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The Shōkokuji Pagoda

Building the Infrastructure of Buddhist Kingship in Medieval Japan

This article outlines the history of the Shōkokuji Pagoda and reflects on the building's role in the remarkable career of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408). A small yet critical body of documents from the late fourteenth century sheds light on a compelling set of details regarding the 109-meter-tall monument's location, iconographic program, and ritual functions. The findings reveal a conscious impulse to mimic precedents set two centuries earlier by powerful ex-sovereigns of the Insei period (1180s–1280s). By building the Shōkokuji Pagoda, Yoshimitsu sought to create a context, both material and situational, within which the symbols and rituals of Buddhist kingship could be deployed to assert a status synonymous with dharma king. In doing so, he forged an anthropocosmic connection between himself and the divine, thereby perpetuating an architectural tradition that can be compared to the great Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms of Southeast Asia.

keywords: Ashikaga Yoshimitsu—Shōkokuji—dharma king—*axis mundi*—Buddhist kingship—cosmology—stupas—Southeast Asia—Kyoto—*kenmitsu*

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The urban and architectural legacy of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408) is well known and widely celebrated. His residential headquarters of Muromachi (Muromachi-dono 室町殿), known popularly as the "palace of flowers," gave the Ashikaga regime its historical toponym. The Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku shariden 金閣舎利殿) looms large in the narrative of medieval Japanese culture, and the Zen monastery of Shōkokuji 相国寺 continues to dominate Kyoto's physical and cultural landscape. The recent discovery of a bronze fragment near the Golden Pavilion has sparked interest in yet another of Yoshimitsu's contributions to medieval Kyoto, one of monumental scale and architectural audacity. Towering a staggering 109 meters above the city and decorated to represent a stacked mandala of the two realms (*ryōkai mandara* 両界曼荼羅), the Shōkokuji seven-story pagoda was a breathtaking statement about Yoshimitsu's capacity to leverage the symbolic power of architecture and ritual pageantry to advance his political aims.

This article outlines the history of the Shōkokuji Pagoda and reflects on the building's role in Yoshimitsu's remarkable career, first as shogun, then prime minister, and eventually a transcendent figure who ruled from cloistered retirement. Although a scarcity of textual records and the absence of archeological investigations have long shrouded the pagoda in mystery, a close reading of a small yet critical mass of documents sheds light on a compelling set of details regarding the tower's location, iconographic program, and ritual functions. The findings reveal a conscious impulse to mimic precedents set two centuries earlier by powerful ex-sovereigns of the Insei 院政 period (1180s–1280s). By building the Shōkokuji Pagoda, it is argued, Yoshimitsu sought to create a context, both material and situational, within which the symbols and rituals of Buddhist kingship could be deployed to assert a status synonymous with dharma king (*hōō* 法皇).

Such a proposition, albeit tentative, advances a fundamental reassessment of Yoshimitsu's biography, which has changed dramatically over the past decade. The previous consensus that he sought to supplant the imperial lineage has now been thoroughly dismissed (Imatani 1990). Instead, some have focused on the significance of his 1402 investiture as "King of Japan" (*Nihon kokuō* 日本国王) by the Ming sovereign (Kojima 2008). Such an honor provided Yoshimitsu with privileged access to luxury goods from the continent and a path to vastly increase his wealth. It also catalyzed a burst of cultural production that emanated from his retirement villa at Kitayama 北山. It must be remembered, however,

that the title of "king" merely signified Yoshimitsu's diplomatic subservience to the Ming. It had no relevance within Japanese political discourse and, as such, rarely appeared on domestic documents.

Recently, attention has turned to Yoshimitsu's fascination with the careers of several cloistered emperors who ruled from retirement during the twelfth century.[1] This shift in focus is constructive because Yoshimitsu's mimicry of Shirakawa 白河 (1053–1129) and Goshirakawa 後白河 (1127–1192) in particular is undeniable. Commentators are confounded, however, by the question of how someone like Yoshimitsu, well versed and otherwise deeply respectful of elite precedent and protocol, could have reasonably aspired to become retired emperor without ever having sat on the throne. The emerging consensus is a compromised view that he must have sought to mimic the *kind* of kingship exercised by powerful ex-sovereigns, but not necessarily attain their formal status. Several scholars have constructively used the word *chiten* 治天 to signify a transcendent Japanese ruler who, like Shirakawa or Yoshimitsu, enjoyed supreme political influence, irrespective of their status (Conlan 2011; Imatani 1990).

There is, however, another possible explanation for this apparent paradox, one that is hidden in plain sight. Although the several figures who Yoshimitsu emulated were indeed retired emperors, "retired emperor" was not the title they used in their lifetimes. Indeed, on this point, the documentary record is unambiguous: the several ex-sovereigns who exercised sweeping influence during the Insei period were most frequently called *hōō*, the Sino-Japanese rendering of the Sanskrit term *dharmaraja*, meaning "dharma king."[2] This fact is obscured, however, by the tendency for modern scholars to habitually conflate *hōō* with "retired emperor," often using the term interchangeably with *in* 院 and *jōkō* 上皇, even within the same scholarly works. This kind of rhetorical slippage has profound implications on interpretation. In the first instance, it perpetuates a Meiji-era assertion that the imperial institution was the perpetual trunk and pivot of premodern Japanese politics. In the second, it ignores compelling parallels between the political discourses of medieval Japan and other parts of Asia.

As was the case in premodern South and Southeast Asia, the term "*hōō*" signified an idealized form of kingship in which the ruler unified sacred authority and secular power, the Buddhist law (Dharma) and governance of the realm (*artha*) (Tambiah 1976, chapter 2). When the discourse of Buddhist kingship arrived in Japan as early as the sixth century the notion of the dharma king penetrated the imperial institution (Walley 2015), but powerfully conservative and combinatory forces prevented it from becoming the defining feature of the emperor's legitimacy (Rambelli 2007). Instead, it was a select few cloistered sovereigns

1. In addition to the works cited below, a prominent example includes Takagishi (2004).
2. Note that *hōō* written as 法皇 appears far more frequently than the homophone 法王.

of the medieval era who most fully exploited the idiom to make it the cornerstone of regimes that achieved something that had remained elusive for almost all Japan's emperors: the unification of sacred authority and political power.

The fact that each of Japan's *hōō* were also ex-emperors makes for an interesting, even compelling quirk of Japanese history, but from the perspective of pan-Asian political discourse, it is rather incidental. Men like Shirakawa and Goshirakawa certainly used their heredity and capital connections to amass wealth and exercise influence. Having been emperor may have even provided them with semi-sacred credentials that set them apart from their peers. And yet, their post-retirement legitimacy was couched firmly within the idiom of Buddhist kingship, not the status of ex-emperor. Having retired, taken the tonsure, and "left the world," they had transcended the narrow confines of Japanese political discourse to become dharma kings in the model of ancient India's Asoka (ca. 232 BCE) or Angkor's Jayavarman II (ca. 770–835 CE).[3]

When evaluating Yoshimitsu's career, this last interpretation proves useful. In other words, to the extent that the shogun emulated Shirakawa and others like him, his aim was not to insinuate the status of emperor or even retired emperor, but rather to depart that dysfunctional system altogether and become *hōō*, dharma king. Yoshimitsu's impulse to play the part is beyond question.[4] After being made Grand Chancellor of State in 1395, for example, he insisted upon wearing ceremonial robes in the styles of Dharma Kings Goshirakawa and Gosaga 後嵯峨 (1222–1272). When climbing Mount Hiei in 1396, he choreographed the procession to resemble that of Dharma King Toba in 1142 and his practically obsessive trips to Ise can be closely compared to the Kumano pilgrimages of Goshirakawa. At his retirement villa at Kitayama, there were two full-scale branch temples of the Shingon and Tendai schools. There, resident protector monks (*gojisō* 護持僧) engaged in a virtually perpetual stream of rituals historically associated with *hōō*, including those that explicitly referred to their patron as a dharma king and Cakravārtin, a "wheel turning universal monarch" (Ōta 2007). Finally, and most famously, Yoshimitsu sought to become "Dajō tennō" 太上天皇, a title synonymous with retired emperors. Had he followed the example of his predecessors, we can be confident he would have shortly converted "Dajō tennō" to "Dajō hōō" 太上法皇, thus making himself "dharma king" in name as well as deed. Incidentally, this is precisely the epitaph that appears on Yoshimitsu's mortuary tablet at the temple of Rinsenji 臨川寺 (Imatani 1990, 175).[5]

3. In Japanese history, forty-five emperors took the title of *hōō*. See Murakami (2003, 131).

4. For details on each example, see Stavros (2017, 70).

5. Another key way Yoshimitsu mimicked powerful retired emperors was by placing his kin into leadership clergy positions with the title of "dharma prince" (*hosshinnō* 法親王), thus conflating his own lineage (imperial and warrior) and dharma lineages. On this topic, see Bauer (2012).

Imagining Yoshimitsu as dharma king requires an acknowledgment of political plurality in medieval Japan and a currency of kingship idioms outside the imperial lineage. Neither, however, should be problematic. He was born, after all, during the Nanbokuchō 南北朝 era (1335–1392), a time when a divided imperial lineage gave rise to heated and sometimes violent debates over imperial legitimacy. Medieval writings are replete with references to Buddhist kingship while rulers such as Shirakawa, Goshirakawa, and Yoshimitsu himself engaged in rites and rituals that sanctified their legitimacy in specifically Buddhist terms. They built temple-palace complexes that can readily be considered alternate capitals and surrounded themselves with mandalas, dharma wheels (*dharmachakra*), pagodas, and other Indian symbols of sacred rulership. This article is about just one of those symbols, the Shōkokuji Pagoda. Although it cannot tell the whole story of Yoshimitsu's political aims, it reveals much about his intent to exploit precedent and the idiom of Buddhist kingship to attain a position of transcendental influence.

Before proceeding, a few remarks should be added to signal the broader implications of this research. Focusing on the material record of Buddhist kingship makes possible compelling comparisons between Japan and Southeast Asia. Although it is widely recognized that Hindu-Buddhist ideas inspired the religious monuments of Borobudur, Angkor, Luang Prabang, and Pagan, precisely the same discourse can explain the construction in Japan of Ninnaji 仁和寺, Hosshōji 法勝寺, Toba 鳥羽, and Hōjūji 法住寺 (Uejima 2010). In both Southeast Asia and Japan—and at about the same time (eighth to the thirteenth centuries)—"dharma kings" were building temple-palace complexes that symbolized sacred status and facilitated political supremacy. If Yoshimitsu is included in the list of Japanese *hōō*, his own architectural legacy—including the pagoda discussed here as well as his Kitayama villa—can be read as an extension of a building lineage that dates back to the ninth century.[6] Subsequently linking that lineage to the monuments of Southeast Asia is not difficult when we remember that Ninnaji, the first of a Japanese temple-palace prototype, was built not long after Kūkai 空海 (774–835) imported the first fully articulated discourse on Buddhist kingship.[7] Having studied the rituals, symbols, and cosmologies

6. Hiraoka Jōkai (1988, 635, 656–58) has made a parallel comparison regarding institutional similarities between Ninnaji and Hosshōji.

7. Kūkai had only limited success with imperial uptake. His first sanctifying consecration (*kanjō* 灌頂) for an imperial was done not for a reigning emperor, but rather for Heizei 平城 (774–824), a retired and cloistered emperor (Grapard 2000). It was not until the thirteenth century when similar rituals came to be held for reigning emperors (Matsumoto 2005), but these were formulaic and never came to define imperial legitimacy (Kamikawa 1990). Instead, Kūkai's continental ideas flourished most meaningfully among former sovereigns such as Uda, Shirakawa, Toba, and Goshirakawa. These men each underwent secret indoctrinations and consecrations that

in Chang'an alongside monks from the great centers of Buddhist learning in Khmer, Java, and Sumatra, would it be unreasonable to imagine Kūkai also brought to Japan ideas of monumentalism that were flourishing at that time in Southeast Asia? (Miksic 1990, 20). Only further research will tell.

Situating the Pagoda

The completion of the Shōkokuji Pagoda in 1399 was the culmination of a building frenzy that, over the course of twenty years, transformed the capital's elite northern district of Kamigyō 上京 into a sprawling temple-palace complex (see figure 1). It began in 1381 when Yoshimitsu created the Muromachi Palace, an opulent residential headquarters embedded with architectural and stylistic elements indicative of the shogun's status as a member of the senior nobility (Stavros 2017). A year later, he began construction on the temple of Shōkokuji. Connected to Muromachi via a private passage, Shōkokuji's grounds covered an expansive fifty-seven acres and encompassed at least five sub-temples. Although the main temple was, and continues to be, institutionally associated with the Gozan Zen establishment, the Shōkokuji name was also applied to two detached venues reserved expressly for exoteric and esoteric (*kenmitsu* 顯密) rituals. The first was the Hakkō Hall (Hakkō-dō 八講堂), located southwest of Shōkokuji's main gate. Functionally, the hall replaced Tōjiji 等持寺 as the preferred venue of Ashikaga memorial services conducted by monks dispatched from the Tendai 天台 headquarters of Enryakuji 延暦寺 and several older temples in Nara 奈良 (Ōta 2002). The seven-story pagoda constituted Shōkokuji's second *kenmitsu* venue and it too stood apart from the main, Zen-oriented monastic grounds (Takahashi 2015, part 1, chapter 3). Despite the apparent dislocation, recent findings confirm that the Muromachi Palace and each of Shōkokuji's three elements were carefully arranged to be part of an integrated master plan that, taken as a whole, is best characterized as a single temple-palace complex (Stavros 2017).

Most striking about the discovery of an alignment is how it makes possible comparisons between Yoshimitsu's architectural legacy and the great temple-palace complexes created during the Insei period, namely Shirakawa-dono 白川殿, Toba-dono 鳥羽殿, and Hōjūji-dono 法住寺殿 (Stavros 2014, 68–74). The last remains partially intact, home to the famous Sanjūsangendō 三十三間堂. Shared traits include the existence of a residential palace consisting of redundant north-south compounds, the attachment of multiple temples, and in each case

validated their status as sacred rulers. (Note that the title of *hōō* was never applied to someone sitting on the Japanese throne.) Recent research has shown that Yoshimitsu engaged in virtually identical rituals, employing full-time "protector monks" (*gojisō* 護持僧) on a purpose-built consecration platform (*dansho* 壇所) first at his Muromachi palace (Takahashi 2015), then later at a fully-fledged Shingon temple at Kitayama (Ōta 2007).

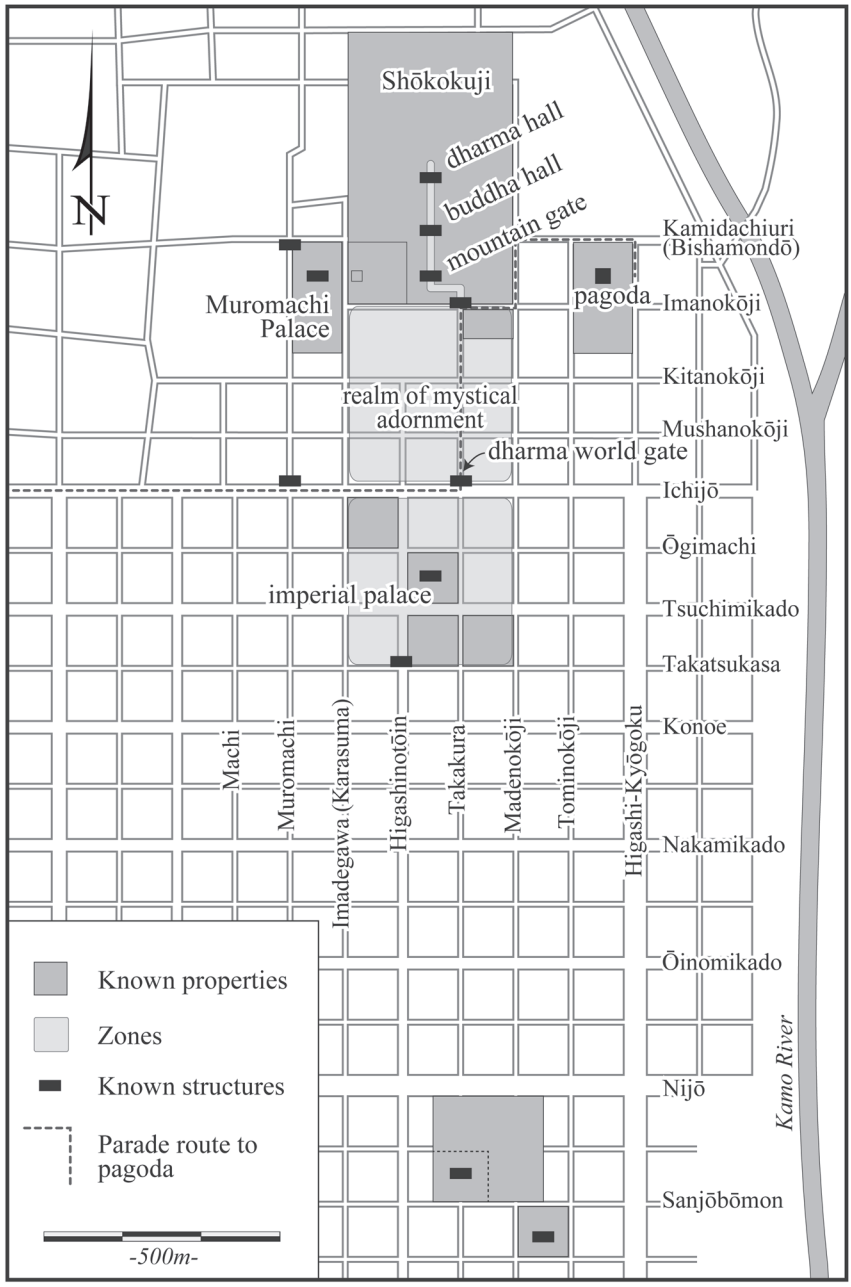

FIGURE 1. Kyoto in the fourteenth century, highlighting the district of Kamigyō and the building projects of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu.

a close attention to Kyoto's classical geography. These same characteristics are equally applicable to Yoshimitsu's later retirement villa at Kitayama (Hosokawa 2010). The physical similarities are so pronounced and Yoshimitsu's pretentions so unmistakable, Shōkokuji (as well as Kitayama) can readily be compared to a *goganji* 御願寺, a temple built by a sovereign to be occupied in retirement (Nishiguchi 1986; Tomishima 2016a, 160). Of course, the biggest difference between Shōkokuji and previous *goganji* is the strong influence of Zen as opposed to the *kenmitsu* schools. This modification might have been a sign of the times: by the fourteenth century, Gozan Zen had become extremely influential and enjoyed close ties with the Ashikaga family and regime. The sect undoubtedly played a key role in Yoshimitsu's political career (Harada 2016). Nevertheless, by also equipping his complex with dedicated *kenmitsu* venues—the pagoda in particular—Yoshimitsu created the infrastructure necessary to conduct rituals in ways that closely mimicked the dharma kings he sought to emulate.

As will be discussed in some detail below, the Shōkokuji Pagoda was directly inspired by the great pagoda created by Shirakawa at Hosshōji in 1091. Built in an audacious continental style with eight sides and nine stories, Hosshōji's eighty-one-meter-high megastructure dominated Kyoto's northeastern horizon for two and a half centuries (Tomishima 2011b). Although destroyed sixteen years before Yoshimitsu was born, we might imagine the young shogun growing up with stories of the towering emblem to Shirakawa's influence. It would be reasonable to assume Yoshimitsu built his own pagoda to match Shirakawa's monumentalism in a general sense. To do so, however, would be to overlook the specific symbolic significance of pagodas—or stupas—within the context of Buddhist kingship. In addition to their function as reliquaries, throughout premodern Asia, the stupa was deployed to represent a symbiotic relationship between sacred cosmology and kingship. Adrian Snodgrass has called it a homologous symbol of the cosmic mountain (Mount Meru) and navel of the universe, while John Irwin has argued for the stupa's nature as an *axis mundi*, marking the center of both cosmos and kingdom (Snodgrass 1985; Irwin 1979). Donald Swearer writes:

> The stupa in its structural form suggests that the ruler is empowered or legitimated by his association with the creative-ordering-liberating forces of the universe … and that through his association, the ruler himself, becomes an active agent in maintaining the order of the universe. (Swearer 2010, 81)

This discourse connecting the built landscape with kingship should not be forgotten when assessing the significance of the pagodas at Hosshōji and Shōkokuji, as well as elsewhere. More than reliquaries or monuments for the sake of monumentalism, they signified an anthropocosmic connection between their creators and the divine.

Precedent and its Deviations

Readers of early Japanese sources will know that ancient and medieval authors were preoccupied (shall we say "obsessed"?) with matters of precedent. It was a governing pillar of elite society and the object of respect for anyone seeking to underscore their legitimacy (Stavros and Kurioka 2015). This is not to say that precedent could not be altered. It could and often was. In fact, the success of a leader in premodern Japan might be measured by his or her capacity to negotiate a delicate compromise between the past and the future, to respect precedent while simultaneously manufacturing it. Yoshimitsu was no exception. The small but dense set of documents related to the pagoda's dedication in the ninth month of 1399 capture a clear intention to model the day's protocol and pageantry on similar events sponsored by previous dharma kings.[8] To the extent that Yoshimitsu departed from precedent, however, he did so only to place himself—quite physically—into an even more central role and redress the perceived mistakes of his predecessors.

Perhaps the most remarkable nod to precedent is implied in the very composition of the official record of the pagoda's dedication. Authored by imperial regent Ichijō Tsunetsugu 一条経嗣 (1358–1418), *Shōkokuji no tō kuyō-ki* 相国寺塔供養記 (hereafter *Kuyō-ki*) begins by chronicling Buddhism's arrival in Japan and its subsequent propagation by virtuous monks and rulers. Among the latter, there is an unmistakable emphasis on five men who underwent sanctifying consecrations (*kanjō* 灌頂) and took the title of dharma king. In rapid succession, the author enumerates the spiritual achievements and temple building projects of Uda 宇多 (867–931), Enyū 円融 (959–991), Shirakawa, Toba 鳥羽 (1103–1156), and Goshirakawa, all of whom are consistently called "*hōō*."[9] To this illustrious list is finally added Yoshimitsu and his pagoda. The implication of the narrative is clear: Yoshimitsu is heir and successor to a lineage of dharma kings who had been building monuments of Buddhist kingship since the ninth century.[10] The Shōkokuji Pagoda is merely the latest addition.

The dedication began early in the morning of the fifteenth with members of the senior nobility assembling at Yoshimitsu's Kitayama villa, in Kyoto's northwest. Forming a grand procession, they paraded with great fanfare through the capital's heavily guarded streets, thronged with sightseers (*Kuyō-ki*, 359–63). The typically circuitous route respected the spatial structure of the greater temple-palace

8. The dedication took place on Ōei 応永 6.9.15.

9. The only other honorable mentions are given to Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701–756) for his establishment of Tōdaiji 東大寺 and Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027) for building Hōjōji 法成寺.

10. An interesting study could be done on how this lineage threads through, yet remains oblique to, the orthodox narrative of Japanese imperial rule.

complex, passing through its constituent "dharma world gate" (*hokkaimon* 法界門) and "realm of mystical adornment" (*myōshōgon-iki* 妙荘厳域) (see FIGURE 1).

Upon arrival at the pagoda's grounds in the city's northeast, Yoshimitsu and his entourage were met by over a thousand monks representing the leading temples of Nara and Kyoto. Chief among them was the grand abbot of the Tendai school whose scribes began their account with a revealing reference to precedent: "The model for today's event is the dedication of Tōdaiji 東大寺 during the Kenkyū era" (*Mon'yō-ki* 門葉記, vol. 12, 276–77). They are referring to the momentous ceremony marking the reconstruction of Tōdaiji's Great Buddha Hall by order of Goshirakawa in 1195. *Kuyō-ki* provides somewhat more detail:[11]

> Today's dedication of the pagoda was based on the one-thousand-monk ceremony held at the dedication of Tōdaiji during the Kenkyū era.… The religious services, which were exoteric, were coordinated by lord Sanjō Sanefuyu 三条実冬 [1354–1411]. This too accords with the Kenkyū precedent. On that occasion, the same role was fulfilled by Sanefuyu's ancestor, Minister of the Left Sanefusa 実房 [1147–1225]. (*Kuyō-ki*, 359–60)

The Tōdaiji dedication is cited as the model three more times in the same document, firmly establishing the pagoda's ritual pedigree. This relationship is important because it reveals in general terms yet another way Yoshimitsu impersonated a powerful dharma king.[12] By imitating Goshirakawa in particular, however, he achieved the secondary benefit of drawing a connection between himself and Emperor Shōmu 聖武 (701–756), Tōdaiji's original creator. *Kuyō-ki* intimates this very association by reminding readers of the similarities in the eye-opening ceremonies carried out by Shōmu and Goshirakawa (*Kuyō-ki*, 354). Although it is conventional to read the eighth-century construction of Tōdaiji as an attempt to augment the prestige and political centrality of the imperial lineage, it should be remembered that, by the time of the dedication, Shōmu was firmly in cloistered retirement (PIGGOTT 1997, chapter 7). He had left the imperial institution altogether. The creation of Tōdaiji could just as readily be interpreted as an early example of someone exploiting the symbols of Buddhist kingship to move beyond the confines of the imperial state, which at the time was gravely dysfunctional.

Not all mimicry was explicit. In fact, some of the most striking parallels go completely unremarked in the documentary record. A careful comparison of accounts reveals that seating arrangements at the pagoda's dedication were

11. Although Goshirakawa was the driving force behind Tōdaiji's reconstruction, it should be noted that he did not live long enough to attend the final dedication. He did, however, personally perform the Great Buddha's eye-opening ceremony in 1185.

12. *Jimon jijōjō kikigaki* 寺門事条々聞書 (80) mentions that Yoshimitsu modeled himself, presumably meaning his dress and actions, on Dharma King Kameyama 亀山.

practically identical to similar ceremonies held earlier at Hosshōji, first at the Golden Hall 金堂 in 1077 and then the nine-story pagoda in 1091 (Tomishima 2016a, 162–63). The findings underscore the suggestion that Yoshimitsu saw Shōkokuji as a *goganji* and himself as Shirakawa's successor.

The parallels notwithstanding, it was precisely with respect to the seating arrangement where a deviation from precedent reveals something remarkable. *Kuyō-ki* (369) explains:

> With regard to the role of chief witness (*shōjō* 証誠), there was a departure from the *goganji* dedication services held for generations. Usually, that position is filled by a dharma prince (*hosshinō*) whose seat is located within the inner sanctum (*naijin* 内陣). Today, however, [Yoshimitsu] took on that role personally. This is most unprecedented! As mentioned, the entire day was staged to mimic precedents set by the Kanpyō Dharma King [Uda], Goshirakawa, and others. How shameful [is this deviation].

The implications of Yoshimitsu's bold move to the physical and ritual center cannot be fully explored in this brief article. Doing so would require a detailed examination of both the historical role of chief witness and the position of dharma prince which, not coincidentally, first appeared during the reign of Uda, Japan's first fully consecrated "dharma king" (Bauer 2012).[13] At the very least, it is possible to read in the seating arrangement a determination to assert ritual agency. Had Yoshimitsu followed precedent, he would have occupied the position of "sponsor" (*ganshu* 願主). Although commanding the deepest respect, a sponsor is ultimately passive, virtually a spectator to rituals meant to be secret. Such was the case with both Shirakawa at Hosshōji and Goshirakawa at Tōdaiji. As chief witness, however, Yoshimitsu was an active, even critical, participant in the day's ritual repertoire. Again, any attempt to interpret this move would require much more investigation. Nevertheless, even a cursory look suggests an attempt to go beyond mimesis and aspire to actually be a dharma king rather than merely holding the title.

Attendance

According to a young diarist from Kōfukuji 興福寺, the one thousand monks who attended the dedication included "three hundred priests from 'our temple,' four hundred from Enryakuji 延暦寺, one hundred from Tōdaiji, one hundred from Miidera 三井寺, and one hundred from Tōji 東寺" (*Jimon jijōjō kikigaki*). The Grand Abbot of the Tendai sect served as primary officiant (*dōshi* 導師) and the role of head chanter (*jugan* 呪願) was executed by the abbot of Ninnaji

13. The monk Dōkyō 道鏡 (d. 772) had been granted the title of *hōō* (written 法王), but he belonged to a very different religious and political context.

(*Mon'yō-ki* vol. 12, 276).[14] About a dozen other monks were also present, serving as "chanters" and "flower throwers."

Perhaps most striking about the day's roster is the glaring absence of participants from Shōkokuji or any other Zen temples. To be sure, despite its name, the pagoda appears to have had no institutional or ritual association with the Gozan school. Its physical separation from the main Shōkokuji grounds, in fact, corresponded with a sharp doctrinal divide. As we have seen, the dedication's ritual program—following the "one-thousand-monk ceremony" (*senzō kuyō* 千僧侶供養)—was definitively exoteric while the presiding leadership hailed from the esoteric strongholds of Enryakuji and Ninnaji.[15] The iconography, which will be discussed below, was likewise esoteric in nature. Under the circumstances, one might wonder why a Zen monastery and a *kenmitsu* pagoda shared the same name. The answer, however, is simple. During a conversation that took place in 1382, the shogun's advisor and confidant, Gidō Shūshin 義堂周信 (1325–1388), explained that a person holding Yoshimitsu's imperial post of Great Minister of the Right (Udaijin 右大臣) would be called "Shōkoku" (*Kunchū kūge nichiyō kufū ryakushū* 空華日用工夫略集, 282–87). This etymological detail reveals that the names of the monastery and the pagoda were, in fact, eponymous. They derived from the Sinicized title of their common founder, not from any doctrinal or institutional association. Indeed, although they were part of the same temple-palace complex and probably built as part of a master plan, they should be considered completely separate religious compounds.

The who's who of the civil aristocracy were also present at the pagoda's dedication, including about forty members of the senior nobility. When not observing the pageantry from enviable front-row seats, they fulfilled a variety of supporting roles such as the offering of incense and the playing of music (*Kuyō-ki*). The reigning emperor Gokomatsu 後小松 (1377–1433) was conspicuously absent, as was the current shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimochi 義持 (1386–1428). Their omission eliminates any possibility for the day's festivities and sacralizing symbols to be oriented toward anyone other than Yoshimitsu himself.

Finally, although commoners played no part in the pagoda's dedication, their presence on the day was conspicuous. *Kuyō-ki* describes the "thousands" who thronged the city's "rain-washed" streets, having travelled to the capital from as far away as "Kyushu in the west and Kamakura in the east." Guards were stationed along the way. Their role as keepers of the peace at a festive time might

14. *Jimon no koto jōjō kikigaki* (80) and *Mon'yō-ki* do not agree on who was primary officiant. The former claims he hailed from Shōren'in 青蓮院, even specifically stating that he was the "only representative from that Shingon temple."

15. On the *senzō kuyō*, see Kan (1997).

have been complicated by the fact that a general pardon had emptied the city's jails that same morning (*Kuyō-ki* 350, 359, 374).

Size, Style, and Iconographic Program

The recent completion of a computer-generated model of the pagoda makes possible, for the first time, a visualization of the tower in all its astonishing grandeur (FIGURE 2).

FIGURE 2. Computer-generated reconstruction of the Shōkokuji Pagoda by Tomishima Yoshiyuki and Takegawa Kōhei 竹川浩平.

If we are to believe documents reporting that the pagoda stood a staggering 109 meters tall (360 *shaku* 尺), it was easily the tallest structure built in Japan prior to 1968.[16] By way of comparison, the famous five-story pagodas that stand at Tōji and Kōfukuji today are a comparatively modest fifty-six and fifty-one meters respectively. *Kuyō-ki* does not indicate a specific height, yet it does state that the structure was taller than the nine-story pagoda of Hosshōji, which was a still impressive eighty-one meters (*Kuyō-ki*, 358). Other references to Hosshōji in *Kuyō-ki* reflect a direct comparison while underscoring the physical and philosophical superiority of Yoshimitsu's creation:

> It is difficult to describe the majesty of this pagoda, built in the standard seven stories. The *Lotus Sutra* mentions that pagodas should be seven stories, decorated with flags and umbrellas. And yet when Shirakawa built his great pagoda at Hosshōji, a decision was made to exceed seven stories … ending up with an unprecedented nine-story structure! Although it was unsurpassed, that tower was so excessive and against the will of the Buddha, it was struck by lightning and destroyed in 1208.… When we compare that structure with the one [dedicated] today, the latter is better because it is taller while also according with the sutras. (*Kuyō-ki*, 357–58)

The final destruction of the Hosshōji Pagoda in 1342 brought thousands of ceramic tiles crashing to the ground. A great many remained buried under the ferris wheel at Kyoto Zoo until excavated in 2009 (Kyōto-shi Maizō 2014). A passing reference to "seven stories of stacked tiles" (七重のいらかかさなりて) in *Kuyō-ki* has led to the long-standing assumption that the Shōkokuji Pagoda likewise had ceramic tiles. There are several reasons to believe, however, that this conclusion is incorrect. First, although a professional archeological dig has never been conducted on the pagoda's former site—now covered with homes—there is no evidence of anyone at any time excavating so much as a single shard of medieval tiles from the area. More important, we have concluded that the number of ceramic tiles required to cover a pagoda of such unprecedented size would have weighed too much. The building methods of the day simply could not have borne the estimated burden. Instead, it is more likely that timber tiles were used, which was not uncommon during the medieval era. Other examples include Toba's Shōkōmyōin Amidadō 勝光明院阿弥陀堂 and the Golden Hall of Chūsonji 中尊寺金色堂, a UNESCO world heritage property (Tomishima 2016a, 168).

The pagoda's iconographic program shared several key features with Hosshōji, yet both sat comfortably within a broader artistic discourse of sacred geography. Whereas Shirakawa had decorated his Golden Hall and nine-story pagoda to represent the Womb World and Diamond World mandalas respectively, Yoshimitsu

16. On the completion of the Kasumigaseki Building 霞ヶ関ビル, see http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/1998/04/17/national/japans-first-skyscraper-turns-30/ (accessed 31 March 2017).

integrated both into a single structure. The petition to build the pagoda describes the configuration:

> A seven-story pagoda is being built. Statues of the five Buddhas of the Diamond Realm (Kongōkai 金剛界) have been enshrined within, including Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi. The second story constitutes the Womb Realm (Taizōkai 胎蔵界) centered on the icon of Vairocana. The [remaining] thirty-two deities [of the Diamond Realm] are painted onto the [four] pillars of the inner sanctum and the doors are painted with images of the twenty-four divas. (*Shōkokuji no tō kuyō ganmon*, 486)

This arrangement of the Mandalas of the Two Realms into a stacked formation at Shōkokuji is intriguing, but not particularly unique. In fact, at least in Japan, the practice of combining statuaries and wall paintings to create three-dimensional "mandalic spaces" (*rittai mandara kūkan* 立体曼荼羅空間) within pagodas dates back to the ninth century. It seems to have begun with Kūkai who, having imported the country's first painted textile mandalas from Chang'an, adapted the motif to define the interiors of pagodas built on Mount Kōya and at Tōji in Kyoto (Tomishima 2007, 361–65). Mount Kōya itself was envisioned as the diamond-like center of a vast mandalic space that integrated the surrounding mountains and plains into a single, amalgamated projection of the Two Realms. As Shingon increased in popularity, pagodas with mandala décors became fairly common. One of the oldest, built in 952, remains standing at the temple of Daigoji 醍醐寺 (ten Grotenhuis 1999, 87–89). Other notable examples include pagodas no longer extent at Hosshōji, Enshōji 円勝寺 (1126), Hōjōji (1132), and Rengeōin 蓮華王院 (1177). Although a distinction should be made between structures that encompassed one mandala or two, it suffices to say that the integrated artistic program at the Shōkokuji Pagoda was not at all unusual. It drew on a sophisticated discourse of sacred geography that, from Kūkai's time, visualized an orderly cosmos centered on a supreme and sanctified ruler. Encapsulating this motif within a pagoda—the tallest ever to be built in Japan—must have sent a powerful message about Yoshimitsu's pretentions to be dharma king.

Destruction and Aftermath

The Shōkokuji Pagoda was destroyed by lightning during the sixth month of 1403. Plans for its reconstruction were drawn up immediately, but the new structure was to stand within Yoshimitsu's retirement villa at Kitayama. Yoshimitsu had moved to Kitayama after retiring and taking the tonsure in about 1395. There, he built a temple-palace complex so large and grandiose that one scholar has likened it to a "new capital" (Hosokawa 2010). In addition to the still-famous Golden Pavilion, the property encompassed redundant residential palaces, two branch temples of the Tendai and Shingon sects, horse-riding grounds,

and a grand approach flanked by willow trees and the homes of vassals. There, Yoshimitsu received envoys from the Ming and Chosŏn courts and forged the terms of a Sino-Japanese trade agreement that endured for over a century. More important, until his death in 1408, Yoshimitsu engaged in a ritual repertoire that perpetually validated his status as dharma king and "universal monarch" (Ōta 2007). The successful relocation of the pagoda would have heightened Kitayama's symbolic significance, effectively asserting its status as *axis mundi*, the place where kingdom and cosmos combined.

Unfortunately, reconstruction dragged following Yoshimitsu's sudden death in 1408. The pagoda was still unfinished when another lightning strike reduced the building to ash in 1416. Precisely where it stood within the Kitayama property has long puzzled scholars due to inadequate material evidence. That changed in 2016, however, when archeologists uncovered a large chunk of bronze thought to correspond to the decorative finials that topped the pagoda (Tomi shima 2016b). The find has touched off renewed debate about the pagoda's significance and Yoshimitsu's impulse to assert an anthropocosmic connection between himself and the divine.

TIMELINE

1077 Hosshōji dedicated, along with its Golden Hall
1091 Hosshōji Pagoda first dedicated
1180 Tōdaiji burned down
1185 Goshirakawa performed "eye-opening" ceremony at Tōdaiji
1195 Tōdaiji Buddha Hall rebuilt and dedicated
1208 Hosshōji Pagoda burned down
1213 Hosshōji Pagoda rebuilt and dedicated
1342 Hosshōji Pagoda burned down
1378 Yoshimitsu moved to Muromachi site
1392 Shōkokuji monastery dedicated (fire in 1394 delayed completion)
1394 Yoshimitsu became prime minister, then resigned in 1395
1395 Yoshimitsu moved to Kitayama (precise date not known)
1399 Shōkokuji Pagoda dedicated
1403 Shōkokuji Pagoda burned down from lightning strike
1416 Shōkokuji Pagoda (unfinished at Kitayama) destroyed by lightning

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