Shugendō. The more purely Japanese forms of Buddhism were generally to discard this interest during their development in the Kamakura period, but it was initially an important meeting point and offered Buddhism a natural entrée into Japanese society.

Finally, one other aspect of the early Japanese society that made it capable of receiving a new religion was its authoritarian nature. Once the Imperial family and leaders of the great clans came to a decision to accept the new religion, the common people out of force of habit followed their lead. It was not necessary for the Buddhists to convert the masses in order to become a national religion, merely the leaders, who were predominantly more interested in the pragmatic benefits of a religion than its spiritual aims. The Yamato leaders were eventually to decide that Buddhism, the faith of advanced continental nations, had a great deal to offer Japan and this important factor was to allow Buddhism a prestigious place in Japanese society and vast sums for temple building at a time when the masses were as yet scarcely aware of its existence.With such a foothold, so easily acquired, the conversion of the masses could be postponed.

In brief, early Japanese society offered an ideal soil for any developed and organized religion that could prove compatible with the psychological attitude of the Japanese people, which was in effect the native faith. This was the key to the Buddhist success in Japan.

Matsunaga - Foundation of Japanese Buddhism

CHAPTER II

INCEPTION OF BUDDHISM

A. Official Transmission and the Socio-political Milieu

Traditionally, the *Nihonshoki* lists 552 A.D. as the date of the official introduction of Buddhism to Japan by the leader of the Korean Kingdom of Paekche (Jap. Kudara), who presented a gilt-bronze Buddha image and sutras to the Yamato court in an effort to foster a political alliance with Japan against the neighboring Korean states of Silla and Koguryŏ. The accuracy of the *Shoki's* date for this event has long been disputed and from earliest periods the year 538 has been considered more precise. In any event, the formal introduction of Buddhism did not represent the first contact of the Japanese with the new faith. Undoubtedly, traders and merchants had brought the teachings with them generations earlier and it was also the dominant faith of most continental immigrants settling in Japan. Among these, there is no question that the large colonies of Koreans already had priests among them. As early as 522, it is recorded that a monk of Chinese ancestry known in Japan as Shiba Tachito, had constructed a temple.[1] This priest, who later reverted to the lay state, was to play an important role in Asuka Buddhism.

The formal introduction of the alien religion to the Japanese court necessitated an official position regarding its acceptability and this was a difficult task for the Emperor to face. As the leader of what had now become a loosely federated native cult, charged with its protection and the conduct of its rituals, the Emperor had to be extremely careful in accepting a new religion. The early Yamato state was a theocracy and in classical Japanese the term *matsurigoto* literally combined both religious rites and civil administration. For the Emperor to consider conversion to an alien faith at that period could pose a threat to the very basis of his

power, which as yet was far from being solidified. It also presented problems in dealing with the *uji*, many of whom had only recently been willing to accept the supremacy of Imperial spiritual leadership. To make matters worse, the introduction of Buddhism by the King of Paekche demanded a decision regarding a foreign alliance that already had become an issue among the leading clans.

For some time competition had been waged between the Soga and Mononobe clans, the two most powerful survivors of the more aristocratic type of *uji*. At this period the clans could be divided into three categories: the *shimbetsu* or those who claimed descent similar to the Imperial family from the gods of *Takamagahara* and the descendents of gods dating prior to Emperor Jimmu, the *kōbetsu* or those of Imperial descent after the time of Emperor Jimmu and lastly, the *bambetsu* or powerful *uji* of foreign descent. The Mononobe were a strong military *uji* belonging to the *shimbetsu*, which were more conservative in nature with an older tradition. In contrast, the Soga belonged to the *kōbetsu*, claiming closer ties to the Imperial family and more liberal. The Soga, who acted as managers of the Imperial estates, which relied heavily upon the settling of foreign immigrants and utilization of their skills, believed that Japan should import the superior civilization and organized form of government found on the continent. In opposition, the conservative Mononobe were joined by a lesser *shimbetsu uji*, the Nakatomi, hereditary ritualists with a vested interest in the indigenous faith, and insisted upon a continuation of the old order. The adoption of Buddhism was not the only issue in the battle between these clans that eventually led to military confrontation, but it added additional fuel to the fire. Emperor Kimmei (531–571)[2], caught between the two groups and his own qualms about the desirability of accepting a foreign religion, decided as a compromise to allow the Soga clan to embrace Buddhism.

The Soga acceptance of Buddhism was far from a conversion in our ordinary sense of the term. They had no philosophical understanding of the new religion and merely regarded it as a possible superior form of magic long practiced by the advanced civilizations they respected and sought to emulate. Undoubtedly, they still must have faced the simple

question that confronted all Japanese on their first encounter with the alien religion; namely, would it anger the native gods? This problem had to be solved before Buddhism could ever be properly welcomed in Japan. The Soga were opportunistic enough to risk the chance and perhaps confident enough in their belief in foreign supremacy. Still this general uneasiness regarding the feelings of the native gods is clearly expressed in legends of the time recorded in the *Nihonshoki*.

According to one account, the new faith was proscribed by the Emperor shortly after the Soga accepted it in the belief that the native gods had been offended and caused an outbreak of plague; the Buddha image was subsequently thrown into the Naniwa canal (*Nihonshoki*: Kimmei, 13th year, 10th month). A similar story is alleged to have occurred during the reign of Emperor Bidatsu (572–585), who allowed the image to be restored in hopes of curing the illness of Soga no Umako, leader of the clan. (Bidatsu, 14th year 3rd month, 30th day). Although the credibility of these accounts is extremely weak, they perhaps represented the swaying tensions in the Soga-Mononobe struggle for power as well as the widespread mixed feelings concerning the new faith.

The first Emperor to actually espouse Buddhism was Yōmei (585–587), whose mother had been a Soga. He took up the new faith when he became gravely ill and requested that an image of Yakushi (Bhaiṣajyaguru), the healing Buddha, be made in hopes of aiding his recovery. The *Nihonshoki* chronicler wrote concerning this, that "the Emperor Yōmei believed in the teaching of Buddha and respected the way of the gods."[3] The Emperor did not live long enough to see the Yakushi image completed and his sister, Empress Suiko (592–628) finished the project twenty years later and enshrined it in the Hōryūji temple.

In the succession dispute that followed the death of Yōmei in 587, the Soga went to war against the Mononobe and Nakatomi, winning a decisive victory that permitted them to freely engage in the importation of continental civilization and the establishment of Buddhism as a state religion. This new policy was actively initiated under Empress Suiko and her regent, Prince Shōtoku, the son of Yōmei.

B. Prince Shōtoku and Buddhism

Traditionally Prince Shōtoku has been regarded as a renowned statesman and the father of Japanese Buddhism. There is no question that with the passage of time he was legendized to such a degree that the character of the actual man has been lost. As early as the *Nihonshoki* (Suiko, 1st year, 4th month, 10th day), he is described as being able to speak the moment he was born and proved to have such wisdom as an adult that he could attend to the claims of ten men at once and decide them all without error. He was also supposedly gifted with a foreknowledge of future events. Modern critics have gone to the opposite extreme in an attempt to demythologize the Prince without being able to present any more concrete evidence. The true character of Shōtoku Taishi must still lie illusively between the extremes of legend and so-called modern criticism.

Although it is difficult to believe that Prince Shōtoku could have been the intellectual giant portrayed in popular legend, we certainly cannot dismiss him as an illiterate. As the son of the first Buddhist Emperor, Yōmei, it is most likely that when he was appointed regent in 592 at the age of 19, that he had already received considerable education in Buddhism and Chinese culture. Five years had elapsed between the conversion and death of his father and his own appointment, it is logical to presume that a great portion of that time was devoted to education. He was later to enjoy the reputation of a scholar both among his contemporaries and following generations. It is most likely that there is a solid core of truth ingrained in the popular legends, for certainly someone was responsible for directing the nation along a new pathway at that crucial period and Shōtoku Taishi is the logical choice. If he was an individual gifted with foresight and vision in the age of social formulation, it would be quite natural to make him a cultural hero.

The Prince's personal attitude towards Buddhism is best symbolized by his alleged deathbed quotation from the *Dhammapada* to his followers:

> Avoid evil, undertake good, purify the mind:
> this is the teaching of the Buddhas.
>
> Verse 183

This statement contains the essence of Buddhist morality and is one of the most perfect summations of the entire teaching. 'To avoid evil' and 'undertake good' is a commonplace moral injunction that might be advocated by any religion, but the specific goal of Buddhism lies in the purification of the mind; for without a pure mind, the practice of goodness and avoidance of evil can degenerate into mere self-righteous conduct. The emphasis upon mental purification resulting from proper conduct has given this verse a significant role in Japanese Buddhism to the present date.

The last testament of the Prince to his wife, stating: "this world [for the unenlightened] is illusion, the Buddha alone is true", displays a knowledge of Buddhism far advanced beyond his contemporaries.[4] The idea that common man's view of the world might be an illusion did not properly invade Japanese thought until generations later; during the Heian period it became a dominant theme pervading almost every area of literature. It is quite likely that Prince Shōtoku's comprehension of the transitory and illusory nature of the present world was a conviction derived from personal experience. He must have often been an isolated and lonely figure during his long thirty year regency, living amongst corrupt relatives in a new nation filled with dissent, intrigue and political rivalry. The native faith could hardly have offered him a solution since the sufferings he experienced as the leader of a nation in the throes of adapting an advanced civilization could not easily be removed. He grappled not merely with simple problems generated by physical and ritual impurity but rather the complexities of human greed and ambition that feed upon wealth and power. The path to achieving such an advanced civilization entailed sufferings that the early *uji* chiefs had little imagined, for when man has to struggle for his daily survival he does not have the leisure to indulge in seeking the goals of personal ambition and thereby perpetrating countless subtle inhumanities against his fellow man that the so-called more civilized individual possesses. The native natural affirmation was not capable of coping with the complex problems of a world that increasingly defied common sense reality.

Whether Prince Shōtoku assumed complete administrative control of

the fledgling nation when he became regent at the age of 19 is debatable although not improbable. In any event, there was no discrepancy between Imperial interests and the interests of the Soga clan, who by then had successfully managed to integrate into the Imperial family by marriage; both Empress Suiko and Prince Shōtoku were of Soga blood.

One of the most crucial developments in Japanese Buddhism that can be directly attributed to Prince Shōtoku was the beginning of official embassies to China in 607. These missions played an essential role in the development of Buddhism and Japanese culture. Students and priests who went to China brought back new ideas for centralized government that ultimately led to the Ritsuryō reform movement, while the encounter with the purer forms of Chinese Buddhism brought with it a more profound knowledge of the sutras and in time, the Chinese sects of Buddhism to Japan. This initial contact of Japanese students with Chinese Buddhism was to set the pathway for the development of Japanese Buddhism for the next several centuries. Certain other alleged accomplishments of the Prince are more questionable.

According to tradition, Shōtoku Taishi composed a 'Seventeen-article Constitution' in 604 and also wrote commentaries upon three important Buddhist sutras of the day; the *Shōmangyō* (*Śrīmālā siṃhanāda sūtra*), *Yuimagyō* (*Vimalakīrti nirdeśa sūtra*) and *Hokekyō* (*Saddharma puṇḍarīka sūtra*). Of these accomplishments, the so-called constitution is most controversial. It is quite possible that it may have been composed a generation or more after the Prince's death as a tribute to his memory rather than by Shōtoku Taishi himself. In any event, the 'constitution' represents a set of moral injunctions rather than a body of law. Insofar as they advocated a centralized government and bureaucracy of merit rather than heredity, they did represent a radical innovation for Japan. This was the essence of the Taika reform initiated in 645, almost a quarter of a century after the death of Prince Shōtoku. It is not inconceivable that the Prince originated the idea since it was a logical step in the assimilation of the Chinese cultural-political system, and certainly must have been considered well in advance of the Taika reform.

The three commentaries on Buddhist sutras (*Sangyōgisho*) attributed to Shōtoku Taishi display a considerable knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. There is no definitive proof that Shōtoku Taishi actually wrote them and some critics maintain they were probably written by a Chinese priest.[5] From the content however, it appears that the commentaries are composed in a Japanese form of Chinese rather than pure Chinese and references to other sutras are limited to those introduced to Japan during Shōtoku's period. Such evidence has led some contemporary Buddhist scholars to still affirm Shōtoku Taishi was the author.[6]

Tradition also maintains that Prince Shōtoku was responsible for building some of the great temples of the Asuka period such as the Hōryūji and Shitennōji. Although the Prince cannot be credited with personally constructing temples as some legends imply, it is clear that this was an important era of temple building. According to the census taken two years after Shōtoku's death, Japan had acquired 46 temples. Most likely Korean immigrants contributed a great deal to their construction since they were designed following the style of Paekche, but they could not have been built without official sponsorship and that had to be provided by Prince Shōtoku and the Soga clan.

Historically, the Hōryūji temple is most closely associated with the Prince since it adjoined his Ikaruga palace and was supposedly built in order to house the Yakushi image created for the benefit of his father, Emperor Yōmei. In this temple the famous Yumedono is presently found where, according to legend the Prince was believed to have spent his periods of contemplation. Actually, the present Hōryūji is a restoration built on a slightly different location after the fire of 670.

The Shitennōji, according to legend, was built by Prince Shōtoku and the Soga family as a fulfilment of a vow to the Four Deva Kings (Shitennō), guardians of the directions and protectors of Buddhism, for the 587 Soga victory over the Mononobe. It is somewhat questionable however, whether the temple was actually known as the Shitennōji at the time of its construction and in early periods it was generally referred to by its regional name, Arahakadera (Deserted Tomb Temple). It is also doubtful whether the Four Deva Kings were even the principal images of veneration during the earliest days of the temple. Despite the question

of this temple's original name, it is clear that it was built in Naniwa during the regency of Prince Shōtoku. At the time of the excavation following the destruction of the pagoda by a typhoon in 1934, it was ascertained that the foundation stone of the original was similar to those of the Asukadera and Hōryūji, the roof tiles also proved to be of a proximate date.[7] The *Nihonshoki* date of 593 (Suiko 1st year 9th month) for the beginning of construction must be nearly reliable.

Another great temple reportedly built by the Soga clan in fulfilment of a vow for their victory over the Mononobe was the Asukadera (Hōkōji) completed according to the *Nihonshoki*, in 596 (Suiko 4th year, 11th month). This was one of the earliest temples to have a systematic arrangement with a somewhat unusual style; a center pagoda with three *Kondō* (halls); a similar arrangement has since been discovered near Pyongyang, the ancient capital of Koguryŏ.[8] Apparently this temple represents a close link with the Korean influenced tomb culture, for in the excavations between 1956–57 it was discovered that beneath the pagoda, jade, *magatama*, swords and other objects frequently found in the ancient tombs were buried in accompaniment with Buddhist relics. Traditionally, the Asukadera was the main temple of the Soga clan and therefore extremely important during the Asuka period. In later years it became known as the Gangōji and when the court moved to Nara, a new temple (Shingangōji) was constructed in that city in 716.

Although we cannot directly attribute the construction of 46 temples during his lifetime to Shōtoku Taishi, we can safely state that the majority of these temples were built under Imperial sponsorship or the patronage of the Soga clan, in which case Prince Shōtoku was either directly or indirectly responsible.

Sufficient changes occurred in the evolution of Japanese Buddhism during the regency of Prince Shōtoku to consider him the sponsor, and by extenuation, father of Japanese Buddhism. Even if we do not accept the authenticity of the writings attributed to him, we have to conclude that he became the symbol of a new direction in the development of Buddhism, a movement away from the theurgic concerns of his contemporaries towards a proper understanding of the teachings. This movement remained merely an undercurrent during the subsequent Nara period, in which thaumaturgy dominated, and did not begin to gain momentum until future generations decided to create a truly Japanese form of Buddhism.

C. Characteristics of Asuka Buddhism

For all practical purposes, Asuka Buddhism functioned as a mundane instrument of the ruling classes. In other words, it was utilized as a superior form of magic and shamanism to enforce the roles of the Imperial family and aristocracy. Prior to the introduction of Buddhism, the indigenous faith had used prayers, divination and other practices as a means of relating to the powers of nature believed to be *kami*. When Buddhism entered the early society it was immediately viewed as another form of theurgy, in fact a more potent variety in view of its acceptance by Japan's powerful civilized continental neighbors. The Buddhist images, having no counterpart in the native faith, were regarded with awe and gained popularity among certain court factions as having powerful efficacy in promoting material prosperity, the cure of illness and aversion of calamities. At the earliest stage the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas were not even clearly differentiated. For instance, the Yakushi (Bhaiṣajyaguru) image of the Hōryūji main hall bears no real difference in appearance from the Shaka (Śākyamuni) image and the two can only be differentiated by means of their carved inscriptions. Even in this area a confusion exists since the inscription on the Shaka image refers to his vow to cure illness and grant prosperity, which are normally attributes of Yakushi. At this period the image itself was believed to possess powers and the philosophical significance tended to be disregarded.

1. The Healing Cults

As one of the first devotions embraced by an Emperor, the cult to Yakushi Nyorai enjoyed immense popularity in Early Japan and typifies the interest in theurgic healing rites. Although not much is known regarding the origin of Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha in India, his prototype

Bhaiṣajyarāja bodhisattva (Yakuō) plays a significant role in the *Lotus Sutra* as a healing bodhisattva. It is quite likely that Bhaiṣajyaguru was derived from the concept of the historical Buddha as a healer or physician who could cure the ills of the mind, source of human suffering. The concept of Amitābha and his Western Pure Land apparently influenced the development of Bhaiṣajyaguru and an Eastern Buddha land. But it would appear that Bhaiṣajyaguru's Buddha land was regarded by his devotees as a type of *deva* heaven and not as a realm of final liberation, for unlike Amitābha, Bhaiṣajyaguru predominately dispensed mundane benefits.[9]

Bhaiṣajyaguru does not appear to have ever enjoyed the degree of popularity in India that he achieved in Japan. In his course of development he became closely associated with Indian Tantrism and eventually this aspect was popularized in Japan during the Heian period. The Yakushi image constructed for the recovery of Emperor Yōmei was completed in 607. The famous Yakushiji temple was begun in 680 as the result of a vow made by Emperor Temmu to obtain the cure of his consort, Empress Jitō. This temple houses the Yakushi triad, one of the earliest and most celebrated examples of T'ang sculpture in Japan.[10]

Throughout the seventh century various devotions were held in honour of Yakushi to revive dying Emperors or members of their family, to ensure longevity, to assist the dead and even to ward off such calamities as drought, famine and plague.[11] These practices easily mingled with native beliefs and won acceptance. The devotion to Yakushi also began to encompass the practice of various transformed ethical rites utilized for the same goals.

2. Keka, Ango, Hōjō-e and Sai-e

The *keka* (Rite of Repentance) in India was a ceremony related to the public confession of the transgression of Buddhist moral laws and was later observed as such by the Ritsu sect in Japan. But already in China this particular practice had been transformed by various Chinese sects into a ceremony held in honour of a popular Buddha or bodhisattva. Such a metamorphis had both desirable and undesirable features. The

monastic chapter of faults, advantageous in preserving the spirit of monastic life and perhaps beneficial in promoting individual humility, could also lead to an attachment to trivialities and deviation from the spirit of self-reliance or personal responsibility set forth in Early Buddhism. With the proper attitude, penitential rites centered around a Buddha or bodhisattva, understood to be merely a mythical projection, could be more constructive unless they happened to degenerate into a form of deity worship. The latter tended to be the case in early Japan where the devotional rites of repentance were utilized, much in the manner of the Shintō purification rituals and harvest rites, as means to gain material benefit. *Keka* were held in honour of Yakushi to heal the sick, overcome calamities, purify the nation and grant longevity. In this respect Buddhist penitential rites transformed into an asset for the nation but in the process lost their significance for the individual.

The *ango* or retrear met a similar fate. Originally in the Indian Buddhist sangha rainy season retreats were held, during which rites of repentance as well as periods of instruction and study for the clergy were offered. This was the time during the year when the monks, unable to travel, would gather together to advance their learning and understanding of the Dharma. In Japan, priests and nuns were often invited to the palace or met in the great temples during the *ango* and held lectures on the various sutras. Members of the aristocracy attended in all their pomp and splendour and perhaps the instructions did benefit them, but the initial intention was once again a quest for mundane benefits. The modern summer *ango* held by the clergy of various sects is a vestige of this ancient custom.

The *hōjō-e* or 'gathering to liberate captive creatures' was an outgrowth of the Mahāyāna respect for all forms of life. In Japan this notion was extended to granting amnesties for prisoners on such occasions as thanksgiving for an Empress-consort's recovery and during periods of drought, flood and various other calamities. Official ceremonies would also be held to release captured animals and although the practice was often abused, since fishermen and hunters would deliberately capture creatures for the aristocracy to playfully release, it did increase the sensitivity of

the Japanese against wanton killing for sport. Prior to the advent of Buddhism, the Japanese had been very fond of hunting, a favourite pastime of the aristocracy, but from this time onward it declined. Even the Shintō shrines, who had long discriminated against bloody offerings, found the Buddhist reverence for life readily acceptable. The concept further became related to the development of Japanese vegetarianism.

The *sai-e* or 'vegetarian repast' was derived from the Indian Buddhist days of abstinence for laymen. The practice was not initially vegetarian and the laymen simply followed the example of the monks, refraining from eating after noon. The meetings also observed the rule against the taking of life and as a result vegetarianism gradually evolved which became popular under Mahāyāna influence. In China the vegetarian repasts were first offered to gain personal merit and then came under the strong influence of Taoism, being later offered for theurgic purposes as well as on such special occasions as the birthday of the Emperor.

The *sai-e* in Japan were held in accompaniment with the *keka* and *ango* as special devotions to bring national prosperity. The practice greatly influenced Japanese culture and the habit of meat eating, which had been a common custom in pre-Buddhist Japan, did not regain influence until the late 19th century. An entire form of vegetarian cooking evolved as a result of these repasts that still enjoys popularity and modern Buddhists observe vegetarianism on days of memorial services.

Such devotions as the foregoing did little to advance the understanding of the common people during the Nara period, although they played an important role in the long process of molding public attitudes. The Ritsuryō government was not interested in the spiritual advancement of the masses, merely their control. In fact by the eighth century legal restrictions were even placed against the teaching of Buddhism to commoners on the grounds that it might tempt them to cause dissension. One of the first to fall victim to the restriction against preaching was En no Gyōja, the hermit of Mt. Katsuragi. In the year 699 he was exiled by Imperial decree to Izu on the charge of sorcery. As far as the government was concerned, Buddhism was beneficial only in the hands of the ruling class; disseminated among the populace, it could pose a threat. Firm control had to be exercised both over what was taught and the teachers themselves.

3. Buddhism and the Establishment of the Ritsuryō Government

After the death of Prince Shōtoku in 622, the Soga clan under the leadership of Emishi and his son Iruka, devoted themselves to the advancement of their personal ambitions, alienating other members of the court. In 643 they even put Prince Shōtoku's heir to death and gradually began to usurp prerogatives of the Emperor. This situation became increasingly unbearable for the other clans. Finally in the year 644, the Nakatomi clan conspired with Prince Naka no Ōe (the future Emperor Tenchi) and a dissatisfied branch of the Soga clan to stage a successful *coup d'etat*. The Soga leaders were killed and in 645, with the accession to the throne by Emperor Kōtoku, the Taika Reform movement was initiated. Under the guidance of Prince Naka no Ōe and the Nakatomi clan leader (subsequently known as Fujiwara Kamatari), the plan for a new centralized government was inaugurated modeled after the style of T'ang China. In theory, private landholdings were abolished, provincial governments and bureaucratic offices established and a system of equal land distribution and taxation put into practice. It was actually something of a fifty year plan since the Ritsuryō codes were not formulated until 701. Idealistically, this movement offered a solution to Japan's problems with the creation of a strong centralized government, but its inexperienced founders were not aware of the tenacity of the *uji* system. Aristocrats, temples and shrines were soon to gain tax-free privileges that eventually undermined the system and led to its downfall.

Buddhism was significantly affected by the new reform policy. Shortly after the death of Prince Shōtoku the need had become apparent for the regulation of monks and nuns. According to the *Nihonshoki* (Suiko, 42nd year, 4th month), a priest's hatchet murder of his grandfather became an important political issue. At that time the government census reported that the 46 temples in Japan housed 816 monks and 569 nuns.

Most of the clergy were under the personal control of the Soga clan. In fact in the year 614, one thousand had reportedly been ordained to effect the cure of Soga no Umako. Empress Suiko, in an attempt to handle the growing problem created a governing board of priests, while admonishing Umako to control their behaviour.[12]

Immediately after the 645 *coup d'etat*, an Imperial envoy was sent to the Asukadera to announce a new policy of government control of the clergy. Although the authenticity of the wording of this edict is disputable, it appears to have been an effort to remove Buddhism from Soga domination and display the power of the new government.[13] In line with this action, the Kudara daiji temple (later known as the Daianji), founded by priests returning from study in China, was made an official temple symbolizing the new direction of Buddhism under the Ritsuryō government. Just as a conscious policy existed to adopt the Chinese political system, the implementation of Chinese Buddhism now seemed more desirable than Soga domination. In emulation of the T'ang Chinese practice of appointing Ten Masters in charge of Buddhist education, the Ritsuryō government initiated a similar plan and four of the nominees were monks who had studied in China. This represented significant government recognition of their importance and future role in guiding the destiny of Nara Buddhism.

The Ritsuryō government further moved to make the Emperor the supreme leader of the Buddhist faith. This was one method of resolving the problem of how to reconcile the new religion with the Imperial role. Since Emperor Kōtoku personally believed in Buddhism, the plan was able to develop quite naturally. Buddhist festivals such as the *Urabon-e* (Festival of the Dead) and *Kambutsu-e* (Buddha's Birth Festival) came to hold importance equal to great state functions. During the period from the initiation of the Taika reform in 645 to the beginning of the Nara period in 710, the most noticeable advancement in Buddhism was in the increase of court rituals. The Taika reformers were content in placing the religion under Imperial control and the monks and nuns under supervision; they did not involve themselves further in Buddhist affairs. Developments during this era largely resulted from the personal

devotion of individual emperors and their desire to obtain mundane benefits.

Emperor Temmu (673–686) was one of the most devout sovereigns, even becoming for a brief period a Buddhist priest. He increased Buddhist ceremonies and rituals held at the palace and sponsored the Daianji temple as a center for the propagation of Buddhism. He also decreed that sutras such as the *Konkōmyōkyō* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsa sūtra*) be recited for the nation. In 685, he set forth an edict that Buddhist shrines be built in 'every house' in the provinces (*Nihonshoki:* Temmu 14th year, 3rd month, 27th day). Although the exact meaning of 'every house' has been disputed by historians to date, it most likely referred to the homes of the aristocrats living in the provinces. This effort to promulgate Buddhism was clearly the antecedent of the *kokubunji* (National temple) system that was to come into being in 741 under Emperor Shōmu.

In conclusion, in examining Buddhism during this period we have to state that it was primarily concerned with exterior aspects rather than the inner life of man. Rituals and temple building were the order of the day; the aristocracy, with the exception of Prince Shōtoku, were not yet ready to apply the philosophy to the problems of human life for they were far too enchanted with the brilliance of the rapidly developing court life.

and study, it does not appear that the chanting of the name of Amida as advocated by Shan-tao (613–781), who systematized Pure Land thought in China, was practiced in Japan at this early date. The writings of Shan-tao were known during the Nara period however, for a Pure Land depiction of this era contained at the Taimadera presents a painting in the Chinese style of the *Kanmuryōjukyō* (*Meditation sutra*) with Shan tao's commentary. We can only presume that the chanting of the name of Amida was not practiced, because at this date there was still no widespread belief in Amida for the purpose of personal salvation.

Inscriptions such as that found on the Amida triad of the Yamato Shirinji temple dated 659, request happiness for the living and peace for the dead, but neglect to mention any desire for the living to attain birth in Amida's Pure Land. The devotion to Amida appears at this period to have primarily been designed to promote prosperity in the present life and peace for the dead. Exceptions to this general tendency are found in the Mannyōshū poet Yamanoue Okura (660–772)[59] and Lady Tachibana, the mother of Empress Kōmyō (701–760). Empress Kōmyō was also closely connected with Pure Land faith, and on the seventh day after her death, an Imperial edict was issued throughout the country to make paintings of the Pure Land and copy related sutras in every province of the land. The following year, in 761, Fujiwara Nakamaro built a temple in her memory within the confines of the Kōfukuji (the Fujiwara family's main temple), enshrining an image of Kannon and placing a tapestry of Amida's Pure Land upon the wall.

The Pure Land faith could not develop in Japan however, until such a time as it could become generally recognized as a means of individual salvation, rather than a method of putting the dead to rest. It also had to await the proper historical moment when dissatisfaction with the existing world would demand a higher affirmation.

From the many references during the Nara period to Tendai, esoteric Buddhism, Zen and Pure Land,[60] it is obvious that the rise of these sects during the Heian and Kamakura period did not represent the sudden introduction of new thought that attracted public attention overnight. Each tradition had a long history of gradual development in Japan, an

incubation period during which they awaited the dynamic leadership and proper social conditions to catapult them into the mainstream of Japanese Buddhism.

C. Political Aspects of Nara Buddhism

1. Ritsuryō Government and Buddhism

Under the Ritsuryō system of government, a pyramid was formed with the Emperor and aristocracy at the head of a vast network of bureaucracy. With the Emperor as titular head of state, his political and religious roles were of prime importance. Thus when the Taihō Ritsuryō code was promulgated in 701, veneration of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Ō Mikami at the Ise Shrine was decreed. This represented the first time the ancestral deity of the Yamato clan was legally recognized and officially enshrined at Ise under the newly centralized government. There was no question in the minds of the Ritsuryō leaders that the indigenous faith, so closely associated with the Imperial role, was superior to the newly imported foreign religion; still Buddhism could not be ignored and a place had to be devised for it within the system.

The Ritsuryō policy towards Buddhism remained consistent throughout the Nara period and despite the various revisions of the code, the *Sōniryō* (Rules and Regulations for Monks and Nuns) underwent very slight change. It was a curious policy from its inception, for normally under the system, '*ritsu*' referred to penal codes and '*ryō*' to administrative laws. Yet the *Sōniryō* was practically a penal code, containing not only prohibitions but also methods of punishment for transgressions and of its twenty-seven articles, eighteen dealt specifically with the subject of punishment. It is obvious that from the start the established government leaders were concerned about the temporal power of the Buddhist institutions and the progressive faction they represented. The situation was entirely different from the Shintō shrines, which were institutionally weak and disorganized; their *Jingiryō* contained no prohibitions nor punishments and dealt mainly with matters of ritual and festivals. The Ritsuryō leaders did not consider the Shintō shrines to be subject to com-

mon law. In this particular aspect, the Japanese departed from their adherence to T'ang Chinese precedents, for the Chinese did not deal so severely with Buddhism, and continually vascillated over the decision of whether or not to accept it as a native religion. They also wavered in firmly deciding to set forth the superiority of common law over monastic law; the Japanese entertained no such doubts, at least not in regard to Buddhism.

One would imagine that the *Sōniryō* as rules and regulations for monks and nuns, might contain articles pertaining to entrance to the priesthood, ordinations and such, but instead they were entirely confined to dealing with the behaviour of those who had already entered the religious life. In particular, they attempted to limit religious activity outside of recognized temples and institutions. For example, an edict issued in 718, was clearly aimed at proscribing the missionary activities of the priest Gyōgi, who during this period was considered to be one of the chief threats to the bureaucratic system.

The government also saw fit to interfere in the lives of individual priests or nuns if it was deemed for the national interest. For instance, in the year 703, the priest Ryūkan was ordered to return to the lay state during the reign of Emperor Mommu because he was extremely talented and had knowledge of the calendar; he was thus too useful to be allowed to devote himself to the religious life. In the government view, a priest was simply a religious individual appointed by the authorities to work for the prosperity and protection of the nation, spiritual goals were completely ignored.

Despite such strict measures and limitations, it is apparent that the government had difficulty from the start in exercising complete control over Buddhism. In 624 Empress Suiko set up the first form of *Sōgōsei* (Bureau of Priests) and this governing body was expanded and incorporated into the *Sōniryō*. The main type of duties these monks engaged in were: the removal of the names of religious who returned to the laity, recording deaths, arbitrating lawsuits, and granting permission to individual religious to change residence, such as to leave the temple for

a hermitage. Under the Ritsuryō system, the priests on this bureau were, at least nominally, appointed by the Buddhist sangha itself and this meant they were not actually government officials and could not be treated as such. The government officially had to recognize them as the legitimate representatives of the Buddhist community. The jurisdiction of this bureau was limited to the capital area, in the provinces the governors or other officials assumed the *Sōgō* duties in cooperation with smaller governing bodies bodies belonging to the various temples. But even though the powers of the *Sōgō* were circumscribed; the very existence of the bureau represented a future potentiality for Buddhist autonomy and created a small wedge in the rigid government control.

On the whole, government control was not resented by the clergy, and many priests of the day were quite satisfied in serving as minor bureaucrats at one of the great official temples. In fact, this was one method whereby members of the lower classes could advance socially. The four great official bureaucratic temples that had been foremost in government influence prior to the establishment of the capital at Nara (Asukadera, Daianji, Kawaradera and Yakushiji) continued to exert their authority during the beginning of the Nara period until the building of the Tōdaiji, which became the centre of bureaucratic Buddhism for the remainder of the era.

One of the first challenges to government authority over religious affairs was the arrival of Ganjin. Although he did not overtly defy government control over ordination, his very presence raised the serious question of whether the government could properly decide who was fit to enter the religious life. This problem was not finally resolved until the Heian period when Saichō received permission to build his own Mahayana *kaidan*.

In the view of the government, control over entrance into the sangha was exceedingly important. Whenever monks or nuns decided to enter the order, their individual names were removed from the civil registration and they were granted tax exempt status. The Ritsuryō leaders did

not want to repeat the mistake the Chinese had made by allowing such a large portion of the population to enter the religious life that the tax rolls were depleted, with resulting economic chaos.

Ordinations were also considered of particular advantage to the nation. At times of calamities or upon the death of an Emperor, mass ordinations would be held to restore prosperity. For instance, Saichō's master Gyōhyō, was one of more than 700 ordained in the year 741, and Kūkai's alleged master Gonzō, belonged to a group of 1,000 ordained in the fall of 770, each of whom had the character *gon* in his name. Naturally, the government was extremely sensitive regarding the matter of illegal ordinations or what was termed 'privately ordained priests' (*shidosō*), and those who ordained them. The majority of Nara Buddhism fell into the official bureaucratic mold, and the average priest of the day was either content to quietly pursue his studies or else minister to the needs of the aristocracy and government by participating in lavish rituals for the benefit and protection of the nation. Still, there were a few idealists present even during this period who believed the function of religion was to benefit and serve the people in their daily lives. The most outstanding example of such a priest was the controversial Gyōgi, friend of the masses and menace in the eyes of the Ritsuryō government.

2. Gyōgi Bosatsu, a Man of the People

Born in 668, Gyōgi entered the religious life at the age of fifteen, first entering the Asukadera and then the Yakushiji, where he received the *śīla* nine years later and became a disciple of Dōshō and other leading Hossō scholars. In 704, when his mother became ill, he returned to his home and transformed it into a temple. Later he took his mother to a small hermitage on Mt. Ikomayama where they lived up until her death. After that he began to preach and travel in the countryside attracting hundreds and even thousands of followers. Many legends evolved during this period regarding Gyōgi's divine powers and miraculous deeds. It is obvious that he must have had a compelling personality since he was always treated with awesome respect.

During his travels, Gyōgi was credited with building 49 temples (34 for monks, 15 for nuns), as well as countless other projects designed to ease the life of the countryside masses, such as boat landings, bridges, dams, irrigation systems, wells, hostels (imitating the Indian style) and so on. Sincerely interested in the welfare of the people, Gyōgi travelled about at the time when Ritsuryō taxation was most heavily exploiting the populace. His message of spiritual freedom made him welcomed as a saviour and his number of followers probably was not exaggerated. In any event, the Ritsuryō government quickly decided that he was a menace to their authority. The first edict was issued against him in 718, followed regularly by others. As late as 730, after he had already begun to win government acceptance, the *Zoku Nihongi* was still describing Gyōgi as an individual who gathered thousands of people on the outskirts of the capital and spoke words of illusion.

Before the Yōrō period (717–723) was over however, Gyōgi had managed to attact the interest of the aristocracy and his situation began to gradually change. He was invited by Empress Genshō to lecture in 721, and permitted to officially ordain two followers. Emperor Shōmu in particular, developed great respect for Gyōgi and the once outlawed priest rose to become an important figure at the capital during his reign, even playing a significant role in the building of the Great Buddha at the Tōdaiji. Gyōgi's new acceptance, grudgingly granted by the government, possibly reflected the Ritsuryō recognition that it was wiser to have him working within the system.

When Gyōgi died in 748, he was buried at the Ikomayama temple and left behind more than 3,000 disciples. He was the first individual in Japan to be posthumously granted the title of *bosatsu* (bodhisattva) by the Emperor.

Due to the efforts of a few men like Gyōgi, Nara Buddhism managed to exhibit some signs of vitality and stir from its moribund bureaucratic-scholastic condition. It is unfortunate that there were not more priests of such calibre. Yet, the few that there were served an important role by planting the seeds of faith among the common people that could be harvested generations later.

3. Emperor Shōmu and the Kokubunji System

As a means of extending its provincial control, the Ritsuryō government decided to imitate the Chinese *Ta-yün* system of national temples. These had been instigated by Empress Wu Chao in honour of the *Great Cloud Sutra* (Chin. *Ta-yün ching*) at the end of the seventh century in the capitals and prefectures of China in an attempt to legitimatize her succession to the throne. They quickly became the most prestigious bureaucratic temples. The system was most likely proposed in Japan by the priest Gembō, who returned from China in 735.

When a smallpox epidemic threatened Japan in 737, an edict was issued that every province should make an image of Shaka Nyorai (Śākyamuni) and copy the *Daihannyakyō*. This measure apparently did not terminate the epidemic. Then in 741 (13th year of Tempyō), Emperor Shōmu decreed that each province in Japan was to build a seven-storied pagoda and make ten copies of the *Konkōmyō-saishōōkyō* and *Hokekyō* to be enshrined in the pagodas. Also, each province was to establish one official temple of twenty priests to be entitled the *Konkōmyō-shitennō-gokoku no tera* (Temple for the Protection of the Nation by the Four *Deva* Kings of the *Konkōmyōkyō*) and as well, a temple for ten nuns to be called, the *Hokke-metsuzai no tera* (Temple of the Elimination of Sins by the *Lotus Sutra*). Popularly these were known as the *kokubun sōji* and *niji* respectively.

This official establishment of the *kokubunji* system in 741 did not necessitate a massive construction project. As early as the reign of Emperor Temmu (673–686), edicts had been promulgated to have sutras chanted throughout the provinces for the protection of the nation and as a result of such decrees, temples, images and other necessary ritual objects were already present in the provinces. According to the *Zoku Nihongi* (5th month, 15th day), in 716 an edict had been set forth calling for investigation of provincial temples in disrepair, the combination of deserted temples and the correction of the improper use of countryside temples by the local laity. With the subsequent establishment of the *kokubunji* system, these already existing temples were converted into the national temple system.

Just as Empress Wu initiated the Chinese *Ta-yün* system as a justification for a female usurption of the throne, Emperor Shōmu also visualized the *kokubunji* system as a means of strengthening Imperial hegemony. Impressed by the Kegon lecture of Shen-hsiang in 740, the Emperor on his way to visit Naniwa stopped at a Chishikiji temple to venerate an image of Mahāvairocana Buddha, the symbolic expression of Kegon totality. Supposedly it was at that time when he decided to build a grand Birushana (Mahāvairocana) Buddha image as the centre of the *kokubunji* system. His idealized plan relating Imperial hegemony to this Buddha was derived from the *Bommōkyō* sutra, an important Mahāyāna vinaya text of the day, in which the Great Buddha reportedly states:

> I am called Roshana and live in the ocean of the lotus world, surrounded by one thousand petals, each petal being a world, making one thousand worlds. I incarnate myself into one thousand Shaka, one to each of the thousand worlds. Further, on each petal, there are ten billion Mt. Sumerus, ten billion suns and moons, ten billion worlds of four directions . . . ten million bodhisattva Shakas are sitting under ten billion bodhi trees, each of them preaching the *Bommōkyō*, which you asked be taught. The remaining nine hundred and ninety-nine Shaka each manifest ten billion Shaka in the same way. The Buddhas on the one thousand petals are my manifestations and the ten billion Shaka are the manifestations of these thousand Shaka. I am their origin and I am called Roshana.[61]

Emperor Shōmu dreamt of applying such a hierarchical system to Japan with Mahāvairocana as the symbol of national unity; subsequently at the dedication ceremony, he took the religious name of Roshana.

Actually Emperor Shōmu's motivation in building the Great Buddha of Nara as the symbolic centre of the *kokubunji* system is not as idealistic as some writers would have us believe. He primarily visualized the project as a means of reuniting a nation that had become exceedingly restless under the harsh Ritsuryō system. Peasants chafing under heavy taxation were attempting revolts, the priest Gyōgi was the leader of a popular religious movement outside the Ritsuryō sphere, the Fujiwara family was exerting pressure on the throne, and the year 740 coincided

with Fujiwara Hirotsugu's rebellion. A plan had to be devised to bring the dissatisfied elements back into the government fold and Shōmu believed the massive project of building the Great Buddha of Nara could be the solution. He was also considering moving the capital to Naniwa, which would not be the first time the Emperor temporarily changed his residence during what tends to be simplistically labeled the 'Nara period'; in all, it was a time of general unrest.

It is difficult in retrospect to assess Shōmu's exact intentions, but most likely they were half political and half a result of true devotion. After all, in 749, just after the casting of the Great Buddha was completed and gold was discovered for the first time in the province of Mutsu as a sign of the Buddha's benediction, Emperor Shōmu became the first Japanese Emperor to declare himself a servant of the Three Treasures (*sambō no yakko*) This represented a very serious move for the titular head of the indigenous faith.

In 743, an Imperial edict was issued to cast the image of Mahāvairocana at Shigaraki near Lake Biwa and the following year the frame was erected; however, in 745, the Emperor decided to maintain his Nara residence, and as a result the initial construction site was abandoned. A new area was selected in the eastern corner of Heijōkyō (Nara) on the site of a temple known as the Konshōji. There the casting began in 747 and was made eight times before it was completed in 749. During this period the temple name was changed to the Konkōmyōji, and finally to the Tōdaiji. In 757, before the gold leaf was finished, a grand dedication ceremony was held with the monk Bodhisena as master of ceremonies and the Empress and full court in participation. The finished statue, seated in lotus posture was fifty-three and a half feet tall and weighed 452 tons.

According to legend, Emperor Shōmu sent the priest Gyōgi to the Ise shrine to receive approval of the Sun Goddess prior to construction, and it is sometimes popularly believed that this event marked the beginning of the *honji-suijaku* (True nature-manifestation) theory, with an identification between the Sun Goddess and Mahāvairocana, the Great Sun Buddha. Actually, this legend appears in works of much later date

such as the 14th century *Genkō Shakusho*, after the *honji-suijaku* theory had already been established. There is no evidence at this early date to support such an identification and the *Zoku Nihongi* is strangely silent. However, some attempts were made to reconcile the construction of the Great Buddha with native gods, and it is quite possible a mission may have been sent to the Ise shrine. We do know according to the *Zoku Nihongi* that in the twelfth month of the same year, the Shintō deity Hachiman journeyed from his Usa shrine in the form of a priestess to venerate the Great Buddha. At that time Hachiman became the official protector of the temple and throughout the provinces, *kokubun*-Hachiman shrines were constructed to serve as guardians of the *kokubunji*.

After its final completion in 757, the first year after Emperor Shōmu's death, the Tōdaiji assumed the position of the foremost of the official temples and the Six Nara Sects were systematically arranged within its confines. The completion of the *kokubunji* system and Tōdaiji temple heralded a change in the condition of Buddhism; it had finally achieved the status of a national religion. As a result of this new position, it was also to achieve new economic strength.

At their inception, each *kokubunji* temple had been granted ten *chō* (ca. 24.5 acres) of rice lands. This was regularly increased by further government grants as well as by the encouragement to rich local landowners to donate land as a means of gaining influence with provincial authorities. After the 743 legalization of the development of new lands (*konden*) with special tax-exempt privileges, aristocratic provincial families acquired large landholdings and soon many temples joined their ranks developing their own lands. The Tōdaiji temple eventually reached the stage where it housed 4,000 families as cultivators of its lands, as well as one hundred slaves. The time was at hand, as a result of the Ritsuryō's own ambitious plans, that Buddhist economic and social influence outgrew the system.

4. Rise of Institutional Corruption

The acquisition of wealth and power inevitably brought corruption

to the Buddhist institutions. One of the first priests to yield to the temptations of success was Gembō, who had been the fourth transmitter of the Hossō doctrine to Japan.

Gembō was an outstandingly talented individual and it is difficult to assess his true character since he was so greatly maligned by jealous contemporaries. In 716, he went to China and while there his abilities were recognized by the T'ang Emperor, who bestowed upon him the purple robe, symbol of the highest rank for a priest. Once he returned to Japan in 735, with Kibi no Mabi, the well-known scholar, he quickly made an alliance with Tachibana no Moroe, the Minister of the Right. By such influence, Gembō was appointed to the Kōfukuji and received a gift of land from Emperor Shōmu. In 737 he was appointed *sōjō* on the Bureau of Priests and also received the purple robe for the first time in the history of Japan from the Emperor.

At this time a rather unusual incident occurred that has subsequently created considerable confusion among later historians and significantly increased Gembō's notoriety. It seems that the dowager Empress Fujiwara Miyako had been suffering from severe depression for some time and refused all visitors, including the Emperor, her son. According to the *Zoku Nihongi*, after a meeting with Gembō, the Empress was cured and the nation rejoiced, while Gembō was richly rewarded. Since the account is somewhat contradictory and ambiguous in classical Japanese, some historians mistakenly believed that Gembō had seduced Empress Kōmyō, the wife of Shōmu, while others thought that this was the wife of Fujiwara Hirotsugu, Gembō's later enemy.[62] In this particular situation Gembō appears to have been blameless. The wealth he received caused jealousy and resentment as well as serving as a temptation to his virtue; for the *Zoku Nihongi* subsequently reports that benefitting from such great rewards, Gembō ceased acting like a priest.

For some time, Fujiwara Hirotsugu had resented Gembo's favoured position and disagreed with his policies. In 740, when Hirotsugu sent a petition to the Emperor criticizing the problems existing in government, he blamed the national calamities on the activities of Gembō and and Kibi no Mabi. This was probably inspired by their well known

worldly life-styles. When Hirotsugu's petition went unheeded, he began a revolt that ended a month later with his death.

It is not clear why Gembō was eventually exiled to Kyūshū in 745, no doubt his unpriestly behaviour and involvement in court intrigues were factors. He died there the following year under mysterious circumstances on the dedication day of the Kanzeonji temple, which ironically had been built in honour of the victory over Hirotsugu. According to legend, just as he was about to enter the temple, something in the air grabbed his body and split his head open. This was popularly believed to have been Hirotsugu's ghost and the story seemed to have developed as a moral tale, depicting the final reward for unvirtuous priests.[63] Most likely Gembō actually was assassinated by one of his many enemies. Although the degree of Gembō's corruption remains equivocal, we do not have to entertain any doubts regarding his contemporary Dōkyō, the most notorious priest of the Nara period.

Dōkyō was a distant relation in the line of Emperor Tenchi and affiliated with the Hossō sect. At an early age he became interested in Tantrism and retired to Mt. Katsuragi to master esoteric rites, such as the secret Nyoirin Kannon practices and astrological ceremonies. He was first brought to court in 752 upon the request of Empress Kōken and received an appointment at the Tōdaiji, where he became a *kambyō zenji* (healing master). As early as 754 he was justifying a government appointment by advising the Empress that since she was ordained, she should surround herself with ministers who were also ordained.

Empress Kōken was an exceedingly devout Buddhist and retired from the throne in 758, in favour of the young Emperor Junnin, a grandson of Temmu. Actually she continued to exercise her control from the background, a common practice in Japan, in accompaniment with the trusted Fujiwara Nakamaro (also known as Oshikatsu). Then in 761, the Empress became ill at her Ōmi palace and Dōkyō arrived to minister to her, curing her illness by means of astrological rites. After this, their relationship changed and Dōkyō had free access to her private apartments. The Empress was a lonely, unmarried forty-five year old woman obsessed with religion. It was a simple matter for an unscrupulously ambi-

tious priest to manipulate her and Dōkyō's meteoric rise to power began from that date.[64] In 763 he was appointed *Shōsōzu* on the Bureau of Priests and the following year the Empress deposed the young Emperor, announcing that in future he would handle only ceremonial affairs. Her action immediately aroused the jealousy of Oshikatsu, who was enjoying manipulation of the throne himself, and he began a rebellion. By 765 Oshikatsu was defeated and slain, the young Emperor exiled to Awaji and Kōken reassumed the throne under the new title of Empress Shōtoku. The same year Dōkyō advanced in rank from *Daijin zenji* (Minister priest) to *Dajō daijin zenji* (Chancellor), a title previously reserved for members of the Imperial family. Finally in 766, Dōkyō was appointed *Hō-ō* (Dharma master), which was probably derived from Prince Shōtoku's alternative title of *Jōgū-Hō-ō*. For Dōkyō and the Empress, this new designation symbolized that he had achieved the same status Prince Shōtoku has enjoyed under Empress Suiko, he now determined government policy.[65]

Dōkyō proceeded to staff the *Sōgō* (Bureau of Priests) with his own loyal disciples and appointed them to other official posts as well. But despite his virtual domination of the government for seven years, few changes were actually made in the bureaucratic system. The Ritsuryō continued to function, albeit in a slightly modified fashion since the roles of Emperor and aristocracy were usurped by Dōkyō and his *Sōgō*. Certain fiscal problems did arise at this time as a result of irresponsible goverment spending on temple building, repair and temple donations, as well as increases in ordination, which removed large segments of productive population from the tax register. It was a unique historical situation; the Ritsuryō government placed ultimate power completely in the hands of the ruler, but it had no provisions for an infatuated Empress. With the death of Oshikatsu, a delight to his many enemies in that age of intrigue, no one was left to restrain her. To prevent such a situation from ever reoccurring in Japanese history, future generations were, with few exceptions, to bar females access to the throne.

The weakness of Nara Buddhism and attitude of the aristocracy were contributing factors to Dōkyō's rise. He willingly performed the miracles

expected of him. In 766 for instance, he supposedly found the relics of the Buddha in a Bishamon (Vaiśrāvaṇa) image and the Empress held a celebration. Two years later the *Zoku Nihongi* was to declare the whole thing a fraud.[66] The same account also accused Dōkyō, who was beginning to cultivate staunch political opponents, and his followers of practicing left-handed teachings, a restrained comment upon his riotous life.

As Dōkyō's group became more worldly, other groups of dedicated Buddhist religious, in an effort to escape such secularization, left for the mountains with or without government permission. The climax eventually arrived when Dōkyō attempted to succeed to the throne. By the first month of 767, Dōkyō was already acting like an Emperor and issuing a New Year's edict, and in the fifth month he had a dream that the Shintō god Hachiman at Usa promised the nation would enjoy peace if he were to be made Emperor. The Empress cautiously decided to send the venerable Wake no Kiyomaro to Usa to confer with the deity Hachiman and confirm this dream. Despite pressure from Dōkyō, the reply Kiyomaro brought back was that only a member of the Imperial family descended from the gods was eligible to become Emperor; a subject could not usurp this role. Dōkyō was furious and succeeded in having Kiyomaro exiled and his sister, a nun, returned to the lay state and banished, but Dōkyō's own days of control were at an end. In 770 Empress Shōtoku died and Dōkyō's rising star waned overnight. By 772 he was to die in exile and be buried with common rites. The man who could perform miracles and sought to become Emperor, discovered at last the fragile nature of worldly power.

Dōkyō's role can be attributed to many factors such as the instability of the government, the aristocracy and the Empress, but above all, it represented another manifestation of shamanism, the aspect of the indigenous faith that in the early days allowed the Imperial family to achieve its religious leadership over the other clans and eventually unite the nation. Although paying exterior homage to Buddhism, the aristocracy had not abandoned their old ways nor their belief in theurgy. Dōkyō fulfilled their expectations for he was skilled in the shamanistic arts,

having studied on Mt. Katsuragi, which just a half century earlier had been the home of En no Gyōja, the famous shamanistic founder of Shugendō. We can only wonder what might have happened if Dōkyō had been a member of the Imperial family and actually eligible to succeed to the throne?

After the death of Empress Shōtoku and banishment of Dōkyō, Emperor Kōnin succeeded to the throne and began to make some drastic changes. He was faced with an unstable government, campaigns against the Ezo (Ainu) and the immediate need to correct the economy and conditions of institutional Buddhism. In 770, he immediately reappointed the priests to the *Sōgō* that Dōkyō had earlier replaced with his own followers. Kōnin also allowed religious the freedom to take up residence in mountain and forest hermitages. This form of spiritual life was now recognized as a necessary asset to combat the worldliness of the capital priests. Those who already had been illegally living in hermitages were pardoned and welcomed back to the capital where their idealism was sorely needed. Strict government supervision was placed over the Nara temples and their now vast land holdings. The Imperial attitude is best symbolized in an edict issued in the first month of 780, upon the occasion of a Buddhist pagoda being struck by lightning. Formerly when such calamities occurred, the Emperor would cite his own inadequacies to blame, but in this incident, although he admitted he might have been negligent, he placed the major blame upon the improper conduct of the religious.

As a result of the reforms initiated by Emperor Kōnin, the Hossō sect rallied from their initially weak position to dominate scholastic studies at the end of the Nara period, toppling the Sanron. In this respect, the reforms were somewhat successful but the Emperor was not able to further them.

By the third month of 780, the Emperor's entire efforts became centred on quelling the Ezo rebellion in the northern province of Mutsu, and he no longer had time to direct further Buddhist policies. Finally in uncertainty and despair over the deteriorating frontier situation, Kōnin, who was already an old man, abdicated and shortly thereafter died. He

was succeeded by Emperor Kammu, who once again directed his energies towards the solution of domestic problems.

One of the first crucial decisions Kammu made after coming to the throne in 781, was to move the capital; that seemed to be the easiest solution. Numerous attempts had been made to move the capital during the Nara period but none were permanent. Kammu decided to transfer the capital to Nagaoka, in neighboring Yamashiro province, believing such a move would benefit ending the Ezo rebellions by lifting the impurity that had settled over the nation. By 785 the palace was completed at Nagaoka and other buildings well along in progress, when Fujiwara Tanetsugu, in charge of construction, was assassinated by the Emperor's younger brother Prince Sawara, who had ambitions on the throne. This was a serious blow to Kammu. Also in 789 the army suffered disastrous losses in the Ezo campaign at Taga castle. It seemed that Nagaoka was not an auspicious site for the new capital after all. By 794, after ten years of mishaps and one of the most politically trying periods during Kammu's reign, he decided the capital at Nagaoka would be abandoned. Upon the advice of Wake no Kiyomaro, who was now restored to Imperial favour, Heiankyō (Kyōto) was selected as the site of what would hopefully prove to be an auspicious capital.

Kammu, up until the move to Kyōto had continued the reform policy towards Buddhism that Emperor Kōnin had originated. Shortly after the transfer, when the new capital did prove to be favourable and Sakanoue Tamuramaro successfully crushed the Ezo rebellions, Kammu was able to turn towards domestic policies and commenced one of the strictest systems of control over Buddhist institutions in Japanese history.

D. Buddhist Interreaction with the Indigenous Faith—Shinbutsu Shūgō

Once Buddhism gained official government support, a natural movement occurred to unite the new religion with the indigenous faith; this is generally known in its early stages as *shinbutsu shūgō* (unification of

gods and Buddhas). The government encouraged such a process by supporting the construction of *jingūji* (shrine-temples). Not much is known regarding this gesture but the first mention of such a combination is found in 698, during the reign of Emperor Mommu, when according to the chronicles, the Taki-daijingūji was moved;[67] this implies that their origin was of even earlier date.

Besides the government, numerous other factions supported the development of *shinbutsu shūgō*. Shintō priests viewed it as a means of sharing the lucrative government benefits bestowed upon Buddhism, idealistic Buddhists recognized it as a way to approach the masses and the common people accepted it as a natural phenomena.

One of the first philosophical developments in this movement was a change in the concept of *kami*. With the construction of *jingūji* and the practice of sutra chanting for the indigenous gods (the early histories relate thirty-eight such incidents), it was commonly accepted that the native deities had embraced Buddhism and decided to protect the Dharma. This was an important step for Buddhism.

The assimilation of autochthonous deities as guardians of the faith has always been an important process in Buddhist evolution. During the lifetime of the historical Buddha, the Indian *deva* were accepted as guardians and also didactically utilized as a means of instructing the laity. In this respect they served as a stage of mental conditioning for the reception of further teachings. Superficially it might appear that their role was extremely minor but this was not the case.

The goal of Buddhism has always been Enlightenment, an intuitive experience that transcends discriminative reasoning. As such it cannot be considered an attainment to be acquired by intellectualism. And as long as the goal is achieved, it is not possible to classify one means superior to another, for the process is entirely a subjective matter, depending upon the individual. From the start, the paths of faith and learning have always shared equal importance in Buddhism, although the transmission and clarification of the doctrine by scholars has tended to emphasize and strengthen the intellectual approach. This has even misled some into the false notion that Buddhism is purely an intellectual endeavour, a rational

philosophy rather than a religion. From such a standpoint, belief in assimilated deities or even the Mahāyāna Buddhas and bodhisattvas may seem degenerate. What is disregarded is the fact that the attainment of the intuitive goal of Nirvana can just as easily be accomplished by *bhakti* or religious devotion as it can be by philosophical study. In fact, the obvious deities of form can more easily be recognized and ultimately set aside than subtle attachments to abstract gods of thought. The methods of faith versus study do not represent 'lower' or 'higher' paths but merely two different approaches, dependent upon individual needs, to the same goal of Enlightenment. The assimilation of the indigenous *kami* into Japanese Buddhism was not merely an historical accident but an important and essential development in the evolution of Japanese Buddhism.

During the Nara period, the native *kami* began to assume two different attitudes towards Buddhism; the role of guardians to the Dharma, whereby they maintained their independence as gods, and secondly, the role of suffering sentient beings seeking to escape their present condition and attain Enlightenment. Some scholars maintain that the guardian role was politically inspired, while the development of the concept of *kami* as suffering creatures in search of Enlightenment, was a natural process derived from the changing view of the indigenous gods under Buddhist influence, from abstract to humanistic beings.[68] This is an interesting theory, but it is difficult to historically substantiate. Many native gods such as Izanami and Izanagi, the Sun Goddess and her brother Susano-o, and Ōkuninushi no Kami were anthropomorphic from their origination. On the other hand, there is no question that Buddhist influence did increase this tendency. The commencement of iconographic representation of deities unquestionably served to humanize their nature, and there also appears to have been an increase in the practice of granting deceased heroes the status of *kami* at this time. The safest assumption is that the conception of the *kami* as guardians and as suffering sentient beings were both natural developments.

To consider this, we first have to question who was responsible for the propagation of *shinbutsu shūgō* among the common people? As we have seen, the Ritsuryō government carefully restricted the legal activi-

ties of Buddhist priests and although regional aristocrats might benefit the *kokubunji* and other Buddhist institutions in the provinces, no real attempt was ever made by the Nara Sects to convert the masses. The main sources of the common man's knowledge of Buddhism during the Nara period were the wandering priests or holy men, who worked outside the sphere of official sanction and more often than not, were extremely eclectic in the various teachings and beliefs that they had acquired. The complex process of uniting the *kami* with Buddhism must have evolved from the local conception of the role of each *kami*, as well as the degree of Buddhist influence present. The inconsistencies present even in the final systematization of the *honji-suijaku* (True Nature-manifestation) theory of the Heian and later periods demonstrate strong regional influences. It is natural to imagine that at this time, the great and powerful *kami* might become the guardians of the local temples, while the lesser *kami*, as they grew more humanized, should be treated as unenlightened gods and instructed in the teachings.

The recorded incidents of both *kami* as guardians and as suffering beings appear to be quite contrived. The most blatant example is the role of Hachiman as guardian of the Tōdaiji, but reports indicate similar calculation. For instance, the *Nippon Reiiki* relates the long story of the priest Eshō of the Daianji temple, who during the era of Hōki (770–80) witnessed the appearance of the Taga Ō Kami in the form of a white monkey requesting to hear the *Lotus Sutra*.[69] The moral of this tale ostensibly is that those who prevent others from Buddhist practice will suffer future retribution such as rebirth as a monkey *kami*. But a number of undercurrents are also presented such as: encouragement to the laity to donate, the right of priests to expect donations in exchange for sutra chanting, the improper use of Shintō shrine lands as the personal property of the Shintō priests, and finally, the punishment that befalls even Buddhist priests who fail to heed the request of a Shintō god (in this case, the white monkey destroys their temple). In brief, the Buddhist author merely used the alleged incident as a means of popularizing his own views. A similar happening was the appearance in 715 of the god Kehi of Echizen province to Fujiwara Muchimaro, requesting a temple

be built in order that he might receive the Buddhist teachings and overcome the karma that caused him to remain merely as a god.[70] The priest Mangan, who roamed throughout the countryside preaching and carving images, had a comparable experience in 763 at the Tadojingūji, when the deity of that shrine announced its desire to take refuge in the Three Treasures.[71]

Incidents such as the foregoing suspiciously appear to conceal underlying motivations but sufficient such occurrences are recorded to demonstrate that they had become common practice and reflected the mood of the society. Political inspiration alone would not have been adequate to create such ingrained folk beliefs that surfaced during the Heian period and have survived up to modern times.

The first step in the Buddhist assimilation of the native gods was to treat them as either guardians of the faith or as suffering sentient beings in search of Enlightenment. Later, as the Buddhist institutions began to make a conscious effort to disseminate their teachings among the masses, the movement gained momentum and the *kami* were to be raised to an even higher status with the development of the *honji-suijaku* theory.

E. Lasting Influences of Nara Buddhism

From the standpoint of historical development, it is possible to regard the Nara period as merely representing the transfer of Buddhist institutions to Japanese soil. By the end of the era, the Six Nara Sects remained alien implants apparently exerting imperceptible influence upon Japanese thought. The vast majority of the populace were scarcely aware of the new religion and even the capital aristocracy, who had been most exposed to its teachings, still failed to recognize it as more than a superior form of magic. It is even questionable how many of the thousands of religious ordained by the Ritsuryō government actually understood the basic teachings of the faith to which they had supposedly dedicated their lives. In this respect, despite the creation of massive temples and innumerable images, Nara Buddhism does not appear to have successfully