monastic order, these ceremonies were essentially upscale lay ordinations. As such, they did not

2. For related discussions, see KATSUURA 1988–1990, TAIRA 1990, and USHIYAMA 1990.

3. For examples of studies that overlook such ordinations, see MATSUO 1987, 1995, and 2001; HOSOKAWA 1987 and 1999; and USHIYAMA 1987 and 1990.

render ordinands certified religious employees of the state. Unlike those who took *vinaya* nuns' ordinations in the Nara period, then, elite women who took the tonsure in Heian and Kamakura Japan were not called upon to perform official rituals on behalf of the state and did not receive annual stipends. But by the Heian and Kamakura periods, most aristocrats would have considered such work to be beneath them, anyway. That is, it is doubtful that highly elite aristocratic women would have aspired to become nun-officials of the state. After all, Buddhist ceremonies were the work not of high-level aristocrats, but of the priests who served them.

While contemporary scholarly understandings of ordination typically rely on definitions provided in the *vinaya*'s monastic codes, Heian and Kamakura aristocrats drew upon a more fluid interpretation of the term *jukai* 受戒 (“receiving the precepts”). Among aristocrats, the meaning of this act in a given context could be tailored to the intentions of the person seeking ordination. The term was sometimes used to indicate, as one might expect, a formal entry into the religious life, but in the context of the Heian court, its meaning was often broader. For Heian courtiers, the semantic range of the term *jukai* included at least the following and some others as well: 1) formal entry into the religious life through a ceremony prescribed in the *vinayas*; 2) ordination in the alternative *nyūdō* manner developed in the court, which often did mark a significant shift in lifestyle (to be discussed below); and 3) receiving the precepts simply as a religious act to form *kechien*, or karmic bonds, during a time of illness or need. The first two usages of *jukai* represent situations in which the meaning of *jukai* overlapped with the term *shukke* 出家 (literally, “leaving home”), which was used to indicate the act of taking Buddhist vows and renouncing lay life. This picture is further complicated by the fact that one could take the precepts multiple times and in multiple contexts. For example, someone who had already renounced the world through a full, *vinaya*-style ordination as described in the first definition above might have sought additional *jukai* from various *kaishi* 戒師, or precept masters, later in life. Similarly, those who had taken a less binding form of the *jukai*, such as that described in the third definition above, might, later in life, take the *jukai* again in a way that entailed a more durable commitment to renunciate life. At the same time, those who took the precepts as outlined in the first two definitions and underwent formal ordination procedures of some kind were not necessarily committing themselves to life in a temple or monastery, even if they did go so far as to shave their heads and don clerical robes.

Empress Shōshi provides an illuminating example of the ways in which the precepts could be administered at different times for different purposes. Shōshi took the precepts on at least three separate occasions, according to *Eiga monogatari*. The first time was in the year 1008, during the difficult delivery of her son Prince Atsuhira. As Shōshi's condition grew increasingly worse, priests and *yinyang* specialists of all varieties were brought in to perform services and rituals to

ensure a safe birth. But the situation became progressively more critical, finally prompting Shōshi to take the precepts in an effort to gain the protection of the buddhas (EM 8.42, vol. 31, 402; McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH, 273).

In this case, Shōshi's *jukai*, or taking of the precepts, was understood not as a formal entry into the religious life, but merely as a ritual aimed at creating merit and securing the protection of the deities. At Empress Shōshi's second ordination, the one described at the beginning of this chapter, her extraordinarily long hair was cut in the *amasogi* 尼削ぎ style, meaning that it was cut to shoulder-length. Finally, the author suggests that Shōshi was to undergo the *jukai* yet again, during the fall of the same year in which her second *jukai* had taken place (EM 27.30–35, vol. 33, 59–62, 65; McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH, 712–16). It is important to note that the same language for taking the precepts is used in all three of these instances: the author uses the characters *ju* 受 and *kai* 戒, at some times employing the compound *jukai*, as in *jukai su* (受戒す), and at other times breaking the characters up into a more *kun* reading, as in *kai o uku* (戒を受く). The reader, then, is expected to understand the qualitative differences between these tonsure cases based not on linguistic cues but rather on contextual ones.

Contextual evidence suggests that Empress Shōshi's first ordination signified a desperate attempt to gain divine protection rather than a formal entry into the Buddhist clerical community. Her second ordination, on the other hand, appears to have represented a more deliberate life transition. But what of her third *jukai*? *Eiga monogatari* uses the same language for both ordination ceremonies, explaining neither the differences between Shōshi's second *jukai* and her third, nor the reason why the additional ceremony was necessary at all. This lack of explanation implies that contemporaneous readers would not have found Shōshi's multiple *jukai* puzzling in the least, since multiple ordination ceremonies were standard protocol. Given that Empress Shōshi's grand emergence as an Imperial Lady (*nyōin* 女院) was marked, not by a full shaving of the head, but merely by the cutting of the hair to shoulder-length, it is likely that the succeeding *jukai* represented a more complete entry into the world of renunciation, one that would have included additional precepts and/or a complete shaving of the head. Most women who became nuns during the Heian period did so in a multi-step process, first taking only novice precepts and cutting their hair to the shoulders, and often saving the final step of shaving the head for much later, commonly at the time of death (KATSUURA 1987).

Imperial Ladies and the Nyūdō Model of Renunciation

Shōshi's ordination rituals did not simply follow the tonsure models of women; rather, they were clearly based on the ordination traditions of the aristocracy as a whole. Shōshi's second ordination ceremony marked her as a *nyūdō* 入道, or a lay novice. As OKANO Kōji (1998, 81) has explained, the model of renuncia-

tion typically followed by members of the Heian aristocratic class was that of the *nyūdō*. As the title *nyūdō* suggests, those who chose this mode of ordination were able to “enter the Path [of Buddhism]” without fully severing secular ties or officially surrendering themselves to the authority of Buddhist institutions. Beginning with the case of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1027), Mitsuhashi Tadashi’s extensive study of *nyūdō* practice cites and discusses multiple examples of aristocrats, both male and female, who became *nyūdō* by shaving their heads and taking religious vows. These semi-renouncers then spent their days journeying to religious sites, writing poetry, and commissioning Buddhist rituals, all the while maintaining their financial and political sources of power (MITSUHASHI 2000, 453–76).

The model of the *nyūdō* soon became the choice mode of renunciation among Heian aristocrats. As MITSUHASHI (2000, 460–61) explains, the *nyūdō* path, which allowed one to practice Buddhism while still enjoying the main prerogatives of aristocratic life, became common not only among Retired Emperors (*in* 院) and Imperial Ladies, but also among members of the Fujiwara regent families (the Sekkan-ke), lower-level aristocrats, court servants, and even poets (like Saigyō) and members of the *bushi* (warrior) classes. There appear to have been a range of possible motivations that drove aristocrats—and those who wanted to mimic aristocrats—to the path of the *nyūdō*. Some, OKANO (1998, 81) argues, became *shukke* as a reaction to personal or political misfortune, or to mourn the death of an emperor, a master, or a family member. Others would seek ordination due to illness: if the merit of ordination did not lead to healing, it would at least prepare one for death. Still others, Okano suggests, renounced the world as a way of atoning for a misdeed. And some, he writes, decided to become *shukke* after developing religious beliefs during their time at court.

In the case of Imperial Ladies and Retired Emperors, the act of receiving tonsure and becoming a *nyūdō* seems to have bolstered, rather than diminished, one’s political power. Although the *nyōin* title did not require one to renounce the world (*shukke su*), it was common for *nyōin* to take the precepts in a formal and recognized way. Like Retired Emperors, Imperial Ladies were released from ceremonial duties related to kami worship (*saishi* 祭祀) and typically devoted themselves to Buddhist rituals instead (“*Nyōin*,” in KSD 3: 299). By taking precepts, Imperial Ladies were able to further strengthen their roles in the performance and commissioning of large-scale Buddhist rites and projects.

Eiga monogatari portrays Empress Shōshi’s ordination ceremony as a marker of personal political transformation. Becoming a *nyūdō* indicates her transition from Empress to Imperial Lady.⁴ Her ordination followed the precedent set by

4. I rely upon the translations of imperial women’s titles supplied by McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, 818–20. They translate the titles as follows: Empress (*kōgō* 皇后), Empress (*chūgū* 中宮), Grand Empress (*kōtaigō* 皇太后), Senior Grand Empress (*taikōtaigō* 太皇太后), and

her aunt, Empress Senshi (Fujiwara no Senshi; Higashi Sanjō-in, 962–1001), who also took precepts just before she received the *nyōin* title (EM vol. 33: 62, n. 6–7). The decision to have five priests perform in the ceremony was also based on the ceremony of Empress Senshi, whose employment of five priests is noted in the court diary *Shōyūki* 少右記 (EM vol. 33: 62, n. 2). Like Shōshi, Senshi was able to assemble a group of renowned priests together for her ordination ceremony: several had Sōgō titles, including Senior Priest General, Priest General, and Vinaya Priest (*Shōyūki*, *Shōryaku* 2 [991].9.16).

Empress Senshi was the first in a long line of imperial women who would eventually receive the title of Imperial Lady. According to *Eiga monogatari*, Senshi had taken Buddhist vows at a young age—she had just passed thirty—due to poor health. After become gravely ill, she announced to those around her that her dying wish was to become a nun. Although her youth gave her brothers pause, in the end they decided that they could not refuse her final aspiration and arranged for the ordination to take place. Soon after, she recovered, and the author speculates that her decision to take precepts must have been one of the primary causes of her miraculous healing (EM 1: 194–95).

Although the narrator of *Eiga monogatari* does indeed lament Senshi's decision to “become a nun” (as was the rhetorical custom of the day), she quickly counters the usual words of regret (“It was a great pity that Senshi had to become a nun when she was scarcely more than thirty”) by highlighting the advantages of Senshi's new position: “but one must point out that she received the status of a Retired Emperor, with the title Imperial Lady, and that the annual offices and ranks were undoubtedly provided for her.” What is more, individuals of “pleasing appearance” were chosen to fill the administrative ranks of her new Imperial Lady's Residence (McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, 165; EM 4.27, vol. 31, 195–96).

For Empress Senshi, then, becoming a nun entailed neither the abandonment of worldly power nor seclusion from the opposite sex. To the contrary, her post-tonsured life brought a significant advance in political rank and the opportunity to be surrounded by handsome attendants, many of whom were male. In a sense, her ordination allowed her to become politically “male”: it marked her as equal to the Retired Emperor in rank and placed her in a position of power that gave her charge over a large staff of men.⁵ The fact that *Eiga monogatari*

Imperial Lady (*nyōin* 女院). With regard to the titles *kōgō* and *chūgū*, both of which have been translated as “Empress,” McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH note that 1) emperors could, from the eleventh century, appoint two empresses, both a *kōgō* and a *chūgū*; 2) the *chūgū* appointment was typically made later than the *kōgō* appointment, thus creating a situation in which the *chūgū* was usually younger and “more influential at Court” (819).

5. Empress Senshi's new title of *nyōin* is described as comparable to that of the Retired Emperor (EM 4.27, vol. 31, 194–95). The position of *nyōin* is also described as equal to that of the Retired Emperor when Empress Shōshi receives the title thirty-five years later (EM 27.32, vol. 33, 62).

describes Senshi's new position as equal to that of the Retired Emperor is particularly striking in view of the fact that both men and women ordained as *nyūdō* followed the same ritual procedures. As Mitsuhashi has confirmed, the procedures of the *nyūdō* ordination, typically referred to as "*shukke sahō*" 出家作法, drew no distinction between the sexes (MITSUHASHI 2000, 750–75, esp. 750).

Eiga monogatari describes Shōshi's transition to Imperial Lady in terms even more superlative than those used in her aunt Senshi's case. While the narrator comments that Senshi's post-tonsured existence was indeed an "enviable" life, her comments regarding Shōshi's ordination are even more laudatory: "Shōshi's future life [that is, her post-tonsured life] thus promised to be as splendid as her present existence. Unlike Senshi, who had been prompted by illness to become a nun, she had taken the step of her own volition—an indescribably splendid decision." Now the head of a new Imperial Lady's Residence, Shōshi herself selected people to fill the official posts of this new household bureau, and the author of *Eiga monogatari* notes, "[e]ach of her appointments was splendid in its way" (McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH, 165, 715–16; EM 4.29, vol. 31, 197; EM 27.32, vol. 33, 63, EM 27.33, vol. 33, 64–65.).

As the first two imperial women to receive the title Imperial Lady, Empresses Senshi and Shōshi set certain standards that court women would emulate for centuries to come. The ordination ceremonies of these women were recorded in court diaries and other literature spread among the aristocratic classes (like *Eiga monogatari*). Later generations of court women looked to these records as they planned their own forays into the world of renunciation.

One such case is that of the Princess Reishi (内親王令子; the eighth daughter of Emperor Shirakawa). Princess Reishi modeled her own ordination in 1129 on that of Empress Shōshi, who had been ordained just over one hundred years earlier. Reishi's ordination, like Shōshi's, appears to have been a major event among courtiers, as it was recorded in no fewer than three separate courtier diaries: Fujiwara no Tametaka's *Eishōki* 永昌記, Minamoto Morotoki's *Chōshūki* 長秋記, and Fujiwara no Munetada's *Chūyūki* 中右記 (see entries for 1129.7.23–26). These records make it clear that Princess Reishi's courtiers intended to follow the 1026 ordination record of Empress Shōshi, as recounted in Minamoto Tsuneyori's diary *Sakeiki*. According to that record, Shōshi's ordination ceremony, as we saw above, had involved five priests (and Shōshi's ceremony, we recall, was in turn based on the precedent of her aunt's [Empress Senshi's] ceremony, which had also included five priests) (*Sakeiki*, Manju 3[1027].1.19). Eager to adhere to these venerable examples, those close to Princess Reishi appear to have wanted to use five priests in her ceremony as well (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 94–95).

In their debates regarding the number and types of priests required for Reishi's ordination ceremony, it is not at all clear that Reishi's counselors were concerned with following the *vinaya* to the letter. Indeed, according to the monastic codes, ten fully-ordained priests and ten fully-ordained nuns were required for

the official ordination of a woman (MATSUO 1995, 380–90); the number five, then, appears to have been a number determined by court precedent. The disagreement was resolved not through communication with monastic authorities, but through discussion at court. In the end, Princess Reishi's courtiers managed to assemble a group of four priests, one of whom was a priest belonging to the imperial household (*Chōshūki*, Daiji 4 [1130].7.22; NISHIGUCHI 1992, 94–95). This episode illustrates the degree to which courtiers tended to privilege imperial precedents over monastic codes.⁶ It further suggests that court women were in the process of constructing their own meaningful ordination practices, traditions that, though they may have remained largely outside of the monastic ordination platforms described in the *vinaya*, were undeniably formal and elaborate. Moreover, the Princess Reishi example illustrates that the perception of priests as employees of the court—as the recipients of court patronage—was one that endured among courtiers well into the twelfth century: Princess Reishi's counselors, after all, were primarily concerned not with gaining the approval of the monastic community, but with replicating an established court precedent and pleasing their sponsors.

Compared to other examples of imperial women taking Buddhist vows, Princess Reishi's case is typical. Indeed, it is clear that the Princess was locating herself within a tradition of court women who based their ordination ceremonies on

6. In arguing that *nyūdō* ordinations privileged court precedent over monastic codes, I do not intend to suggest that the procedures ignored monastic codes altogether. As Mitsuhashi's research has revealed, the *shukke sahō* of Heian aristocrats seems to have been modeled on the work of the priest Genshin (942–1017), who compiled the text *Shukke jukai sahō* 出家授戒作法 (MITSUHASHI 2000, 755–57). While certain aspects of this ritual were undoubtedly based in the *vinaya*, there is no indication that aristocrats were themselves reading the *vinaya*; instead, they appear to have been reading the work of Genshin, and the ordination records of other aristocrats. It could be suggested that, from the perspective of the *vinaya*, the numbers four and five are significant for the following reasons: a group cannot be considered a *sangha* unless there are four priests present, and ordinations at remote temples required only five priests, instead of the usual ten. It might be possible, then, to suggest that this concern with the numbers four and five was based in a certain reading of the *vinaya*. However, there is no indication, in the records mentioned above, that the courtiers concerned with these numbers were basing their concern in an understanding of the *vinaya*. Instead, it appears that they were concerned with filling all of the positions that had been delineated in earlier instances of the *shukke sahō*: the precepts priest, the ritual shaver, the choral priest, and so on. Moreover, there are examples, such as that of the Empress Tokushi 中宮篤子 (1060–1114), in which even fewer priests were present at the ordination ritual. According to the diary *Chūyūki*, only two priests participated in Tokushi's ordination. The author of the diary himself wonders why a choral priest (*baishi* 唄師) had not been called in for the ceremony, suggesting that he was not concerned with the overall number of priests, but with the specific positions that he believed should be filled—even if a choral priest had been summoned, there still would have been only three priests, but the author does not suggest that the number three would have been problematic. As Nishiguchi suggests, the number of priests employed most likely depended on the status of the person undergoing the tonsure. If, as Mitsuhashi argues, bigger was better and more was more when it came to the religious rituals of the Heian elite, then it is likely the case that the elite were able to demonstrate their status levels through the number of priests they employed in their rituals. See NISHIGUCHI 1992, 82–95, 100; MITSUHASHI 2000, 394–400, 497–99.

those of court women who had come before them. By the early twelfth century, the basic format of a court woman's ordination ceremony had been outlined in the text *Shukke sahō* 出家作法. Later generations of court women appear to have used this text as a guideline, sometimes making small stylistic changes, and likely borrowing additional details from the ordination records of male courtiers. The procedures followed in the ordination ceremonies of individual Imperial Ladies were often recorded in accounts known as *shukkeki* 出家記.

While it is true that the ordinations of court women described in *nyōin* ordination records may not have been viewed as authentic in the eyes of monastic authorities, or from the perspective of the *vinaya* codes, a close and contextualized study of the records suggests that these highly structured and often lavish rituals certainly gained a legitimacy of their own among courtiers. Heian-period women did not have access to full, *vinaya*-style ordinations at the state-recognized platforms of Mt. Hiei's Enryakuji or Nara's Tōdaiji, but they maintained, and often creatively embellished, their own set of ordination procedures. It is also worth noting that the ordination traditions of imperial women offered certain privileges that ordinary, *vinaya*-style ordination did not: for many court women, the renunciation of the world (*shukke*) and the taking of the precepts (*jukai*) allowed them to practice, and to gain proximity to, the techniques of Buddhist ritual while at the same time preserving financial and political interests and remaining involved in the affairs of their families. Moreover, as we shall see in the next section, the *shukke sahō* enabled ordinands to acknowledge the kami of their own clans and to control and even alter certain aspects of the ceremony itself, such as its location or the order in which its procedures were to be followed.

Like their male counterparts, many aristocratic women preferred the status of *nyūdō* to that of full-fledged *vinaya* novice, as *nyūdō* certainly enjoyed more freedom. But even if few aristocrats, male or female, actually intended to undertake formal Buddhist training at a monastic institution following their *shukke*, it is clear that men did have a wider range of options than women. For while most *nyūdō* ordinations seem to have included the bodhisattva precepts and to have taken place in the privacy of the court, high-ranking men often had the additional option to take further, *vinaya*-style precepts (from the *Shibun ritsu* 四分律, or *Four-Part Vinaya*; Ch. *Sifēn lǜ*, Skt. *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* T 1428) at Enryakuji or Tōdaiji, which was not an option for women. Receiving additional precepts, whether they were the ten novice precepts or the full *gusoku-kai* 具足戒, was understood as even more ritually powerful than the *shukke sahō*, which was centered on the bodhisattva precepts of the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (Jp. *Bonmōkyō*, *Brahma Net Sutra*, T 1484.24.997a–1010a). After Emperor En'yū's (959–991) impromptu *shukke* ceremony failed to heal an illness, for example, he finally decided to take the additional measure of going to Tōdaiji to receive the *shamini-kai* (novice precepts). Although En'yū had no

intention of becoming a novice at Tōdaiji, it was believed that the act of receiving the *shamini* precepts at the Tōdaiji platform would be more effective at curing his sickness than his earlier, less official *shukke* (*Shōyūki*, Kanna 1 [985].8.9; MITSUHASHI 2000, 758–59). Other emperors and retired emperors, too, took various levels of precepts at ordination platforms officially sponsored by the government. Fujiwara no Michinaga, the Retired Emperor Go-Toba, and Go-Shirakawa, for example, are known to have taken precepts, and in some cases, even to have received the *abhiṣeka* ordination, on the precepts platforms at the monastic centers Enryakuji, Tōdaiji, and Ōnjōji. While these men plainly did not intend to train as novices or to live in monasteries, they did desire access to the ritual efficacy of high-level ordinations at officially sponsored ordination platforms.

Although women did have access to the same *shukke sahō* ordinations as men, they did not have access to these additional ordinations, since no state-recognized nuns' ordination platform had survived. Early attempts to revive these platforms, such as that of Empress Shōshi, who had planned to take her third *jukai* on a nuns' ordination platform that was to be established at Hōjōji, suggest that some imperial women did indeed seek to restore the nuns' ordination platforms—not necessarily because they wanted to become novices, but rather because they wanted access to the additional levels of religious power associated with receiving the precepts at a temple platform deemed official by the Buddhist monastic community (EM 27.34, vol. 33, 65; McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH, 716).⁷

Records of Renunciation and Its Formalities

Aristocratic women would continue to emulate Empress Shōshi's elaborate ordination ritual for centuries after her death. The renunciation records of other Imperial Ladies and princesses, many of them appearing in multiple courtier diaries, suggest that such ordination ceremonies were typically grand in scale. Most court women's ordination ceremonies commenced, for example, with a formal procession of aristocrats and priests, and all involved a variety of hymns and incantations. Records suggest that these ceremonies were well planned, well attended, and, one might guess, exceptionally expensive.

In a fascinating study of the ordination records and manuals associated with Imperial Ladies and other court women, NISHIGUCHI Junko (1992) examines the degree to which elite women developed and maintained an ordination tra-

7. Empress Shōshi is said to have taken her third *jukai* at an *ama kaidan* (nuns' ordination platform) in Manju 4 (1027). The temple burnt down in the year 1058, and there is no historical evidence that the *ama kaidan* was restored thereafter (MATSUO 1995, 362–82). A detailed and careful treatment of ninth and tenth century attempts to revive the nuns' platforms can be found in GRONER 2000, 260–88.

dition of their own. Although these tonsure procedures may not have been recognized as official from the perspective of male monastic authorities, they did mark an entry into the religious life and typically involved both the shaving of the head and the donning of clerical robes. Nishiguchi's study shows that these tonsures followed a set of intricate, predetermined ceremonial procedures. From the 1026 record of Empress Shōshi's tonsure to the 1348 record of Senkōmon-in's ordination, the procedures of the ordination ceremony appear to have remained markedly similar. This observation suggests that consorts, princesses, and ladies-in-waiting maintained and reproduced, for well over three hundred years, a certain set of basic norms regarding the ways in which a woman of the court should receive ordination (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 79–107).

The ordination procedures followed by Imperial Ladies were based in a number of texts. Nishiguchi argues that the guide most closely followed by Heian- and Kamakura-period court women was the 1113 Manshuin 曼殊院 version of the *Shukke sahō*. This manual was produced specifically for Imperial Ladies and high-ranking Fujiwara daughters, most likely by the priest Ryōnin 良忍 (1072–1132), who was known for his following of fervent female believers (SHIRATO 1982, 61; MITSUHASHI 2000, 775). According to NISHIGUCHI, most of the women's ordination records extant from this period build upon the basic procedures set forth in the Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* (1992, 93).⁸

Although Nishiguchi is right to point to the similarities between Ryōnin's *Shukke sahō* and the ordination records of Imperial Ladies, it is clear, once we place the ordination rituals of imperial women within the larger context of aristocratic ordination ceremonies, that these rituals drew not only from Ryōnin's text, but also from other *shukke sahō* manuals and from the tonsure records of male courtiers. The tonsure rituals of aristocrats more generally followed the basic structure delineated by the Tendai priest Genshin's (942–1017) *Shukke jukai sahō* 出家授戒作法, a text he wrote specifically for Heian aristocrats. The Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* shares many similarities with Genshin's manual, suggesting that the two texts were based upon a similar set of sources.⁹ Indeed, both Genshin's manual and the Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* borrow heavily, though not exclusively, from the seventh-century Chinese text *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T. 2122). The encyclopedic *Fayuan zhulin*, compiled by the Chinese *vinaya* master Daoshi 道世 (Jp. Dōsei, 591–683), was imported to Japan during the Nara period and quickly became one of the main Buddhist references and sourcebooks used by courtiers and priests (IBJ, 721a). The Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* follows many of the basic principles of the ordination ceremony

8. The manual from Manshuin is written predominately in Chinese characters, although it does contain some *kana*. The tonsure records that appear in men's court diaries also use *kambun* or *majiribun* (and not *kana* alone).

9. Nishiguchi does not mention Genshin's manual. Mitsuhashi's study would suggest, however, that the Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* followed Genshin's manual quite closely.

as detailed in the twenty-second fascicle of the *Fayuan zhulin*, lifting numerous chants and hymns directly, character-for-character, from Daoshi's work (T. 53, no. 2122: 447–449). It is clear, however, that the *Fayuan zhulin* was only one of a number of texts that influenced Ryōnin's *Shukke sahō*.

Early *shōmyō* 声明, or Buddhist chant, texts appear to have been one of the other primary sources utilized by Ryōnin. His *Shukke sahō* begins with the offering of water meant to purify the ritual space (*shasui* 灑水), the performance of the three obeisances (*sanrai* 三礼; bows to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) (HOSOKAWA 1999, 225), a hymn or chant (*bai* 唄) in honor of the Thus Come One (*Nyorai bai* 如来唄), a declaration of the ritual's purpose (*hyōbyaku* 表白), and a summoning of and offering of Dharma to the kami (*shinbun* 神分). Each of these steps represents a specific *shōmyō*. None of these chants are mentioned in Daoshi's *Fayuan zhulin*; they clearly draw from other sources, primarily Tendai in origin. Ryōnin, who earned attention as the reviver of Tendai *shōmyō*, is known to have compiled many of Japan's early *shōmyō* (IBJ, 834b–835a). These five chants were likely among those that he collected and anthologized. All of these *shōmyō* tend to appear, in some form or another, in extant *nyōin shukke* records. In some cases, such as the ordination record of Senkōmon-in, these portions of the ceremony appear near the ceremony's end, rather than at its beginning, but they are nonetheless included. These five chants soon became standard elements of esoteric ritual and can be seen in a variety of other rituals, including, for example, contemporary Shingon school funerary practices.

Following these opening chants, Ryōnin's *Shukke sahō* instructs the person taking the ordination to pay obeisance to her clan deities, her king, and her mother and father. In many of the records, this aspect of the ordination rite is described in terms of the four debts (*shion* 四恩). Although the traditional reading of the four debts (such as that which appears in the *Shinjikangyō* 心地觀經) includes: (1) one's mother and father; (2) one's king; (3) sentient beings (*shūjō* 衆生); and (4) The Three Jewels, the ordination records of court women offer various permutations of the four, combinations that tend to include neither sentient beings nor the Three Jewels.¹⁰

In contrast to conventional Buddhist configurations of the four debts, the Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* emphasizes clan deities (*ujigami* 氏神), kings, and parents (implying that mother and father can be counted as two sources, rather than a single source, of debt). The *nyōin* ordination records tend to follow this precedent, although some offer lists of the four debts that greatly exceed the number four. Most include deities that connote the power of the imperial family, specifically the Daijingū 大神宮 (Ise Daijingū 伊勢大神宮) and Kasuga Daimyōjin

10. For more on the ideology of the four debts in premodern Japanese Buddhist discourse, see RUPPERT 2001, 31–55.

春日大明神。Indeed, a summary of the *nyōin* ordination records would read the four debts as follows: (1) clan deities; (2) Ise Daijingu and/or Kasuga Daimyōjin; (3) the king (that is, the Japanese emperor); and (4) one's mother and father. This reconfiguration of the four debts clearly supports the imperial family (honoring both the clan deities associated with aristocratic families who support the imperial house and those deities associated with the imperial house more directly). The *nyōin* ordination records replace (3) sentient beings and (4) the Three Jewels with the emperor and with deities representative of the Japanese imperial family and its court. Such court-oriented readings of the Four Debts suggest a powerful re-appropriation of basic Buddhist principles. In particular, the insistence on displacing the Three Jewels themselves in favor of the deities of the imperial court emphasizes the freedom with which *nyōin* and other elites, both male and female, were able to manipulate Buddhist concepts.¹¹

Other ritualized elements of the ordination ceremony that are outlined in the Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō* and that appear in all of the *nyōin shukke* records include the removal of secular clothing and the donning of Buddhist robes, the acceptance of one's Buddhist name (*hōgō* 法号), and the shaving of the head. In some of the ordination records, the Buddhist name was written on a piece of paper and attached to the Buddhist robes (*kesa* 袈裟); the *nyōin* received her new name when the *kesa* was handed to her.

Although the Manshuin-bon version describes the physical shaving of the head in the simplest terms possible (*tsugi atama o soru* 次剃頭 or “next, shave the head”), the *nyōin shukke* records divide this single step into a series of sub-steps. In the record of Ōmiya-in's 1272 tonsure, for example, the hair is divided into two parts (first the left, then the right), washed, and then shaved in parts: first the preceptor (*wajō* 和上; Sk. *upādhyāya*) shaves the crown of the head (*chō* 頂), and then the priest designated to do the shaving (*teishu* 剃手) shaves the rest of the head (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 86). These details mirror those described in the *shukke sahō* records of aristocratic men, many of which also indicate that the hair was to be divided into two sections before it was shaved.¹²

11. Mitsuhashi has shown that the practice of honoring one's clan deities (*ujigami bai* 氏神拜) before taking the tonsure was a common practice among aristocrats during the late Heian period. Both men and women of the *kishu*, or aristocratic families, typically bowed to their *ujigami* at the stage in the *shukke sahō* that directly proceeded the changing into Buddhist garments and the subsequent shaving of the head. This step, Mitsuhashi suggests, was based on the practice of reporting to one's clan deities (usually by taking a pilgrimage to one's clan shrine) before undergoing the *shukke*. Bowing to one's *ujigami*, Mitsuhashi argues, symbolizes the point at which the ordinand leaves the secular life behind and enters the Buddhist order. For members of the Genji clan, *ujigami bai* involved prayers to Iwashimizu Hachiman; for the Fujiwara, it meant prayers to Kasuga, Ōharano, or Yoshida. For members of the Imperial clan, it likely meant prayers to the Ise Daijingu. MITSUHASHI (2000, 750–61) furthermore explains that this step, like the other steps of the *shukke sahō*, was identical for both men and women.

12. See, for example, the record of Nakayama (Fujiwara) no Tadachika (1132–1195), whose *shukke*

Genkimon-in's 玄輝門院 1291 tonsure record pays even greater attention to the shaving of the head. In this record, the *nyōin's nyōbō* (ladies-in-waiting 女房) enter carrying all of the ritual implements necessary for the tonsure itself. These implements include an armrest, a basin for hand-washing, pitchers full of hot water, shaving knives, small paper tablets, chrysanthemums, and a lamp. The text then explains that two *nyōbō* divided the hair into two sections and that the priest designated as shaver (*teishu* 剃手) began trimming the hair. The *nyōbō* then signalled for the choral priest (*baishi* 唄師) to begin singing, and after the right segment of hair had been completely shaven off, the *nyōbō* again signalled the choral priest to sing as before. After the *nyōin* slipped into her Buddhist robes, the precepts priest (*kaishi* 戒師) proceeded to shave the crown of the head.

The tonsure accounts of Nijō Ōmiya (Princess Reishi), Higashi Nijō-in, and Senkōmon-in (1088, 1293, and 1348, respectively), all share the same basic framework, especially with regard to the shaving of the head. Dividing the hair into two segments, right and left, is a practice that appears in all of these accounts. Most of the records also include some type of ceremonial washing of the hair. Another common feature is the division of labor between the *wajō* (or, in some cases, the *kaishi*), who shaved the crown of the head, and the *teishu*, who presumably shaved what remained.

Another significant shared feature of these tonsure accounts is that they all prescribe for *nyōbō*, or ladies-in-waiting, very specific roles, typically charging them not only with the presentation of the ritual implements, but also with the duties of dividing the hair into segments and of signaling the priests when it is time to chant or to otherwise proceed with the next step in the ritual. As NISHIGUCHI (1992, 95–97) demonstrates, ladies-in-waiting were given roles of considerable consequence in the ordination rituals of Imperial Ladies. In the case of Princess Reishi's tonsure, for example, her *nyōbō* prepared the ritual implements for the *shukke*, rolled up the blinds, brought in the shaving blade, and divided and washed the hair. It was also common for *nyōbō* to signal the priests at certain points during the ceremony, often by way of fans or screens (as noted above in the case of Genkimon-in's tonsure). According to Nishiguchi, these *nyōbō* were performing tasks "normally" carried out by priests; that is, their duties were equivalent to those typically performed by "odd-job" priests (*zōyakusō* 雑役僧) in contemporaneous ordination rituals for imperial men.¹³ Many *nyōbō* also chose to take Buddhist vows together with their mistresses, especially those who were in close service to the woman taking the tonsure and who planned

record dates from the year 1161. In Tadachika's diary, the *Sankaiki*, Ōhō 1/11/12 (qtd. in MITSUHASHI 2000, 749).

13. Here Nishiguchi points to a scene from the 1169 entry in the diary *Heihanki* in which Go-Shirakawa has three priests perform the same duties that *nyōbō* perform in the *nyōin shukkeki*.

to continue working in her service even after she had entered the religious life. Examples of ladies-in-waiting undergoing ordination along with the princesses or *nyōin* they served can be found throughout Heian and Kamakura literature.

A further standard practice evident in the ordination records of court women is the ritualized offering of alms to the priests who perform in the ordination ceremony. Within the last few lines of each record, it is noted that offerings were to be made to the relevant priests. In Ōmiya-in's case, for example, the third line from the end reads, "fuse o tamau, jūsō fuse o maku" 布施を賜う, 従僧布施を撒く ("Hand down the offerings (Sk. *dāna*); distribute the offerings among the retinue of priests"). The language of this particular example is noteworthy. While many of the records simply say, "kaishi ni fuse" 戒師に布施 ("offerings to the precepts priest"), or "kaishi ika ni fuse" 戒師以下に布施 ("offerings to the precepts priest and those priests below him"),¹⁴ Ōmiya-in's ordination record uses the verb *tamau*, a verb which means not simply "to give," but, more specifically, to give to one who is of a lower status than oneself (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 87–89, 91–91). The word thus carries the connotations of "to bestow" or "to hand down." The use of the verb *tamau* makes it clear that court women were aware of the fact that they were socially superior to the priests they invited to participate in their ordination ceremonies. From the perspective of the *nyōin* ordination records, priests were clearly employees of the court; in this sense, it is clear that *nyōin* and other high-ranking imperial women wielded a considerable amount of power over the priests who shaved their tresses and gave them the precepts.

In a study of the Manshuin-bon *Shukke sahō*, Shirato Waka also comments on the particular uses of language in ritual manuals used in connection with court women. In contrast to the *nyōin shukkeki*, which were recorded by court aristocrats (and therefore speak of the priests from the elevated perspective of imperial women), the *Shukke sahō* was written by a priest for an audience of court women and thus displays extensive use of *keigo*, or honorific language. The guide, Shirato explains, was prepared for high aristocratic women and is thus extremely conscious of the priest's position vis-à-vis that of lofty female patrons. In places where an ordination ceremony would ordinarily employ the word "disciple" (*deshi* 弟子), for example, the manual instead uses the term "patron" (*seshu* 施主), or, more commonly, "great female patron" (*onna no daiseshu* 女大施主) or "great *bikuni* female patron" (*bikuni onna no daiseshu* 比丘尼女大施主), terms that cleverly avoid the suggestion that the tonsuree is in a subservient position in relation to the priest who gives her the precepts. Because his audience was of such noble birth (and, perhaps even more importantly, because one would not want to offend women who were patrons of potentially large financial consequence), Shirato maintains, the priest who compiled the

14. For examples from the tonsure records of Higashi Nijō-in and Princess Reishi, respectively, see NISHIGUCHI 1992, 88–89, 91–93).

Shukke sahō had to use extremely polite language when speaking of aristocratic women. As an example of this particularly honorific language, Shirato cites the following line from the manual: “Nyorai no on-deshi to nari-tamau” 如来の御弟子と成り給ふ. (An awkward translation might read: “[She] honorably becomes the honorable disciple of the Thus Come One.”) It is clear that the language both of the *Shukke sahō* and of the *shukkeki* compiled by imperial women is extremely conscious of the perceived difference in status that separated imperial women from priests employed by the court (SHIRATO 1982, 61–66).

An additional detail mentioned in the *Shukkeki* worth noting here is the location of the ordination ceremony. Nishiguchi explains that private, temporary ordination platforms could be set up in a variety of places and insists that one did not have to take one’s tonsure at a permanently established, state-recognized ordination platform for the ritual to be considered “official.” In contrast to those who have defined “official” as “state-recognized” or as “in accordance with the *vinaya*,” Nishiguchi defines “official” as *seishiki* 正式, “formal” or “correct” (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 100–101). Her definition thus recognizes that the ordination rituals of the Imperial Ladies, despite the fact that they did not take place on state-recognized precepts platforms, still conveyed a sense of official sanction. As she illustrates, Imperial Ladies and other court women took formal and highly structured ordination ceremonies in a variety of places: many women took the precepts in temples, private practice halls, or in the privacy of the court itself, either in their own quarters (Empress Tokushi 中宮篤子 [1060–1114], among others, took her vows in her *omoya* 母屋, or private, elevated quarters), or in those of the Retired Emperor (*Chūyūki*, Kajō 2[1107].9.21). The installment of special ritual implements, such as Buddhist statues or illustrations, tables, flower vases, incense, sacred water, and so forth, marked the chosen location as a formal and legitimate, if provisional, site of ordination (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 93–94, 100–101).

Another marker of the sacredness and formality of ordination rituals was sound. Beyond the chants that inaugurate Ryōnin’s procedures for the ordination, additional *gatha* are found throughout both the Manshui-bon *Shukke sahō* and the ordination records of court women. Indeed, formalized sounds and recitations appear to have accompanied nearly every step in the ordination protocol. At various junctures throughout the ceremony, Ryōnin instructs the presiding priest to sing specific *gatha*, or to have the tonsuree sing certain lines. After the tonsuree has paid respects to her clan deities, for example, Ryōnin says that she should be instructed to sing a *gatha* that begins with the line, “In the three realms of transmigration, clinging to love and obligation cannot be severed...” This same *gatha* appears in Daoshi’s *Fayuan zhulin* (T. 52, no. 2122, 488b3). Several lines later, Ryōnin’s *Shukke sahō* instructs the priest to anoint the tonsuree with a fragrant liquid and to intone yet another chant taken from Daoshi’s text. This pattern continues, with the tonsuree and priest singing vari-

ous *gatha* taken from the *Fayuan zhulin* after she pays respects to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, after he shaves her head, after she receives her robes, after she receives her Buddhist name, as she formally gives rise to the intention to attain Buddhahood, and so on. Such musical elements punctuate Ryōnin's entire *Shukke sahō*. The *nyōin shukkeki* do not list the *Fayuan zhulin* chants with the same degree of detail, but they do make reference to the chants in a more abbreviated way, with phrases such as, "The *nyōin* sang the 'Devotion to the Great World Honored One,' *gatha*," or "The precepts master sang the 'In the Three Realms of Transmigration' *gatha*" (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 90, 92). These more casual references to the *gatha* suggest that the chants were so well known that the reader could identify them by their introductory stanzas alone. In addition to the human voice, musical instruments also appear to have played a role in the aural landscape of ordination ceremonies. Genkimon-in's 1291 ordination, for example, mentions, at multiple points, the striking of the *kei* 磬, a gong-like Chinese instrument typically made of bronze or iron and often used in Buddhist ceremony.¹⁵

As for the actual conferral of the precepts, Nishiguchi suggests that imperial women typically received the Perfect and Sudden Precepts (*endonkai* 円頓戒) of the Tendai school. Indeed, Ryōnin's *Shukke sahō* specifies that tonsurees are to receive a variety of precepts, including the *sanju jōkai* 三聚淨戒 (Skt. *trividhāni śīlāni*; Threefold Pure Precepts), as well as the *jūjūkin* 十重禁 (Ten Major Prohibitions) and the *shijūhachi kyōkai* 四十八輕戒 (Forty-Eight Minor Precepts). As Nishiguchi points out, ordinands who received this comprehensive ordination in a single ceremony would have been deemed full-fledged *bosatsu kaini* 菩薩戒尼, or Bodhisattva Precept Nuns (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 84, 99).

Interestingly, Nishiguchi suggests that the handling of *nyūdō* ordination ceremonies did differ, if only slightly, depending on one's sex. While the *shami jūkai* 沙弥十戒 (Ten Novice Precepts) of the *Four-Part vinaya* were typically given prior to the bodhisattva precepts, often in a separate ceremony, Ryōnin abbreviates this step in the case of female tonsurees and argues that the ten major bodhisattva precepts can be used in place of the novice precepts. One-time, comprehensive ordinations were also typical in contemporary aristocratic men's ordination records, but the priests who presided over these ordinations tended not to truncate the novice precepts altogether; instead, they merely conferred the novice precepts immediately prior to the bodhisattva precepts. In his *Chōshūki*, Minamoto Morotoki offers some insight on this issue. Although the bodhisattva precepts are usually to be taken only after one has taken the ten novice precepts, he writes, an exception was made for Princess Reishi, given the fact that, as a noblewoman, she had not had opportunity to ascend the precepts

15. Unlike a gong, though, the *kei* is not circular in shape. *Kei* are most typically cast of bronze or iron in the shape of the kana letter *he* (へ).

platform previously (NISHIGUCHI 1992, 98–99; *Chōshūki* 1129.7.16). Morotoki's remarks suggest that an awareness of women's limited access to traditional *vinaya* precepts platforms encouraged certain priests to alter the ordination ceremony so as to best accommodate their elite female patrons.

Concluding Remarks

As the work of Nishiguchi and Shirato suggests, it is clear that Heian- and Kamakura-period court women maintained an intricate and highly structured ordination tradition of their own and, furthermore, that this tradition was tailored to served their political and religious interests. While it is true that some women may have wanted to undergo additional ordinations at temple ordination platforms, it is also evident that the formal *shukke* ceremonies undertaken by aristocratic *nyūdō* were open to women, and that powerful aristocratic women contributed to these ordination practices by following the precedents set by *nyōin* and by leaving records of their own ordinations behind as guides for later women.

Most of the ordination accounts that survive are those of exceedingly elite women—*nyōin*, empresses, and princesses. But the practice was certainly not one restricted to *nyōin* and other imperial consorts and daughters. Ordination records of many women from the Fujiwara families have also survived. The ordination procedures of Minamoto no Reishi 源麗子, the wife of Fujiwara no Morozane (1042–1101), for example, are recorded in *Denryaku*, the diary of Fujiwara no Tadazane (1078–1162). Reishi took her formal Buddhist vows in the year 1103 under the guidance of Tendai abbot Ningaku 天台座主仁覺 and then went to live at Kyōgokudono 京極殿, one of the villas that had belonged to Michinaga. While Reishi's ordination ceremony is not described in as great of detail as those of the *nyōin* and other, extremely higher-ranking women discussed above, it clearly follows the same basic procedures of the *shukke sahō*: Reishi honors her *ujigami*, puts on her Buddhist robes, and has her head shaven. Then a priest chants, she receives the precepts, and she bestows a gift upon the priest. Reishi's ordination was not as grand as those of *nyōin* or princesses—her ceremony seems to have featured only a couple of priests, with Ningaku serving both as the *kaishi* and as the *teishu*—but since Ningaku was a Tendai abbot, it is clear that Reishi, like many women of the court, was able to secure the services of prominent Buddhist clergymen (*Denryaku*, Kōwa 4 [1102].1.26; MITSUHASHI 2000, 751–52).

As this example of Reishi's ordination demonstrates, the aristocratic woman's model of Buddhist ordination was clearly based on the tenth- and eleventh-century tonsure rituals of Imperial Ladies like Jōtōmon-in (Empress Shōshi) and Higashi Sanjō-in. As *nyōin* spheres of artistic, financial, and political power expanded during the late Heian period, the prestige of *nyōin* and their courtly

traditions, flourished a trend that, if anything, contributed to an ever-increasing interest in the ordination rituals of *nyōin* and their *nyōbō*. Court women—and women who aspired to associate themselves with the mystique of the court—were thus drawn to follow the precedents of prior noblewomen when making the decision to take formal Buddhist vows. Even when the power of the *nyōin* and their ladies-in-waiting began to fade in the thirteenth century, the cultural cachet of the *nyōin shukke* ceremony lingered on, well into the fourteenth century: even the Imperial Lady Senkōmon-in, who took the tonsure in 1348, chose to follow the *nyōin shukke* tradition established by Empress Shōshi. And like so many Imperial Ladies who came before her, Senkōmon-in saw that her own *nyōin* ordination record would be left behind for posterity.

So while we may not have the actual records of the ordinations of lower-ranking women connected to the court, it seems quite likely, as MITSUHASHI (2000, 460–61) suggests, that the *shukke sahō* procedures followed by grand imperial personages such as Imperial Ladies and Retired Emperors had indeed, by the mid-Heian period, become the model of world renunciation most common among those connected to the court, including members of the Fujiwara regental family (the Sekkanke), members of the lower aristocracy, poets connected to the court, court administrators of various kinds, and even members of the warrior classes, who often looked to the court as a source of culture and refinement. And as we have seen in the ordination records of imperial women, it is clear that this model of *shukke* was prominent among both men and women.

Close attention to the cultural and historical contexts of Heian- and early Kamakura-period court life thus suggests that for elite women living during this period, exclusion from the state-sponsored precepts platforms of Mt. Hiei and Nara did not translate into their complete exclusion from the types of formal Buddhist ritual highly respected among their aristocratic peers. Indeed, far from internalizing the exclusionary rhetoric and practices of male monastic institutions, Japanese noblewomen, like other, male aristocrats, found ways to make the ordination ritual their own, formalizing and elaborating the event and using social hierarchies to their own advantage. In ordination records, after all, it is the elite ordinand who occupies the central role; the Buddhist priest is portrayed primarily as a facilitator, as an employee of the court, and as the recipient of elite patronage.

But while a close study of the ordination rituals of Heian- and Kamakura-period imperial women does demonstrate that these women had created their own model for taking formal Buddhist vows, this research is unable to answer the question of how women of ordinary means thought about and experienced Buddhist ordination. Non-elite women did not have equal access to the sophisticated tonsure rituals and religious traditions of the privileged women studied here. Although sources reflective of the religious lives of non-elite women are difficult to obtain, in future research I hope to explore issues of women and the

tonsure more broadly, by considering, to whatever extent possible, the stories of non-elite women as well.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS

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