

Kevin Gray CARR

## Pieces of Princes

### Personalized Relics in Medieval Japan

By late medieval times, it was common to describe Prince Shōtoku as “Japan’s Śākyamuni,” but how was he symbolically elevated to this status? This article considers “personalized relics”—unique remains identified as a particular part of the actual body of an honored figure—and shows how they played a crucial role in transforming the sacred identities of the Japanese and South Asian princes. The three sections each deal with a different type of relic associated with Shōtoku: a miraculously manifested eye, locks of hair, and various teeth that were enshrined, stolen, and re-enshrined. These case studies trace the incremental replacement of Śākyamuni with Shōtoku as a source of religious power and authority, one that surpassed its original model for its unique and inalienable connection to devotees in medieval Japan.

KEYWORDS: relics (*shari*)—Prince Shōtoku—Śākyamuni—*mappō*

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THIS IS the story of two princes and what they left behind. In Japan, the most famous prince of them all is surely Shōtoku (聖徳, 573?-622?). Within a century of his death, texts such as the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (720) valorized him as a towering cultural hero, crediting him with the establishment in Japan of Buddhism, Chinese style governmental institutions, and even the country's first "constitution."<sup>1</sup> In the Buddhist world as a whole, the most eminent prince is surely Siddhartha Gautama, the man who became known as the Buddha. According to the great biography that accompanied the tradition wherever it went, before he left his palace to seek liberation, Siddhartha lived the luxurious life of a prince in a kingdom in northern India. In canonical East Asian scriptures, the Buddha-to-be in this period is consistently referred to using the characters read as *Taishi* 太子 in Japanese, and so it was easy to associate this prince with Shōtoku Taishi. In fact the linguistic association of the two figures, Shōtoku and Siddhartha, is no mere coincidence, and even by the end of his life, the Japanese prince was implicitly associated with the Buddha Śākyamuni. For example, the inscription on the mandorla of the statue that is now housed in the Golden Hall (*Kondō*) of Hōryūji states that when the prince fell ill in 622, various people close to him commissioned a statue of Śākyamuni made in the same size and proportions of the Japanese prince.<sup>2</sup> This may have been a gesture towards a kind of sympathetic magic, since the work was begun in the hope that it would bring about his recovery and elicit his rebirth in some kind of Pure Land (*jōdo* 浄土). Later, this statue served as a memorial to Shōtoku even while it stood as an icon of Śākyamuni. Yet this was only the first of innumerable symbolic shifts that established an unmistakable bond between the two princes, and the typological association of their biographies, characters, and powers continued to inspire people up through modern times. For example, Sakaino Kōyō proclaims:

\* This article was initially inspired by work I did with John Strong in a seminar at Princeton in 2003. I am indebted to both his published work and the various conversations we had about aspects of relics in Japan and elsewhere in the Buddhist world.

1. COMO (2006, 202, n. 37) rightly asserts that "seventeen admonishments" is a much better translation of the Japanese *Jūshichijō kenpō*, but, as he notes, contemporary usage still favors this gloss.

2. Legitimate questions have been raised about the date of the mandorla of the Hōryūji Śākyamuni triad (see MCCALLUM 2004, 23). However, stylistic and material evidence suggest that the text of the inscription at least dates from around the time of Shōtoku's death. The text is reproduced in STZ 3: 472-73. See also LURIE 2001, 435, and ŌNO 1970, 210-13.

Concerning the question of the status of Prince Shōtoku in Japanese Buddhist history, one can easily sum it up in one phrase: “Prince Shōtoku is Japan’s Śākyamuni.” That’s all there is to it. (SAKAINO 1904, 53)

To Sakaino and uncountable others throughout Japanese history, Prince Shōtoku represented the pinnacle of the Buddhist ideal in Japan, transmitting Śākyamuni’s teachings and at times even eclipsing the importance of the Buddha himself.<sup>3</sup>

How did these two princes—Siddhartha and Shōtoku—become so closely linked? There are many ways to answer that question, but this article will consider one class of objects through which Shōtoku was symbolically transformed into “Japan’s Śākyamuni”: relics. Veneration of the bodily remains of eminent saintly figures was a common feature of Buddhist culture throughout Asia, and relics were especially important in Japan for negotiating sacred identities and authoritative lineages.<sup>4</sup>

One of the fundamental facts of Buddhism in Japan was the gulf between the age of the Buddha and the geographic and historical place of local devotees. Before the nineteenth century, only one monk said to be from South Asia, Bodhisena (Jp. Bodaisenna 菩提僊那, a.k.a. Baramon Sōjō 婆羅門僧正, 704–760), arrived in Japan. No one from premodern Japan ever made the successful round trip to South Asia and back. In the minds of the Japanese, the land of Tenjiku 天竺 was on the other edge of the world, if it existed at all as a place one could actually go. Moreover, the time of the Buddha was long past, such that according to Chinese reckoning, the degenerate period of “the latter days of the Law” (*mappō* 末法) was believed to have begun almost at the same time Buddhism arrived in Japan. Absence was a *fait accompli*, and the Buddha was very, very far away.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, relics offered a way around this problem. As the physical remains of the actual Buddha, they provided a way to subvert the sense of separation from authentic sources of Buddhist authority. A little piece of Śākyamuni col-

3. One should not forget that Shōtoku beliefs, especially in the modern period, involved a large measure of cultural nationalism. There is not enough space in this article for a discussion of the political influences on the historiography of Shōtoku studies, but the reader should bear in mind the veils through which the prince is often seen in Japan.

4. *Relics of the Buddha* (STRONG 2004) is the best single overview of the wider relic tradition in Buddhism. See also TRAINOR 1997 and GERMANO and TRAINOR 2004. Especially relevant to this study are the essays by Strong, Faure, and Sharf in the latter collection. Brian RUPPERT’s monumental *Jewel in the Ashes* (2000) is the most extensive study of relics in Japan. In addition, see YIENGPRUKSAWAN (2001). In Japanese, see KAGEYAMA (1986), and NAKAO (2001).

5. Although wholly concurring with Robert Sharf’s general point that absence/presence is not the only or necessarily the most important issue surrounding relics, it is undeniably a crucial aspect of medieval relic cults in Japan, given the country’s temporal and geographic location in the Buddhist world; see SHARF 1999.

lapsed the perceived gulfs of time and space and made his concrete, continuing presence manifest for anyone to see and hold.

Although the Heian period saw the start of many prominent relic traditions, their full flowering only occurred in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The new movements of the time centered on different ways to deal with the age of the end of the Dharma and the theoretical extinction of Buddhist practice and teachings. While some thinkers (such as Shinran) saw the effort to try to reconnect with the Buddha as ultimately futile, other groups like Zen and Shingon Risshū believed that liberation could be realized again through dedicated practice modeled on the golden age of the Buddha. It was around that time that the promoters of the Shōtoku cult at temples like Hōryūji and Shitennōji were most effective in promoting the prince as a bridge to the distant and apparently absent Śākyamuni.

Despite their symbolic prominence, relics in East Asia often lack a strong sense of individual presence. Although they were generally believed to be actual physical remains of the historical Buddha, most objects treated as relics in Japan appear to be little more than small polished stones enshrined in elaborate reliquaries and monstresses. Other than their ritual and narrative context, there is little to differentiate any one piece from another: they are all just “bits of the Buddha.” Although they might vary slightly in color, shape, or other minor physical properties, such relics—called *shari* 舍利 in Japanese—served as a fungible spiritual currency that could be used to settle a wide variety of religious and political debts in medieval Japan.<sup>6</sup> Since this sort of relic has been extensively studied by scholars writing in both Japanese and English, it will be treated here only as it relates to another kind of material trace of a sacred personage: “personalized relics.”<sup>7</sup> This latter type is unique, not subject to replication, and identified as a particular part of an actual body. Although they might be called *shari* as well,

6. The Chinese *sheli* and the Japanese *shari* are transliterations of the Sanskrit *śarīra*, lit. “bodies.” These are the primary focus of Brian RUPPERT’s definitive study (2000) of relics in early medieval Japan.

7. STRONG succinctly summarizes the wide variety of scholarly interpretations of relics (2004, 4–5), but his book follows a different tack from most: “I propose to view relics not as the embodiments of a transcendent or imminent or otherwise absent Buddha, nor just as functionally equivalent to the departed Master, but as *expressions and extensions of the Buddha’s biographical process*” (2004, 5). Strong’s notion of biographical relics is akin to the idea of “personalized relics” suggested here in this article, but I argue that the sense of presence is essential to understanding the particular power of Shōtoku relics. In contrast, although Strong does not deny the importance of presence, he suggests that it is best to see them as part of a “posterior life” narrative that continues on well after the Buddha died. The relics, he asserts, do not incarnate the Buddha in the abstract as much as perpetuate his presence by recalling and giving expression to events of his life (229). These two approaches are complementary, since biography is a key aspect of a “personalized” relic.

such objects are frequently referred to as specific body parts (“hair,” “arm,” and so on), or more generally as “honored bones” (*okotsu/onkotsu* 御骨).<sup>8</sup> This class of object is quite familiar in Europe, where reliquaries are often shaped like the arm or leg of a saint and bound inextricably to his or her particular (often gruesome) story of martyrdom. Yet specifically identified remains of holy figures actually represent only a tiny fraction of relics in medieval Japan. Nevertheless, their very rarity lends them a disproportionate prominence in the mythological representations of sacred figures and the place of Japan in the Buddhist world.

In medieval Japan, there was a general lack of interest in the individual history of relics, unless they were explicitly associated with a particular historical person. As Brian Ruppert describes, the sundry, anonymous relics imported into the country were indeed important symbolic capital, but given the large number of them and their demonstrated ability to multiply, they do not tend to carry their origins and unique provenances with them through various exchanges and translations. They seem to have been freely interchangeable and were only vaguely linked to a sacred body or source. On the other hand, miraculously-manifested relics of Śākyamuni and those from lesser figures such as Shōtoku had a clearer provenance than the run-of-the-spiritual-mill *shari* of the Buddha. Compared to even large numbers of the anonymous *shari* type, a single personalized relic possessed a prodigious symbolic mass.

By its nature, a personalized relic is not exchangeable with anything else: the left eye of Śākyamuni is unmistakably different than Shōtoku’s eyetooth. Yet despite their inherent assertion of difference, such relics were essential to the process whereby the Japanese prince first was identified with—and later supplanted—the Buddha. This article will show how these two princes and various pieces of them come to be conflated and equated in the words and deeds of early medieval Japanese believers. We will consider representative bodily remnants of these princes, especially their eyes, hair, and teeth, at three sites at which Shōtoku was imagined and physically represented: Hōryūji, Shitennōji, and Shōtoku’s grave. These personalized relics and their respective performative contexts reveal an incremental transformation: at first, Shōtoku is presented as a bridge to Śākyamuni, then as equivalent to him, and finally as a complete replacement for him. The various texts considered here, taken primarily from collections of tales and diary entries, demonstrate that the promoters of Shōtoku cults were able to make his continuing presence both palpable and powerful

8. STRONG (2004, 10–12) distinguishes “beads” (equivalent to *shari* in Japan) and “bones” of the “ordinary dead” who have no relics. While ordinary, identifiable bodily remnants are often deemed impure, the “personalized relics” discussed here are considered especially holy in large part because of the way they conflate the perfected essence of *shari*-like relics with identifiable remains of a singular individual.

by drawing on familiar, preexisting paradigms of relic production and use. The accounts show that it was primarily small and subtle shifts in the use and placement of material objects associated with the princes that transformed Shōtoku's remains—from the mere bodily remnants of a dead man, into personalized holy *relics* worthy of worship.

*The Eyes Have It: Miraculous Manifestations and Bridges to the Buddha*

*Nihon shoki* is one of the earliest records we have of the transformation of Shōtoku into a legendary figure and several of the stories it tells about him relate directly to relics. However, one event only later came to be explicitly associated with the prince. It is found in the twentieth book, in the entry for the ninth month of the thirteenth year of Emperor Bidatsu's reign (584). The minister Soga no Umako had recently enshrined a stone statue of Maitreya and sponsored a dedicatory ceremony:

The three nuns prepared food offerings for a great ceremony. At this time, Tatto<sup>9</sup> found relics (*shari*) on top of the food offering (*imohi/saijiki*). He thus took the relics and offered them to [Soga] Umako no Sukune.

(SNKBZ 3: 488, 490)

Here, apparently through the vehicle of Shiba Tatto's faith and the compassion of the Buddha, a relic exhibiting extraordinary characteristics appears as if from nowhere.<sup>10</sup> In later accounts, Shōtoku plays an increasingly central role in the creation of the relic on the rice. For example, *Sambō ekotoba* of 984 recounts the prince's words after Soga no Umako built a pagoda in his new temple for a statue of Maitreya:

[It was said] "A pagoda is supposed to hold a relic of the Buddha. Perhaps a relic of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni will appear here." So Umako prayed and a relic of the Buddha was found lying upon offertory rice. It was put into a glass [*ruri*] jar that was placed upon an altar, and they worshiped it.

(KAMENS 1988, 175)

9. Shiba Tatto (司馬達等, Kuratsukuri no Shiba Tatto, a.k.a. Shime Dachito, Shiba no Tachito, dates unknown) immigrated to the Yamato court from the Liang dynasty and founded the Kuratsukuribe clan. In 584, he and Ikebe no Hita were sent out by Soga no Umako to find a Buddhist monk, and they found a man from Koguryō named Hyepyōn 惠便 (J. Eben, see entry for Bidatsu 13 in *Nihon shoki*) who had returned to lay life but consented to help the pair spread Buddhism. Tatto had his daughter take Buddhist orders as the nun Zenshin. Tatto was the grandfather of the famous Kuratsukuri Tori, who made the Śākyamuni triad in the Golden Hall at Hōryūji (NKBT 68: 149; SNKBZ 3 [*Nihon shoki* 2]: 488).

10. This miraculously manifested relic was subsequently installed in the foundation stone of the heart pillar of Hōkōji. See also the entry in the twenty-second book of *Nihon shoki* for Empress Suiko's first year (592). NKBT 68: 172; SNKBZ 3: 528, 530.

In this version of the story, Tatto—a foreigner of great faith, but a relatively minor character compared to the prince—is not even mentioned, and Shōtoku’s associate Umako assumes a more active role in bringing about the manifestation. The definitive biography of the prince, *Shōtoku Taishi denryaku* (mid- to late-tenth century), included the same story but explicitly sets the prince at center stage as the catalyst which caused Soga no Umako to pray to make the relic miraculously appear:

In the [Prince’s] fourteenth year (an *ichishi* year),<sup>11</sup> in the spring of the second month, Great Minister Soga built a pagoda to the north of Ōno hill, and held a large ceremony [*sai-e* 齋會]. The prince prepared himself, and came to see this. When the heart pillar was being erected, he pressed his hands together three times in prayer, and said to the ministers, “This is a receptacle for the Buddha’s relics. If one does not put relics [inside] it cannot be a pagoda. After the *parinirvāṇa* of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni, the relics of particles of his bones [*saikotsu shari* 碎骨舍利] appeared according to his will [應感]. This was the Tathāgata’s gift to outsiders.<sup>12</sup> Ah, the sage is far away! Great Minister, if you do not enshrine relics, this pagoda will certainly collapse.”

When the Great Minister heard this, he wished to obtain relics. Twenty-one days later, he [miraculously] received one relic grain atop the offertory rice. It was about the size of a sesame seed. Its color was red and white, and it was surrounded by purple light. It floated on water and did not sink; it had a hole in the middle. When the relic was thrown into the water, it rose and sank accordingly at will. Although it was pounded, it did not break. It spewed forth a wondrous light. As a test, Umako no Sukune took the relic and placed it in an iron fulling block [*kanashiki* 鐵鑢], and struck it with an iron hammer. Although the block and the hammer were utterly destroyed, the relic was not damaged. The Great Minister kept [the relic] in a glass [*ruri* 琉璃] jar and worshiped it morning and evening. The relic always rolled around inside the jar, and sometimes it turned into two or three [relics], sometimes into five or six. It had no set number. Every evening it would spew forth light. The prince came and

11. Shōtoku’s fourteenth year (585) was a very significant one for many reasons: in that year, Umako enshrined the relics in the pagoda as recounted here; Emperor Bidatsu allowed Buddhism to continue at the urging of Prince Shōtoku; an epidemic occurred that was blamed on Buddhism; Mononobe Moriya 物部守屋 and Nakatomi Katsuumi 中臣勝海 rallied against the burned Buddhist halls and destroyed images; another epidemic spread that made the victims feel “as if being burned and broken”; the emperor conceded to permit Minister Soga to practice Buddhism alone; and, by the end of the year, Buddhism had made a strong and lasting comeback. These events basically began with the erecting of the pagoda with the relics in it, and were often seen as a holy war to establish Buddhism. Thus, the story suggests the triumph of Buddhism and relic worship through the person of Shōtoku.

12. The phrase translated as “outsiders” is *toya [ni]/geka* 外家 in the original. It may refer to foreigners from the perspective of India.

worshiped it and said to the Great Minister, “This is the true form of a bone relic.” The Great Minister prepared the ceremony and enshrined [the relic] underneath the heart pillar of the pagoda. (STZ 3: 84)

This passage touches on many of the oddities and paradoxes that echo through much of the tradition of Buddhist relics. Shōtoku asserts that a relic is a necessary part of any pagoda, even in Japan, so distant from the land of Śākyamuni. The prince laments that “the sage is far away,” yet he states clearly that the Buddha intentionally left relics for beings to feel close to him. Although they represent the breaking up and dissolution of the Buddha’s mortal body, the relics are characterized as unbreakable and impervious to damage. The text makes a point of specifying that only one relic (*ichimai* 一枚) appears on the rice, but in response to veneration, the relic multiplies itself. Lastly, even though the prince says that the object was “the true form of a bone relic” (*shinkei kotsu shari* 真形骨舍利), its description does not suggest a real bone at all. This strange combination of elements reflects ambivalent feelings about relics common across Asia, and it highlights fundamental problems of permanence and presence distinctive to Japan, where the Buddha is indeed so “far away” yet so essential. In this context, one of the most powerful ways to overcome the great distance of time, space, and psychology was to employ the device of the divine manifestation of a relic through the mediation of an eminent devotee—the more exalted the intercessor, the more powerful the object made manifest. In this story, Shiba Totto was eventually replaced by Shōtoku, who offered a more efficacious conduit to the real presence of Śākyamuni.

In the preceding passage from *Shōtoku Taishi denryaku*, Shōtoku is said to “press his hands together three times in prayer” before expounding the necessity of installing relics in a pagoda. This detail recalls a famous episode from the spring of Bidatsu’s second year (573 CE) that the same text recounts. Shōtoku was two years old and it was the second month:

At the beginning of dawn on the fifteenth day, [Shōtoku] pressed his palms together, faced to the east,<sup>13</sup> called out “Praise to the Buddha” [*Namu butsu* 南

13. No one is certain of the significance of Shōtoku’s facing *east*. KAMENS (1988, 181) suggests that the direction may be related to Maitreya, but the paintings that were originally on the walls of the Golden Hall at Hōryūji locate Yakushi (Skt. Bhaiṣajyaguru), in his “Lapis Lazuli World to the East” 東方淨瑠璃世界. Thus, the episode originally may have been related to cults of the medicine buddha. However, it may simply have been a function of the time of day of the event—the author, not influenced by Amidist Pure Land ideas, would naturally have imagined that the prince would have faced the rising sun. Neither explanation is terribly cogent in a medieval interpretive context, since thirteenth-century texts make it clear that the relic that appears is that of Śākyamuni, though geographically he would be associated with the west.



FIGURE 1. Prince Shōtoku at age two, c. 1292. Japanese cypress wood with polychromy and rock-crystal-inlaid eyes. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museum (formerly Walter C. Sedgwick Collection).

無仏],<sup>14</sup> and again made obeisance. He did not do this because anyone taught him to do so.

(NITCHŪ BUNKA KŌRYŪ-SHI KENKYŪKAI and  
KURANAKA 1985, lines 32–34, pages 24–25)

This same incident was recounted in general tale collections from the Heian Period, such as *Sanbō ekotoba* (984) and *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (first half of the twelfth century, 11.1), and it probably was originally intended to illustrate Shōtoku's precocious spiritual maturation. Indeed at first glance, it would seem that this event has nothing to do with relics. However, as with the story about the miraculously-manifested grain for Soga no Umako's temple, in medieval Japan, the two-year-old Shōtoku was increasingly seen as providing a bridge to the material traces of the historical Buddha.

The fact that the infant Shōtoku's act was said to have occurred on the fifteenth day of the second month was not overlooked by later commentators. That day was considered to be the anniversary of the final passing (*nehan* 涅槃, Skt.

14. The origin of the phrase *Namu butsu* (Praise Buddha), which is central to all accounts of the incident, is unclear. It appears in the "Chapter on Expedient Means" (*Hōben-bon* 方便品) in the *Lotus Sutra* and other texts, but it does not seem to be associated with young children in any sutra. However, Ishida Mōsaku has pointed out that the phrase also often appears in *jātaka* tales dealing with Śākyamuni's former life, and may have been integrated into the Shōtoku legend as a means to link the two princes. That association is also asserted by the visual similarities between depictions of Shōtoku at age two and the Buddha at birth. Thus, the addition of the miraculous manifestation of the relic to the episode only makes *explicit* the message that was already implied in the earlier version of the legend.

*parinirvāṇa*) of Śākyamuni and the moment that the salvific powers of the Buddha's relics were made available to the world. Medieval accounts of the same event dramatize this connection by adding a crucial new element to this Shōtoku myth: a relic that miraculously appeared when the boy parted his hands after calling the Buddha's name. It was said that since his birth until that moment, the prince had not unclenched his fist and the holy remains of Buddha had been in his palm the whole time.<sup>15</sup>

At Hōryūji, the relic that dropped from the hand of the two-year-old prince was believed to be the same one that is still enshrined in the Relic Hall (*Shariden*) of the East Precinct of the temple. *Shōtoku Taishi-den shiki* 聖徳太子伝私記 (a.k.a. *Kokon mokuroku-shō*, c. 1238–47) by Kenshin 顯真 (early- to mid-thirteenth century) describes the object. The section entitled “Collection Concerning Relics in Japan” (*Fusō shari-shū* 扶桑舍利集) states that it was “white like a small horn and about [the size of] a bean,” going on to say that it was placed in a silver bag (*fukuro* 袋) and kept at the treasure storehouse of the Jōgūō-in. In a section on the treasures inside that same hall, the author discusses the relic further:

...First, the one relic grain from [the prince's] fist changed color to yellow or white, depending on the time. This is none other than divine transformation [*shinpen* 神変]. Although it is said that there are unbelievers who do not think [the Relic Hall relic] is the one from his fist, this is the unfathomable [*fukashigi* 不可思議] way of non-Buddhists [*gedō* 外道]. Extrapolating from the two-fascicle chronicle,<sup>16</sup> this [truth] can be clearly seen. That is, on the morning of the fifteenth day of the second month, [Shōtoku] intoned “Praise to the Buddha [*Namu butsu*].” This was on the day of Śākyamuni's *parinirvāṇa* [*nyūmetsu* 入滅]. [The prince], wishing to display that relic, chose this point in time [to reveal it]. Moreover, since that unspoken matter was exceedingly well-known in the world, it was neither recorded nor was it kept a secret. Therefore, this [incident] is not recorded [elsewhere], though it is in the twelve-fascicle biography (in Uji's treasure storehouse [*hōzō* 宝蔵]).<sup>17</sup> (DNBZ 71: 289a)

In addition to offering some explanation as to why earlier texts do not mention the relic, the author makes explicit the fundamental bond between Shōtoku and

15. One medieval tradition recounting the origin of the relic states that Lady Śrīmālā, one of Shōtoku's previous lives, took the relic directly from the ashes of Śākyamuni's funeral pyre. She held it when she died and in each subsequent life, grasped the relic tightly, presumably so that it would eventually make its way to Japan.

16. This refers to *Shōtoku Taishi denryaku*, which is sometimes called “The two fascicle chronicle” (*nikan-den* 二卷伝). However, there is nothing in that text to suggest the appearance of a relic in the prince's fist.

17. It is not clear to what text this “twelve-fascicle biography” refers, but it is probably no longer extant.

Śākyamuni that is inchoate in the original story. For many medieval devotees, the Japanese prince—especially in the guise of a precocious two-year-old—was seen as a bridge and a gateway to his Indian counterpart. In this role, he was a fundamental figure who served to alleviate anxiety about the absent Buddha.

The narrative of the infant Shōtoku manifesting a relic has its visual correlate in myriad statues of the young prince that were made by artists in all leading schools of sculpture and funded by most of the major religious sects. This iconography, which became exceedingly popular later in the century, represents the two-year-old Shōtoku in long, red trousers with his hands pressed together in prayer. Although generally slightly smaller than an actual child, the statues maintain youthful proportions with their large eyes, round heads, and short, stocky bodies. In addition, many statues make use of naturalistic polychrome, nakedness (that is, they were meant to be clothed), and crystal eyes to give the impression that the statue is alive, momentarily frozen in the act of chanting the Buddha's holy name. The earliest extant datable sculptures of Shōtoku as a two-year-old boy were made at the end of the thirteenth century, but the first textual reference to such a statue can be found in the nineteenth fascicle of *Azuma kagami*.<sup>18</sup> According to the text, the shogun Sanetomo dedicated an image in 1210 (Jōgen 4)/11/22: “A ceremony was held in his personal worship hall [*jibutsu-dō* 持仏堂] for the image of Prince Shōtoku (a “Praise Buddha” [image]).”<sup>19</sup> This is the first recorded use of the term “Praise Buddha” (*Namu butsu*) to refer to an image of Shōtoku, and given the context, it almost certainly refers to a statue of what came to be known as the “Praise Buddha Prince” (*Namu butsu Taishi* 南無仏太子).<sup>20</sup>

One of the oldest extant dated images of the two-year-old prince is the “Sedgwick Shōtoku” in the Fogg Museum of Art.<sup>21</sup> Datable to around 1292, it is a masterpiece of late Kamakura naturalism. The faded red of his trousers, the white pigment under the arm, and the subtle red shading in the corners of his eyes remind the viewer that it would originally have been covered in fine polychrome from head to toe. Despite the statue's small size, it communicates a powerful sense of living presence that stems from the combination of the plump, rounded forms and proportions of a child's body, melded with the introspective visage of a sage. Moreover, the

18. The oldest firmly datable statue of the infant Shōtoku was made, according to its inscription, in the third month of 1261 by Kōshun and is now in the collection of Fujita Isamu.

19. DNS 4.10: 880. Minamoto no Sanetomo 源実朝 (r. 1203–1219; 1192–1219) became the third Kamakura shogun in 1203. While his life and death were marred by constant bids for power between opposed factions in the *bakufu*, he was an important patron of the arts. For more on the possible meanings of the infant to Shōtoku and his family, see CARR 2005, 102–15.

20. The author does not explain what the *Namu butsu* Shōtoku is, suggesting that the sculptural subject was already known, but it is unlikely that such images were made before the end of the twelfth century.

21. For an excellent analysis of this work, see ROSENFELD 1968–1969.

interior contents of the Sedgwick Shōtoku are as intriguing as the external details. When the statue was repaired, the restorers found a rich cache of materials inside it, including a Southern Song printed *Lotus Sutra* from 1160, poems, prayers, *siddham* characters, charms, Tendai texts, diminutive statues of Bishamon, Jizō, Yakushi, and two images each of eleven-headed Kannon and Aizen Myōō. Although this is an intriguing combination of miniature icons, in the context of this article, the most important elements in the cavity are the twenty-five relic grains in all different colors, shapes, and sizes. Furthermore, the statue's hands are spread a few millimeters apart, as if to display something inside. It is likely that they too originally held a relic. At the very least, such a statue, filled to the brim with sacred objects, is functionally equivalent to secondary relics such as the Buddha's clothing or a stupa that enclosed and gave an accessible form to the primary physical trace.

John ROSENFELD comments that the Sedgwick statue is conceived "more as a living person and less as a ritual object" (1968–1969, 62). Indeed, considering the narrative, ritual, and physical context of such images, the two-year-old prince may be best understood as a kind of living reliquary that provides a palpable and powerful conduit to the authoritative presence of Śākyamuni. Shōtoku embodies a very special kind of reliquary that produces relics itself from the power of the prince's spiritual charisma. Without Shōtoku, the Hōryūji relic would not exist.

Hōryūji tradition holds that the relic manifested by the prince was actually the left eye of Śākyamuni.<sup>22</sup> This particular designation may have resonated with native myths, such as the famous tale recounted in the first fascicle of *Nihon shoki* that states that upon washing his left eye, Izanagi formed Amaterasu, the sun goddess. Yet the association with a specific body part adds at least two other important symbolic layers to the Hōryūji relic. First, medieval texts refer to the object enshrined in the Eastern Precinct as "the relic of seeing the Buddha and hearing the Dharma" (*kenbutsu monpō shari* 見佛聞法舍利). Not only did it enable a believer to view the Buddha upon beholding the relic, as the Buddha's own eye, it also made it possible for the believer to be seen by the Buddha as well. By identifying Shōtoku's relic with such a key part of Śākyamuni's anatomy, it opened the possibility of a two-way spiritual connection that promised actual effects in response to the viewer's particular needs.<sup>23</sup> Both the young Shōtoku's fist relic and Shiba Totto's rice relic show a power to work in the world in a concrete way: the relics give off light, multiply themselves, and manifest other such

22. The tradition that the relic is the left eye of the Buddha appears in *Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略紀 (late eleventh-early twelfth century, KT 12) and *Gyokurin-shō* 玉林抄 (by Kunkai 訓海, 1448).

23. Seeing and being seen by the divine has been eloquently explored in the South Asian context by ECK (1981). STRONG (2004, 234–35) applies the notion of *darśan* (lit. "seeing") to South Asian relic cults as well, but the animating power of the eyes is equally important in East Asia, most clearly dramatized by the "eye-opening ceremony" (*kaigen kuyō* 開眼供養) that accompanies the dedication of most statues.

signs of some sort of active presence within them. In this way, the living Buddha was brought to Japan. In addition, the designation of the relic as the Buddha's eye effectively personalizes what might otherwise have been an undistinguished object, just another *shari*. The relic is intimately tied to the biography of the great Japanese prince whose authority vouchsafes its authenticity and inimitability through his miraculous presentation of the piece of the Buddha. There is only one left eye of Śākyamuni and it is at Hōryūji.<sup>24</sup>

Many factors went into developing these stories to accord with the paradigm of personal spiritual power eliciting relics. In the case of Shiba Tatto's (and later, by association, Shōtoku's) rice relic, miraculous manifestation is presented as a legitimate way of obtaining relics. In fact, this method may be *more* desirable than conventional importation because it associates the object with a specific supernatural event and a famous legendary believer.<sup>25</sup> Thus the relic actually has a clearer provenance and a more illustrious history than the majority of individually undistinguished relics that were physically imported to Japan by the thousands by early monks such as Bodhisena (750s), Jianzhen (754), Ryōsen (826), or Engyō (840).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, by imagining relics to be created in Japan, rather than simply brought from some faraway place, the people who formulated these legends make Japan itself holy, with the same degree of access to the physical presence of the Buddha as India, Central Asia, China, or Korea.

24. Actually, there are at least two more temples that make competing claims about the location of the left eye of the Buddha. One is Jōkokuji 浄国寺 in Iwatsuki 岩槻, Saitama Prefecture. Jōkokuji's "mountain name" (*sangō* 山号), "Mountain of the Buddha's Eye" 仏眼山, comes from the tradition that the relic now housed in the small pagoda (仏眼舍利宝塔, 57 cm high, constructed in 1654) is Śākyamuni's eye that was brought to the temple by Kyōzō Shōnin 教藏上人 (fl. mid-fourteenth century). The other temple is Oppōji 乙宝寺, a Shingon temple in Niigata (Nakajō-machi, Kinoto 中条町乙). Temple legend (in the late-Edo *Sagen go-shari engi* 左眼御舍利縁起, and most elaborately presented in the Edo Period *Oppōji engi emaki* 乙宝寺縁起絵卷) states that Bodhisena brought both eyes of Śākyamuni from India, installing the left one in what became Oppōji. The right eye was enshrined in a temple in China called "First Temple" (甲寺, Jp. Kinoe-dera), so the new temple was called "Second Temple" (Kinoto-dera 乙寺). Although it is likely to be an apocryphal story, Emperor Go-Shirakawa is said to have donated a pure gold pagoda to house the eye relic, and changed the temple name to "Second Treasure Temple" (Oppōji 乙宝寺).

25. This idea finds resonance in the story of the Sennyūji relic, which, in passing from Skanda (韋駄天, Ch. Weituo, Jp. Idaten) to Daoxuan (道宣, 596–667), was imbued "with the prestige of a new miraculous origin, and the legitimacy of being associated with a great Vinaya master." See STRONG and STRONG 1995, 3.

26. Of course, the fact is that Jianzhen (or any other illustrious and virtuous monk who brought the relic to Japan) associated the object with his charismatic personality and religious clout. However, the thousands of stone-type relics that he and others imported were not individually distinguished by physical or spiritual marks. Thus, they would generally not have as many concentrated associations as the individualized relics discussed here.



FIGURE 2. Shōtoku at age sixteen (“the hirsute prince,” Shokuhatsu Taishi 植髮太子), late thirteenth to fourteenth century, Japanese cypress wood with polychromy and rock-crystal-inlaid eyes, Kakurinji, Hyōgo Prefecture.

Again and again in Japanese legends, the mediation (actual or only implied) of some great man is shown to be essential for establishing contact with the Buddha.<sup>27</sup> Things associated with one leads a person closer to the other. As a symbolic bridge for the Japanese people, Shōtoku had the distinct advantage of having both historical and spatial reality. The monks of Shitennojōji or Hōryūji needed only to look out their back door to see places inextricably bound to the life of the prince, and they could read an account of Shōtoku’s life or view his images to find evidence of his equivalency with Śākyamuni. Through the con-

27. The notion of Shōtoku as mediator is in part inspired by Paul Mus’s assertion that the king is crucial for establishing the “mesocosmic arena” in which the Buddha and worshipper can interact. See MUS 1935, 636. For a deft application of these ideas to South Asian materials see STRONG 1983, 131.

duit of the Japanese prince, his South Asian counterpart was made present in that backwater of the Buddhist world called Japan. From “the Buddha *through* Shōtoku,” or “the Buddha *in* Shōtoku,” it was only a short jump for medieval hagiographers to think of “the Buddha *as* Shōtoku.”

### *A Hair's Breadth's Difference*

Despite the fact that they are full of stories about shaven-headed monks, Buddhist scriptures and legends devote a great deal of attention to hair. In what may be seen as the very first instance of relic worship related to the historical Buddha, Prince Siddhartha cut off his royal topknot and tossed it into the heavens. Indra then caught the hair and enshrined it in a bejeweled stupa in his heavenly domain. Later on, according to such sources as *Dharmaguptaka vinaya*, soon after Śākyamuni realized *nirvāṇa*, the two merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika made offerings to him. When they asked what they should venerate upon returning to their native country, the Buddha gave them some of his hairs and nail clippings. The merchants were at first disgusted and the Buddha chided them, saying:

Oh, merchants, you should know that, everywhere in the heavens and in the universe, Māras and Brahmas, *śramaṇas* and *brāhmaṇas*, gods and humans, make offerings and pay homage to the hair and nails of the Tathāgata in such a way that all of them obtain inestimable merits.

(Ch. *Sifenlü*, Jp. *Shibunritsu* 四分律, T.1428, v. 22, 782a22–25)

Another story tells of a haircut that the Buddha received from the young boy, Upāli. Ānanda, thinking the hair impure, wants to get rid of it in an old pot, but Śākyamuni says that the hair should instead be placed in a new pot and revered. In these anecdotes, hair—which turns white and constantly falls out and so would normally epitomize impermanence—coming from the Buddha's head is asserted to be worthy of worship as a symbol of his permanence and presence.<sup>28</sup> Hair is one of the few “pre-mortem” relics that are possible, and thus could be thought to link a devotee even more closely to the living Buddha.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas the previous section dealt with Shōtoku facilitating the manifestation of the primary relics of the Buddha and providing access to his powerful presence, this section will show how “relics” of the Japanese prince were placed on a level equivalent to those of Śākyamuni. The most prominent early example of this phenomenon is the enshrinement of Shōtoku's hair in the Shitennōji

28. For more on hair relics, see STRONG 2004, 71–85.

29. The one-hundred fascicle *Fayuan zhulin* (Jp. *Hōen shurin* 法苑珠林, T. 2122, v. 53: 598c11–13), compiled in 668 by Daoshi 道世, asserts that the color of a relic indicates its origins in the body: white are bones, black is hair, and red is flesh. The fact that hair is listed along with flesh and bones indicates its importance as a material trace of a holy figure.

pagoda in Naniwa. The core account comes from *Go-shuin engi* 御手印縁起, a one-volume text from Shitennōji that purports to have been written in 594 by Shōtoku himself.<sup>30</sup> However, the text was “discovered” in a gold and lacquer six-story miniature pagoda in the temple’s Golden Hall in 1007 and it was probably written around that time. Even so, due to its semi-miraculous origin and the fact that it was supposedly in the prince’s own hand, the manuscript itself was conceived as a type of relic. The text begins by describing the temple and its history, proclaiming:

This site is the place where, long ago, Śākyamuni turned the wheel of the Dharma. At that time, a great one was born [Shōtoku] who worshiped the Tathāgata, helped protect the Buddhist Dharma, and through this karmic connection, erected temples and pagodas. He spread seven jewels across the land, and thus green dragons always protected it. The fine water that flowed east [in the compound] was called “white stone jade” water, and if one drinks it with a compassionate heart, it becomes Dharma medicine [*hōyaku* 法薬]. The jeweled pagoda and Golden Hall are at the center of the gate of [Amida’s] paradise. Six hairs of his head [*keihatsu* 髻髮] and six grains of the Buddha’s relics were placed in the heart pillar of the pagoda. (DNBZ 85: 305–307)

According to this account, Shitennōji, one of the main sites where Shōtoku established Buddhism in Japan, is located in the exact place where the Buddha first turned the wheel of the Dharma (presumably the land flew of its own accord to Japan after Śākyamuni’s death). Moreover, the six hairs of *Shōtoku’s* head were enshrined right beside, and in the same ritual context as, the same number of relics of Śākyamuni.

This legendary narrative of Shōtoku’s hair is corroborated by sources such as *Nihon kōki* 日本後記 of 840. The text says that in Jōwa 3 (836), the pagoda and Shōryō-den at Shitennōji was hit by lightning and the court dispatched a messenger to inspect the aftermath.<sup>31</sup> He found the prince’s undamaged hair among the burnt and fallen timbers, thus indicating that the hairs were already enshrined in the pagoda sometime before this year. Shōtoku’s hair was again installed in the twelfth month of 837: the sixth fascicle of *Shoku Nihon kōki* 續

30. The text is signed “Imperial Prince, Disciple of the Buddha, Śrīmālā” (*kōtaishi busshi Shōman* 皇太子仏子勝鬘), explicitly linking Shōtoku to the South Asian princess who he appeared as before he was born in China and Japan. The last character of the Sino-Japanese version of the name, *man*, can mean “hair falling down in bunches,” “a wig, hair ornament, or hair-style,” or *mizura*-style hair (the hairstyle most associated with the young Prince Shōtoku)—all of which associate him with hair in some way.

31. The Shōryō-den was a hall at Shitennōji used specifically for enshrining icons of the prince and holding ceremonies directly related to him. Its existence in the ninth century is another piece of evidence concerning early Shōtoku belief in Japan.

日本後紀 of 869 states that at imperial command, a lathed wooden pot and an engraved bronze pot with gold inlay were crafted to house “Shōryō’s [Shōtoku’s] august hair from [Shi]tennōji 天王寺聖靈御髮” (KT pt. 1, 9, 70). The rapidity with which the hair was re-enshrined suggests its prime ritual importance; the style of the containers used to hold the hairs is on par with other contemporary reliquaries for *shari*. In fact, the passage about putting the hairs back in the pagoda does not even mention the Buddha’s relics (though they were almost certainly there), suggesting that the hair was thought to be even more significant than the relics of the Buddha himself.

In this instance, the main method promoters of Shōtoku veneration used to raise his spiritual status was simple juxtaposition. While perhaps not very subtle, placing objects associated with the Japanese prince right next to the relics of the Buddha made the two ritually equivalent, if not interchangeable. Another clear example of this sort of juxtaposition—sacredness by association—is the combined Relic Hall and Picture Hall that stands in between the Yume-dono and Dempō-dō in the East Precinct of Hōryūji. This seven-bay hall was originally a storehouse for treasures owned by the prince, but it was later divided down the center by a one-bay-wide path. The left three bays contained a statue of Shōtoku and his biography painted on the walls; the right side had a shrine for the relic of the Buddha that was manifested by the two-year-old prince.<sup>32</sup> By setting up the ritual space in this way, the monks, without saying a word, made a clear statement about the equivalency of the different elements of the installation. Such ritual parallels further strengthened the link between Śākyamuni and Shōtoku, and a worshipper was afforded a clear path to overcome the absence of the Buddha.

Another type of imagery that reveals a similar ritual treatment of the Buddha’s relics and things associated with Shōtoku are the various statues of the prince with hair implanted in their heads. These statues—at least six from the Kamakura and Muromachi Periods are still extant—usually depict the prince holding a scepter (*shaku*) and a long-handled censor, thus iconographically marking it as a depiction of Shōtoku at age sixteen. Most images of this type are carved with naturalistic features as if they are at least partially naked, and sculptors usually used rock crystal for the eyes of the statues. Along with the hair that is attached to the heads of the statues, these elements make the works seem exceedingly life-like and “present.” One of the oldest examples of this type is from Kakurinji in

32. Another type of so-called “sacredness by association” is the structural similarity of the hagiographical accounts of the Buddha and Shōtoku. The particulars cannot be discussed here, but suffice it to say that the wall paintings in the Painting Hall and the texts on which they are based show clear parallels with the sacred biography of Śākyamuni. Furthermore, the enshrining of Shōtoku’s hair as holy of course recalls the many times the Buddha’s hair was worshiped similarly.

Hyōgo Prefecture (TANAKA 1943, 138–39, pl. 74). This statue is carved such that it appears to be only wearing undergarments, so devotees had to clothe it themselves. The hair-like threads attached to its head seem to have been an essential part of the ritual grooming of the statue. It was originally combed and was probably put up in the *mizura* hair style that is especially associated with the prince before his coming of age ceremony (*genpuku* 元服) at age nineteen. The hair locates the sculpture biographically at the same time that it contributes to a eerie impression of a living body. Thus, artistic naturalism translates into a sense of religious presence. In this way, hair on Shōtoku statues functions like relics of the Buddha that are placed inside statues in that it animates the work and imparts vitality to the material that the statue may otherwise have lacked. While the sculptor of the Kakurinji statue used fine silk threads in lieu of the hair, other statues, especially later in the Muromachi Period, seem to have used real human hair.<sup>33</sup> This practice likely reflects an attempt to form karmic bonds (*kechien* 結縁) with the prince: what could be more intimate than to donate parts of one's own body to an icon? Furthermore, the perception that Shōtoku's hair was on par with the Buddha's relics may be manifested in the loss evident from the hair of statues such as the Muromachi Period Taisei Shōgunji 大聖將軍寺 Shōtoku. In such works, the missing hair is in part accounted for by the practice of believers taking strands away as holy mementos of the prince. The hair on these images thus served as an element that both imparted life to the statue and eventually came to be treated as an object that embodied that life and made it available to devotees.

In the cases of enshrining hair relics and making hirsute images of Shōtoku, the common thread is the use of hair as an ambiguous symbol of transience, which nonetheless suggested the continuing life of the prince. While the relics in the pagoda at Shitennōji or the Relic Hall at Hōryūji pose Shōtoku in ritual juxtaposition with the Buddha, the hair on Shōtoku statues wove in one more significant symbolic strand. The hair could, like the relics of the Buddha, serve as a personalized relic to his sacred person. Without the ninth-century precedent of combining the Buddha's primary relics with Shōtoku's, the hairy statues could not have had the same, powerful effect and the link would not have been as strong. The figuring of his hair as a relic facilitates the tie of believers to Shōtoku, and makes it easier for them to draw further symbolic connections to the Buddha because of these associations.

33. There is surprisingly little published information about these "hair-growing Shōtoku statues." The only source that I found that speaks about them in any detail is Tanaka Shigehisa in the short essay in his book (TANAKA 1943, 138). He only notes, for example, that the hair on a statue's head is "perhaps thread or hair." Moreover, I do not have the inscriptions from the inside of the statues, if they exist. Therefore, the above comments are only speculative, but were included because they suggest some interesting possibilities.

Therefore, the problem for medieval Japanese artists and writers need not necessarily have been limited to trying to recapture the *Buddha's* presence. As both the pagoda relics and the hairy statues demonstrate, a sense of Shōtoku's living presence and miraculous efficacy took on a significance that was equal to or greater than the problems posed by the Buddha's absence. In this way, in addition to Shōtoku serving as a bridge to the Buddha, he was also worshiped as a spiritual equal of Śākyamuni. The third section of this study presents the logical progression from these developments: the perceived religious power of Shōtoku's relics was not only enhanced by the association with the Buddha's relics, but, in time, the Japanese prince's remains came to functionally replace them altogether.

### *Taking a Bite Out of the Buddha's Territory*

The Buddhist world is full of famous tooth relics.<sup>34</sup> Probably the most famous is said to be kept in the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, and its story is recounted in the *Dhātavaṃsa* (Chronicle of the tooth).<sup>35</sup> Four teeth of the Buddha are mentioned at the end of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*: one went to Indra, one to Gandhāra, one to Kāliṅga, and one to the *nāgas*.<sup>36</sup> In Japan, Sennyūji's tooth was prominent in literary history and it became the focus of an enduring devotional cult centered on the temple.<sup>37</sup> Remarkably, each of these relics were said to have been stolen at one time or another. The Kandy tooth was at the center of several wars and political disputes and thus was a true "bone" of contention. In some accounts, four teeth were stolen by Droṇa (also Doṇa), the Brahman who divided the relics, but he ended up with only the cup used to measure the

34. For more on tooth relics in Buddhism, see STRONG 2004, 179–210.

35. See NANDARATANA 1984. For a new translation from the Sinhalese and an up-to-date commentary of the "Chronicle of the Stupa" (which deals with many aspects of relics), refer to BERKWITZ and PAṆḌITA 2007. Droṇa's theft is recounted on pages 126–27 of the latter.

36. *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*, T. 375, v. 12; WALSH 1987, 277.

37. The monk Mon'yō Tankai 關陽湛海, a disciple of the Ritsu sect priest Shunjō (1166–1227), went to Song China during the Katei era (1235–1238). In 1244, he visited Bailiansi 白蓮寺 on Mt. Tai 泰山 and was deeply moved by the sight of the relic of the Buddha's tooth there. Although he pleaded to be able to take it back to Japan, he returned empty handed that same year. Several years later, he again went to the temple, which had fallen into ruin. He rebuilt it with wood from Japan, and (claims to have) received the tooth in recompense for his deed. After he returned to Japan in 1255, he installed the relic at Sennyūji along with various Song sculptures, including "Yang Guifei Guanyin" (Jp. Yōkihi Kannon 楊貴妃觀音), the Indian Buddhist patron Somachattrā (Jp. Gakkai Sonja 月蓋尊者), Skanda (Jp. Idaten 韋馱天), and *arhats* (*rakan* 羅漢). See STRONG and STRONG (1995) for a much more complete treatment of this relic and the story of its theft. Note also that Sennyūji has a statue of Prince Shōtoku at age fourteen which dates from the Kamakura period, and so it may have some connection with medieval Shōtoku belief.

FIGURE 3. Eleven-Headed Kannon, c. 1203. Japanese cypress wood with traces of gilding and metalwork. Shin-Daibutsuji, Mie Prefecture.



remains, since all of the other relics were in turn pilfered from him.<sup>38</sup> The Japanese Nō play called *Shari* (Relic) describes the attempted theft of the Sennyūji relic by the fleet-footed demon, Sokushikki (速疾鬼; also *Shōshitsu rasetsu* 捷疾羅刹, Skt. *rākṣasa*), who originally tried to steal it from Indra, commenting that “The tooth was stolen away before, and it can be stolen away again” (STRONG and STRONG 1995, 18). All these thefts show Buddhists trying to deal with Śākyamuni’s absence by forcibly taking possession of his physical relics and thus establishing a unique and efficacious connection with him.

A much less well-known case of tooth filching that touches on similar themes occurred sometime in the fifth month of 1203 (Ken’nin 3 建仁). Two

38. From the ninth century on, especially after the sacking of Constantinople in 1204, relic thefts became very common in European Christian lore. The implications of relic thefts have been most notably explored by GEARY 1978. On relic thefts in South Asia, see TRAINOR 1992. STRONG (2004, 120–21) also offers many examples of relic thefts in South and Southeast Asian Buddhism.

“robber-monks,” named Jōkai 淨戒 and Kenkō 見光, were exiled after they opened Shōtoku’s grave, stole a piece of his body, and were finally apprehended. The eleventh fascicle of *Hyakuren-shō* 百練抄 records the event in this way:<sup>39</sup>

Twenty-eighth day: the provisional middle counselor Sadasuke went there and entered, [and saw] that the exiled pair had broken open the grave of Prince Jōgū [Shōtoku]. As for the two monks who stole the august tooth (Jōkai was sent to Bizen Province and Kenkō to Suō Province),<sup>40</sup> they had to be exiled to a distant place, but the holy man of Tōdaiji<sup>41</sup> requested that they be exiled to areas that his temple manages.<sup>42</sup>

It is indicative of the gravity of the theft that Sadasuke, a relatively high-ranking official, was sent by the government to survey the scene in person. Furthermore, for a cleric as eminent as Chōgen to intercede in the issue of where to exile the pair suggests that this theft was a very important event of the day. An entry in the sixth month of Ken’nin 3 of the *Inokuma Kanpaku-ki* 猪隈関白記, the diary of Konoe (Fujiwara) Iezane (近衛家実, 1179–1243) covering 1197–1217, provides some more detail:

Nineteenth day, an *itsubō* day. The rains fall as if they will never stop. The head controller [*tō no ben* 頭弁] minister Nagafusa came.<sup>43</sup> He reported the following to the retired emperor:<sup>44</sup>

“Two temple monks [*jisō* 寺僧] stole a relic [*shari*] from Prince Shōtoku’s grave.

39. *Hyakuren-shō* was a seventeen-fascicle collection of popular historical accounts, but the first three books are lost. It covers the period from around the time of Emperor Reizei to 1259, and it is dated to c.1259–1274 by its content. The full text is reproduced in KT 11: 132.

40. Bizen Province is in present-day Okayama prefecture and Suō Province is in present-day Yamaguchi prefecture. Both of these areas were land grants under Tōdaiji control (*chigyō-koku* 知行国). This land system began in the time of cloistered emperors, and under it, aristocrats and large temple complexes managed the land, even though the court technically owned it. In the medieval period, these tended to become private estates (*shōen*).

41. “The Holy Man of Tōdaiji 東大寺上人” was Shunjōbō Chōgen 俊乘房重源 (1121–1206). According to his *Namu Amida butsu sazen-shū* 南無阿彌陀佛作善集, he was actively engaged in promoting relic worship, and had many five-element pagoda reliquaries made for various religious sites associated with Tōdaiji. See KURATA 1973, 30. For the most extensive and insightful study of Chōgen in English, see ROSENFELD 2011, which includes a translation of the full text of *Namu Amida butsu sazen-shū* and considers in detail the priest’s promotion of various types of art.

42. KT 11: 132, line 17; also quoted in KOBAYASHI 1965, 456.

43. This is most likely “the Nijō royal advisor” (*Nijō saishō* 二条宰相), Fujiwara Nagafusa (藤原長房, 1170–1243). He became head chamberlain (*kurōdo no tō* 藏人頭) in 1200, and royal advisor (*sangi* 参議, equivalent to *saishō*) in 1204. Thus, at the time of the incident, Nagafusa was also a relatively high-ranking member of the court, who was serving as a secretary to the emperor.

44. Go-Toba-in (r. 1183–1198; 1180–1239).

They were exiled (this fact we should record). Later, [I] looked over 准 the tumulus 山陵 to determine whether or not to make an official apology. What shall we do?" (DNK 4: 28)

The diarist also offers further comment on the back of the same document (*uragaki*):

Nineteenth day.

I said, "As for the matter of [the theft of] the relic from Prince Shōtoku's grave, I looked over the tumulus and expressed my condolences for the crime. Isn't this unprecedented?" Both senior secretaries (Yoshinari and Moroshige)<sup>45</sup> submitted a joint memorial to the throne expressing that [the act] was without precedent. We should send an imperial messenger to inspect the grave. The [monks] ought to be punished. (DNK 4: 29)

From these passages, it is clear that in the weeks following the incident other high officials including Konoe Iezane came to formulate a report about the grave. This was clearly shocking news of the day.

These texts provide the basic details of the crime, but several questions remain unanswered. What precedents were there for the theft? Who were Jōkai and Kenkō and why did they steal the tooth? What became of it? What does it imply about Shōtoku and relic worship? Each question can only be partly answered, but together they help flesh out a picture of the theft that reveals a great deal about the way that sacred bodily remains were understood and manipulated in thirteenth-century Japan.

Iezane's account of the incident agrees with others, but the comment that the incident was "without precedent" was not correct. The latter part of the passage from the ninth-century *Shoku Nihon kōki* cited above goes on to quote oral reports that though four hairs of the prince at the time lay under the heart pillar of Shitennōji's pagoda, after lightning struck the previous winter, the imperial messenger who was sent to inspect the site stole the hairs and gave them to his wife (*onodzuma* 己妻). The two of them venerated the remains, which were only later returned to their original place (KT 1: 9, 70). In addition, more than a decade before Jōkai and Kenkō robbed Shōtoku's grave, one of the most infamous cases of relic thefts in Japan took place. Kujō Kanezane's (九条兼実, 1149–1207) diary, *Gyokuyō* 玉葉, includes an entry for the seventh day of the fifth month of Kenkyū 2 (1191) that mentions that one of Chōgen's Chinese disciples,

45. The early Kamakura courtier Kiyohara Yoshinari (清原良業, 1164–1210) is known for the "Japanese Analects" (*Wa-rongo* 倭論語); a compilation of famous sayings by emperors, aristocrats, generals, and priests of Japan is falsely attributed to him. He became senior secretary in 1193. Nakahara Moroshige (中原師重, 1165–1221) had become senior secretary (*daigeki* 大外記) in 1198.

Kongti 空體, stole ten relic grains from Mt. Murō 室生山.<sup>46</sup> The text goes on to describe in substantial detail the extended political fallout of the act.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, Kanezane forces Chōgen and Kongti to return the relics to Go-Shirakawa (後白河, 1127–1192), who blithely appropriated them for himself.<sup>48</sup>

Yet while these previous relic thieves pilfered the relics of the Buddha, Jōkai and Kenkō absconded with the relics of the Japanese prince, Shōtoku. In this sense, the crime truly does appear to be unprecedented. In having the good fortune to be stolen, Shōtoku's tooth was transformed into a very valuable commodity. The theft demonstrated that Shōtoku's and Śākyamuni's relics were both worthy of theft and veneration. Yet in contrast to the indistinguishable pebble-like *shari* that represented the bulk of relics attributed to the Buddha, Shōtoku's stolen relic was a unique and identifiable part of an individual who occupied the same historical and physical space as medieval believers. Situated in this way, the personalized relic was uniquely powerful.

Almost all of the sources are reticent about the motivations for the monks' actions. Yet their reasons for stealing the tooth bear directly on how the remains of Shōtoku were understood at the time. The clemency shown by Chōgen, and the fact that the monks did not destroy the grave but rather stole a single relic suggest that it was not mere spite or greed that drove the pair. In fact, as Gomi Fumihiko notes, Chōgen was clearly complicit in Kongti's theft of the Murōji relics and he seems to have been involved from the start in the affair of Shōtoku's tooth (GOMI 1995, 168). So it is quite possible that he put the two priests up to the theft in order to procure the piece of the prince for himself. The entry for the sixteenth day of the second month of Kangen 3 (1245) in *Shōtoku Taishi-den shiki*

46. It is not certain that Kongti (空體房鑊也, also written 空躰, Jp. Kūtai-bō Ban'ya, 1149–1230) was indeed Chinese, but here we can take the designation of his nationality in *Azuma kagami* as relatively reliable. MUROGA Kazuko 室賀和子 (1990, 1998) has published most extensively on this figure.

47. Kanezane mentions the theft of the Murōji relics often throughout the summer of 1191: see *Gyokuyō* entries for Kenkyū 2/5/22, 5/29, 5/30, 6/1, 6/6, 6/12, 6/14, 6/16, 6/17, 6/19, 6/28, 7/3, 8/3; Chōgen is specifically mentioned in the entries for Kenkyū 2/5/22 and 6/6. See also *Azuma kagami*, Kenkyū 2 (1192)/7/23 in KT 32: 445. RUPPERT (2000, 184–86) treats this theft in some detail.

48. Murōji's relics continued to be appropriated by various dubious means in the thirteenth century. After mentioning how Kūtai smashed open a seven-story stone pagoda to get relics Kūkai had placed in a cave there, *Murō-zan o-shari sōden engi* 室生山御舍利相伝縁起 of 1302 (see RUPPERT 2000, 24; ZGR 27 ge, 299), the text goes on to describe a theft in Bun'ei 9 (1272)/3/21 by a priest from Kai named Kakujitsu-bō (覚日房, Shinō 信応), who passed through on a pilgrimage with other monks from Tōdaiji. They initially split the spoils among themselves but, frightened by thunder, they turned over the relics to Hōni 法爾, a priest of Mur'yōju-in in Kamakura; in 1511 (Eishō 永正 6) the same relics (never returned) were enshrined in a pagoda at Tōdaiji and to this day they are venerated on the nineteenth of every month.

gives more insight into the reasons for the theft. The author, Kenshin, describes a strange meeting at Hōryūji:

A person named Gesshō-bō 月勝房 who came [to the temple] said, “I am the bastard child [*otoshigo* 落子] (marginal note: descendant) of Jōkai-bō. This is a most secret matter.”<sup>49</sup> He went on to say, “Kenkō-bō died two years ago at the age of ninety-three (interlinear note: that monk said, “610 years after the *parinirvāna* of the prince [*Taishi go-nyūmetsu* 太子御入滅] in the year of the Oki Emperor’s rebellion,<sup>50</sup> the tooth that Jōkai-bō had taken was finally returned to [Shōtoku’s] grave by imperial decree). Every day, [Kenkō-bō] would make five stupa pillars (*sotoba*) and worship them. Near the end of his days, he [still] made and worshiped them; thus at his death he was born into the Pure Land.”

[Gesshō-bō reported that] Jōkai-bō said, “I am a person with a karmic connection [*kechien* 結縁] with the prince. When I near the end of my days, even if some people [think me] wicked, I shall rely on this bond.” In the end, this person [Jōkai-bō] was also born into the Pure Land.

This was passed on as an utmost secret: the bones of the prince are long and large and the five fingers of both his left and right hands stretch out to cover his chest as he lies supine. His head faces south. He left no descendants.... The other two coffins have ashes, but no bones. (FUJIWARA 1944, 248)

In a wonderfully dramatic turn, this strange man named Gesshō presents himself to the chronicler as the illegitimate son of Jōkai. Apparently, Jōkai felt that he was specially connected to the prince and that his actions were, in the end, not evil at all. While the situation is not completely clear, if the visitor’s story had at least some “grain” of truth in it, the monks stole because of some excess of devotion.<sup>51</sup> Kenshin seems to doubt the veracity of the strange visitor’s account, as should we, yet the fact that he included it in his collection of oral tradition about Prince Shōtoku suggests that he at least considered it worthy of record and plausible in the context.

One final source sheds light on what became of the contentious relic and the resolution of the theft episode. *Kokon mokuroku bassui* 古今目錄拔萃 in the Hōryūji collection contains much of the same basic information as the other

49. The character used here is *mitsu* 蜜, which usually means “honey.” I read it here as a mistake for the character 密, which has the same reading, but means “secret.”

50. Go-Toba was exiled to Oki after the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1221. This would set Shōtoku’s death to c. 621.

51. In this respect, this theft is quite similar to those recounted in Western Christian sources. Both Japanese and Western relic thefts could apparently be justified by the good intentions of the thieves or the receivers of the relics. See GEARY 1978.

texts, but it also includes some revealing passages about the later actions of Chōgen and the two monks:<sup>52</sup>

At the time of Tosa-in [土佐院 = Emperor Tsuchimikado, r. 1198–1210; 1195–1231] (Middle cloister), during the Genkyū era [1204–5], it is said that the two temple monks Jōkai and Kenkō deceived people in order to enter the prince's tomb, and stole the prince's tooth. They then went out to the world, either [trying to] sell [the relic] or getting people to make donations. These two monks were originally resident monks at Taima [temple], and later moved to live [near] the [tomb of the] prince. According to the [wishes of the] Tōdaiji *kanjin* saint, Namu Amida Butsu Shunjōbō [Chōgen], the tooth was then taken and installed inside the body of an image of eleven-headed Kannon that was made [for that purpose]. A great temple ground was set up in Iga province, and it was called the “new Great Buddha.”<sup>53</sup> It is said that this Jōkai and Kenkō claimed that the appearance of the prince was truly as if he were sleeping on a bed in the daytime. Later the former abbot of Kōninji said: “Now the words of both Jōkai and Kenkō agree. Thus we know the august fact that the prince lives in his golden body.”<sup>54</sup>

The two monks seem to have moved to the area around the tomb, ingratiated themselves with the shrine guardians, and then when they had the chance, they stole a piece of the prince. This version of the story clearly paints the theft as a premeditated act with some sort of monetary or other material incentive. This last source, coming out of Hōryūji, which had a lot of stake in the tomb, was probably biased strongly against the monks, and so made them seem more wicked than they may actually have been. Yet even if it is true that they tried to sell the relic, it shows that the remains of Shōtoku—not the Buddha—could not only receive worship, but were also a commodity that people wanted to possess, even if stolen.

This passage also reflects a common theme in stories about relics—the permanence of the bodily remains of holy figures. However, it is not completely clear what the body of the prince actually looked like. *Shōtoku Taishi-den shiki*

52. The Hōryūji *Kokon mokuroku bassui*, literally “Notes on/abstract of *Kokon mokuroku*,” is a short commentary and supplement to Kenshin's *Shōtoku Taishi-den kokon mokuroku-shō* (AKA *Shōtoku Taishi-den shiki*) from the mid-thirteenth century. It is not listed in *Kokusho sōmokuroku*, but it appears in SSU 12: 252–55 (the mention of the relics appears on 254–55). This same passage is also quoted in KOBAYASHI 1965, 456–57. The earliest date in the colophon of the text reproduced in SSU is Ōei 5 (1398), but KOBAYASHI (1965, 248) plausibly dates the text to the mid-Kamakura Period, soon after Kenshin completed his work.

53. *Namu Amida butsu sazen-shū* indicates that this temple was founded around Kennin 2 (1202). It had a worship hall with a stone altar, on which a gilded Amida triad was installed. NARA KOKURITSU BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1955, lines 89–93. See also KOBAYASHI 1965, 448–54.

54. Kobayashi writes this as 全 (whole); other texts list this as 金 (golden).

from Hōryūji (quoted above) records that Gesshō-bō claimed that “the prince’s bones” (*Taishi no onkotsu* 太子ノ御骨) were quite large and that his fingers were spread over his chest. This description could fit either a corpse with flesh or a skeleton. On the other hand, *Kokon mokuroku bassui* asserts that both Jōkai and Kenkō said that “the appearance of the prince was truly as if he were sleeping on a bed in the daytime” and that “the prince lives in his golden body” (KOBAYASHI 1965, 456–57). To believers, the idea that Shōtoku was in some way alive could offer a great deal of comfort; to unbelievers, it may have provided a powerful incentive to worship the prince and perhaps recapture the efficacious presence of Shōtoku as a living Buddha.

All of the above sources recount a paradigmatic Buddhist story: after Shōtoku entered *parinirvāṇa* [*nyūmetsu* 入滅], the tooth—a *shari*—was stolen but eventually recovered. Whether unconsciously or not, Jōkai and Kenkō emulated many of the legends about the parts that Śākyamuni left behind. The double vision of the two princes employed mythic paradigms to legitimate a new kind of relic—one of a non-Buddha that was structurally and functionally equivalent to those of a true Buddha. In fact, by treating the mortal remains of the Japanese prince as relics, the mythographers and ritualists were able to create a spiritual commodity that even surpassed the symbolic motivating force of Śākyamuni’s remains. For although the Buddha’s relics were certainly never widely thought to be at a lesser spiritual level than those of Shōtoku, the former were foreign and generally without clear provenance, whereas the latter were firmly grounded in Japan, had a clear history, and intimated the possibility of direct, personal contact with a known and knowable higher being. Thus, while the consistent designation of Shōtoku’s remains as “relics” (*shari*) indicates the degree to which they were seen as equivalent to the Buddha’s, the more salient description is “honored bones” (*okotsu/onkotsu*). The latter term points to the more specific embodiment of personalized relics—the eyes, hair, teeth, and other parts—that made possible a unique and concrete connection to sources of religious authority, be they in India or Japan.

In the end, where did Shōtoku’s tooth end up? Not only did it become a relic in name, it was made one in actual ritual practice by Chōgen himself. *Kokon mokuroku bassui* makes it clear that, instead of returning it to the grave, the priest had it enshrined in a statue of an eleven-headed Kannon that he had made for the temple he founded in Iga Province (present-day Mie prefecture).<sup>55</sup> The site,

55. Chōgen’s *Namu Amida butsu sazenshū* (1203 or after) describes a towering (twenty-five *shaku* tall) gilt bronze standing Amida *raigō* triad dedicated in 1202. The three statues were part of a larger sculptural program that incorporated the site’s preexisting cult by including a stone Jizō statue and plinths and platforms made of the native rock of the site. It would be unusual (but not necessarily out of character for Chōgen) to cast an eleven-headed Kannon statue as an attendant bodhisattva for an Amida triad, but the sculpture in which Chōgen installed Shōtoku’s relic was probably an independent image. Shōtoku is not mentioned in the dedication documents nor

known as “the new Great Buddha Temple” (Shin-Daibutsuji 新大仏寺), stands at the endpoint of Shōtoku’s conversion into an independent Buddhist deity.<sup>56</sup> His bodily remains had become “relics,” his relics could animate a statue as did the Buddha’s, and the statue was, at least in name, explicitly associated with the Great Buddha in Nara. Shōtoku, and the objects associated with his person, had truly become a towering spiritual force.

Despite Chōgen’s elaborate attempt to establish an enduring cultic center at his “New Great Buddha Temple” in Iga, he was ultimately unsuccessful. After he died, the temple slowly declined and it was little noted in historical documents until Bashō visited it in 1688 and it was rebuilt after a fire at the site in 1726. The fate of Shōtoku’s tooth is unclear, but temple tradition states that it is still inside the statue of eleven-headed Kannon enshrined at the temple. Nevertheless, the more general transformation of Shōtoku into “Japan’s Śākyamuni,” often negotiated in the material realm of relics, was eminently successful. Throughout medieval times, the Japanese prince often came to stand in the stead of his South Asian counterpart and more textual, material, and ritual energy was devoted to Shōtoku than to perhaps any other figure.

Although they were not directly involved with much of the sectarian conflict that seems to have driven many relic thefts from the thirteenth century onwards, Shitennōji, Hōryūji, and other sites associated with Shōtoku continued to be enmeshed in sacred larceny. For example, the entry for Kangi 1 (1229)/10/25 in *Minkei-ki*, the diary of Hirohashi Tsunemitsu (広橋経光, 1213–1274, alternative dates: 1226–1270), describes how the author went to Shitennōji on the way to Kumano and heard a story from an “*ācārya* priest of the third rank” (*sanmi ajari-bō* 三位阿闍梨房) about a “picture-explicating priest” (*etoki hōshi* 絵解法師) who tried to steal an unidentified relic from Shitennōji and install it in Hokkeji.<sup>57</sup> An even more striking example of relic theft is found in the third fascicle of *Kongō busshi Eison kanjingaku shōki* 金剛仏子觀尊感身学正記, written by Eison 觀尊 (1201–1290) around 1285–1286. It states that on 1284 (Kōan 7)/7/26, the *Namu butsu* relic itself was

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the inscription of the names inside the head of the central image recorded when it was repaired in 1727 (KOBAYASHI entry 1965, 448–49, 453–54). However, given the subsequent decline of the site, it is very difficult to tell where the original relic was found. The current main image of Shin-Daibutsuji, attributed to Kaikei 快慶 c. 1202, is a 4.05 meter tall statue known as the “Great Buddha of Iga” (Iga Daibutsu 伊賀大仏) and “Great Buddha of Awa” (Awa no Daibutsu-san 阿波の大仏さん). It was repaired by the sculptor Yūkei 祐慶 in 1727.

56. It is not clear exactly when the “Iga bessho” became known as “Shin-Daibutsuji,” but since the mid-Kamakura *Kokon mokurokushō bassui* uses the latter name, we can assume that it was an element in Chōgen’s revival of the temple.

57. See also the entry for 1229/10/25 in Yotsuji Yorisuke’s (四辻頼資, 1182–1236; Tsunemitsu’s father) diary, *Yorisuke gyōki* 頼資卿記. See KAMINISHI 2006, 28; and TOKUDA 1986, 196–97.

stolen from Hōryūji.<sup>58</sup> Yet when Eison delivered a lecture on the Brahma Net Sutra, the relic miraculously reappeared.<sup>59</sup> In the description of this incident, Śākyamuni fades into the background, and Eison appears as a conduit renewing access only secondarily to the Buddha, and primarily to Shōtoku and the personalized relic so closely bound to his sacred story.

Before 1203, only Śākyamuni's relics had been stolen in Japan. In other words, when Jōkai and Kenkō absconded with Prince Shōtoku's tooth, their crime—seen as a ritual act, intentional or not—in effect placed Shōtoku's remains on the same level of those of Śākyamuni. This ground-breaking theft appears to have elicited a flood of veneration of the “relics” of non-Buddhas. For example *Tōdaiji zoku yōroku* describes a mass (*kyō* 供養) held in the Great Buddha Hall for the relics of the “bodhisattva” Gyōki 行基 in 1259 (Shōka 3/3/16).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, many of the personality cults of sectarian patriarchs in later medieval times centered on control of their remains in different forms. After Shōtoku's relics were first accorded the honor, the remains of other Buddhist patriarchs, such as Kūkai, Hōnen, and Shinran, were stolen as well. Since these luminaries were known historical figures with identifiable graves, their remains were distinctly personalized relics: a skull, a lock of hair, or an entire body became the focus of many disputes over the legitimate claim to different lineages. In essence, Jōkai and Kenkō demonstrated that the remains of buddhas could be found in Japan as well. What need was there for the distant Indian prince?

58. The entry for Kōan 7 (1284) in *Saidai chokushi Kōshō bosatsu gyōjitsu nenpu* 西大勅諭興正菩薩行実年譜, a text in the Saidaiji Collection that was compiled by the Shingon priest Jikō 慈光 (1741–1801) in the late eighteenth century, specifically identifies the stolen objects as Shōtoku's “Praise Buddha” relics and it makes it clear that Eison was the reason they reappeared. See NARA KOKURITSU BUNKAZAI KENKYŪJO 1977, 187.

59. For annotated versions of the text, see HASEGAWA 1990 and HOSOKAWA 1999. Much the same content is repeated at the very end of the last fascicle of this same text. The relic theft (along with an eleven-headed Kannon made by Shōtoku) is also mentioned in an entry for Kōan 7 (1284)/8/7 in *Kanchū-ki*. See *Kanchū-ki* 2 in ZST 35, 12a. However, the text offers little additional detail about the crime, except to say that the author went to see the relics himself after they were returned.

60. *Tōdaiji zoku yōroku*, which updated the 1106 *Tōdaiji yōroku*, covers the Kōan to Shōō eras (1278–1292). Most of the text was completed by an unknown author in the middle of the Kamakura Period, but some material was added later in the Muromachi. The original does not exist, but there are many copies kept in Tōdaiji 東大寺, the Imperial Household Agency Texts and Mauselea Division (Shoryō-bu 宮内庁書陵部), Tokyo National Museum, and so on. Specifically, the text reads, “The august relics were the remains/bones [*ikotsu* 遺骨] of the bodhisattva Gyōki 御舍利者行基遺骨也.” See ZZGR 11, *shūkyō-bu* 1, 227a. For the most extensive treatment of Gyōki in English, see AUGUSTINE 2005.

*Re-incorporating the Parts of the Princes:  
Śākyamuni, Shōtoku, and Personalized Relic Cults*

The three main sections of this article each dealt with a particular type of relic associated with Shōtoku: a miraculously manifested eye, hair relics, and different teeth that were enshrined, stolen, and re-enshrined. These cases represent different techniques for transforming a historical person through the physical and symbolic manipulation of objects purported to be the remains of sacred figures. The episodes recounted above provide examples of symbolic techniques such as miraculously producing relics through force of personality, juxtaposing and overlaying objects or symbols to equate different types of bodily remains, and reviving through ritual and legendary means the presence of one closer to the devotee than the Buddha. The gradual changes were not the product of a conscious, unified force working through late Heian and early medieval times. Nonetheless, the cumulative effect of myriad symbolic micro-movements was to enshrine and redefine Shōtoku as “Japan’s Buddha.” Whether intentionally or not, in the course of the historical process whereby the princes were decomposed into portable and malleable relics and then reformed in new ritual and narrative contexts, Śākyamuni was so thoroughly integrated into Shōtoku’s sacred personality that once the pieces of the princes were reincorporated, the Buddha as an independent entity was no longer necessary for overcoming the sense of absence and distance fundamental to early medieval religious experience.

The process that placed Shōtoku’s physical relics on a par with those of the Buddha was never complete. Shōtoku was continually reinvented to serve the demands of changing historical and social contexts, and his remains were never truly interchangeable with the Buddha’s relics. In fact, the ultimate non-equivalency of the two types of personalized relics was precisely the point for Shōtoku worshippers. The relics of the prince were *not* those of Śākyamuni, but were special objects that could at times be more effective, more personal, and more present than other kinds of relics could ever be in Japan. Thus, while it is true that Shōtoku did become “*Japan’s* Śākyamuni,” his significance for medieval devotees lay in the fact that he was never simply “Śākyamuni.” His personalized relics provided a unique opportunity for Buddhists to connect with a presence that transcended the perceived distance from the Buddha. At the same time, the relics could never be anything more—or anything less—than those of Japan’s own Prince Shōtoku.

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- DNK *Dai Nihon kokiroku* 大日本古記録, ed. Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo 東京大学史料編纂所. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1955–.
- DNS *Dai Nihon shiryō* 大日本史料, ed. Tōkyō Teikoku Daigaku 東京帝國大學; Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensanjo 東京大学史料編纂所. Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1901–.
- KT *Kokushi taikei* 国史大系, ed. Kuroita Katsumi 黑板勝美 et al. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1968–.
- NKBT *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系. 102 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957–1968.
- NS *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀. NKBT 67–68.
- SEDS *Saidaiji Eison denki shūsei* 西大寺叡尊伝記集成, ed. Kanshū Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 監修奈良国立文化財研究所. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1977.
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- STZ *Shōtoku Taishi zenshū* 聖德太子全集. 5 vols. Ed. Shōtoku Taishi Hōsankai 聖德太子奉讚會. Tokyo: Ryūginsha, 1944.
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