

seventh-century conditions in that distant land, states that the Japanese “revered Buddhist teachings, obtained Buddhist scriptures from Paekche, and came to have a written language for the first time.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Early decades*

Although we have reliable historical and archaeological evidence that large Buddhist temples were built in the Yamato capital of the Asuka region during the closing years of the sixth century, we have only spotty information, and little consensus, on the timing and circumstances of the earlier introduction and spread of that imported faith. From the extant sources, which are secondary and fragmentary, two conflicting theories have been formulated. The first, based on entries in the *Nihon shoki*, is that Buddhism was introduced to the Yamato court in 552, the thirteenth year of the Kimmei reign. The second, based on an early history of Yamato’s first great temple (the Asukadera) entitled the *Gangō-ji engi*, claims that it was introduced in 538, the fifty-fifth year of the Chinese sexagenary cycle that began in 484.

The *Nihon shoki* account states that King Sōngmyōng of Paekche sent to King Kimmei of Yamato an envoy bearing Buddhist images and scriptures and that a message from Sōngmyōng recommended the adoption of Buddhism on the grounds that this religion had greatly benefited the rulers of other lands. The Yamato court ministers were divided on the issue of adoption, and so finally Kimmei had Soga no Iname, who favored adoption, perform Buddhist rituals experimentally. The experiment was followed by an epidemic that Soga opponents attributed to the displeasure of the native kami. Accordingly, Kimmei had the statues cast into the Naniwa Canal and a recently constructed Buddhist pagoda burned to the ground. The chronicle item concludes with the report that, on that day, winds blew and rain fell under a clear sky.<sup>40</sup>

A critical study of this account reveals two serious flaws. First, questions are raised about the envoy who was reportedly dispatched from Paekche: His name does not appear in any other source of that day; no other person from the “western section” appears in the *Nihon shoki* until after 655; and there is no other reference to such a high Paekche official (with the rank of *takol*) coming to Japan in the sixth century.<sup>41</sup> Second, the Buddhist texts presented to Kimmei were

<sup>39</sup> Wo-kuo, “Tungg-i chuan,” *Sui shu*, fascicle 81.

<sup>40</sup> Kimmei, 13/10, NKBT 68.100–3; Aston, 2.65–67.

<sup>41</sup> Ikeuchi, *Man-Sen shi kenkyū*, 1.356–7; NKBT 68.554.

based, according to studies by Iida Takesato and Fujii Akitaka, on the *Chin-kuang-ming-tsui-shen-wang-ching*, which was not translated into Chinese until 703.<sup>42</sup> Noting this second flaw, Inouye Kaoru observed that Dōji, a Buddhist priest who went to China in 702 and returned in 718, brought back a copy of the recent translation that the compilers of the *Nihon shoki* had seen.<sup>43</sup> Historians are therefore in general agreement that the *Nihon shoki* item concerning the introduction of Buddhism contains additions and embellishments made by later editors. And yet it cannot be denied that King Sōngmyōng of Paekche actually sent Buddhist images and texts to the Yamato king around the middle of the sixth century and that this was an important event in the early history of Japanese Buddhism.

The *Gangō-ji engi*, thought to have been compiled a few decades earlier than the *Nihon shoki* and to have been less affected by an urge to glorify the imperial line, provides independent support for key points: that a presentation of Buddhist statues and scriptures was indeed made by the king of Paekche, that the presentation was followed by a conflict over its acceptance, and that Soga no Iname favored the official adoption of Buddhism. Finally, this source adds support to the theory that Buddhism was introduced to Japan in 538 rather than in 552.<sup>44</sup>

Many scholars have examined the *Gangō-ji engi* and other early texts, developing theories about their composition, dating, and reliability. In regard to when Buddhism was first introduced to the Yamato court by King Sōngmyōng, they can agree only that it occurred sometime between 538 and 552. But textual analyses, together with the study of early Buddhist history in the three kingdoms of Korea and reflections about the significance of a ruler's patronage of a world religion,<sup>45</sup> are helping us gain a clearer understanding of two knotty

42 Iida Takesato, *Nihon shoki tsūshaku* (Tokyo: Unebi shobō, 1940), vol. 4, pp. 2748–49; Fujii Akitaka, “Kimmei-ki no Bukkyō denrai no kiji ni tsuite,” *Shigaku zasshi* 36 (August 1925): 71–74.

43 Inoue Kaoru, *Nihon kodai no seiji to shūkyō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1961), pp. 189–232.

44 The tendency to consider 538 as the year in which the Paekche king sent Buddhist statues and texts to Yamato has led a number of historians to ask why the *Nihon shoki* gives the date 552. One rather convincing theory is that 552 was calculated to be the 1,501st year since the death of Śākyamuni, the first year of the third and final Buddhist age of deterioration (*mappō*). Tamura Enchō found that Chinese Buddhists had long believed this final age would soon begin, or had already begun, and that Dōji (who returned to Japan in 718) transmitted such views to Japan. Still another theory is that the discrepancy between 538 and 552 (fourteen years apart) is based on two ideas about the beginning of the Sōngmyōng reign: 513 or 527, also a difference of fourteen years.

45 A thoughtful study has been made by Yuasa Yasuo, *Kodaijin no seishin sekai*, vol. 1 of *Rekishi to Nihonjin* (Kyoto: Mineruba shobō, 1980). Tsuji Zennosuke's views on the transmission of Buddhism to Japan have long been accepted; see his *Nihon Bukkyō shi: jōsei hen* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1944), pp. 33–43, 45.

historical questions: Why were the Soga and other clans divided over the acceptance of Buddhism until the Soga military victory of 587? And why did Buddhism not become a state religion, with imperial patronage, until the Soga defeat in 645?

*A divided society*

Early texts present a consistent picture of Soga support for Buddhism during that crucial sixth century. The rise of this clan and its connections with the introductions and spread of Buddhism, were outlined in Chapter 3. Here I wish to consider the problem of resistance to the adoption of Buddhism, which is most clearly revealed in (1) two cases of persecution before the Soga victory of 587 and (2) the actions and ideas of Empress Suiko and Prince Shōtoku in the years before the Soga defeat of 645. When studying the resistance issue, we are faced with a paucity of evidence that is often contradictory, but we are beginning to see that Japan was then divided, as Paekche had been, by two fundamentally different types of clans: those with chieftains whose spiritual authority flowed from rites honoring the imported worship of Buddha and those with chieftains whose spiritual authority arose from the performance of rites addressing indigenous deities.

This division was not unlike the one that had complicated the introduction and acceptance of Buddhism in Paekche, where kings were heads of the immigrant Puyō clan (said to be descendants of the semilegendary founder of Koguryō) and performed ancestral rites at tombs, whereas indigenous Han chieftains ruled an agricultural people and performed agricultural rites held at village *sotsu*. So when the royal Puyō clan adopted Buddhism, reinforcing its spiritual sacred-lineage authority with the sponsorship of imported rites, the native Han people and their leaders were slow to follow suit.

The unresponsiveness of the Han was not due simply to a dislike of what the immigrant masters did and wanted but, rather, to broad and deep assumptions – arising from an entirely different social and religious situation – concerning the nature of divine power and how that power could be directed to the enrichment of agricultural life. Unlike Koguryō, where Buddhism spread rapidly to the lowest levels of society, Paekche's indigenous Han people, being locked into a primitive agricultural ritual system, never fully accepted the authority of the Puyō kings and probably never permitted Buddhism to permeate the life of its villages. Such social and religious polarity helps us understand why Buddhism was not adopted by the Paekche kings until more

than a century after the arrival of the first Buddhist monk from China. According to the *Samguk sagi*, the first priest to arrive in Paekche was sent by the Chinese court of Eastern Chin in 384, but Buddhism was not adopted by a Paekche king until the reign of Muryōng (501–23), over 150 years later.

Roughly the same kind of sociopolitical division existed in Japan. On its native side, kings rose above the clan federations in which the divine authority of all leaders, from village heads to Yamato kings, flowed from their roles as priests of agricultural rites. To be sure, clan chieftains and Yamato kings were increasingly preoccupied with ways of emphasizing the divinity of their particular lines of descent, but the core of the native ritual system was agricultural in character. On the immigrant side of the division, leaders were heads of clans who had come to Japan with advanced techniques for constructing tombs and buildings, making tools and weapons, and managing imperial estates and governmental affairs. The Soga, gradually achieving a position of dominance in this immigrant segment of society, also took the lead in introducing and supporting Buddhism.

Whereas the immigrant Soga chieftains were undergirding their spiritual authority by sponsoring Buddhist rites held at temples (*tera*), the Yamato kings and Japanese emperors from the native segment of society were achieving spiritual authority from their roles as chief priests for the worship of agricultural kami at shrines (*jinja*). By appreciating the broad socioreligious differences between these two segments of society in sixth-century Japan, we can see that resistance to Buddhism did not arise simply from personal belief in kami but was rooted in traditional assumptions that community life, and especially the life of its rice plants, was more likely to be enriched if kami rites were performed properly by a community leader: village head, clan chieftain, or Yamato king.

The first *Nihon shoki* reference to the suppression of Buddhism is found in a long entry for the thirteenth year of the reign of Kimmei (552?) about what transpired after the king of Paekche presented a Buddha image and Buddhist sutras and recommended the adoption of the Buddhist religion. The account reports that Soga no Iname, chieftain of the leading immigrant clan, favored its adoption: “All neighboring states to the west already honor Buddha. Is it right that Japan alone should turn its back on this religion?” But two other high ministers, who were chieftains of native clans, were opposed: “The kings of this country have always conducted seasonal rites in honor of the many heavenly and earthly kami of land and grain. If [our king] should now

honor the kami of neighboring states, we fear that this country's kami would be angered."<sup>46</sup> Although it is now agreed that this account had been subjected to considerable editorial change, these quotations present positions that would logically have been taken by the leaders of the two separate segments of Japanese society: the immigrant clan chieftain maintaining that the king should do what the kings of Korean states had already done, and the native clan chieftains pointing out that a king in Japan had always conducted rites for the various agricultural kami of the land.

A report recorded later in this same account states that Kimmei compromised, ordering Soga no Iname to worship Buddha experimentally. Then a pestilence broke out and Kimmei, apparently fearing that this disaster had occurred because he had not properly performed his priestly role, ordered Buddhist statues thrown into the Naniwa Canal and Buddhist halls burned.<sup>47</sup> But the *Gangō-ji engi* places the first suppression of Buddhism in 569 and links it with the execution of Soga no Iname in the closing months of Kimmei's reign, not with the sudden outbreak of a pestilence. Thus the first suppression of Buddhism seems to have been caused mainly by the death of a Soga leader.

As soon as Iname's son, Soga no Umako, began to regain the position of influence that his father had held, Buddhist worship was revived. In 584, according to the *Nihon shoki*, Umako asked Paekche for two Buddhist images, sent Shiba Tattō around the country looking for Buddhist practitioners, had Tattō's daughter ordained as nun, built a Buddhist hall at the Soga residence where a Miroku statue was enshrined, asked three Buddhist nuns to perform a Buddhist rite there, saw a miraculous sight when handling a Buddha relic, and "practiced Buddhism unremittingly."<sup>48</sup> The same source states in an item of the second month of the following year that the country suffered from another pestilence after which, and on a recommendation made by two ministers who were chieftains of traditional clans, Buddhism was again banned. Buddhist statues as well as a pagoda and Buddha hall were again burned, and three nuns were stripped and flogged.<sup>49</sup> But because the pestilence continued, the emperor permitted Soga no Umako – but no one else – to resume the practice of his faith.<sup>50</sup> The *Gangō-ji engi* reports the same sequence of events but with one significant difference: Instead of pinning the blame on the two anti-Buddhist ministers, as the *Nihon shoki* does, it states that the origina-

46 Kimmei 13/10, NKBT 68.102–3; Aston, 2.66–67. 47 Ibid.

48 Bidatsu 13, NKBT 68.148–9; Aston, 2.101–2.

49 Bidatsu 14/3/1 and 13/3/30, NKBT 68.150–1. 50 Bidatsu 14/6 NKBT 68.151.



tor of the purge was Emperor Bidatsu himself. As the chief priest of kami worship, he, not his ministers, would have been the logical leader of, and spokesman for, priestly rulers in the native segment of Japanese society. Opponents of Buddhism are also referred to as “the other ministers” (*yoshin*), a term apparently denoting all anti-Buddhist ministers who were chieftains of clans in the traditional segment of society.<sup>51</sup>

### *Soga authority*

A two-stage showdown between the two opposing segments of society came in 587 and 592, as a result of which the Soga clan emerged victorious and Buddhism began to prosper. By the military victory in 587, the chief ministerial opponent of Soga no Umako was killed, and by the court coup in 592 the uncooperative Emperor Sushun was assassinated. The enthronement of Empress Suiko (a Sushun sister who had a Soga mother) in 593 is considered to be the starting point of the Asuka enlightenment, a period when Soga no Umako was in control of state affairs and when China-oriented cultural activity revolved about the Asuka-dera that he had built. Why, then, did not Umako himself occupy the throne as a Chinese victorious general might well have done? And did Empress Suiko really become an active supporter of the Buddhist cause?

Convincing answers to both questions must take into account the conflicting interests and beliefs of Japan's two opposing clan societies: (1) the less populous immigrant clan groups located mainly in and around the capital, enjoying wealth and power arising from an extensive use of imported techniques and learning and associated with the worship of imported Buddhism, and (2) the far more populous native clans scattered throughout the country, engaged largely in agricultural production and the worship of native agricultural kami.

As the highest-ranking clan chieftain in the immigrant segment and the chief sponsor of imported Buddhism, Umako must have concluded that he could not become emperor, a position traditionally held by an imperial son who performed the time-honored role of high priest in the worship of native agricultural kami. He may have decided this because he knew what trouble the royal clan of Paekche had had in ruling that state's native Han people and realized that he, as head of an

<sup>51</sup> Hino Akira compared the *Nihon shoki* and *Gangō-ji engi* treatments in his *Nihon kodai no shizoku denshō no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata bunshōdō, 1971), pp. 187–207.

immigrant clan, would never be accepted as the high priest of indigenous kami rites. Even if he had not understood the nature of the problem faced by the royal clan of Paekche, he would have reached the same conclusion by noting fundamental differences between the leadership role in the two segments of Japanese society, recognizing that he could not assume both roles even if he had achieved military supremacy by defeating the strongest native clan and arranging the assassination of an uncooperative emperor.

### *Imperial authority*

The impossibility of joining the two roles cannot be understood without realizing the strength and basic character of the kami worship (Shintoism) that had come to pervade all aspects of life in the native segment of Japanese society. Such worship was, first, carried out by a particular community as a whole and was centered on a pervasive belief that the community could enjoy the benefits of the mysterious life-giving power of its kami only if the kami were honored by a priestly leader – village head, clan chieftain, or state sovereign – who stood closest to, or was possessed by a part of, that particular kami. This three-layered priestly structure, with village heads dominating clan chieftains and a Yamato king standing above the chieftains, had been developing for centuries.

Harada Toshiaki points out that originally a community's priestly head – at the bottom of the structure from which upper layers emerged – was chosen ritually, thereby making certain that the selection was in accord with kami will.<sup>52</sup> Divinely chosen heads at all three levels were believed to administer all community affairs, not just kami rites, as an expression of divine will. Even when clan rule became hereditary, a chieftain was believed to be conducting clan affairs in accord with the will of the clan kami. The development of this priestly system had paralleled the growth of the Yamato kingdom, with each level strengthening and being strengthened by the other. Soga no Umako must have known that because he was not the son of a previous Yamato king and was instead the son of an immigrant clan chieftain, he could not, no matter how much wealth and power he had accumulated, seize the throne and be accepted by kami-worshipping communities as their chief priest.

<sup>52</sup> Harada Toshiaki, *Shūkyō to shakai* (Tokyo: Tōkai daigaku shuppankai, 1972).

Was it also impossible for Empress Suiko, even though she had a Soga mother, to sponsor the worship of Buddha and, at the same time, to serve as the high priestess of kami worship? Until World War II, most Japanese historians tended not to differentiate her support of Buddhism from that of Soga no Umako and Prince Shōtoku. Five references to her support of Buddhism, recorded in the *Nihon shoki*, were then accepted at face value. These stated that she had ordered her ministers to support the Three Treasures and to make copper and embroidered images of Buddha, that she had a Buddhist nunnery built, that she requested Prince Shōtoku to lecture on Buddhist sutras, and that she appointed priestly officials (*sōjō* and *sōzu*) and then ordered them to supervise other Buddhist monks and nuns.<sup>53</sup>

But the *Nihon shoki* also includes an edict that she issued in the fifteenth year of her reign (607) on the subject of her religious responsibilities as a descendant of priestly rulers who honored kami:

We have heard how our imperial ancestors ruled the land in ancient times. Descending from heaven to earth, they devoutly honored heavenly and earthly kami. They worshiped [kami residing in] mountains and rivers everywhere and were in mysterious communion with heavenly and earthly kami. By performing rites to kami and by worshiping and communing with them in this way, our imperial ancestors harmonized negative and positive forces [*on'yō*] and handled affairs in accord with [those forces and the will of the kami]. Now in our reign nothing should be done to anger the heavenly and earthly kami by the way in which we honor and worship them. So we hereby command that our ministers work together devotedly in the worship of heavenly and earthly kami.<sup>54</sup>

Although the five *Nihon shoki* items about her support of Buddhism say nothing about her playing a priestly role in the worship of Buddha, this edict points directly to her priestly functions in the worship of kami, stating that these had been inherited from her imperial father's ancestors and must be properly performed.

Only recently have historians come to see that it was not the empress but Soga no Umako who was the principal beneficiary of the spiritual authority that flowed from the worship of Buddha. Scholars first began to think of Buddhism in these pre-645 years as Soga Buddhism when their textual analyses of *Nihon shoki* items – especially those dealing with the introduction and early spread of Buddhism – revealed a strong

<sup>53</sup> Suiko 2 (594)/2/1, NKBT 68.174–5; Suiko 13 (605)/4/1, NKBT 68.186–7; Suiko 14 (606)/5/5, NKBT 68.186–7; Suiko 14 (606)/7, NKBT 68.188–9; Suiko 32 (624)/4/13, NKBT 68.208–9.

<sup>54</sup> Suiko 15 (607)/2/9, NKBT 68.188–9.



pro-imperial, anti-Soga bias. They soon realized it was natural to find such biases in a work that was compiled several decades after 645 by officials of an imperial government formed in the wake of the Soga defeat, when the government was attempting to extend and deepen an emperor's religious authority by having the Yamato king, not a Soga chieftain, assume the role of chief sponsor and high priest of Buddhism. As Futaba Kenkō pointed out, the compilers apparently added the item about Emperor Kimmei's handing down an imperial edict requiring Soga no Iname to honor Buddhism, as well as the one that Emperor Bidatsu is said to have handed to Soga no Umako.<sup>55</sup> Fukuyama Toshio showed an even more obvious case of purposeful editorializing by comparing the *Nihon shoki*'s and the *Gangō-ji engi*'s treatments of the same event: the arrival of Buddhist relics and Buddhist priests from Paekche soon after Soga no Umako had won his military victory against native clans in 587. The *Nihon shoki* clearly states that these relics and priests were presented to the imperial court, whereas the *Gangō-ji engi* reports that they were brought to Japan in response to a request sent to Paekche, presumably by Soga no Umako.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Soga patronage*

But the case for Soga's prominence in the rapid spread of Buddhism after 587 does not rest simply on the minor role played by Empress Suiko. Even the *Nihon shoki* reports leave little doubt that the leading Buddhist temple of the period, the Asuka-dera, was erected by Soga no Umako following a vow he made immediately before winning the military victory of 587.<sup>57</sup> And when that great temple compound was completed in 596, the same chronicle reports that his son was asked to serve as temple commissioner (*tera no tsukasa*).<sup>58</sup>

Inoue Mitsusada observed that the Asuka-dera – whose size and grandeur have been revealed by recent archaeological investigations – is of historical significance on several counts: It was the first large continental-style building ever erected in Japan; it occupied a central position in Japan's first "permanent" capital; and it had a clan-temple (*ujidera*) character common to all temples founded before the Great

55 Kimmei 13 (552?)/10, NKBT 68.102–3; Bidatsu 14 (585?)/2/24, NKBT 68.149; Futaba Kenkō, *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata bunshō-dō, 1984), p. 41.

56 Sushun 1 (588)/3, NKBT 68.168–9. This text is compared with that of the *Gangō-ji engi* text in Futaba, *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi*, p. 43.

57 Sushun, before enthronement (587)/7, NKBT 68.164–5.

58 Suiko 4 (596)/11, NKBT 68.174–5.

Reforms of 645 (see Chapter 3). It was, in addition, the centerpiece of an emerging temple system that by 624 included forty-six temples concentrated in and around the Nara basin where the immigrant clans were based. With its imposing statues, great bronze bells, and exotic ceremonies, this temple system – an impressive representation of continental cultural achievement – symbolized the Soga's wealth and power and, at the same time, enhanced the spiritual authority of the Soga chieftain. Futaba concluded that Empress Suiko's less-than-enthusiastic support of Buddhism may have stemmed from her conviction that Soga no Umako was intentionally using the Buddhist system to increase his spiritual authority, planning eventually to overwhelm the imperial clan and make Buddhism a state religion, not just a clan religion in which the Soga head was the chief patron and high priest.<sup>59</sup>

The rapid spread of Buddhism between 587 and 645 was certainly due in large measure to the generous support provided by the immigrant clans, especially the Soga, and to the exotic appeal of Buddhist paraphernalia and ritual, but another contributing factor was the increasingly popular belief that Buddhist rites had a mysterious power to produce spectacular physical benefits. Early Buddhist temples were built around a pagoda (a memorial to Buddha), at the base of which a Buddha bone (*shari*) was commonly placed, making a pagoda something like the inner sanctuary of a shrine where the most sacred object (the *shintai* or kami body) was housed. So at both a Buddhist temple and a Shinto shrine, a particularly potent sacred article was believed to possess an essence of divinity that could, with the appropriate ritual, benefit the human community in substantial and concrete ways.

We find no evidence that Buddha was worshiped at a Soga temple for the purpose of ensuring spiritual enlightenment or rebirth in a Buddhist paradise after death. The *Nihon shoki* tells us that when Soga no Umako himself became ill in 623, a thousand men and women were admitted to the Buddhist priesthood "for his sake."<sup>60</sup> Two decades later, at the time of the terrible drought of 642 when offerings and prayers to kami produced no rain, the Soga minister proposed another type of prayer: the reading of excerpts from Mahayana sutras at Buddhist temples, with the Soga minister himself participating. The report says that because rain fell the next day, the reading of excerpts was discontinued two days after it had been started.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Futaba, *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi*, p. 44. <sup>60</sup> Suiko 22 (614)/8, NKBT 68.200–1.

<sup>61</sup> Kōgyoku 1 (642)7/25, 7/27, 7/28, 7/29, NKBT 68.240–1.

*Prince Shōtoku's Buddhism*

Having traced the general outlines of Buddhist development on the immigrant side of Japanese society, and the rise of what has been called Soga Buddhism, we shall turn next to the nature and historical significance of the Buddhism of Prince Shōtoku (574–622), known as the father of Japanese Buddhism. The prince was more clearly a member of the imperial family than was Empress Suiko: He was a son of Emperor Yōmei, had been designated Suiko's successor to the throne, and was her regent. According to the *Nihon shoki*, he was responsible for opening up relations with the Chinese court of Sui, adopting reforms and reform policies, and building a palace and Buddhist temple at some distance from the Asuka region where the Soga's control was centered. In sum, he is depicted as a crown prince and regent who had become, by about the age of thirty, an independently powerful political leader who also lectured on Buddhist scriptures at the imperial court.

Until recently, historians have been generally skeptical about the authenticity of evidence concerning Prince Shōtoku's Buddhist activities, especially after coming to realize that *Nihon shoki* compilers had permitted this chronicle to be colored by their pro-imperial, anti-Soga bias.

But recent archaeological investigations made at the prince's palace in Ikaruga, the nearby Ikaruga-dera (now known as the Hōryū-ji), and the Arahaka-dera in Naniwa (now known as the Shitennō-ji) show that his palace and the two temples associated with him were actually built at places and times indicated in *Nihon shoki* reports (see Chapter 3, this volume). Moreover, historians do not now doubt the veracity of two statements made about his faith. The first, made by his son Prince Yamashiro in 628 when he refused to press his own candidacy for the throne, reads as follows:

And when my father was dying, he called his children in and said: "Avoid every kind of evil and practice every kind of good." I heard these words and embraced them as my constant rule of life. Although I have personal feelings [about the succession issue], I will therefore be patient and not become angry.<sup>62</sup>

Because the phrase "Avoid every kind of evil and practice every kind of good" appears in Buddhist scripture, Yamashiro's report is thought to be a reflection of what the prince had believed.<sup>63</sup>

The second expression of the prince's Buddhist belief is found in an inscription on an embroidered picture of heaven (*tenjukoku shūchō*)

62 Jomei, Introduction (629), NKBT 68.225–7.

63 Ienaga Saburō, "Shōtoku Taishi no Bukkyō," in Ienaga Saburō, ed., *Kodai hen*, vol. 1 of *Nihon Bukkyō-shi* (Kyoto: Hōzokan, 1967), pp. 70–71.

made by the prince's wife, Tachibana no Iratsume. The picture shows the prince facing his wife and observing, "The world is impermanent; Buddha alone is truth." Although this inscription suggests that the prince understood and accepted this fundamental Buddhist teaching, it is thought that belief in a Buddhist heaven (the subject of the embroidered picture) was held only by his wife.<sup>64</sup>

The third most important piece of evidence concerning Prince Shōtoku's Buddhist ideas and beliefs is found in Articles 2 and 10 of the famous Seventeen Injunctions, commonly referred to by the misleading term "Seventeen-Article Constitution" and recorded in a 604 item of the *Nihon shoki*.<sup>65</sup> As early as the Edo period (1603–1868), a historian maintained that the Seventeen Injunctions had not been written by Prince Shōtoku but by the *Nihon shoki* compilers. And in more recent years the distinguished Tsuda Sōkichi claimed that the injunctions could not have been written before 645, as they included a term for governor (*kokushi*) that was not used until after 645. But recent research has shown that for some years both terms for governor (*kuni no miyatsuko* and *kokushi*) had been used in earlier times. This and related discoveries have largely discredited Tsuda's position. Now it is generally agreed that the injunctions were in accord with the political situation of the early seventh century and that they may well have been composed by Prince Shōtoku.

The second of the Seventeen Injunctions urges the worship of Buddha in these words:

Sincerely revere the Three Treasures of Buddhism (Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood). In all four types of life and in all countries [of the world] they are the ultimate truth. Any person of any age should revere Buddhist law. Few persons are really bad. If they are well taught, they will be obedient. But if they are not converted to [the truth of] the Three Treasures, how can their wrongs be corrected?

And the Buddhist portion of the tenth injunction reads:

[The sutras] say that one should avoid indignation, decry angry looks, and not be angry about differences with others. Every person has a heart, and every heart has its attachments. What is right for others is wrong for us, and what is right for us is wrong for others. We are not necessarily sages, and others are not necessarily fools. Both we and others are ordinary human beings. Who can sharply distinguish between what is bad and what is good?

Although other injunctions, as well as the last part of injunction 10, reflect Chinese Confucianism and Legalism, these two quotations – parts

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71. <sup>65</sup> Suiko 12 (604)/4/3, NKBT 68.180–7; Aston, 2.128–33.

of which have been traced to particular sutras – reveal that Buddhism too was an important ingredient in the injunctions' ideological mix.

One additional Buddhist source traditionally associated with Prince Shōtoku is the Commentaries on Three Buddhist Sutras (*Sangyō gisho*): the Shōman Sutra, the Yuima Sutra, and the Hokke-kyō or Lotus Sutra. Of the three, the commentary on the Lotus Sutra is said to have been written in the prince's own hand. The first scholar to claim that these commentaries were composed by someone else was Tsuda Sōkichi, who maintained that the prince was not a monk who could have given specialized lectures on the sutras but a regent who was concerned principally with the conduct of state affairs. In short, Tsuda did not consider the commentaries to be valid historical evidence of what the prince thought about Buddhism.

But Hanayama Shinshō's detailed study of the contents of the commentaries on the Lotus and Shōman sutras has led him to agree with the Nara Buddhist who attributed them to the prince. Supporting Hanayama's case was the discovery that only pre-589 sources had been used. Hanayama decided, too, that the commentaries could not have been written by a foreigner, as they had a definite Japanese cast. Although Ienaga Saburō does not think that Shōtoku's authorship has been proved, he believes that Hanayama has made an important contribution by showing that these commentaries reflect Chinese Buddhist thought during the period of China's Southern and Northern courts (420 to 589).<sup>66</sup>

What does such evidence tell us about Prince Shōtoku's Buddhist ideas and beliefs? The answers given by historians range widely between those of Tsuda, who did not consider the prince a serious Buddhist thinker, to those of Ienaga, who believes that the prince not only understood and accepted the most basic Buddhist teachings but was the first Japanese to grasp the Buddhist doctrine of denial (*hitei no ronri*) by which the truth of anything impermanent – that is, anything but Buddha – is denied. Ienaga's interpretation, though not yet generally accepted,<sup>67</sup> is appealing and provocative.<sup>68</sup>

66 Ienaga, "Shōtoku Taishi no Bukkyō," pp. 73–75. Ten ancient Chinese scrolls have been identified as commentaries on the Shōman Sutra written during the period of the Northern Court. The one referred to as the E Text is remarkably similar to the Shōman commentary in the *Sangyō gisho*. Fujieda Akira has compared the two and finds roughly 70 percent of the wording identical and the general thrust of the interpretations the same; "Shōman-gyō gisho," Ienaga Saburō, Fujieda Akira, Hayashima Kyōshō, and Tsukishima Hiroshi, eds., *Shōtoku Taishi shū*, vol. 2 of *Nihon shisō taikēi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), pp. 484–544.

67 Although Futaba has reservations about certain points, he generally accepts Ienaga's thesis and reviews the positions taken by other Buddhist scholars; see his *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi*, pp. 84–101.

68 Outlined in his "Shōtoku Taishi no Bukkyō," pp. 64–81.



Ienaga concluded that Prince Shōtoku's acceptance of the Buddhist doctrine of denial developed gradually after about 604, when it is thought the Seventeen Injunctions were written. Before that the prince seems to have devoted his energies mainly to such administrative tasks as restoring control over Mimana (Kaya) and modernizing the bureaucracy. But the two injunctions just quoted reveal an emerging commitment to the Buddhist denial of truth in any worldly phenomenon, including the state and one's own self. Unfortunately, nothing remains of what the prince wrote in the closing years of his life, but the statement attributed to him on his wife's embroidered banner (the *tenjukoku shūchō*) suggests that he had come to embrace the Buddhist doctrine of denial. His son Prince Yamashiro may have had an even deeper conversion, leading Ienaga to say that with Yamashiro we have a model of humanity restoration (*ningen-sei kaifuku*) by which an individual is willing to give his own life for the welfare of ordinary people living in this mundane world. And here, says Ienaga, the Japanese – who had not until then been able to rise above the narrow thoughts and beliefs of a closed agricultural society – made their first great leap into a new spiritual world.<sup>69</sup>

Although the prince is seen as a solitary thinker who was not well understood by his contemporaries and whose ideas about the truth of Buddha were not greatly appreciated until centuries later, he was an important figure in the history of Japanese Buddhism. He not only founded the Ikaruga temple, which was central to the Buddhism of Asuka times, but in 608 he sent to China four student priests who, according to the Chinese dynastic history of Sui, were intent on studying Buddhist law. When these young priests returned to Japan, usually after a stay of ten or more years, they not only gave seventh-century Japanese Buddhism its special character but zealously introduced many non-Buddhist skills. Under their leadership, Japan gradually turned its attention from the Buddhism introduced from Koguryō and Paekche to the Buddhism of the reunified Chinese empire of Sui and T'ang. Finally, one cannot help but see Prince Shōtoku as a forerunner, if not the forefather, of such thirteenth-century Buddhist reform thinkers as Shinran (1173–1262) who affirmed a truth that transcended everything in this polluted physical world.

#### *Toward state Buddhism*

But where did Prince Shōtoku stand in the old conflict between the indigenous communities headed by kings and emperors (the chief

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

priests of kami worship) and the immigrant communities headed by clan chieftains (the principal patrons of Buddha worship)? Although this question has been studied and debated for years, historians still disagree on whether the prince was concerned primarily with the building of a strong state, with the implications of Buddhist law, or with the formation of state Buddhism. Inoue Mitsusada thinks that the Seventeen Injunctions (thought to have been written by the prince) were essentially rules and regulations for officials to follow in exercising absolute obedience to the emperor and that Buddhism was injected, in a somewhat minor position below Confucianism and Shintoism, as an ideological support (see Chapter 3). Ienaga, on the other hand, sees the injunctions mainly as expressions of the prince's commitment to the ultimate truth of Buddha, a truth transcending the affairs of state and the individual self. Futaba Kenkō too feels that the prince was not thinking of Buddhism as a support of state power but as a world religion for all states, one that should be accepted by all rulers and all peoples.<sup>70</sup>

With respect to the two socioreligious segments of Japanese society (Buddhist immigrant clans headed by a Soga chieftain and Shintoistic indigenous clans by Empress Suiko), Prince Shōtoku occupied a fairly strong position in both: He was an ardent supporter of Buddhism who resided in Ikaruga, an immigrant-clan power base located some distance from the Asuka capital, and he was also, as crown prince, slated to follow Empress Suiko as the country's highest-ranking conductor of kami worship. But his religious interests, his sense of the locus and character of spiritual authority, differed from those of either Soga no Umako or Empress Suiko.

Soga Buddhism was closely identified with rites that were believed to provide miraculous and mysterious physical benefits here and now. Rites carried out at Buddhist temples were therefore not unlike those traditionally held at Shinto shrines. But because Buddhist worship was bound up with the use of exotic paraphernalia imported from culturally advanced lands, it was believed to generate truly wonder-working magic, explaining why Buddhism was spreading rapidly in and around the Soga's power base and strengthening the spiritual authority of the leading patron, Soga no Umako. Probably, however, the spiritual side of Soga authority was enhanced even more by the way that the impressive Buddhist paraphernalia (especially temples, statues, and bells) symbolized both the physical and the spiritual authority of the Soga leader. Before Umako's time, kingly authority

<sup>70</sup> Futaba, *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi*, p. 6.

seems to have been symbolized mainly by huge mounds erected for the burial of deceased kings. But great temple compounds like the Asuka-dera must have symbolized, and thereby generated, far greater authority than a burial mound did, helping us understand why burial mounds gradually became smaller and less significant after Umako's day.

Japanese historians frequently ask whether Soga no Umako was attempting to establish state Buddhism. Inoue Mitsusada thinks that he started to move in that direction as soon as he defeated his opponents in the civil war of 587. For Inoue, Soga Buddhism was therefore state Buddhism, and Asuka-dera was the first state temple. But Futaba Kenkō maintains that Umako was simply using Buddhism to strengthen his own authority, not that of the imperial court. For Futaba, then, Umako may have been thinking ahead to the establishment of state Buddhism but had taken only the first step in 587. The second step was not taken by a Soga chieftain but by the emperor who ascended the throne after the Soga defeat in 645. In the light of the Paekche model (Buddha-worshipping immigrant leaders ruling over the indigenous, community-centered people of Han) and of the fact that Buddhist institutions of Asuka Japan were essentially clan temples (*ujidera*), we can conclude that Soga no Umako thought of himself as the high priest and major beneficiary of rites held at Buddhist temples. He must have considered all temples of the Asuka period, even those founded by Prince Shōtoku, as units of a particularistic Soga-supporting religious system. If he looked forward to the establishment of state Buddhism, he must have seen a Soga state, not a state ruled by a high priest or priestess of kami worship.

What did Empress Suiko and Prince Shōtoku think about this issue? Empress Suiko seems to have been preoccupied with her role as high priestess of kami worship; as far as we know she did not found a single Buddhist temple or conduct a single Buddhist rite. On the other hand, her designated successor, Prince Shōtoku, is said to have founded two Buddhist temples, lectured at the court on Buddhist sutras, and embraced the basic Buddhist denial of permanence, or truth, in this physical world. Moreover, he is thought of as the author of the Seventeen Injunctions, which enjoined state officials to serve obediently one emperor and to revere the Three Treasures of Buddhism.

Historians do not yet agree on the question of how the prince related his Buddhist convictions to his vision of an imperial state. Whereas Tamura Enchō insists that the prince approached Buddhism as an individual believer and had no intention of relating Buddhism to the

state,<sup>71</sup> Futaba disagrees. Largely accepting Ienaga's views on the nature of the prince's Buddhist convictions, Futaba argues that the second of the Seventeen Injunctions (reverence for Buddhism as the supreme faith of all countries) made Buddhism not only the primary ideological support for other injunctions but also the religious truth by which an emperor (presumably a Buddhist convert) could rule effectively. Thus he sees the second injunction on reverence for Buddhism as a precondition for the third injunction on obedience to imperial commands.<sup>72</sup>

Although Futaba's thesis seems to have greater merit than do those of other known writers on the subject, the picture will still be blurred if we disregard the ideological significance of the third injunction on obedience to imperial commands, which reads as follows:

Scrupulously obey imperial rescripts [*mikotonori*]. The emperor [*kimi*] is Heaven and his ministers are Earth: Heaven overspreads and Earth upholds. By having [the affairs of state] conducted in accordance with [the demands of] the four seasons, [benefits] will be obtained from the operation of innumerable divine forces. But when Earth overspreads Heaven, [the world] is ruined. Therefore [good] ministers must accept imperial commands: When actions are taken on high, those below must comply. So edicts handed down by the emperor must be scrupulously obeyed. If they are not obeyed, [ministers] will bring ruin upon themselves.<sup>73</sup>

Although this injunction contains Confucian phrases and ideas, its basic thrust is clear: The emperor is the highest authority of the land.

This authority is not explicitly related to the traditional role of a ruler who, as chief priest of kami rites, is descended from a long line of priestly rulers. But neither is that authority rooted explicitly in Confucian virtue or Buddhist truth. So why is it not logical for the prince to have assumed, without articulation, that an emperor possessed the highest authority simply because Japanese emperors had always had such authority? If such an assumption lay behind the formulation of the third injunction, we can properly think of that injunction as standing at the top of a three-tiered ideological structure: Confucianism principles of ministerial behavior at the bottom (Injunction 1), reverence for Buddha as the supreme object of worship in all lands on a higher and more sacred tier (Injunction 2), and traditional imperial authority at a top spot near Heaven (Injunction 3).

71 Tamura Enchō, "Shōtoku Taishi no jidai to sono Bukkyō," *Shōtoku Taishi ronshū*, cited in Futaba, *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi*, p. 45.

72 Futaba, *Nihon kodai Bukkyō-shi*, pp. 48–51.

73 Suiko 12 (604) 14/3, NKBT 68.180–1, translated somewhat differently in Aston, 2.129.

Such an interpretation of the way that Prince Shōtoku related his Buddhist convictions to Japanese imperial rule, when seen against the backdrop of a divided society with different sources of spiritual authority, helps us understand why both Soga no Emishi and Soga no Iruka (Umako's son and grandson) were violently opposed to Prince Yamashiro's occupying the throne. They must have realized that this son of Shōtoku, apparently more committed to the Buddhist cause than his father was, would surely draw sacred Buddhist authority to the emperor and away from the current chieftain of the Soga clan. Accordingly, Yamashiro and his family were brutally eliminated, an event that kindled a coup by which the Soga themselves were destroyed. The emperor (Kōtoku) who was placed on the throne then began to patronize Buddhism, as Shōtoku seems to have wanted.

The prince's apparent advocacy of imperial patronage for Buddhism – no doubt based on the assumption that imperial patronage of the foreign faith would further justify and sanctify imperial rule – explains why court leaders arranged the assassination of Soga no Emishi (who was concerned mainly with the Soga's authority) in 645, why they moved quickly to bring Buddhist priests and temples under imperial authority, why reform measures were announced by imperial edict, and why Prince Shōtoku soon came to be honored (eventually worshiped) as a great hero of the imperial line. The Buddhism that was supported by the state after 645 was not, however, the prince's type of Buddhism (centered on the doctrine of denial), but a Soga form that stressed magic and ceremonies honoring deceased ancestors.

#### RITSURYŌ BUDDHISM

After eliminating Soga no Emishi in 645, the leaders of the new administration adopted reforms that led to the formation of a Chinese-style penal and administrative structure referred to as the *ritsuryō* state. Legal and political measures taken to increase the emperor's autocratic power and authority were paralleled by endeavors to make Buddhism a state religion: Buddhist temples and Buddhist worship were used in support of the ruler's authority, similarly to what was done earlier in China and Korea. The actions taken in those years to sever established Buddhist temples from Soga patronage and to place them under the wing of emperors and empresses mark the beginning of what is known as the period of *ritsuryō* Buddhism.

Ties between political and religious change after 645 were so deep and extensive that the truth of contemporary historical movements is