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Lori R. Meeks

In Her Likeness

Female Divinity and Leadership at Medieval Chūgūji

This study takes as its focus the medieval deification of Prince Shōtoku's mother, Anahobe no Hashihito. Long associated with the Nara nunnery Chūgūji, Empress Hashihito was resurrected as patron goddess of the nunnery in the medieval period, when Chūgūji was restored and expanded by the nun Shinnyo (1211-?). Images of Empress Hashihito and the Nun Shinnyo take center stage in the literature and art associated with Chūgūji. This article argues that medieval Chūgūji narratives effectively ignore androcentric Buddhist teachings in favor of popular legends that present Empress Hashihito as a female deity and Shinnyo as a female Buddhist exemplar. That Chūgūji materials offer these seemingly positive images of Buddhist women challenges the commonly held scholarly assumption that medieval Japanese women fully internalized the disparaging views of the female body disseminated in Buddhist doctrinal texts.

KEYWORDS: *Taishi shinkō* — Prince Shōtoku — Anahobe no Hashihito — Chūgūji — Shinnyo — Eison — nuns — *bikuni* — women's salvation

Lori Meeks is Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, CA.

By the early years of the Nara period, practices expressing devotion to the mythical Prince Shōtoku (Prince Umayado, 573?–622?) had gained broad popularity. Shōtoku's cult grew even stronger with time; by the Heian period, *Taishi shinkō* 太子信仰 (devotion to the Prince) was a staple of religious activity at court. Among aristocrats, pilgrimage to Shitennōji 四天王寺, one of the numerous temples said to have been established by Shōtoku, came into vogue, and many made the journey there in order to participate in relics ceremonies and to venerate the Prince. It was also during the Heian period that the hagiographies of the Prince proliferated and grew increasingly elaborate.

Taishi shinkō remained extremely influential during the years of the Kamakura period. The cult of the Prince was so pervasive, in fact, that most of the leaders of Kamakura reform movements invoked the Prince in one way or another. None, it would seem, could afford to ignore him. Shinran (1173–1262) received his famous revelation at Rokkakudō from the Prince and later wrote *wasan* (hymns) in honor of him. Eison (1201–1290), too, was known as a devotee of the Prince and performed numerous rituals in his honor. Linking oneself to the Prince was not merely a matter of personal devotion, however; Kamakura-period priests were well aware of the worldly power and influence that could be gained through association with the Prince. Leaders of institutions and movements struggling for support knew that prosperity could be achieved if only they could establish a compelling connection with the Prince. And thus, as Oishio Chihiro has demonstrated (2006, 271), when Eison's Saidaiji-branch 西大寺流 Ritsu 律 (Vinaya) revival movement made an effort to expand into Kyoto, the group focused first and foremost on reviving temples that had some association with *Taishi shinkō*.

Within the broader history of *Taishi shinkō* is the fascinating side narrative of how Prince Umayado's mother, Anahobe no Hashihito 穴穂部間人 (?–621), came to be recognized as Amida Buddha and worshiped as the patron saint of the nunnery Chūgūji 中宮寺. Empress Hashihito's growing importance in the cult of the Prince is suggested by her prominence in the 1254 *Shōkō mandarazu* 聖皇曼荼羅図, a large (over twenty square feet) color-on-silk painting produced

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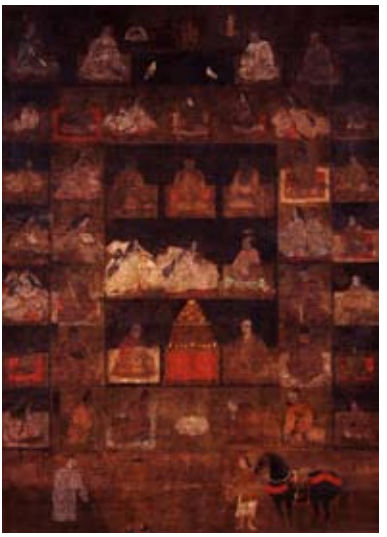

FIGURES 1 and 2 (detail). *Shōkō mandarazu* 聖皇曼荼羅図. Color on silk. Kamakura period (1254), Hōryūji, Nara.

at Hōryūji 法隆寺 through the collaboration of the priest Kenshin 顯眞 and the painter Gyōson 堯尊 (OISHIO 2006, 256–58; OGINO 1936, 467–72).

The *Shōkō mandarazu* appropriates the stylistic conventions of Buddhist mandalas to portray a group of Japanese court figures as cosmic deities. In doing so, it implicitly invokes the theory of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹, or "original ground and subsidiary manifestations," which holds that Japanese kami are the manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas.[1] Legendary figures from Japan's imperial past (who were, after all, often identified as kami), the image asserts, should also be recognized as Buddhist deities.

Perhaps what is most striking about the image is the fact that it includes so many women. Not only are the most of the mandala's deities female, but its principal deity—the buddha who occupies its very center—is Empress Hashihito. Here we see Hashihito depicted in the white gowns of a Heian-period aristocratic nun, her hair cropped in the style of a partially tonsured woman. To her left is her son, Shōtoku, and to her right, also in nun's robes, is Kashiwade Bunin, the woman said to have been Shōtoku's favored consort. By the late Heian period, popular literature had come to identify Empress Hashihito, her son Shōtoku, and his consort Kashiwade with the Amida triad, the Buddha Amida flanked by the bodhisattvas Kannon and Seishi. It was because this configuration identified Empress Hashihito as Amida Buddha, the central deity in the triad, that

1. I am indebted to Stephen Bokenkamp for suggesting this alternative translation of *honji suijaku*.

Hashihito appears in the center of the mandala. Shōtoku was understood to be the manifestation of Kannon, and his consort Kashiwade was portrayed as Seishi.

Despite Hashihito's central position in the mandala, however, it cannot be denied that the main subject of the *Shōkō mandarazu* is Prince Shōtoku. Indeed, all of the figures in the mandala relate to him directly: each is a relative, associate, or manifestation of the Prince. The mandala, then, is a pictorial representation of the Prince's lives past and present. Unlike the Womb and Diamond mandalas, which were to be used in meditation, this mandala was most likely used for *etoki* 絵解き, a type of exegesis performed using illustrations. More specifically, we can surmise that the image was used to teach pilgrims and patrons visiting Hōryūji about the lives and times of Prince Shōtoku (Pradel 2006). Following the conventions of Pure Land iconography, the Kashiwade-Shōtoku-Hashihito triad is surrounded by images of Shōtoku's twenty-five royal children, who represent the twenty-five bodhisattva *raigō* 来迎 associated with Amida. Directly below Shōtoku is an image of Huisi 惠思 (515–577), the Chinese Tiantai patriarch recognized as a previous incarnation of Prince Shōtoku. Just below Kashiwade we find Huici 惠慈 (fl. 595–623), the Koguryo priest said to have been Shōtoku's master. At the top left of the painting are two figures representing Shōtoku's past lives: the legendary Queen Śrīmālā 勝鬘夫人 (Shōman Bunin) of the ancient Indian kingdom Kośala; and Kōbō Daishi, or Kūkai 空海 (774–835). And on the top right are two figures who came to be understood as Shōtoku's later incarnations in Japan: Emperor Shōmu (701–756), and Shōbō 聖寶 (832–909), who was recognized as the founder of the Ono branch of Tōmitsu Shingon. At the bottom of the painting we find images of Shōtoku's servants and close associates. Among those represented here, for example, are Kakuka 覺哥 (also 覚哿 and Gakka 学呵), recognized as a teacher of Shōtoku's; Nichira 日羅 (?–583), a Paekche official said to have acknowledged Shōtoku as a manifestation of Kuse Kannon; Hata no Kawakatsu 秦川勝, the émigré from the Korean peninsula said to have founded Kōryūji after receiving a Buddhist image from the Prince; and Chōshi no Maro 調子丸, who was regarded as the Prince's most faithful servant (and, not coincidentally, also an ancestor claimed by Kenshin, the Hōryūji priest behind the planning of this mandala). In addition to the many individuals depicted in the painting are objects associated with *Taishi shinkō*: relics of Śākyamuni, the Seventeen Article Constitution, the three sutra commentaries attributed to Shōtoku, and so on. Even the Prince's loyal horse appears in the painting (Pradel 2006 and Ogino 1936).

The *Shōkō mandarazu* was not so much a tribute to Empress Hashihito, then, as it was a pictorial summary of *Taishi shinkō*. Noting the many signs of usage visible on the painting itself, Ogino argues, rather compellingly, that the *Shōkō mandarazu* was a promotional tool used for teaching Hōryūji visitors the particulars of popular Shōtoku narratives (1936, 459–460). In this sense, then, the *Shōkō mandarazu* is not *about* Empress Hashihito, nor is it *about* the divine potentiality

of women: it is, rather, about *Taishi shinkō*. That said, the fact that the image portrays historical women from Japan's past as Buddhist deities does tell us something about the ways in which certain Kamakura-period elites understood divinity. What's more, while Empress Hashihito may not be the main subject of the *Shōkō mandarazu*, her portrayal here as Amida, the central deity of the mandala, creates a lasting precedent that will be revisited by those seeking to revive the nunnery Chūgūji, a small temple located on the grounds of Hōryūji. Just several decades after the completion of the *Shōkō mandarazu,* those active in the revival of Chūgūji would build on Empress Hashihito's deification as Amida, fashioning the Empress as the patron saint of the nunnery and creating a hagiographical tradition that is more clearly focused on the Empress herself.

The deification of Empress Hashihito raises important questions about the ways in which women received and made use of Buddhist doctrine in premodern Japan. Historians of Japanese religions have demonstrated that Buddhist monastic institutions, especially those focused on doctrine, worked to exclude women from Buddhist practice. Although records suggest that Japan's first Buddhist clerics were women, official, state-sponsored ordinations of women disappeared by the ninth century (NS 21.2; USHIYAMA 1990, 45). By the tenth and eleventh centuries, *nyonin kekkai* 女人結界, the practice of banning women from temple grounds, became increasingly common (TAIRA 2000–2002, 302a–b). Moreover, the notion that women faced a variety of karmic obstacles specific to their sex had been circulating since the early years of the Heian period. The most pertinent of these obstacles, at least in terms of thinking about Empress Hashihito's deification, is that of the Five Hindrances, which states that there are five positions in the Buddhist cosmos that cannot be attained in a woman's body.[2] At the top of this list of realizations unattainable by women is that of Buddhahood. A woman cannot, according to the theory of the Five Hindrances, attain Buddhahood in her female body.

Many Buddhist priests urged their female followers pray for rebirth into male bodies so as to ensure their salvation in a future lifetime.[3] Some priests even taught that women's bodies could be made male (*tennyo jōnan* 転女成男) through special rites, such as *kōmyō shingon* incantations or other esoteric rituals (TAIRA 1992). Although it is impossible to measure the degree to which women

2. The Five Hindrances (*itsutsu no sawari* 五障) describe five specific ranks in the Buddhist cosmos that are purportedly unattainable by women. According to the *Lotus Sutra*, a woman's body, because it is subject to the Five Hindrances, "cannot become first a Brahmā god king, second the god Śakra, third King Māra, fourth a sage-king turning the Wheel, fifth a Buddha-body." The text emphasizes the severity of such limitations when Śāriputra exclaims, having delineated the Five Hindrances, "How can the body of a woman speedily achieve Buddhahood?" (*Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華経, T 262, 9:35c; HURVITZ 1976, 201).

3. The Ritsu monk Sōji (1233–1312), for example, circulated among groups of women texts such as the *Tennyoshinkyō* 転女身経 [The sutra on transforming the female body], which promises women that their faith and purity will be rewarded with birth into male bodies.

had come to internalize such disparaging views of the female body, both the Five Hindrances and the theory of *tennyo jōnan* (alternatively known as *henjō nanshi* 変成男子 and *tennyo jōbutsu* 転女成仏), or transforming women into men, do emerge regularly in non-monastic literature of the Heian and Kamakura periods. As Edward Kamens has noted, concern over the Five Hindrances is evident in the *Genji*, where Kaoru is said to feel pity as he watches his mother carry out her daily devotions (Kamens 1993, 389). Since "a woman labors under the five hindrances," Kaoru reasons, her efforts at salvation would be futile (Seidensticker, 1976, 738). Concerned about these Five Hindrances, at least some women appear to have followed the advice of male priests. We know, for example, that a certain novice nun named Shinmyō, produced (or commissioned) in 1247 a prayer request (*ganmon*) asking that all women, beginning with her mother, be separated from their female bodies in the life to come (SEDS, 393).

It is likely that women's reception of these androcentric theories depended on a variety of factors, including not only the time of their birth (these theories wielded less influence in the early years of the Heian period than in the later years of the Heian period and the beginning of the Kamakura), but also on their social, regional, and educational backgrounds (one might expect that the greater a woman's social standing and education, the less likely she was to accept these theories uncritically). As Kamens has shown, the highly accomplished, mid-Heian period female poet Izumi Shikibu manages, in at least one poem sequence, to poke fun both at the Five Hindrances and at the practice of *nyonin kekkai* (Kamens 1993, 425). And in the eleventh-century *Sarashina nikki*, the Daughter of Sugawara Takasue rejects the notion that rebirth into a female body is necessarily problematic when she suggests, through a dream sequence, that rebirth as an aristocratic female member of the laity is preferable to rebirth as a low-ranking male priest (NKBT 26, 327). But perhaps for women like the above mentioned novice nun Shinmyō, who was born in a different era and to a low-class family far removed from court circles, challenging well-entrenched notions like the Five Hindrances, *nyonin kekkai*, and *tennyo jōnan* seemed to lie beyond the realm of the possible (Hosokawa 1997, 100).

The 1254 *Shōkō mandarazu* suggests, however, that resisting these androcentric notions, or at least providing alternative explanations of women's salvation, was not beyond the realm of possibility for Shinmyō's more privileged contemporaries. Produced some seven hundred and thirty years after Hashihito's death, this mandala wholly ignores disparaging views of the female body, suggesting that bodhisattvas, and indeed, the Buddha Amida himself, can take female form. The prominence given to courtiers in the image reflects the fact that the painting's primary patrons, as well as its target audience, consisted of well-placed court aristocrats.[4] Members of this same milieu would, several decades

4. Konoe Iezane and Konoe Kanetsune appear to have provided financial support for the completion of the *Shōkō mandarazu* (Ogino 1936, 472–73). Oishio has also demonstrated that a great

later, become patrons of the nunnery Chūgūji 中宮寺, an ancient temple that was revived around the time of the mandala's production. The nunnery's leadership promoted Empress Hashihito as its founder, protector, and patron deity.

This study seeks to unravel and reconstruct the early history of Empress Hashihito's deification, as well as to examine her relationship with Chūgūji and its thirteen-century nun-restorers, the most famous being the nun Shinnyo 信如 (1211–?). The representations of Empress Hashihito that emerge from Chūgūji literature offer compelling examples of the ways in which Kamakura-period nuns and court ladies succeeded in creating and promoting feminine images of the divine, thereby thwarting, or at least detracting attention away from, conventional androcentric Buddhist views of women, their bodies, and the obstacles they were thought to have faced on the Buddhist path.

Empress Hashihito and Chūgūji's Early History

The Nara nunnery Chūgūji, located just to the east of the temple complex Hōryūji, claims a long-standing association with Empress Hashihito. Most narratives of the nunnery's initial establishment indicate that Chūgūji was founded when Shōtoku had his mother's residence converted into a temple following her death in the year 621. Chūgūji appears in a number of early Shōtoku narratives, including, among others, the 917 *Shōtoku Taishi denryaku*, the mid-Heian *Fusō ryakki*, and the eleventh-century *Shōtoku Taishi eden*, which includes an illustration of Chūgūji. These narratives typically recognize Shōtoku as the founder of Chūgūji. In the eighth-century texts *Hōryūji garan engi narabini ruki shizaichō* 法隆寺伽藍縁起幷流記資材帳 and *Shichidaiki* 七代記, as well as in the mid-Heian text *Jōgū Shōtoku hōō teisetsu* 上宮聖徳法王帝説, Chūgūji is listed among the seven or eight temples said to have been established by the Prince (Pradel 1997, 216–25).

But even while Chūgūji's founding is typically attributed to Empress Hashihito's son Shōtoku, Hashihito's ties to the institution are often emphasized over Shōtoku's, as the nunnery was long understood as the final resting place of her

number of Fujiwara elites, including Kujō Michiie 九条道家 (1193–1252), his son Kujō Yoritsune 九条頼経 (1218–1256), who was named shōgun while still a child, and the Imperial Ladies Senyōmon'in 宣陽門院 (1181–1252), Kitashirakawa'in 北白河院 (1173–1238), and Shūmyōmon'in 修明門院 (1182–1264), were involved in *Taishi shinkō* at Hōryūji (Oishio 2006, 255–56). As Sakakibara Fumiko has pointed out in recent work, Hōryūji faced fierce competition from Shitennōji in its efforts to attract Shōtoku devotees. By the early eleventh century, she writes, Shitennōji had all but won the rivalry since it was closer to the capital and easier to access. Shitennōji had also produced the *Shitennōji engi*, which even further boosted its prominence in the world of *Taishi shinkō*. Sakakibara explains how Hōryūji responded with "discovered" documents of its own meant to bring Shōtoku devotees back to the southern capital. The great proliferation of Shōtoku narratives over the course of the Heian period, then, was largely a result of economic competition between Hōryūji and Shitennōji (see Sakakibara 2007, handout p. 12). It is likely that the *Shōkō mandarazu*, too, was meant to give Hōryūji an edge in this ongoing rivalry with Shitennōji.

FIGURE 3. Detail from the eleventh-century *Shōtoku Taishi eden byōbu* (Tokyo National Museum). Scholars have identified the main hall and pagoda in the upper right-hand corner as Chūgūji.

spirit. Although the tomb said to contain the remains of Shōtoku, his mother, and his favored consort Kashiwade no Ōiratsume, is in distant Shinaga,[5] Chūgūji, perhaps because its buildings had served as the personal quarters for the Empress during her lifetime, is often recognized as the earthly home of the deceased Empress. And as we will see below, Chūgūji documents further expand upon this connection, arguing that the nunnery is an earthly satellite of the Empress' pure land, an entrance into the paradise she established for those who had created karmic ties (*en*) with her spirit.

Little is known about the history of Chūgūji during its early years as a temple. Indeed, almost nothing is known about the status of the temple prior to its thirteenth-century association with the Vinaya revival movement led by the priest Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290). The 1069 folding screen *Shōtoku Taishi eden byōbu* is one of the few artifacts offering insight into the nunnery's pre-thirteenth-century history. Scholars believe that a scene from the folding screen depicts the main hall and pagoda of Chūgūji as it looked in the eleventh century. In this illustration, Chūgūji's halls appear well maintained, and various people in official costume, many of whom appear to be male, are milling about the grounds of the nunnery. The illustration suggests that, by the eleventh-century, anyhow, Chūgūji may not have been closed to men. It also suggests that the nunnery's buildings were in use during this period. This latter speculation is supported by archeological data, which indicates that Chūgūji's buildings were physically renovated once during the late Asuka period, once in the Heian period, and twice during the Kamakura period (Nishikawa 1978, 56). Thus, while it is not clear that Chūgūji was in continuous use throughout its pre-thirteenth-century history, these sources suggest that the nunnery was never neglected for whole centuries at a time.

Yet even if Chūgūji was being used during the Nara and Heian periods, it is unlikely that the temple ever housed a large assembly of nuns. Most likely the

5. The Shinaga tomb is in present-day Osaka-fu, Minamikawachi-gun, Taishi-chō.

buildings served as a hermitage of sorts, perhaps as a home to small cluster of itinerant lay nuns or to retired women of the court who wanted to devote their later years to a life of Buddhist prayer and practice. The nunnery appears to have maintained close ties to the neighboring temple Hōryūji, and it is likely that women who stayed at Chūgūji were related, in some way or another, to the monks in residence at Hōryūji. Documentary evidence indicates that Hōryūji was managing Chūgūji and its buildings during the twelfth century; male leaders at Hōryūji oversaw the renovation of Chūgūji's main hall in the year 1131, and they supervised pagoda repairs at the nunnery from 1101–1108 and again in 1164. In 1164 they also orchestrated the refinishing of twelve golden Buddha statues held within the pagoda (*Hōryūji bettō shidai* 法隆寺別当次第, qtd. in NISHIKAWA 1978, 57–59). Given Hōryūji's apparent jurisdiction over the nunnery at this time, it is reasonable to speculate that Hōryūji monks may have used Chūgūji buildings from time to time, especially during periods in which Chūgūji had no female inhabitants.

Chūgūji's Thirteenth-Century Restoration

Although Hōryūji documents suggest that Chūgūji buildings underwent frequent renovations during the twelfth century, other sources, namely those connected with the nunnery's thirteenth-century revival, claim that Chūgūji had fallen into a state of severe neglect by the mid-thirteenth century, just fewer than one hundred years after Hōryūji monks had the nunnery's pagoda repaired. According to Shinnyo, the nun recognized as the leader of Chūgūji's thirteenth-century revival, the nunnery was in a state of utter abandonment when she first arrived there. Her *Ama Shinnyo ganmon* 尼信如願文 (hereafter *Ganmon*) goes to great length in lamenting the pitiful state in which she found the Chūgūji. First describing the glory of Chūgūji's past, Shinnyo goes on to describe its pitiable state in the early to mid-thirteenth century:

> [Now] the fences are used to dry laundry; pine trees take root in roof tiles. The flowers and incense [used for offerings] have gone unused for many years. In the morning, there is no [ringing of the bell], and in the evening, there is no *kei* [music]. The altar is infested with lizards and frogs; stags and flying squirrels fight in the rock garden. When I, Shinnyo, saw this current state of shabbiness, I cried and thought of the temple's prosperity in ancient times. I took over the administration of this temple and vowed to return it to its ancient state.
>
> (*Ama Shinnyo ganmon*, YKT 1, 82n–83a)[6]

Shinnyo appears to have taken up residence at Chūgūji around the year 1262 (HOSOKAWA 1987, 114–15). Her *Ganmon*, as well as other related documents, declares that she was herself responsible for the revival of Chūgūji. Some other

6. Cf. *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* 法華滅罪寺縁起 (HMZJE), in YKT 5, 142a–b, 143a.

versions of the Chūgūji revival narrative assert, however, that the priest Eison (1201–1290) and his nephew Sōji (1233–1312) led the effort to revive the nunnery. Conflicting interpretations of who led the restoration efforts at Chūgūji, as well as the highly gendered debates they suggest, will be addressed in a later section.

Worth noting at this juncture are the similarities between Shinnyo's telling of the Chūgūji revival and the nun Enkyō's telling of the restoration of the nunnery Hokkeji. Enkyō's 1304 narrative of Hokkeji's revival, written just under twenty-five years after Shinnyo's *Ganmon*, narrates the story of Hokkeji's restoration in very similar language. Enkyō, for example, writes that before Hokkeji's restoration,

> There were only dilapidated remains here and there, and the lecture hall alone barely remained. Because the halls had fallen into destruction like this, the spring rain fell upon the Buddhist statues. There was only one person living in the temple, and she had let the autumn wind turn the door. The garden had turned into a field and become the dwelling place of oxen and horses. Can sensitive people who look at this [situation] not be moved to tears? (HMZJE)

Even more striking than the similarities between Chūgūji's restoration and that of Hokkeji is the fact that both nunneries took imperial women from Japan's past as their patron deities. Chūgūji, as we have seen, took Empress Hashihito, as its foundress and patron. And Hokkeji took Empress Kōmyō (701–760), the consort and co-ruler of Emperor Shōmu and the mother of Japan's last powerful female emperor, Emperor Kōken-Shōtoku, as its founder and principal deity. Kōmyō, like Hashihito, was portrayed by the nuns of Hokkeji as a divine figure. She was considered to be a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon, and according to Enkyō's *Hokke metsuzaiji engi*, she also acted as a kami, possessing, at least once, a member of Hokkeji's assembly of nuns and delivering an oracle through her.

During the mid-thirteenth century, Chūgūji and Hokkeji both came to be associated with the Vinaya revival movement of Eison. Chūgūji's restoration can thus be understood as part of a larger nuns' revival movement that had aligned itself with Eison and his followers, who centered their work at Saidaiji 西大寺, a Nara temple they restored in 1235. Eison's group worked not only to spread interest in an adherence to the Vinaya codes, but also to rebuild hundreds of temples that had been destroyed during the wars that ravaged the archipelago from the late twelfth century onward. Although most of the temples supported by Eison's network were monasteries, he and his disciples were also interested in the creation of an officially ordained nuns' order, as they believed that the Vinaya could not be fully realized in Japan until all seven divisions of the *sangha*, including orders for *bikuni* 比丘尼, probationary nuns, novice nuns, and lay women, had been established.

The newly restored Hokkeji, also located in Nara, emerged at the center of this effort to rebuild a nuns' order in Japan. Hokkeji records report that by the

late 1200s, the nunnery housed well over five hundred nuns concurrently (see Ōishi 1997, 184–89 and Matsuo 1996). Hokkeji functioned both as the center of a network of nunneries that came to be linked to Eison's movement and as a training ground for nuns who were later sent out to serve as abbesses at smaller nunneries. Shinnyo herself studied at Hokkeji before moving on to found Tatsuichi Shōbōji (also known as Seihōji) 正法寺, a small hermitage for women, and to revive Chūgūji. Some sources even indicate that Shinnyo had served as an abbess at Hokkeji before she took up residence at Chūgūji.[7]

Shinnyo's Path to Ordination

Shinnyo was not of imperial birth, but her writing conveys deep interest in the affairs of the court.[8] Her texts romanticize the court and its women, perhaps because Shinnyo, like many of the ladies-in-waiting-turned-nuns involved in the restoration of Hokkeji, longed to be a part of that shining world she had read about in the *Genji monogatari*, or perhaps because she hoped that her writings would attract the interest of potential patrons from the female aristocracy. During her campaign to restore Chūgūji, Shinnyo is known to have appealed directly to court women. In particular, she used the *Tenjukoku mandara* 天寿国曼荼羅, which we will discuss below, to raise interest and funds among elite women.

The priest Eison refers to Shinnyo as a *nyōbō* 女房 in his autobiography but does not explain his use of the term. "Nyōbō" was often used to describe women who served as ladies-in-waiting at the court or in the homes of high-ranking aristocrats, but it could also be used simply to mean "woman." Although it is possible that Shinnyo may have, at some point during her youth, secured a job as a lady-in-waiting at court or in the home of a powerful family, there is little evidence to suggest that such was the case. Instead, popular legends about Shinnyo emphasize the humble nature of her upbringing.[9] The story of Shinnyo's birth and childhood can be found in a variety of late medieval texts, including not only Mujū Ichien's thirteenth-century *Shasekishū* 沙石集 and the later compilation *Shōyoshō* 聖誉抄, but also a number of lesser known works from the Saidaiji document collection (*Saidaiji monjo*).[10] In all of these versions

7. See the version of the Shinnyo narrative that appears in the *Saidaiji monjo*, *Saidaiji kyōzō*, Box 38, no. 6.

8. According to Nagai (1967, 262), Shinnyo's father, the Kōfukuji priest Shōen, may have hailed from a middle-ranking Fujiwara-clan family. Origins aside, however, surviving narratives of Shinnyo's life all emphasize her father's poverty.

9. Ogino has argued that Shinnyo may in fact have been a lady-in-waiting at court before her ordination. He admits, however, that there is little evidence to support his thesis. It is true, though, that many of the women who became active in the restoration of nunneries in the thirteenth century had indeed been *nyōbō* at court. See Ogino 1975.

10. The dating of the *Shōyoshō* is unclear, but according to the *Bukkyō kaisetsu daijiten*, the text was compiled sometime before Tenbun 16 (1547) and drew from a variety of other texts, including the *Mokurokushō* of the priest Kenshin (a thirteenth-century Hōryūji priest), the *Kesshinshō* of the

of the Shinnyo narrative, Shinnyo's father, the Kōfukuji scholar priest Shōen, is described as a "fallen" priest, that is, as a priest who has indulged his sexual desires and taken a wife. According to Mujū, Shōen, a disciple of the eminent priest Jōkei (1155–1213), "fell into Māra's realm" when he became involved with a woman (*Shasekishū*, ch. 1).[11]

The *Shōyoshō* and *Saidaiji monjo* versions of the narrative explain that Shōen met a woman at the temple Yakushiji when he was a student commuting to the temple for his studies. The two became lovers, and their relationship yielded several daughters. Like scholars tend to be (*gakushō no kuse nareba)*, the texts continue, Shōen was extremely poor: he had no possessions to speak of and eventually lost his following of students as well. His only valuable possession was a book he had composed called the *Rokuchō no meimoku* 六帳の名目. He left this thick bound booklet to his daughters, telling them to require one *kan* (about a year's worth of rice) from those who wished merely to see the text. Thanks to the valuable book, the narrative claims, Shōen's daughters were able to make a comfortable living. Scholars (*shūgakusha* 修学者) from Kōfukuji, Tōdaiji, Yakushiji, Hōryūji, "and other such temples" came to them in great numbers and, just as it was written in Shōen's will, each paid one *kan* to his daughters in order to look at the text, allowing Shinnyo and her sisters to spend their days happily (*tanoshiku sugoshi tamahikeri*) (*Saidaiji monjo* box 38, no. 6; and *Shōyoshō*).

Although it is impossible to know the degree to which these stories were embellished over time, they suggest a number of possibilities worthy of analysis here. First, the stories suggest that, while most women in premodern Japan took up Buddhist practice in their later years, as a way of commemorating the death of a loved one (usually a husband, father, or lord), some women, like Shinnyo, desired to enter the monastic life from a rather young age. Indeed, it is likely that, as the daughter of a Buddhist priest, Shinnyo was encouraged to commit herself to Buddhist practice as a way of continuing her father's trade: Buddhist

priest Shungen, and the *Sentaishidenreki* of the Taira clan (BSD vol. 5, 389d–390a). Mujū Ichien's *Sasekishū* dates to the late thirteenth century, and the Saidaiji document to which I refer here is an untitled, handwritten document in the *Saidaiji monjo* collection (Box 38, No. 6). At the end of the text, the copyist says that the text was copied during the Daiei period (1521–1528). This text focuses on the legend of Prince Shōtoku but includes an entire section titled "Chūgūji" that concentrates specifically on the story of Shinnyo, her tonsure, and her efforts to revive Chūgūji. In terms of content, the *Saidaiji monjo* text follows the *Shōyoshō* text quite closely, and in many parts, both texts use the same exact phrasing, suggesting that they were indeed drawing from the same body of texts. Although Enkyō's *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* (HMZJE), which lists the first sixteen abbesses of Hokkeji, does not mention Shinnyo, other texts, in particular the *Saidaiji monjo* text described above, do identify her as an abbess of Hokkeji. It is possible that she was not actually recognized as an abbess at Hokkeji, but it appears safe to assume that she did indeed spend some time at Hokkeji and that she may have been one of the nunnery's early leaders.

11. The Kōfukuji priest Jōkei is known especially for his role in the suppression of Hōnen's exclusive nenbutsu group. For more on Jōkei, see Ford 2006.

scholarship. It is known, for example, that the wife, daughter, and granddaughter of the Tōdaiji scholar-priest Genkan (?–1241) all became nuns and took up residence at Hokkeji. It is likely that the women in Genkan's life, like Shinnyo, were exposed to Buddhist texts from a young age and were well acquainted with the Buddhist community in the southern capital (Hosokawa and Tabata 2002, 51–56; Nishiguchi 1987, 184–218).

It should not surprise us that Shinnyo, raised by a scholar monk and forced to earn a living by letting local monks read her father's work, managed to acquire a thorough education in doctrinal texts. Surviving Chūgūji documents indicate that Shinnyo's ability to navigate Buddhist doctrine ran deep—not only did she write her own calendary ritual manual (the "Ryōjusen'in nenjū gyōji" 靈鷲山院年中行事), but she also added *katen* 加点 to a copy of the *Yugashijiron* 瑜伽師地論 (Skt. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra,* T 1579, 30.279–882), an act that suggests she was herself invested in the interpretation of difficult doctrinal texts.[12] In his own description of Shinnyo, Eison mentions that she had studied Buddhist sutras and commentaries under the priest Ze-Amidabutsu at Shōryakuji (KJGSK, 18–19; cf. Hosokawa 1999, 141–42).

Eison also notes, in the same passage, how Shinnyo impressed him during a visit she made to Saidaiji in the year 1243. When Shinnyo arrived at Saidaiji, she witnessed Eison giving official *vinaya* ordination to a young boy. Finding the ceremony extremely moving, she was inspired to participate in the ceremony by sharing with the audience of priests the details of a vision she had received some years earlier, around 1235. Although she had long remained unsure of how to interpret this dream, Shinnyo says, she suddenly realized, upon seeing Eison's ordination of the boy, that her dream was meant to foretell Eison's success in revitalizing the *vinaya*.[13] Recording Shinnyo's dream in his diary, Eison appears

12. See the "Ryōsen'in nenjū gyōji" and the "Yugashijiron" 瑜伽師地論, both in YKT 1, 81–82 (back); 84 (front). The *Yugashijiron* is known as a difficult, highly theoretical text. Shinnyo's study of such an advanced doctrinal work is a testament both to her ability to read Chinese, and to her learning more generally. Recently scholars have been revising the assumption that premodern Japanese women were generally unable to read and write Chinese. Shinnyo's study of this difficult Chinese treatise adds to this discussion, as her case suggests that some women had developed extremely high levels of literacy in Chinese. See the archives of the PMJS (Premodern Japanese Studies) Listserv. June 2000, March 2001. (http://www.meijigakuin.ac.jp/~pmjs/).

13. The excerpt in Eison's autobiography that relates Shinnyo's dream reads as follows:

> There was one woman who was from Nara. [Margin notes: She was the disciple of Bodai-san's Ze-amidabutsu and had studied the *Yōu-zàn*. Today she is the Nun Shinnyo of Chūgūji.] She saw the precept ceremony and was filled with deep joy, so she asked Jōshun, "From what time did this type of revival of the Dharma begin?" He replied, "From the time of the Katei-period shutting of the gate [1235]." [She then told] of a dream she had received during that same time: "In the mountains of Kasuga, there was a laywoman and four or five priests playing a *shakubyōshi* and singing kagura music. They discarded the *shakubyōshi* and had a discussion about the need to revive the Dharma and benefit sentient beings. In light of [the failure of] the great appeal made by Kōfukuji [to the court to suppress its enemies], I had thought that a joyous omen [that is, my own dream of the

to have held it in high esteem. After all, it offered evidence of supernatural support for his still controversial efforts to create a new ordination platform and a strict monastic community that included orders of nuns.

Regardless of whatever admiration Eison may have felt for Shinnyo, however, the Ritsu community responded to her initial request to seek full ordination with great hesitation. Popular narratives about Shinnyo say that her decision to pursue full ordination was the result of an epiphany she experienced during a period of ritual confinement in a Chūgūji practice hall the week before Shōtoku's birthday. During her ritualized chanting of Śākyamuni's name, it is said, she suddenly realized that she wanted to seek full ordination as a *bikuni* (*Shōyoshō,* 21b). And so it was that in the year 1244, just one year after her encounter with Eison at Saidaiji, Shinnyo visited the Tōshōdaiji priest Kakujō, one of the men who had vowed, along with Eison and several others in 1236, to commit himself to the revival of the *vinaya*. Shinnyo explained to Kakujō her desire to become a fully ordained nun and asked if he would bestow the *bikuni* precepts upon her (Hosokawa 1987, 105–106). He refused.

Kakujō's response to Shinnyo's initial request for ordination is recorded in the *Shōyoshō.* According to this account, Kakujō explained his reasons for refusing to ordain Shinnyo as follows:

> The *bikuni* precepts are among the most major matters of the Buddha-Dharma. If I allow you to take the precepts, others may see it and, liking what they see, they will also desire *shukke* [the act of renouncing the world]. If this results in a bad situation, people will surely slander me, saying, "Yorō [Kakujō] allowed this." It would be impossible for me to permit myself to carry out on my own that major matter of giving [you] the *vinaya* precepts. (*Shōyoshō,* 21c)

Kakujō's words are not completely discouraging, however. He adds that, should he receive a message from the Buddhas or kami stating that the Ritsu group should indeed proceed with the ordination of female practitioners, he will grant Shinnyo full ordination as a *bikuni* (Hosokawa 1987, 106).

Kakujō's response to Shinnyo suggests that he is concerned about the social unconventionality of her determination to gain full ordination as a woman.

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laywoman and five monks vowing to revive the Dharma] had been followed only by a loss of face [on the part of the Buddhist establishment]. . . . But now I [realize] that my dream in fact correlates to this event [that is, to Eison's revival of the precepts]!" she said (KJGSK, 18–19; cf. Hosokawa 1999, 141–42).

According to Abe Yasurō, this "gate closing" refers to an event that took place at Kōfukuji, the temple connected with the Kasuga Shrine. Around the year 1235, there was a scrimmage in the area, and Kōfukiji, wanting to assert its power and authority, closed its temple gates and made a great appeal to the court. At this very same time, Eison and four or five of his priests were preparing to ordain themselves (for the purpose of "reviving the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings"). Shinnyo also dates her dream to this time. Although many expected Kōfukuji to win the appeal, the Bakufu interceded and placed its *jitō* (land stewards) on Kōfukuji lands, thereby disgracing the temple complex. See Abe 1987.

FIGURE 4. Portrait of Shinnyo Bikuni. Color on silk. Kamakura period. Chūgūji, Nara.

While it was common in Shinnyo's day for women, especially those who considered themselves patrons of Buddhism, to study under Buddhist priests and take the lay, bodhisattva, or even novice precepts, it had been at least four hundred years since a woman had taken the entire *gusoku-kai* 具足戒 (Skt. *upasaṃpanna*) in Japan. Ordaining a woman as a *bikuni*, then, was not a matter of small consequence.

According to the *Shōyoshō*, Shinnyo walked away from this encounter with Kakujō only to pray incessantly that he would receive some sort of divine sign urging him to ordain her. Shinnyo's prayers and lobbying must have left a strong impression on Kakujō, for shortly following their conversation, a divine sign surfaced. The *Shōyoshō* states that the following message was delivered to Kakujō in a vision: "The time is now ripe for the nuns' precepts in the land of Japan. You must hurry and allow *bikuni* to receive the precepts" (*Shōyoshō,* 21c). Having received the supernatural sanction he was seeking, Kakujō decided to grant Shinnyo's request.[14]

Shinnyo appears to have received ordination as a *bikuni* sometime between 1244 and 1249, when she is referred to as an official nun in several documents (Hosokawa 1987, 109). Although ordained alone, she soon found herself at the center of a large community of monastic women, as the Hokkeji-centered nuns' revival movement began to gain momentum just a few years following her ordination. From the time of her ordination through the year 1262 or so, Shinnyo concentrated her practices at Hokkeji and at the Yamato nunnery Shōbōji 正法寺 (or Seihōji), which, as noted earlier, she is said to have founded herself.

Shinnyo's Campaign to Restore Chūgūji

Given the fact that Shinnyo was said to have received her calling to seek full ordination as a *bikuni* during a time of ritual seclusion at a Chūgūji practice hall, it is probably safe to assume that, long before she initiated her campaign to restore Chūgūji, she made regular visits to the temple. As a devotee of Prince

14. For more on Shinnyo's biography, see Groner 2005, esp. 221–29.

Shōtoku, Shinnyo was likely drawn to Chūgūji because of its connection to Shōtoku and his mother.

With over a decade of monastic experience (much of it administrative in nature) behind her, the fifty-something Shinnyo embarked upon her restoration of Chūgūji, a project that would span at least two decades, in the early 1260s. We do not know the details of her first years at the nunnery, but it is clear that many of her early efforts were focused on recovering the legendary *Tenjukoku* mandala (Hosokawa 1987, 114–15).[15]

The *Tenjukoku* mandala, which appears to have originally been created as a set of large (five square meter) silk-on-silk embroidered curtains, depicts the Tenjukoku 天寿国, or "Land of Infinite Life," a paradise thought to have been the resting place of Prince Shōtoku and his mother. The original *Tenjukoku mandara* is said to have been commissioned by the ladies-in-waiting of the Lady Tachibana, a consort of Prince Shōtoku (574–622). Narratives from Shōtoku story collections such as the *Jōgū Shōtoku Sōōtei setsu* explain that the Lady Tachibana was so devastated by his passing that she ordered her ladies-in-waiting to weave a silk mandala that would depict Shōtoku's life in the other world, the Tenjukoku, a paradise that many scholars believe to have been akin to the Western Pure Land of Amida (Naitō 2003).[16]

According to popular narratives of her life, Shinnyo's quest to locate the *Tenjukoku mandara* was rooted in her desire to learn the death date of Empress Hashihito, the figure most intimately associated with the nunnery. Such knowledge would allow her to hold a commemorative service (*kuyō* 供養) in honor of Hashihito's death. Claiming that she was unable to determine the date of Hashihito's death, Shinnyo is said to have cloistered herself in prayer during the second month of Bun'ei 10 (1273) to appeal for an answer. She then received a dream in which it was revealed that Hashihito's death date was inscribed on the *Tenjukoku mandara,* which had been stored away in the Hōryūji treasury and forgotten. But because the Hōryūji treasury was an "imperially sealed treasury" (*chokufū no kura* 勅封の蔵), the legend goes, Shinnyo was unable to search for the mandala until an unrelated event forced the doors of the Hōryūji treasury open.[17] Shinnyo narratives claim that in the second month of Bun'ei 11, about one year after Shinnyo first learned that the mandala had been stored at Hōryūji, a thief broke into the Hōryūji treasury. The event presented an opportunity: it allowed Shinnyo to enter the treasury as part of a group sent in to find out if any of the temple's prized treasures were missing. Shinnyo is said to have "discovered"

15. Several of the texts featuring variations of the narrative in which Shinnyo discovers the *Tenjukoku* mandala include the *Shōyoshō*, the *Taishi mandara kōshiki* (1275), the *Chūgūji engi* (1274?), and the thirteenth-century *Shōtoku Taishi denki*.

16. For a full study of the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara*, see Pradel 1997.

17. The Shōshōin of Nara's Tōdaiji temple is another example of an "imperially sealed" treasury.

the mandala, severely damaged, the same day the thief had broken into the Hōryūji treasury (*Shōyoshō* 22b–c; HOSOKAWA 1987, 114–15).

Having recovered the mandala, Shinnyo was granted permission to remove it from the treasury. She took the mandala to Kyoto during the years of 1274 and 1275. One of her first decisions, it seems, was to visit the Hōin Priest Jōen of the temple Ryōzenji in the Higashiyama district of Heian-kyō and Kazan'in Chūnagon Morotsugu, both of whom she asked to help her decipher the text written on the mandala (HOSOKAWA 1987, 115–16). Then, as a part of the fund-raising efforts she launched in the capital, Shinnyo took the *Tenjukoku mandara* on tour. Among other places, Shinnyo gained audience with potential patrons at the court of Retired Emperor Kameyama'in (1249–1305). Emphasizing Chūgūji's connection to court women, she appealed for funds both to make a replica of the mandala and to hold a *kūyo* service for Hashihito. She accomplished these goals around the year 1282, when she wrote the *Ganmon* (ABE 1987, 79–80).

Shinnyo's primary audience in the capital appears to have been made up of women with court ties; indeed, the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* says that it was through the patronage of high-ranking ladies-in-waiting (上臈女房達 *jōrō nyōbō tachi*) that Shinnyo was able to produce a replica of the mandala (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 88b). But many sources suggest that her fame extended beyond court society. The author of the *Shōyoshō,* for example, writes that "everyone in the capital and in Kamakura, from the noble to the base" knew of Shinnyo (信如房ヲハ。京鎌貴モ卑モ皆知タル明人也, *Shōyoshō* 23a; cf. HOSOKAWA 1999, 149–52 and 1987, 114).

As evidence that Shinnyo was in fact known in court circles, several scholars have pointed to a passage from the well-known memoir *Towazugatari*, written by Go-Fukakusa's consort Lady Nijō. In her *Towazugatari,* Lady Nijō records a visit made to Chūgūji in the year 1290. Here she recalls seeing Shinnyo for the first time in a great many years:

> Later I went to visit the Chūgū Temple [Chūgūji], curious to learn about its connection with Prince Shōtoku and his consort. The head of the cloister was a nun called Shinnyobō, whom I had seen once at the palace. She was older than I, and my acquaintance with her scarcely went beyond knowing her name, so I was not sure how she would react to my visit. But she greeted me kindly, and I remained there for a time. (BRAZELL, 1973, 205; Cf. *Towazugatari*, 457)

In mentioning the fact that she had known the nun Shinnyo from her days in service at court, Lady Nijō confirms that Shinnyo had indeed made herself known within court circles. This evidence thereby lends credit to the thesis that Shinnyo's 1274–1275 campaign in Kyoto had been targeted at women of the court.

In addition to Lady Nijō, a number of other prominent contemporaries mention interactions with Shinnyo in their writings. The Buddhist priest and writer Mujū Ichien, for example, includes a story in his *Zōdanshū* that he claims to have first heard from Shinnyo when he visited her at Chūgūji (*Zōdanshū*, 307).

The Saidaiji priests Eison and Sōji also mention Shinnyo with some frequency in their writings, as does the Tendai priest Jōen, whose writings will be explored below. Shinnyo's legacy thrived, her story having a charisma of its own that enabled it to reemerge in various forms, including oral tales of the Muromachi and Sengoku periods.

Much of the considerable body of literature surrounding Shinnyo focuses on her efforts to restore Chūgūji. Many of these early narratives of Shinnyo the revivalist were actually penned by the nun herself. Shinnyo was rather bold in promoting the extraordinary quality of her own role in the restoration of the nunnery, but her narratives and the narratives she commissions tend to center even more clearly on Empress Hashihito, who is recognized as the spiritual mother of the nunnery. Shinnyo identifies herself as a devotee of Prince Shōtoku, but her Chūgūji-related materials privilege the Empress over the Prince. Indeed, thirteenth-century Chūgūji literature develops a full hagiography of the Empress. Shinnyo and those she enlists to write for her movement create literary images of the Empress that diverge significantly from earlier representations of Hashihito. In the end, this literature succeeds in producing new interpretations of the Empress, raising her out of the shadows of Shōtoku biographies and granting her a divine light of her own.

The next section will offer a survey of literary images of Empress Hashihito that predate the Chūgūji revival movement led by Shinnyo. The subsequent section will then turn to an examination of the *Shōtoku Taishi denki*, a text produced as a part of the Chūgūji revival movement. As the most fully articulated Chūgūji tribute to the Empress, the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* stands in stark contrast to literary images of the Empress that existed before the thirteenth-century Chūgūji restoration. The final sections will connect themes related in the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* to Chūgūji literature as a whole and offer broader conclusions about the role of these Empress-centered motifs in the revival of Chūgūji.

Prince Shōtoku and Empress Hashihito in Heian-Period Texts

Empress Hashihito's son Shōtoku has long been revered as a pivotal figure in the cultural and religious history of the Japanese archipelago. Countless hagiographies attest to his miraculous deeds, and he has been credited for everything from the establishment of Buddhism on the Japanese islands to the writing of the first Japanese constitution. But while Shōtoku's presence is ubiquitous in early Japanese texts, his mother tends to remain, in most Heian-period texts, a rather obscure figure.

The tenth-century (917) *Shōtoku Taishi denryaku* (hereafter *Denryaku*) opens with what came to be, by the mid-Heian period, the standard narrative of Shōtoku's mother. A virgin birth story that serves to emphasize Shōtoku's divine nature, the narrative begins with a dream. Before Empress Hashihito became

pregnant with Shōtoku, the story begins, he visits her in a dream. He appears before her as a golden-hued priest (which indicates that he was a manifestation of the *Buddhakāya*, or Buddha body) and, saying that he has made a vow to save the world, indicates that he would like to stay in her womb for a while. When the Empress asks this golden priest who he is, he responds by saying that he is the Bodhisattva Kuse Kannon and that his home is in the Western Direction, or the Western Pure Land. Hashihito then confides that she is hesitant to grant his request since her womb is "filthy and polluted" and is not befitting of a noble being. The Prince responds by saying that he does not shun pollution. The Empress, apparently persuaded by this argument, agrees to grant his request. Shōtoku, delighted, leaps into her mouth. Once she wakes from the dream, she learns that she is pregnant.

A less elaborate version of this story appears in the early Heian-period *Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi den hoketsuki*, which predates the *Denryaku* version of the narrative summarized above. Following its appearance in the *Denryaku*, this same narrative reappears in a number of other texts, including, among others, the 984 *Sanbōe kotoba* (2.1), the tenth-century (985–987) *Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*, the 1040 *Hokke genki* (1.1), and the twelfth-century *Konjaku monogatarishū* (11.1). These texts follow each other closely. They all portray Shōtoku as a divine figure—as the bodhisattva Kannon—and they all describe a virgin birth in which Shōtoku's mother, Empress Hashihito, is a passive figure who refers to her own body as defiled.

The full deification of Shōtoku appears to have taken place during the Heian period. Early legends of Shōtoku, such as the eighth-century texts *Jōgū Taishi bosatsu den* and *Shichi daiki*, portray Shōtoku not as a manifestation of Kannon, but merely as the reincarnation of the Chinese meditation master Huisi. In the early-Heian-period *Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi den hoketsuki*, Shōtoku does not declare that he *is* Kuse Kannon, but only that he has the vow of Kuse Kannon. In the tenth-century *Denryaku*, however, Shōtoku declares that he is indeed Kuse Kannon, and in all the subsequent versions of the narrative listed above, his identification as Kuse Kannon is made explicit (for example, *Sanbōe kotoba, Nihon ōjō gokurakuki, Konjaku monogatarishū, Hokke genki*, and so on).[18]

Excitement centered on the growing Shōtoku cult gained additional momentum from the mid-eleventh century, when various figures, especially priests associated with Shitennōji, began "discovering" the purportedly lost prophesies of Shōtoku. Many of these apocryphal messages and verses, typically said to have been delivered in the form of stone epigraphs, were integrated into various versions of the *Shitennōji engi*. These revelations (some of which later came to be referred to as the *Taishi miraiki* 太子未来記, the *Shōtoku Taishi kimon* 聖徳太

18. For further details on these earlier versions of the Shōtoku biography, see Tanaka Tsugihito 1983, esp. 3–73; and Hayashi 1960, esp. 113–60.

子記文, and the *Taishi byōkutsuge* 太子廟窟偈), both elaborated upon the Prince's divine status and built upon Pure Land interest in the Amida triad (the Buddha Amida flanked by attendant bodhisattvas Seishi and Kannon). Placing Shōtoku's identification as Kannon within the larger framework of the Amida triad, these prophetic texts produce a configuration in which Shōtoku's mother, Anahobe no Hashihito, is identified with Amida Nyorai and his consort, Kashiwade Bunin, is identified as the Bodhisattva Seishi. The idea that Shōtoku, his mother, and his consort were manifestations of the Amida trinity was also linked with the belief that the three had been buried together, a notion referred to as *sankotsu ichibyō* 三骨一廟, "the remains of three in a single tomb."

Thus we witness a fascinating series of transformations in the Shōtoku narrative, which changes from a story in which Shōtoku is the reincarnation of a Chinese Tiantai master to one in which he is the bodhisattva Kannon who "borrows" the womb of the sullied, human empress Hashihito, to one in which he is only one of three divine figures, as his mother and primary consort are themselves revealed as divine. It is of considerable interest that this last development, the identification of Shōtoku's mother with Amida Buddha, calls the standard virgin birth narrative into question, suggesting that Empress Hashihito, far from being a polluted woman who loans her womb out to the exalted Kuse Kannon, is *herself* a divine figure whose status rivals that of her son. But through most of the Heian- and Kamakura-period narratives, it appears, these two views of Hashihito remained largely discrete; that is, while the "discovered" prophesies and verses of Shōtoku identify his mother and consort as divine figures, written narratives of Shōtoku that appear in tale and miracle literature do not mention any association with the Amida trinity and instead portray Empress Hashihito as a mere vessel of Shōtoku's divinity.

The thirteenth-century literature related to the revival of the nunnery Chūgūji, however, breaks this trend. Chūgūji literature ignores the *Denryaku*-style virgin birth narrative altogether and instead builds upon Hashihito's identification as Amida Nyorai as revealed in apocryphal records of Shōtoku. The *Shōtoku Taishi denki*, believed to have been written around 1274, at the height of the Chūgūji-revival led by the nun Shinnyo, is the most obvious example of this shift. In the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* narrative, Hashihito is not only identified with Amida, but as Amida, she is shown to be the most prominent figure in the Amida triad. She is the one who guides and consoles her son Shōtoku, and her Pure Land, which is said to be accessible through her earthly dwelling, the temple Chūgūji, is described in great detail.

Exalting the Empress: Hashihito in the Shōtoku Taishi denki

The authorship of the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* is uncertain, but scholars believe that the text, which appears in the document collection of the Shingon temple

Daigoji, was written around the year 1274, when Shinnyo was most actively engaged in her effort to raise funds for Chūgūji. Judging from its contents and tone, the text appears to have been written by someone who was both close to the court and sympathetic to Shinnyo's central role in Chūgūji's restoration. It seems likely that the text may have been the product of a collaborative project directed by Shinnyo. In any case, it is clear that the author or authors of the text were committed to Shinnyo's version of the Chūgūji revival narrative. The latter section of the text predicts its own "discovery," as well as Shinnyo's unearthing of the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara*, and goes on to explain the divine Empress Hashihito's role in the revitalization of the nunnery.

The *Shōtoku Taishi denki* begins with a moving scene of filial devotion: Prince Shōtoku, kneeling in front of his mother's tomb, is wailing as he mourns her death. He weeps there for seven days and seven nights, praying for a relic of her. He then divulges, just a few sentences into the main narrative, the true identity of his mother:

> From the beginning, my mother's *honji* [original ground] was that of the founder of the Annyō Realm [the Pure Land of Amida]. She was led by compassion to save those not connected to her, to leave her lotus pedestal in the Pure Land of the Ninth Level and to mix with foolish beings [*bonbu*] floating through the six realms of *saṃsāra*, to dwell together with them in this land of dust. Even though her karmic affinity [*en*] with this realm had expired, she did not return to her original land but instead decided to continue guiding sentient beings. I do not know where my mother has been reborn! Is she in the defiled realm or in the Pure Land? (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 87b–88a)

Having made this tearful plea, Shōtoku then prays that he would be shown the place of his mother's rebirth. Seven days later, his request is fulfilled, as a celestial woman arises from Empress Hashihito's grave and comforts Shōtoku with the following words:

> Although I have exhausted my *en* with this realm, I will not return to the Western Pure Land but will remain in this polluted realm in order to benefit sentient beings who have forged *en* with me. I will be born in the Tenjukoku [Land of Infinite Life] towards India. Because foolish people [*bonbu*] have many obstacles and impurities, there are many who will not be reborn in the Western Pure Land. For this reason, I have temporarily established this Tenjukoku. It is a pure land in the defiled realm. It draws in those with heavy karmic obstacles. (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 88a)

Once she has revealed herself as a bodhisattva who has created a pure land out of compassion for sentient beings, the *Shōtoku Taishi denki*'s Empress Hashihito proceeds to tell her son of the wonders unique to her celestial realm. In describing the heavenly realm of Empress Hashihito, the text draws upon language

consistent with conventional Mahāyāna descriptions of pure lands. Empress Hashihito's pure land sounds just like that of Amida's—multilevel pagoda palaces sparkle with jewels, golden pavilions produce beautiful hues of yellow, jeweled pools line the riverbanks, and golden sand emits radiance. It is a land with earth made of lapis lazuli, a land adorned with jeweled lotuses and fragrant trees. Every aspect of this miraculous realm teaches the pure Dharma of the Empress: the birds sing it, the winds preach it, the waves recite it. Just by looking at the trees one attains enlightenment, and comfort is gained simply by touching the grass. In the center of this land, Empress Hashihito tells her son, is a four-tiered palace, and she lives in the palace of the fourth level (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 88a).

Shōtoku's own rebirth is then predicted in a dream revealing the five signs of a heavenly being's death.[19] His mother predicts that Shōtoku will himself join her in her pure land during the spring of the following year, when he is destined to die. Shōtoku responds with joy and begs his mother to show him, before his own eyes, the characteristics of the Tenjukoku. Hashihito thus manifests her pure land, framed in rays of light, before her son. "This," she says, "is the Tenjukoku." Moved, Shōtoku prostrates deeply. He then copies the image of the Tenjukoku with his own hands. His aunt, the Empress Suiko, is so moved by his story and by his illustration of his mother's pure land that she orders the imperial consorts and ladies-in-waiting to embroider the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara*. According to the *Shōtoku Taishi denki,* the women used five colors of silk and created a mandala so large that it was like a banner. The mandala was then stored in the treasury of Hōryūji (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 88a).

The *Shōtoku Taishi denki* version of the narrative explaining the origins of the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara* diverges significantly from other accounts. According to standard versions of the story, the mandala was commissioned not by Shōtoku, but rather in honor of him. The canonical narrative, which can be found in Shōtoku story collections such as the *Jōgū Shōtoku Hōōtei teisetsu,* explain that the Lady Tachibana, one of Shōtoku's consorts, was so devastated by Shōtoku's death (and, perhaps to a lesser degree, by Hashihito's death, which had occurred only a year before Shōtoku's) that she approached her grandmother, Empress Suiko, and said that she was wholly unable to overcome her grief. In response, Empress Suiko is said to have ordered her ladies-in-waiting to weave a silk mandala that would depict Shōtoku's life in the other world, the Tenjukoku. It is this version of the narrative, which understands Tachibana's anguish over Shōtoku's death as the motivating force leading to the creation of the mandala,

19. The text specifically mentions *gosui* 五衰, the five signs of a heavenly being's death. These five signs include 1) the withering of the floral wreath upon one's head; 2) the polluting of one's heavenly garments; 3) sweat pouring forth from one's underarms; 4) constant spinning of the eyes; and 5) the inability to enjoy life in the heavenly realm. In Japan the notion of *gosui* gained currency through Genshin's usage of the term in his *Ōjōyōshū*. See "Gosui," in IBJ, 275b.

that has gained widespread acceptance. This version of the story is so ubiquitous, in fact, that it can be found in the *Kōjien* dictionary of modern Japanese.

In its retelling of the origins of the *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara*, the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* effectively transfers the central focus from the Tachibana-Shōtoku relationship to the Shōtoku-Hashihito relationship. In doing so, the narrative shifts emphasis from Shōtoku veneration to Hashihito veneration. What is more, the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* inverts Shōtoku's position. No longer the worshiped, he is now the worshiper, and it is his mother who occupies an exalted position of omniscience, wisdom, and authority. In the *Shōtoku Taishi denki*, Shōtoku is no longer a golden-hued bodhisattva who demands incubating space in Hashihito's "defiled" womb; instead, he is a doting son who, recognizing his mother's divinity, clings to her every word and prostrates himself before her.

The *Shōtoku Taishi denki* also offers readers a clear definition of the term *tenjukoku* 天寿国. Because the Chinese characters used in this word are not found in Buddhist sutras and are not widely used in other early Japanese writings, scholars have been unable to do more than speculate about the meaning of the term. Given the presumed connection between Shōtoku and Buddhism (links that have only recently become the object of close scrutiny), most scholars have assumed that the term is of Buddhist origins. Many have understood it as a paradise analogous to the Tuṣita Heaven of the Future Buddha Maitreya or to the Western Pure Land of Amitābha.[20] Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that this notion of a *tenjukoku,* understood more literally as a "land of infinite life," was not necessarily related to Buddhist notions of the afterlife and may have in fact been associated with Chinese ideas about Daoist Immortals.[21] It is possible, then, that the creators of the 622 *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara* envisioned Shōtoku and his mother as Daoist Immortals who had conquered death and taken up residence in a land of never-ending life. Buddhist and other continental ideas were still relatively new to Yamato courtiers at this point; that the seventh-century *Tenjukoku shūchō mandara* may have conflated Buddhist ideas with Daoist ones is also a strong possibility. Historians intent upon identifying Shōtoku as the first powerful champion of Buddhism on the Japanese archipelago, however, have tended to overlook the possibility that the mandala could be understood outside a Buddhist framework.[22]

But regardless of how the mandala may have been understood by its seventh-century contemporaries, it is clear that by the thirteenth century, when the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* was written, Pure Land ideas and practices had become so mainstream that Amida's Western Pure Land would have served as the primary

20. For scholarly assessments of *tenjukoku*, see Naitō 2003 and Pradel 1997, esp. 28–29.

21. "Tenjukoku shūchō mandara," in IBJ, 592–93.

22. Pradel addresses such historiographical concerns in her dissertation, cited above. Her second and third chapters, in particular, note that orthodox versions of Japanese history insist on understanding Shōtoku as the motivating force behind the rise of Buddhism in Japan.

frame of reference for most interpreters encountering the unfamiliar term *tenjukoku*. It is no surprise, then, that the author of the *Shōtoku Taishi denki* reads the Tenjukoku through the lens of Amida's Pure Land. But this author does not wholly identify the term Tenjukoku with Amida's Pure Land. Instead, he suggests that Empress Hashihito's Tenjukoku is a satellite of Amida's Pure Land. The *Shōtoku Taishi denki* makes it clear that the true home of Hashihito, a manifestation of Amida, is the Western Pure Land. However, the text goes on to state that the Empress, out of her profound compassion for sentient beings, decided that she would not return to the Western Pure Land immediately but would instead establish the Tenjukoku as a temporary outpost of the Pure Land. The Tenjukoku, which according to the text is located near India, is the Pure Land manifested within the realm of *saṃsāra*, and it warmly welcomes those "foolish beings" (*bonbu*) of the Latter Dharma Age who lack the good karma required for birth into Amida's Pure Land.

The *Shōtoku Taishi denki*'s reformulation and elaboration of the Hashihito narrative is both ambitious and remarkable. Although the notion that Shōtoku was part of an Amida trinity that included his mother and his consort was undoubtedly in circulation by this time, this narrative takes that relatively undeveloped concept and advances it extensively. The authors do not simply identify Hashihito as Amida Nyorai, but they build upon that identification, describing the bodhisattva vows made by Hashihito, who has vowed to save those who would not ordinarily make it to the Western Pure Land. In addition, the *denki* narrative greatly modifies the hitherto standard account how the celebrated *Tenjukoku shūchō* mandala came into existence, shifting from an emphasis on Shōtoku veneration to an argument for Hashihito veneration. Now it is Shōtoku who seeks guidance from his mother; while he is merely the bodhisattva Kannon, she is the even more exalted Amida Buddha.

Finally, the *denki*'s definition of the Tenjukoku as Hashihito's own manifestation of the Pure Land puts the text in dialogue with broader theories of *honji suijaku*, which argue that Buddhist divinities manifest themselves as Japanese kami during the Latter Dharma Age so as to best reach inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago. Read within the context of *honji suijaku* discourse, the *denki*'s explanation of the Tenjukoku as a satellite Pure Land specifically designed for a Japanese audience that perceives itself as incapable of easy entrance into the distant Pure Land of Amida suggests, subtly but effectively, that Empress Hashihito is superior to Amida. The Empress is presented as even more approachable than the merciful Buddha Amida; her pure land is closer to this realm than is Amida's, and it offers greater access. Empress Hashihito is thus portrayed as a savior figure who, for those living in Japan during this Latter Dharma Age, anyway, is even more available (and therefore more effective) than the highly regarded Amida Buddha himself.

The Newly Deified Empress and the Chūgūji Revival

The *Shōtoku Taishi denki* is part of a larger collection of texts produced during the time of the thirteenth-century revival of Chūgūji led by the nun Shinnyo. Some of these texts, like the 1264 "Ryōjusen'in nenjū gyōji" and the 1282 *Ama Shinnyo ganmon*, were written by Shinnyo. Others, such as the *Chūgūji engi* and the liturgical text *Shōtoku Taishi mandara kōshiki* 聖徳太子曼荼羅講式, both thought to have been composed during the period 1273–1275, were written by Jōen 定円, who was both a prominent Tendai priest and a personal friend and supporter of Shinnyo and her movement. Finally, some Chūgūji texts, like the *Shōtoku Taishi engi*, are of unknown authorship.

These texts share a number of common themes, the most prominent of which are the spiritual efficacy of Hashihito and the courageous leadership of Shinnyo. These two themes appear again and again in these texts, which functioned, it would seem, as a body of literature that sought not only to glorify the nunnery and to justify its revival, but also to attract patronage from a specific audience.

Following the *Shōtoku Taishi denki*, other Chūgūji documents build upon the notion that Hashihito is an incarnation of Amida Nyorai. Most notably, Shinnyo's own prayer request, the *Ganmon,* concentrates on the divine power of Empress Hashihito, whose past deeds, Shinnyo writes, "unfailingly generate [benevolent] responses" (*Ganmon*, 82b). As is also suggested in other documents, Shinnyo's *Ganmon* reveals that one of her primary goals in reestablishing Chūgūji was to hold postmortem rites (*on kijitsu kuyō* 御忌日供養) on behalf of Hashihito. In the *Ganmon,* Shinnyo also relates the now familiar narrative of her "discovery" of the *Tenjukoku* mandala following a dream in which it was revealed to her that Hashihito's death date would be revealed on the mandala. Having revived Chūgūji and performed a full day of proprieties for the Empress, Shinnyo claims in her *Ganmon*, "I, Shinnyo, have revived the holy legacy of Anahobe no Hashihito, planting Buddha seeds in the dew of Amida's Western Pure Land. Already we have known the effectiveness of [Hashihito's] Original Vow" (83a).

Shinnyo's portrayal of Hashihito asserts that the Empress is a Buddhist deity: she has an "Original Vow" (*sogan* 素願) that has already proven to be efficacious (*yūkō* 有効), meaning that she has been successful on the bodhisattva path. And her past deeds, like the past deeds of other divine beings, "generate [benevolent] responses" (*kannō* 感応) in the karmic world. Shinnyo also suggests that Shōtoku's eminence was the result not of his own karmic merit, but rather of his mother's guidance: "As for the Empress' acts of faithfulness," Shinnyo writes, "she herself made the temple [Chūgūji] her own residence and aroused in the Prince feelings of mercy and humanity throughout his life" (82b–83a). Notice here that Hashihito is said to have established Chūgūji herself—in most versions of the narrative, Chūgūji is established not by Hashihito, but by Shōtoku, after her death.

The *Chūgūji engi*, thought to have been written by Jōen, also emphasizes the divine status of Empress Hashihito. The *engi* traces the Empress' identification as a manifestation of Amida Buddha to a stone inscription on the tomb of Prince Shōtoku:

> The Empress Anahobe no Hashihito 孔部間人皇后 is an incarnation of [A]mida Nyorai 弥陀如来, the founder of the Heavenly Realm (*gokuraku-kai* 極楽界). A stone inscription on the tomb of the Dharma-King (*hōō* 法王) Shōtoku reads,
>
> [Kannon/Shōtoku's] Original Vow of Great Compassion and Great Mercy
> Is to treat all sentient beings as if they were his only child.
> It was for this reason that, as an expedient means, from the Western Direction.
> He was reborn in the hinterlands [of Japan] and promoted the Dharma [here].
>
> *I am Kuse no Kanzeon [the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara]*;
> *My consort Jōe* 定恵 *is the Great Seishi [Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta];*
> ***The Great Compassionate Mother who bore and raised me***
> ***Is the founder of the Western Pure Land, the Honored [A]mida.***
> ***The worldly truth and the ultimate truth are rooted in the same body;***
> ***One body manifests as three, but they are the same one body.***
> *Our ge'en [karmic destiny to enlighten sentient beings] has already been extinguished;*
> *[And so now] we return to my Pure Land in the Western Direction.*
> *To save all sentient beings in this last age of the Dharma [masse* 末世*],*
> *This flesh-and-blood body to which my father and mother gave birth*
> *I leave here in the beautiful land of this tomb.*
> The remains of three in a single tomb [*sankotsu ichibyō* 三骨一廟]; it is the place of the Amida Triad (*sanzon* 三尊).
> It is the place where the Seven Buddhas of the Past teach the Dharma;
> It is the land of good merit commensurate with the Great Vehicle [Mahāyāna].
> If one makes a pilgrimage here [Chūgūji] just once, he or she will be separated from the evil realms
> And will definitely be reborn in the Heavenly Realm. (*Chūgūji engi*, 86b)

These verses from the *Chūgūji engi* recapitulate concepts already introduced in the *Shōtoku Taishi denki*, namely that Empress Hashihito, the mother of Shōtoku, is a manifestation of Amida, the central and most powerful figure in the Amida triad, and that, in this divine capacity, she has established Chūgūji as an earthly access point to Amida's Pure Land in the West.

It was this characterization of Hashihito, undoubtedly shaped through Shinnyo's influence, that came to define images of the Empress passed down through the centuries. An eighteenth-century hanging scroll from the Chūgūji archives suggests that Hashihito's historical image and theological status, at Chūgūji anyway, were solidified during the last decades of the thirteenth century, when

Shinnyo and her supporters were promoting Hashihito not only as the patron goddess of Chūgūji, but also as a regal woman of the court and as an ideal mother.

An eighteenth-century Chūgūji hanging scroll titled *Hashihito kōgō goei* suggests that the nuns at Chūgūji remained committed, some five hundred years later, to the portrayal of Hashihito included in Jōen's thirteenth-century *Chūgūji engi*. The scroll is inscribed with four lines taken from the tomb verse quoted in Jōen's *Chūgūji engi* (as indicated in boldface above):

生育我身大悲母
西方教主弥陀尊
真如真実本一躰
一躰現三同一身

The Great Compassionate Mother
who bore and raised me
Is the founder of the Western Pure
Land, the Honored [A]mida.
The worldly truth and the ultimate
truth are rooted in the same body;
One body manifests as three, but they
are the same one body.

FIGURE 5. *Hashihito kōgō goei*, eighteenth-century hanging scroll, color on silk, 103.8 x 45.8 cm, held at Chūgūji Nunnery, Nara, Japan. Image from Nara National Museum, *Chūgūji bosatsuzō*.

Equally instructive is the fact that the eighteenth-century scroll portrays Hashihito as a Heian-period court woman (despite the fact that she died centuries before the commencement of the Heian period). In this sense, the eighteenth-century hanging scroll follows the 1254 *Shōkō mandarazu,* introduced earlier, as it, too, dresses Empress Hashihito in the stunning attire of a Heian noblewoman. What is more, both images portray Hashihito as bridging the status of a court lady with that of a nun. Although the earlier image is more explicit in its depiction of Hashihito as a nun, putting her in the white robes of an aristocratic *shukkesha* 出家者, both images depict Hashihito as partially tonsured. A close examination of Hashihito's hair, in both illustrations, reveals shoulder-length locks in the front. Hashihito is thus portrayed as having undertaken at least one tonsure ceremony; in other words, she is represented as a "lay nun," as

an aristocratic woman who has taken some form of the precepts, most likely the bodhisattva precepts.

Aside from these images—the first of which was produced some six hundred years after the Empress' death, and the second produced well over one thousand years following the Empress' death—there is no historical evidence to suggest that Hashihito had ever styled herself as a nun. That she is portrayed this way tells us very little about the actual historical life of Hashihito, of course, but it does allow us to infer a few things about those who deified her in the thirteenth century. If we assume that Shinnyo's primary audience was made up of court women, Imperial Ladies (*nyōin* 女院), and ladies-in-waiting (*nyōbō* 女房), then it is probably fair to speculate that this particular audience would have found Hashihito all the more compelling when portrayed as a nun. The reason, I will argue, is because in looking upon the image of Hashihito as an aristocratic nun, these women were able to catch a glimpse of themselves.

It is likely that most of the court women to whom Shinnyo appealed in her campaign to restore Chūgūji had already undertaken, or expected to undertake in the future, a private ordination ceremony of some kind that would mark them as elite "lay nuns." Such rituals seldom led to the kind of monastic life that Shinnyo had carved out for herself; in most cases, these rituals allowed women to affirm their roles as patrons of Buddhism. As Nishiguchi Junko and Okano Kōji have shown, private ordination rituals became a regular part of aristocratic religious practice from the eleventh century onwards. For men and women alike, it was a mark of prestige and sophistication to become the patron of a Tendai priest and to arrange a lavish private ordination ceremony in which one would receive some form of the precepts (usually the ten major bodhisattva precepts), remove at least a token amount of hair, and have a variety of prayers and incantations performed (Okano 1998). The extravagant ordination rituals commissioned by Imperial Ladies often involved five or more high-ranking Tendai priests (Nishiguchi 1992). Wanting to imitate their powerful female role models, ladies-in-waiting, high-ranking members of the aristocracy, and women of rising warrior families pursued private ordination ceremonies as well, though their ceremonies were typically smaller in scale, sometimes employing only a single priest. Pursuing private ordination did not necessarily indicate that one intended to take up life in a nunnery; ordination was viewed as a means of gaining karmic merit, of displaying Buddhist devotion, and of asserting one's own sophistication.

By the Kamakura period, few court women enjoyed the kind of economic prosperity that had blessed Heian elites. The court was on the wane during the years of the Chūgūji revival, and it is likely, as Hosokawa and Tabata, among others, have pointed out, that many of the former ladies-in-waiting and other warrior family women who populated thirteenth- and fourteenth-century nunneries pursued monastic life primarily because they were left financially insecure, if not homeless, following the destruction brought on by the Genpei War,

the Jōkyū Disturbance, and related conflicts (Hosokawa and Tabata 2002, 245–76). So while it is true that at least some court women still had the financial means to become patrons of Buddhism (otherwise, one would suspect, Shinnyo would not have targeted her fundraising efforts at this audience), many of the women to whom Shinnyo made her appeals were acutely aware of their declining status. And many, it would seem, longed for the Heian past, a time when court women were able to sponsor elaborate rituals on a regular basis and when the court was able to provide consistent support for many ladies-in-waiting. The figure of Hashihito as a Heian-style Empress who had taken religious vows likely appealed to Kamakura-period court women because it allowed them to identify with a court woman who, like most of their peers, had taken a private ordination ceremony. At the same time, however, this particular image of Hashihito may have given Kamakura-period court women an opportunity to forget the financial and political problems they faced and to imagine themselves as descendants of idealized imperial women from the legendary glory days of the court.

In portraying Hashihito as a sophisticated court woman and lay nun, Shinnyo and Jōen not only provided the women of the thirteenth-century court with an opportunity to feel connected to celebrated women from Japan's past, but they also presented these women with an appealing model of religious practice. In sharp contrast to androcentric Buddhist texts that disparage the female body and its potential for enlightenment, the literature and art of Chūgūji argue, though in an implicit fashion, that women could prosper on the Buddhist path. These works also suggest that women need not rely on the mediation of male priests in order to succeed as Buddhists. Empress Hashihito, Chūgūji literature suggests, will provide her followers with all they need to acquire rebirth in her pure land. It is true that, by the time Shinnyo revived Chūgūji, officially tonsured nuns were a thing of the distant past and a number of androcentric Buddhist theories, such as the Five Obstacles and *tennyo jōnan,* had achieved wide circulation. But the Chūgūji deification of Empress Hashihito suggests that women were able, even as late as the mid thirteenth century, to look beyond exclusionary Buddhist rhetoric and to appropriate Buddhist practices and ideas in ways that suited their own needs and concerns.

Chūgūji literature uses the figure of Empress Hashihito not only to attract the patronage of courtiers interested in Shōtoku worship and court women interested in the romanticization of imperial women from Japan's ancient past, but also to emphasize female leadership at Chūgūji. This emphasis on female leadership at Chūgūji is significant because scholars have tended to understand the nunnery's thirteenth-century history from a Saidaiji-centric perspective that attributes Chūgūji's successful revival to the work of Eison and his band of disciples, a group that restored many dilapidated ancient temples as Vinaya institutions.

Under the Leadership of Women: Chūgūji Texts and the Subversion of Androcentric Buddhist Rhetoric

While both Saidaiji's own narratives and modern Japanese scholarship tend to credit Eison and his disciples for the remarkable restorations of Chūgūji, Hokkeji, and other nunneries,[23] the revival narratives related in Chūgūji literature, much like the nun Enkyō's account of the Hokkeji revival, are inclined to ignore Eison and his Vinaya movement. Chūgūji narratives instead emphasize the nunnery's ties to the imperial court. Shinnyo's *Ganmon* does not mention Eison, Sōji, or any Ritsu priest even once. She instead portrays herself as the sole force behind Chūgūji's revival; the priests who are mentioned in the text appear only when they are following her lead. She is bold in asserting her centrality, as well as that of Empress Hashihito. Moreover, she appears to follow the customs of court women over those of monks. When Shinnyo holds the memorial service (*kuyō)* for Hashihito, for example, she does just what a woman of the Heian court would have done: she invites a high-ranking Tendai monk to perform the service. She does not ask Eison or one of his Vinaya-school disciples to lead the ceremony but instead appoints a priest of even higher standing: she invites the Junior Great Master of the Righteous Dharma Seal Genga to preside over the *kuyō*. Shinnyo continually stresses her own affinity both with Shōtoku and with the Empress, and she further suggests that any assistance received from priests was secondary to her own leadership of Chūgūji. According to Shinnyo, priests became involved in the project only *after* she had discovered the mandala.

The *Shōtoku Taishi denki* version of Shinnyo's restoration of Chūgūji does make mention of both Eison and Sōji, a nephew and disciple of Eison. But even though the text refers to Eison and his Vinaya revival movement, it ultimately emphasizes the superiority of Shinnyo and the nunnery's unique role as a temple *exclusively* for women. From an earlier section that elaborates the divine qualities of Empress Hashihito, the text, which claims to record the ancient words of Prince Shōtoku, transitions into a narrative on Shinnyo's restoration of Chūgūji by presenting readers with a prediction offered by the Prince himself:

> Over six hundred years after my entry into nirvana [death], the mandala will first be discovered in the world. This record will not be incorrect. [This will happen] over six hundred and forty years after the Prince's death, during the time of the ninety-first emperor, Go-Uda, when the two brothers Go-Fukakusa-in and Kameyama-in are ruling the realm, in Bun'ei 11 (1274). In the province of Yamato, to the east of Hōryūji Temple, is the Chūgūji Temple, the holy place established by the Prince's mother. Five hundred years after the

23. For examples of Eison-centric treatments of nunneries revived as Vinaya temples, see especially Hosokawa Ryōichi 1987, 1989a, and 1997; Hosokawa and Tabata 2002; Matsuo 2001.

> Prince's death…the temple will have fallen into a state of decay; all that will remain is a two-story main hall and a treasure stupa.
>
> (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 88a)

Having forecasted the tragic decline of Chūgūji, the text then goes on to prophesize the priest Sōji's interest in the nunnery's revitalization:

> Enter here the Nichijō Shōnin [Eison's disciple and nephew Sōji], abbot of the Kawachi temple Sairinji. Although, having seen the way in which Chūgūji had fallen into a state of disuse, he had the will to restore it, he hadn't the means to effectively benefit the temple. So during the Bun'ei period [1264–1275], he cloistered himself in Chūgūji's main hall and prayed for the means to rebuild the temple. In a dream, Shōtoku Taishi appeared to him and said,"Teacher, your kind will is worthy of praise. But this temple, from days of old, is a place maintained by nuns. Now there is again a nuns' order that can revive it. Do not lament!"
>
> Sōji was moved to tears. He met with the Saidaiji abbot Eison and reported this message to him, saying, "It is my wish that you choose the precept-upholding nuns' order and have them maintain this temple." Eison was moved by this, and he selected the Ritsu nun Shinnyo and made her abbess.
>
> (*Shōtoku Taishi denki*, 88a)

Although this text offers a sympathetic portrayal of Sōji, who is praised for his earnest desire to restore Chūgūji to its former glory, the narrative ultimately suggests that Sōji, as a man, is incapable of reviving the nunnery. Emphasizing Chūgūji's unique role as a temple *exclusively* for women, the text insists that a woman lead the nunnery's restoration and offers Shinnyo as the best candidate for the job. It is worth noting here that Prince Shōtoku is given the role of mediator here; it is his guidance that makes decisions legitimate. Moreover, he is understood as having a special affinity with nuns, an idea that will be explored at greater length below.

An additional account of Chūgūji's revival, the *Taishi mandara kōshiki*, appears to have been written by Jōen, in the mid-1270s (Hosokawa 1987, 114–16). The *Taishi mandara kōshiki* follows Shinnyo's own writing in that it places her at the center of Chūgūji's revival. The second of a three-part liturgy designed for use in conjunction with the *Tenjukoku* mandala, the text was most likely composed at Shinnyo's request. Here, at the beginning of the text, Jōen tells the story of Shinnyo's recovery of the mandala:

> First, to reveal the origin story of its manifestation, this mandala is a record that the Prince of the Upper Court [Prince Shōtoku] was led by his mother to birth in the Pure Land. It is the illustration [of the Pure Land] that Empress Suiko ordered her maidservants [*uneme*] to weave. Over fifty reigns later, the time was still not ripe. Over six hundred calendar years passed, and the

> mandala was uselessly buried in Hōryūji. For a long time, it was decaying in a storehouse that could not be opened without the permission of the *sangō* priests. The world knew nothing of the mandala; people did not know of its existence. *Enter here a single bikuni. She was wholly faithful to the Prince of the Upper Court. She deeply lamented the old temple Chūgūji's state of decay. Crying, she made plans to repair the temple by restructuring its main hall. But her begging bowl was still empty, even of mist.* How could this [paltry sum of money] possibly serve as the base for a high-eaved temple hall? Although the robes [of the nuns had become so thin that] they could feel the cold wind, they [sacrificed in order to] just barely keep the three-tiered bell stupa running [that is, in order to keep the temple operating, if only just barely]. They swept the long-neglected, moss-covered paths running between the nuns' quarters and the Buddha Hall. They also performed *tendoku* [ritualized quick sutra readings] and incantations, laying out incense and flowers. The Prince had already built this lofty hall for his Honorable Mother. We also wanted to open the temple right on the day that a memorial service should be held in her honor, but we did not know the date of her death. We wanted to pray for the knowledge of the date that she achieved enlightenment [died]. Even though we asked wise people about this, none of them knew. We also looked for the date in old records, but there was no record of it.
>
> (*Taishi mandara kōshiki,* 88b, emphasis mine)

The account goes on to describe the same story related in the *Chūgūji engi,* the *Shōtoku Taishi denki,* and *Ama Shinnyo ganmon*; namely, that Shinnyo was so determined to find the mandala that she cloistered herself in prayer, received a vision in which revealed the location of the mandala, and eventually acquired the mandala.

Jōen styles Shinnyo as the single person responsible for Chūgūji's revival both in the *Taishi mandara kōshiki* and in the *Chūgūji engi*, which he is thought to have written around the same time. Indicating that Empress Hashihito led Shōtoku to birth in the Pure Land, he describes her in terms that elevate her above her son, and he also describes Chūgūji as the manifestation of the Western Pure Land, the earthly dwelling place of Amida (Hashihito) and Kannon (Shōtoku). Jōen furthermore suggests that Shinnyo's revival of Chūgūji was an act of bodhisattva-like proportions. Shinnyo, Jōen writes, revived Chūgūji so that it flourished as it had in the days of Shōtoku. So this narrative, like other Chūgūji narratives, provides its audience with two female models of Buddhist practice—one ancient (Empress Hashihito) and one contemporary (Shinnyo), both of whom were closely connected to the figure of Prince Shōtoku, a figure already popular among court women. Moreover, the narrative is firm in its assertion that Chūgūji was revived not through the compassion of male monks like Eison, but through the sacrifices made by Shinnyo's hard-working and committed female followers.

In thinking about the ways in which Chūgūji texts portray female leadership in the Buddhist community, the opening passage of Jōen's *Chūgūji engi* is also worth noting:

> Our Dharma King and Merciful Bodhisattva [Prince Shōtoku] was also the one who, in the village of Wakaki ("Village of Young Trees"), first spread the teachings of the Tathāgata and ordained the three nuns Zenshin 善信, Zenzō 善蔵, and Ezen 恵善. [These three nuns] were the first to renounce the world [*shukke* 出家] in our country. Women have the obstructions of the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences [*sanjū* 三従]; the mountain of obstructions caused by their transgressions is high, and their sea of vanity that is the cycle of life and death (*saṃsāra*) is deep. Grieving over these matters, [he, Prince Shōtoku] first encouraged women [to renounce the world and practice Buddhism], and thus [he] ordained about five hundred nuns (*nisō* 尼僧). They all made this Ikaruga Nunnery [Chūgūji] their main temple (*honji*).
>
> (*Chūgūji engi*, 87b)

This excerpt, when read in the context of Jōen's larger valorization of Shinnyo and Chūgūji, is striking. First of all, while many Shōtoku narratives do mention these three nuns, who are said to have been the first ordained clerics in Japan, other Shōtoku narratives do not, as far as I am aware, suggest that Shōtoku encouraged nuns any more than he encouraged monks. Standard Shōtoku narratives do hold that Shōtoku ordained "one thousand monks and nuns" in an effort to help Soga no Umako overcome severe illness. Such narratives typically do not specify, however, that the one thousand ordinands were equally split between monks and nuns, nor do they indicate that Zenshin, Zenzō, and Ezen were among the nuns he ordained. This particular episode from Jōen's *Chūgūji engi* is also unique insofar as it offers a doctrinal explanation of the long-held legend that Japan's first Buddhist clerics were women. Women were the first to be ordained, the passage suggests, because, as women, they faced greater karmic challenges than men and were therefore better able to attract Shōtoku's sympathy. Although neither Jōen nor Shinnyo mention any of the karmic burdens linked to women in any of their other Chūgūji-related works, Jōen here appeals to women's associations with karmic obstacles such as the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences.

Jōen's references to the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences can be read in several ways. On the one hand, his handling of the terms confirms that the notion that women faced soteriological obstacles specific to their sex was, by the thirteenth century, a well-entrenched one. At the same time, however, the context in which Jōen employs this rhetoric is especially noteworthy. For here Jōen offers a rereading of the historical narrative that fully recognizes Japan's first three female monastics, Zenshin, Zenzō, and Ezen. By contrast, Eison, in one of his sermons, dismisses these three nuns as women who had not been ordained properly. According to Eison, Zenshin, Zenzō, and Ezen were not

"real" nuns—in fact, he seems to mock, in a record of one of his sermons, those who would think of them as such (*Kōshō bosatsu gokyōkai chōmonshū*, 218). But Jōen re-appropriates the narrative by arguing that these first nuns—whom he further identifies as the first nuns of Chūgūji—received ordination from the legendary Shōtoku himself. His *Chūgūji engi* thereby rejects the view that Japan's, and Chūgūji's, first nuns were not legitimate members of the Buddhist *sangha*.[24] He calls these women not merely *ama* 尼 (as Eison does), but *nisō* 尼僧, the inclusion of the character *sō,* or priest, suggesting that the women were fully ordained clerics. Against Eison's description of Japan's first nuns' order as pitifully underdeveloped (he says that the nuns "had barely shaved their heads" and "hadn't as much as five robes"), Jōen describes the order established at Chūgūji as a flourishing one that counted over five hundred women among its ranks. He furthermore argues that these first nuns, and, indeed, Chūgūji's current nuns, had a special relationship with the deified Shōtoku himself. How could anyone, including Eison, fail to recognize as legitimate those ordained by Shōtoku?

This particular argument for the legitimacy of Chūgūji hinges on the connection between Chūgūji nuns and Shōtoku, which is described in terms of the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences. While more conventional doctrinal treatments of the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences had tended to cite these heavy karmic burdens as arguments for the exclusion of women from the monastic order,[25] Jōen uses these concepts for the exact opposite purpose. He suggests that these karmic burdens actually serve to legitimate the nuns' order, for it was precisely because women were understood as having faced the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences, Jōen writes, that Shōtoku forged a special relationship with them.

Also significant is the fact that Jōen's mention of the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences is not understood as incongruous with the larger purpose of the *Chūgūji engi*, which valorizes Shinnyo and Empress Hashihito. Given the degree to which the *Chūgūji engi* venerates Shinnyo for her commitment to Buddhist practice, her miraculous recovery of the *Tenjukoku* mandala,and her leadership at Chūgūji, it is clear that Jōen does not understand the "heavy karmic burdens of women" as having hindered Shinnyo's practice. Since Jōen celebrates Shinnyo, in her female state, as a model Buddhist practitioner and leader, we can understand his handling of the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences as one that recognizes the assumption that women face heavy karmic burdens while simultaneously rejecting the idea that these karmic burdens are of any *real* consequence in women's practice of Buddhism.[26]

24. Eison identifies the three nuns with the nunnery Toyuradera.

25. In Hōnen's commentary on the *Guan wuliangshou jing*, for example, he cites the Five Hindrances and the Three Obstacles as justification for the exclusion of women from certain temples and sacred places. See *Hōnen shōnin zenshū*, 77.

26. See, especially, Matsuo 2001, 372–73, 376, 378–80 and Hosokawa 1987, 1989b, and 1997.

It is worth noting that while Jōen includes references to the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences in the *Chūgūji engi*, the Hokkeji nun Enkyō ignores the concept altogether in her *Hokke metsuzaiji engi*, and Shinnyo, too, avoids the topic of women's heavy karmic burdens in her writings, such as the *Ganmon*. Perhaps Jōen, as a Tendai monk unable to shrug commitments to the doctrinal orthodoxy of his day, was not in a position that would have allowed him to "talk past" the various androcentric Buddhist doctrines that Shinnyo and Enkyō manage to ignore in their writings. In any case, the way in which Jōen's writing invokes the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences to argue in *support* of Shinnyo's leadership at Chūgūji accentuates the complexity and multivalence of rhetoric about women and gender in the Ritsu nuns' revival movement and illustrates the ways in which arguments in support of the nuns' own interests may have overlapped with, appropriated, or even been embedded within, certain androcentric assumptions.

Conclusion

Chūgūji literature uses images of Shōtoku and Empress Hashihito in several distinct ways. Perhaps the least remarkable of the conclusions to be drawn from this study is that Chūgūji narratives clearly draw upon the widely recognized authority attributed to Shōtoku as a way of arguing for Chūgūji's importance, both historically and culturally. By this time Shōtoku belief was, of course, quite widespread and was especially popular among the court elite. That Chūgūji narratives deliver dreams and divine messages through the figure of Shōtoku (here I refer to the dream-visions of Shinnyo and Sōji) should hardly surprise us; Shōtoku was also delivering doctrine-legitimating dreams to other, contemporaneous Buddhist figures (like Shinran, for example).

The more fascinating aspect of these Chūgūji narratives is first that they elevate Empress Hashihito, elaborating and fully developing the notion that she is an incarnation of the Buddha Amida; secondly, that they valorize Shinnyo's Buddhist practice and leadership without problematizing her female state; and thirdly that they suggest a particular affinity between Prince Shōtoku and nuns. Far from ignoring the fact that Chūgūji, as a nunnery, was distinct from male-centered Buddhist temples, Chūgūji literature instead draws attention to its position as an institution for women and attempts to use these differences to the temple's advantage, primarily, it would seem, by working to attract the patronage of court women.

Chūgūji literature would have been attractive to women of the court for several reasons. First of all, given the degree to which Shōtoku worship was already popular among courtiers, Chūgūji's connection with Shōtoku and his mother would have had a certain appeal. Secondly, it is likely that court women would have been drawn to the ways in which Chūgūji literature idealized the leadership

qualities, Buddhist practice, and salvific powers of female figures like Shinnyo and Empress Hashihito.

By the thirteenth century, when this literature was written and circulated, the theory that women needed to acquire male bodies (*tennyo jōnan*; *henjō nanshi*; *tennyo jōbutsu*) had spread wide and far, especially in elite society, which had been exposed to the notion since the Heian period. Also widespread by this time was the notion that women faced heavy karmic burdens specific to their sex, namely the Five Hindrances and the Three Obediences. Indeed, contemporary Japanese scholars examining the Saidaiji Vinaya movement and its role in the restoration of ancient nunneries have repeatedly argued that women who aligned themselves with the Eison's Vinaya movement had fully internalized the androcentric rhetoric of the Saidaiji school, which held that women were soteriologically inferior to men and should pray for rebirth into male bodies if they hoped to acquire salvation. Such scholars have gone on to argue that nuns associated with Eison's group would have been acutely aware of their spiritual inferiority as women and would have lacked confidence in own understanding and practice of Buddhism.

But the revival literature of Chūgūji, much like that of Hokkeji, suggests that women associated with these nunneries, far from having internalized male rhetoric concerning the inferiority of the female body, actually looked to female figures as exemplary models of Buddhist practice. Chūgūji renderings of Empress Hashihito, much like Hokkeji renderings of Empress Kōmyō (a topic I treat in other research), imply that women can indeed pursue Buddhahood as women, and in women's bodies. Rather than suggesting the need for transformation into a male-gendered body (as much Saidaiji and other contemporaneous monastic literature tends to do), Chūgūji literature instead suggests that a certain affinity between women and Buddhism had existed in Japan since Shōtoku's day. "Talking past" popular concepts regarding the insurmountable obstacles faced by women on the Buddhist path, Chūgūji narratives offer an alternative view: they suggest that Chūgūji patrons can overcome concerns about their sex and can establish a place for themselves in a lineage that traces itself back to legendary imperial women from an idealized past. In re-appropriating and fully deifying Empress Hashihito, Chūgūji literature diverts its readers' attention away from the notion that salvation is acquired only through the mediation of male priests and suggests instead that women, in modeling themselves after the female exemplar Shinnyo, can rely on the salvific powers of the once royal, now divine Empress Hashihito.

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BSD *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten* 仏書解説大辞典. Ono Genmyō 小野玄妙, ed. Tokyo: Daitō Shuppansha, reprint 1974–1978.

DNBZ *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書. 150 vols. Tokyo: Bussho Kankōkai, 1912–1922.

HMZJE *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* 法華滅罪寺縁起 (1304). By Enkyō 円鏡. In YKT 5: 140a–143b.

IBJ *Iwanami Bukkyō jiten* 岩波仏教辞典. Nakamura Hajime 中村 元 et al., eds. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1998.

KJGSK *Kanjin Gakushōki* 感身学正記. By Eison 叡尊. In SEDS 1–76.

NKBT *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本文学大系. 102 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957–1968.

NS *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. NKBT 67–68.

SEDS *Saidaiji Eison denki shūsei* 西大寺叡尊伝記集成. Kanshū Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 監修奈良国立文化財研究所 ed. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1977.

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SNKBZ *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集. 88 vols. Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1994–.

YKT *Yamato koji taikan* 大和古寺大観. 7 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978.

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭 eds. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932.

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*Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi bosatsuden*上宮聖徳太子菩薩傳 . DNBZ 112: 1–7.

Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi den hoketsuki 上宮聖徳太子伝補闕記. DNBZ 112: 3–7.

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