

Chapter 1

Shinran and Shōtoku

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

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

SHINRAN'S LIFE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHINRAN'S DREAMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

1

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

2

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

3

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

4

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

5

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

6

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

7

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

8

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

9

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

10

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

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

future, in accordance with his portrayal in the *Nihon shoki* when Prince Shōtoku predicted the moving of the capital from Nara to Heian.

The Chinese characters of the title *Taishi byōkutsu-ge* also expressed special devotion to Prince Shōtoku and were often written on his portrait as a devotional practice by Shōtoku worshipers. In various writings, Shinran associates the *Taishi byōkutsu-ge* with the following description of Shōtoku Taishi: “I am the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva *Avalokiteśvara* (Kannon) in this world and my wife is the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva *Mahāsthāmaprāpta* (Seishi). The mother who nurtured and looked after me is the reincarnation of the Amida Buddha, one who is filled with great compassion. These reincarnations exist to save people during *mappō* (age of degenerating dharma).”²¹ The major symbol in this hymn is the Pure Land or Amida triad, which consists of the Amida Buddha with his two attendants, bodhisattvas *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mahāsthāmaprāpta*, identified as a family consisting of mother, husband, and wife. The compassionate response (of the Amida triad) to save all people during *mappō* exemplifies a prevalent theme from Shinran’s reinterpretation of Prince Shōtoku’s ideals.

Consequently, Rokkakudō was the place where Shinran attained birth in the Pure Land. Located in the southeast of the intersection of Karasuma and Sanjo streets in central Kyoto, Rokkakudō was originally founded by Prince Shōtoku to enshrine *guze* Kannon near a pond (*ike*) where he bathed; the small hut (*bo*) of succeeding generations of Buddhist priests gave rise to the name “Ikebo.” During Shinran’s time, statues of the Buddha, temples, and unusual land features were considered to have certain mystical powers that could be directed toward one’s spiritual benefit. Villagers used Rokkakudō as a gathering spot, at which times flower arrangements were usually placed at the temple. A detailed description of the interior and exterior design of Shitennojō in Shinran’s *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* informs us about Prince Shōtoku’s typical design for a temple dedicated to the world-saving bodhisattva of compassion:

17

In 593, after moving to the eastern section of the Kōryō region,
Prince Shōtoku built the Shitennojō
And spread the Buddhist teaching everywhere.

18

At this place, it was believed that the Tathāgata²² came in the past
And declared that he would turn the wheel of dharma
In order to spread the Buddhist teaching.

19

At that time, the honorable Prince Shōtoku
 Made offerings to the Tathāgata.
 Out of his devotion, he built the temple and pagoda
 To honor the Tathāgata.

20

Constructing the statues of the Four Guardian Deities
 And spreading the Buddhist teaching,
 Prince Shōtoku built the Kyōden-in temple
 As a place where enlightenment could be realized.

21

At this place, there is a body of pure water, which is called Kōryō
 pond.
 An auspicious dragon lives there
 And protects the Buddhist teaching.

22

In 597, Prince Shōtoku performed rituals for the dragon
 On the banks of Tamatsukuri
 To propagate the Buddha's teaching.

23

The place is adorned with the seven precious materials;
 The dragon is always there.
 The pure water, flowing to the east,
 Is called "flowering water of white jade."

24

For those who drink the pure water with a heart of compassion,
 It becomes a medicine of dharma.
 Those who obey the words of Prince Shōtoku humbly draw from
 its flow.

25

The main hall and the pagoda stand in the center,
 Facing the eastern gate of the Paradise.
 All who make a pilgrimage there once
 Will surely attain birth in the Pure Land.

26

Prince Shōtoku placed six grains of relics of the Buddha inside the
pillar,
Which is erected in the center of the pagoda;
By doing this, Prince Shōtoku was bestowing benefits
To sentient beings of the six courses.

27

A gilt bronze statue of *guze* Kannon
Is enshrined in the Kyōden-in temple.
After the death of Prince Shōtoku, King Seong Myong of Paekche

28

Built the sacred image to express his love and devotion,
And instructed Prince Ajwa, as a royal envoy,
To deliver it to Japan to be used as a memorial.

29

With his own hand, Prince Shōtoku laid gold on the base of the
pagoda,
To symbolize the spread
And influence of Śākyamuni's teaching in Japan.²³

In Eshinni's letter to her daughter Kakushinni—a letter discovered by Washio Kyōdō in 1921 (Taishō 11)—the detailed explanation of her husband Shinran's dream at Rokkakudō confirms that his worship of Prince Shōtoku played an important role in his conversion to the *senju nenbutsu* teaching:

Shinran left Mount Hiei and remained in seclusion for one hundred days at Rokkakudō, and prayed for the salvation of all people. On the dawn of the ninety-fifth day, Shōtoku Taishi appeared to him in a dream, revealing the path to enlightenment in verse form. Immediately after Shinran left Rokkakudō and, seeking a karmic link that would lead him to salvation, he met his master Hōnen, who would show him the way of salvation. Just as he confined himself for a hundred days at Rokkakudō, Shinran visited Hōnen daily for a hundred days, rain or shine, regardless of obstacles. He heard the Master teach that in order to be saved in the afterlife, regardless of whether one was good or evil, only the recitation of the nembutsu was necessary. Since he carefully kept this teaching in his heart, Shinran would

say the following when people talked about the nembutsu: "I shall follow Hōnen wherever he goes, even if others may say that I would go to hell, because I have wandered since the beginningless beginning and I have nothing to lose."²⁴

Here, Eshinni's dream account also reveals Shinran's motivation to begin religious training under Hōnen: to be saved in the afterlife. Following Shinran's dream, it is said that Shinran studied so diligently under his master that he was allowed to paint Hōnen's portrait and later changed his name to "Zenshin," which is the name that Prince Shōtoku gave to him in the revelation.

A copy of the *Shinran muki* (Record of Shinran's Dreams) by Shinran's disciple Shinbutsu (1209–1261)²⁵ and another version recently discovered by Hiramatsu Reizo, which has been authenticated to be in Shinran's handwriting, provide further evidence of the profound impact that Shinran's dream encounter with Shōtoku had on his life:²⁶

Guze Kannon appeared as a righteous monk at Rokkakudō. Dressed in simple white robes and seated on a large white lotus, he said to Shinran: "If a practitioner is driven by sexual desire because of his past karma, then I shall take on the body of a holy woman (*gyokunyo*) to be ravished by him. Throughout his entire life I will adorn him, and at death I will lead him to birth in Pure Land." After saying these words, *guze* Kannon proclaimed to Zenshin [Shinran]: "This is my vow. Expound it to all people." Based on this proclamation, I realized that I needed to tell this message to millions of people, and then I awoke from my dream.²⁷

The following is Kakunyo's account of the appearance of the bodhisattva Kannon in Shinran's dream, taken from the *Honganji shōnin Shinran denne* (An Illustrated Biography of Shinran):

On the fifth day of the fourth month in the third year of Kennin (1203), Shōnin had a vision at night in the hour of the Tiger. According to records, the world-saving bodhisattva of compassion [*guze* Kannon] of the Rokkakudō manifested himself in the form of a holy monk of dignified appearance, wearing a white robe and sitting in a proper posture on the pedestal of a huge lotus flower. He said to Zenshin: "If you are obliged to have sexual contact with a woman through some past karma, I will transform myself into a beautiful woman and become your partner. I will adorn you with virtues throughout your life, and at your death I will guide you to the Land of Utmost Bliss."²⁸

Particularly interesting in this passage is the sexual transformation of bodhisattva Kannon, who has been traditionally worshiped as a male figure in Buddhism.²⁹ Scholars remain uncertain about the beginning of female worship of Kannon in Japan, but this account provides one logical rationale for its origin and development. Many writers have interpreted this part of Shinran's dream in modern terms, suggesting that Shinran left Mount Hiei because he desired to have sexual relations—Shinran's subsequent marriage to Eshinni and birth of his children are consistent with this interpretation. Although monks typically took vows not to eat meat and abstain from sexual relations, during Shinran's time it was widely known that many monks lived with women who bore them children; they simply pretended to remain celibate by not legally marrying the women they lived with. Unwilling to be hypocritical like his peers, Shinran was the first monk who openly and legally married a woman. Moreover, according to *Jōdo Shinsbū* scholar, Hattori Shisō, Shinran had at least two, perhaps three wives, and a total of seven children.³⁰ In any case, in view of his master Hōnen's teaching of complete reliance on the Other-power, Shinran's decision to publicly break the Buddhist precept of celibacy was based on his belief that marriage did not hinder one's birth in the Pure Land.³¹

Interestingly, in the *Honganji Shōnin Shinran denne*, Kakunyo claims that it was the bodhisattva Kannon who appeared before Shinran, while Eshinni's account claims that it actually was Prince Shōtoku:

In the third year of Kennin (1203) on the fifth day of the fourth month, during the hour of the Tiger (3:00–5:00 A.M.), it is recorded that the statue of the Bodhisattva Kannon assumed a human form with a calm appearance and wearing a white robe. Sitting on a lotus blossom, he said to Zenshin: "You are destined to know women so I shall transform myself into the woman you will make love to. I shall be by your side all your life to purify this act. When you leave this world, I shall lead you to the Pure Land." The Bodhisattva Kannon said to Zenshin [Shinran], "This is my vow to you." Zenshin understood the vow and proclaimed it to the masses.

The following is Kakunyo's³² account of Shinran's inspiration received from Kannon of the Rokkakudō Temple:

In the first year of Kennin (1201), Shōnin [The Master; Shinran] received an inspiration from Avalokiteśvara of the Rokkakudō Temple. According to his instruction, Shōnin proclaimed Avalokiteśvara's message to the multitude of men and women who gathered in Higashiyama. One of the three people resting in the hall is Shōnin, who was attempting a 100-day confinement. Shōnin worshiped

Avalokiteśvara with his palms joined together. The white-robed world-saving bodhisattva of compassion Kannon is seated on a white lotus seat. Shōnin proclaimed Kannon's message to the multitude of people who gathered in Higashiyama.

Kakunyo also includes an account of Ren'i's dream:

In the eighth year of Kencho (1256), Ren'i, who constantly attended Shōnin, had a dream in the hermitage at Nishino toin, Gojo, Kyoto that Prince Shōtoku worshiped Shōnin as Amida's incarnation.

Shōnin is wearing a black robe, aged eighty-four. Prince Shōtoku worshiped Shōnin with his palms joined together.

Ren'i-bo was lying in bed dreaming.

On the ninth day of the second month in the eighth year of Kencho (1256), at night at the hour of the Tiger, Shaku Ren'i had a vision in a dream: Prince Shōtoku bowed in worship to Shinran Shōnin and said in verse,

Adoration to Amida Buddha of Great Compassion!
 You have appeared in this world (as Shinran Shōnin) to
 spread the excellent teaching;
 You lead people of the evil world in the evil period of the five
 defilements
 To definitely attain the supreme enlightenment.

Hence, it is clear that Shōnin, the Patriarchal Master, was an incarnation of Amida Tathāgata.

Although this is a slight variation from Eshinni's dream account, we may deduce that Eshinni's recollection is likely to be more accurate than Kakunyo's because she probably heard it firsthand from Shinran. Also, it is highly likely that Kakunyo had Eshinni's letters as reference when he wrote the *Honganji Shōnin Shinran denne*. Why, then, did Kakunyo change which person spoke to Shinran? Despite the fact that there is no conclusive evidence for this change, if one considers the purpose of Kakunyo's version—to unify and strengthen *Jōdo Shinsbū* followers at Honganji—there is a more dramatic effect of bodhisattva Kannon appearing before Shinran rather than Prince Shōtoku.

In the Higashi Honganji copy of the *Honganji Shōnin Shinran denne*, Ren'i, a disciple of Shinran's later years, described a vision in which Shōtoku Taishi supplicated himself before Shinran and said: "He who bows to Amida Buddha (Skt. Amitābha, 'He of Immeasurable Light'), the Tathāgata of Great Compassion whose purpose in coming into this world is to transmit the holy teaching, will be enlightened even if he is born when the five unpardonable

transgressions are commonplace.” It is thus clear that Shinran is the manifestation of Amida Buddha.

According to this Honganji record, Shinran is elevated to a deified status as Amida Buddha; it is no longer Shinran bowing to Shōtoku Taishi, but rather Shōtoku Taishi bowing to Shinran. In fact, Eshinni had a dream in which she saw Shinran as a manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon:

In front of the temple, images of the Buddha were hung on something that looked like a *torii* (a Shintō shrine archway). One image, which I could not clearly see, seemed to emanate a bright light from the head of the Buddha. There was another image that clearly showed the face of the Buddha. When I asked which Buddha it was, someone replied that the one that emanates a bright light is Hōnen Shōnin, who is none other than Seishi (*Mabāsthāmaprāpta* Bodhisattva). Then when I asked about the other image, the voice replied that the one with the face of the Buddha was Bodhisattva Kannon, who is none other than Zenshin (Shinran Shōnin). After I heard these words, I awakened and realized that it was all a dream.³³

Ever since that dream, Eshinni regarded her husband Shinran as the manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon. Needless to say, such distortion of facts served to promote the interests of *Jōdo Shinsū* leaders at Honganji but obviously went far beyond the limits of historical reality. Although the subjectivity of Eshinni’s dream account may cause us to doubt the reasons involved in Shinran’s life change, a closer examination of Shinran’s subsequent compositions of hymns in praise of Shōtoku reflects that he did indeed experience some profound change, one in which he emphatically incorporated the worship of Prince Shōtoku in his version of Buddhist teaching. From that point on, Shinran’s life took a new course as he began his discipleship under Hōnen and, later, as a family man.

HYMNS DEDICATED TO SHŌTOKU

It is evident from the numerous hymns that Shinran dedicated to Shōtoku as a manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon that Shōtoku’s revelation at Rokkakudō had a profound effect on Shinran.³⁴ To understand Shinran’s unique doctrine, it is essential to understand the importance of that revelation. Shinran wrote over 500 hymns during his lifetime: 307 are dedicated to eight specific individuals; 190 are about Shōtoku Taishi. The other 117 are dedicated to the seven patriarchs of the Pure Land movement: Nāgārjuna (10), Vasubandhu (10), T’an-luan (34), Tao-ch’o (7), Shan-tao (26), Genshin (10), and Hōnen (20).³⁵ In the *Shōzōmatsu wasan* (Hymns of the Dharma-Ages, 1258), Shinran dedicated

eleven hymns to Prince Shōtoku, whom Shinran regarded as responsible for the introduction of the dharma into the country. Prince Shōtoku's importance in the *Shōzōmatsu wasan* (Hymns of the Dharma-Ages, 1258) and *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* (Hymns in Praise of Prince Shōtoku) stems from Shinran's view of him as a manifestation of bodhisattva Kannon, who compassionately appeared in Japan to deliver the nembutsu teaching during *mappō*.³⁶

In the Appendix of *Kōsō wasan* (Hymns of the Pure Land Masters, 1248), Shinran found special significance in the timing of Prince Shōtoku's birth: "Born on the first day of the first month in the first year of Emperor Bidatsu, 1521 years after the passing of the Buddha."³⁷ According to a widely accepted belief, the world entered the last dharma-age (*mappō*—the final period in the decline of the dharma in the world) 1,500 years after Śākyamuni's death. Thus, Prince Shōtoku's life corresponded to the onset of the last age, and Shinran regarded him as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon, who appeared in Japan precisely at this time to guide beings to the Pure Land path.³⁸

83

Entrusting ourselves to the vow of the inconceivable wisdom of
the Buddha through the kindness of Prince Shōtoku
We have entered the true stage of the settled mind
And have become like Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku), the Buddha-
to-come.

84

The world-saving bodhisattva of compassion, *guze* Kannon, who
appeared
And announced himself as Prince Shōtoku
Is like a father, never deserting us,
And like a mother, always looking after us.

85

From the beginningless past to the world of present,
Prince Shōtoku has compassionately looked after us like a father
And stayed close to us like a mother.

86

Prince Shōtoku has compassionately recommended and led us to
believe
In the vow of inconceivable wisdom of the Buddha,
So that we are now able to enter the true stage of the settled mind.

87

May all those who entrust themselves in *tariki* (Other-power) to
fulfill the
Benevolence of the Buddha,
Spread the two aspects of the Buddha Tathāgata's virtue
Throughout the ten quarters.

88

The world-saving Prince Shōtoku of great love
Stays in our heart like he is our father;
The world-saving bodhisattva of compassion, *guze* Kannon,
Stays in our heart like she is our mother.

89

From the incalculable aeons of the past to this present world,
Out of Prince Shōtoku's great compassion, we have now entered the
Inconceivable wisdom of the Buddha,
Which is beyond the notion of good and evil, pure and impure.

90

Prince Shōtoku, the religious founder of Japan:
We are profoundly indebted and grateful to him.
Trust him wholeheartedly and praise him always.

91

Out of deep concern for the people of Japan,
Prince Shōtoku came to enlighten people
By proclaiming the compassionate vow of Tathāgata.
Let us rejoice and praise him always!

92

Through countless lives and incalculable aeons
Of the past to this present world,
Every one of us has received his profound compassion.
Trust him wholeheartedly and praise him always.

93

With his compassionate care, Prince Shōtoku always provides for us
And protects us and encourages us
To receive the two aspects of Buddha Tathāgata's virtue.

We can clearly see from these *wasan* that Shinran worshiped Prince Shōtoku as the incarnation of Kannon and the manifestation of the Buddha's virtue of love and compassion.

In his *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* (Hymns in Praise of Prince Shōtoku), Shinran again describes Prince Shōtoku, with his significant achievements and contributions to the promotion of Buddhism in Japan, as the incarnation of bodhisattva Kannon who appeared in Japan during *mappō*. In support of his belief that Shōtoku was an incarnation of bodhisattva Kannon, Shinran traces Shōtoku's karmic connections to previous dharma masters in India and China:

11

Prince Shōtoku was born
As Queen Śrīmālā in India
And appeared as Master Hui-ssu (Jpn. Eshi) in China.

12

He appeared in China to help people;
He was reborn as both man
And woman five hundred times.

13

He appeared in the Hunan province at Mount Heng
In order to spread the Buddhist teaching;
Having experienced tens of incarnations,
He proclaimed Śākyamuni Tathāgata's teaching.

14

He appeared as Master Hui-ssu to help people in attaining
liberation;
He was referred to as Master of Southern Mountain
At the Mount Heng temple where the Wisdom sutras were pro-
claimed.³⁹

According to Shinran, in this hymn Prince Shōtoku was born as Queen Śrīmālā, who renounced her imperial duties to become a devoted nun and disciple of Buddha. In other words, Shinran is essentially claiming that Prince Shōtoku received the dharma directly from Śākyamuni Buddha. Consequently, Shinran's vision of Shōtoku incarnated as a woman has special significance. Because Kannon was understood to be feminine, Shinran obviously had a positive view of femininity. Shinran's explanation of Shōtoku's incarnation as

Queen Śrīmālā in India confirms that Shinran identified with Shōtoku's idea of salvation for all sentient beings, including and especially women, who were considered inferior by older and traditional schools of Buddhism.

Shinran explains that Shōtoku was reborn in China as Master Hui-ssu, who spread Śākyamuni Tathāgata's teaching. Shinran describes how Shōtoku was responsible for transmitting and spreading the teaching of Śākyamuni Buddha in China through the incarnation of Master Hui-ssu. Shinran also explains that Prince Shōtoku was reborn in Korea to spread the dharma to all sentient beings there. Without making any specific references to a certain Buddhist monk in Korea, Shinran explains that Prince Shōtoku, working together with King Seong Myong and Prince Ajwa of the land of Paekche, "sent Buddhist statues, collections of sutras, *vināya* texts, and treatises, robes, monks, and nuns to Japan."⁴⁰ After tracing the transmission of the dharma through Shōtoku's rebirths in India, China, and Korea, Shinran explains that Prince Shōtoku was born in the imperial family in Japan to spread Śākyamuni Tathāgata's teaching and to save all sentient beings:

33

Prince Shōtoku was born in the imperial family;
His edict was declared throughout the provinces.
He instructed the people to build many temples, pagodas, and
images,
In reverence of the Buddha.

34

Prince Shōtoku, a child of Emperor Yōmei,
Composed three major Mahāyāna commentaries:
The Lotus Sutra, the Śrīmālā Sutra, and the Vimalakīrti Sutra.

35

After Prince Shōtoku died, those who desire
To spread the teaching of Śākyamuni Tathāgata
And help others toward enlightenment
Are to be regarded as manifestations of Prince Shōtoku.

36

Honoring the teachings of the six schools,
Prince Shōtoku helped people incessantly.
Always observing the five precepts, Prince Shōtoku was called
Śrīmālā.

37

When this queen was alive long ago,
Śākyamuni Tathāgata compassionately preached
The Śrīmālā Sutra.

38

Subsequently, Prince Shōtoku gave lectures on this sutra
And also wrote a commentary, which marked the beginning of
The propagation of the Buddhist teaching in Japan
For the sake of all the Japanese people.⁴¹

Interestingly, in these verses, Shinran describes the former incarnations of Prince Shōtoku rather than the former incarnations of bodhisattva Kannon. For instance, instead of saying that the bodhisattva Kannon was born as Queen Śrīmālā or Master Hui-ssu, Shinran says that “Prince Shōtoku was born as Queen Śrīmālā and appeared as Master Hui-ssu in China.”⁴² Shinran identifies bodhisattva Kannon with Prince Shōtoku and points to Prince Shōtoku as the embodiment of the Amida Buddha:

41

The gilt bronze *guze* Kannon
Was delivered to Japan by Prince Ajwa, as a royal envoy,
And was enshrined in the Kyōden-in temple.

42

Always take refuge in this statue, which is the body of Prince
Shōtoku!
Give reverence to this statue,
Which is the transformed body of Amida Tathāgata!

43

Queen Śrīmālā, a child of the Buddha,
Gave homage to the buddhas of the ten quarters;
“May Brahma, Indra, the Four Guardian Deities, the Dragon-god,
And other guardians protect the dharma!”

44

Ilra of Silla proclaimed, “Give reverence to *guze* Kannon,
The king of millet-scattered islands
Who transmits the light of dharma to the east,”
And prostrated before the Prince of eight ears.

45

Prince Ajwa of Paekche bowed down and declared:
 “Give reverence to the most compassionate *guze* Kannon,
 Who has spread the wonderful teaching eastward to Japan,
 Transmitting and explicating the light of dharma for forty-nine
 years!”

46

In China, Prince Shōtoku’s teachers
 Were Master Hui-ssu and Master Hui-wen.
 When Prince Shōtoku was incarnated as the nun Śrīmālā,
 Master Hui-ssu was his teacher.⁴³

The last part of the *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan* describes Shōtoku’s victorious defeat of Moriya no Mononobe, who, in Shinran words, “sought to destroy the Buddhist teaching.”⁴⁴ Interestingly, Shinran interprets this historical event as a spiritual battle between Prince Shōtoku, who sought to spread the dharma, and Moriya, who sought to destroy the dharma in Japan:

62

In order to spread the Buddhist teaching and help people,
 Prince Shōtoku left Mount Heng
 And appeared here in Japan where the sun rises.

63

Emerging victorious from the wrong views of Moriya,
 Prince Shōtoku bestowed the gracious merits of the dharma.
 The Buddhist teaching will soon spread all over
 And many people will attain birth in the Land of Peace.

64

All those who doubt and reject the teaching given by the Tathāgata
 And try to destroy it by using ill tactics
 Are reincarnations of Moriya no Mononobe.
 Do not be kind and become close to such people!

65

As Prince Shōtoku was proclaiming the Buddha’s dharma
 To teach and guide people,
 Moriya no Mononobe, being the destructive enemy,
 Followed him like his shadow.

66

Rebels of Moriya no Mononobe's clan harbored deep malice,
 Attempted to destroy the Buddhist teaching by
 Burning temples and pagodas.

67

In painful grief during the destruction of the dharma,
 Prince asked the emperor with respect
 To dispatch soldiers

68

Joining the soldiers with his bow of meditation and arrow of
 wisdom,
 Prince Shōtoku subdued the rebel Moriya
 For the sake of all people.

69

There are people who seek to destroy temples, pagodas,
 Buddha's dharma and bring disaster and ruin to the nation and
 people;
 Those people are reincarnations of Moriya;
 They should be rejected and cast aside.

70

The rebel Moriya no Mononobe,
 Having gone through innumerable rebirths in the many realms
 of samsara,
 Follows the Prince like his shadow
 And is determined to destroy the dharma.

71

Those people who constantly slander the Buddha's dharma,
 Lead people astray with their wrong views,
 And seek to destroy the teaching of sudden attainment
 Are reincarnations of the rebel Moriya.⁴⁵

These verses show that Shinran interpreted the historical battle of Shōtoku and Moriya through his Buddhist worldview. Shinran's description of Moriya, for instance, "having gone through innumerable rebirths in the many realms of samsara," emphasizes the karmic connections in Moriya's attempt to stop the spread of the dharma in Japan.

OTHER WRITINGS ON SHŌTOKU

Shinran left two other writings on Shōtoku Taishi: *Jōgū Taishi gyōki* (Account of Prince Shōtoku of the Upper Palace) and *Dai Nihon koku zokusan ō Shōtoku Taishi hōsan* (Hymns in Praise of Shōtoku Taishi, Minor Ruler of the Great Country of Japan). The first two books contain the *Byōkutsu-ge* ([Shōtoku Taishi's] epitaph verse), allegedly written by Prince Shōtoku, in which he describes himself as the incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon, his mother as the incarnation of the Amida Buddha, and his wife Kashiwade no hikikimi no iratsume as the incarnation of the bodhisattva Seishi—Seishi stands next to Amida Buddha and shines on everything with the power of *chie* (to bring the truth to light and realize enlightenment) in order to dispel people's illusion (*mayoi*) and help them toward the actualization of enlightenment. According to Kenshin 1, *Byōkutsu-ge* was dedicated to the *Zenkōji Nyorai 2* by Shōtoku Taishi. In the *Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan*, Shinran used the following titles to describe Shōtoku Taishi: (1) *guze* Kannon—the world-saving bodhisattva of compassion, Kannon; (2) *Daiji guze* Shōtoku—the great world-saving Prince Shōtoku; and (3) *Daibi guze* Kannon—the great world-saving bodhisattva Kannon with a great merciful heart; and (4) *Wa-koku no kyōsyū* Shōtoku—the world-saving Shōtoku, leader of Japan.

These hymns clearly reveal that Shinran had a profound worship of Prince Shōtoku, whom he believed to be more than an imperial regent who was responsible for the promotion of Buddhism in Japan and more than a charismatic figure that was regarded as a *kami*. What is particularly important to note is Shinran's use of the same adjective, *guze* (world-saving), in describing both Kannon and Prince Shōtoku. Shinran's use of *guze* refers to his significant role as the founder of Buddhism and also as a manifestation of the bodhisattva Kannon. This constitutes the most remarkable difference between Hōnen's Jōdoshū and Shinran's *Jōdo Shinshū*. The Jōdoshū does not have this level of veneration of Prince Shōtoku, but it is a salient feature in the *Jōdo Shinshū*. Thus, to truly appreciate the uniqueness and profound depth of Shinran's Buddhism, one cannot overlook the importance of Shinran's worship of Prince Shōtoku as *guze* Kannon. In the next chapter, we will examine more closely the figure of Prince Shōtoku and how he evolved into a deified entity from early to medieval Japan.