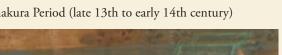
The Finest Masterpiece of the Shōtoku Taishi Illustrated Biographies

The Honshōji Edition, The Illustrated Biography of Shōtoku Taishi



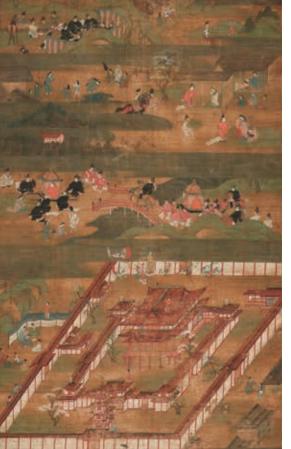
Shōtoku Taishi Eden 9 Panels • Late Kamakura Period (late 13th to early 14th century)





Panel 5

6 7 **è** Panel 4



Yoshisuke and the empress were brought before the judgment of the King of Hell, Enma. At that moment, the Bodhisattva Kannon appeared, acting as a messenger of the Amida icon fro Zenkōji. Through Kannon's divine intervention, both Yoshisuke and the empress were revived and returned to the world of the living



6 The Love Story of Prince Shōtoku and the Bride Who Plucked Dropwort

Prince Shōtoku came across a filial daughter gathering dropwort in order to tend to her ailing parents. Deeply moved by her devotion, he asked for her hand in marriage

The story of Prince Shōtoku and the bride who picked dropwort, along with the tales of Somachattra and his daughter Princess Nyoze, and Honda Yoshimitsu and his son Yoshisuke. became beloved narratives highlighting the enduring bonds of love and gratitude between parents and children, as well as between spouses.



7 The Birth of Zenkōji Temple Yoshimitsu, now a provincial governor, oversaw the establishment of Zenkoii.

Shakyamuni Buddha manifested atop the roof of Zenkōji, providing his blessings and marking the beginning of Zenkōji worship in Japan. Prince Shōtoku, who once conversed with the Amida o Zenkōji by the sea in Naniwa, offered prayers, extended his protection, and celebrated the temple's founding.

Prince Shōtoku and the Illustrated Biography of Shōtoku Taishi (Shōtoku Taishi Eden)

rince Shōtoku (574–622) was born as the eldest son of Emperor Yōmei and Queen-Consort Anahobe no Hashihito. At the age of 22, when his aunt Empress Suiko ascended the throne, Prince Shotoku was appointed Crown Prince and served as regent, governing the state on her behalf. Devoted to the ideals of Buddhism, Prince Shotoku created the "Seventeen-Article Constitution," in an attempt to build a state centered on the emperor and guided by Buddhist principles.

Prince Shōtoku's life, modeled after the Buddha Shakvamuni has been passed down as a narrative full of miracles and mystery. The stories about his life were eventually painted and became known as the Illustrated Biography of Shōtoku Taishi (Shōtoku Taishi Eden). During the Nara period (710-794), a gallery depicting Prince Shōtoku's life was established at Shitennōji temple in Osaka, the same temple that Shōtoku had founded. This gallery, called the "Picture Hall" (Edo), inspired the construction of another similar looking hall at Höryūji temple in Nara. Inside this Horyūji hall, the illustrated biography was depicted on sliding screen panels. The paintings, now housed in the Tokyo National Museum, are the oldest surviving examples of a Shōtoku Taishi illustrated biography

By the Kamakura period, the illustrated biographies of Shōtoku Taishi evolved into large hanging scroll paintings that were portable and widely disseminated. These scrolls were often displayed in a Taishi Hall, a hall dedicated to Prince Shotoku, and used for storytelling by means of picture explication (etoki). Over 50 sets of medieval hanging scroll versions of the *Illustrated* Biography of Shōtoku Taishi still exist today. At Shitennöji, scripts were created for these storytelling performances, including a preserved book titled Shoborinzo ("The Treasury of the True Dharma Wheel").

The tradition of *etoki* storytelling continues today, most notably during the annual Taishiden-e celebration held every summer at the Taishi Hall of Zuisenji, a branch temple in Inami, Tovama Prefecture.

Honshōji and the Illustrated Biography of Shōtoku Taishi (Shōtoku Taishi Eden)

onshōji, located in Anjō City, Aichi Prefecture, is a temple of the True Pure Land Buddhist tradition (Jodo Shinshū), founded by the monk Shinran (1173–1262). Jodo Shinshū is also known as the Ikkō sect. During the 15th and 16th centuries, Honshöji became famous for being a significant regional stronghold during the Ikkō uprisings (ikkō-ikki), where followers of the Ikko movement united and took up arms to resist the rule of the Shogun Tokugawa Ievasu.

Honshōji was founded in the late Kamakura period (late 12th to early 13th century) by Kyōen, a Pure Land saint and disciple of Shinran, who devoted his life to chanting the name of Amida Buddha (nenbutsu). In its Taishi hall, Honshōji enshrines Prince Shōtoku as the principal deity and houses nine panels of the Honshöji Illustrated Biography of Shötoku Taishi, five panels of the Zenköji Illustrated Biography, and seven panels of the Hönen Shonin Illustrated Biography

Although the Taishi hall no longer exists, these illustrated biographies are regarded as monumental masterpieces of exceptional quality. They have been officially designated as Important Cultural Properties of Japan

The nine panels of the Illustrated Biography of Shotoku Taishi from Honshōji share the same composition as other examples now housed separately in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (five panels) and the Nakanoshima Kosetsu Museum in Japan (three panels). Unfortunately, the seventh panel has been lost. The fact that Honshöji preserves the complete set of nine panels intact makes its set exceptionally valuable.

A closer examination of Honshöji's monumental Illustrated Biography of Shotoku Taishi reveals that the fifth panel prominently features the temple complex of Shitennöji, serving as the focal point of the entire set. Within the illustration, a narrow, elongated gallery reminiscent of the Picture Hall is depicted. This detail highlights the connection between this illustrated biography and the tradition of depicting the Shitennöji Picture Hall within the Shōtoku Taishi Illustrated Biography.

4 5 Panel 3



Panel 2

3





1 2 3







Prince Shōtoku, grieving deeply, pray to the guardian deities of Buddhism known as the Four Heavenly Kings. With their divine providence, Shōtoku defeated Mononobe no Moriva in battle. When Prince Shōtoku went to retrieve the Amida statue, the icon

disclosed that it would remain in the sea at Naniwa for the time being.

4 Journey to Shinano Province

Honda Yoshimitsu traveled from Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture) to the capital. As he passed by the sea at Naniwa, the Amida statue leapt onto his back.



Yoshimitsu was then revealed to be the reincarnation of Somachattra. During the journey, Yoshimitsu carried the Amida statue on his back by day, while at night, the statue carried him. Together, they made the long journey back to Yoshimitsu's distant hometown in Shinano Province. Once home, Yoshimitsu and his wife enshrined the image in their house and devoted themselves to its worship.



5 The Miracles of the Zenkōji Amida!

One day, Honda Yoshimitsu's son, Yoshisuke, suddenly passed aw While making his way through the depths of hell on a path toward salvation and revival, Yoshisuke encountered Empress Kōgyoku, who was being dragged away by demons. Deeply moved by her suffering, he earnestly pleaded for her life.

2 The Manifestation of Amida: The Birth of the Amida Icon

Somachattra repented and expressed his wish to create a statue of Amida to save the people, seeking permission from Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni's disciple, Maudgalyayana (In Japanese, Mokuren), journeyed to the Dragon King's

kingdom at sea, and retrieved sacred gold dust originating from the Jambunadi river. The statue of Amida was crafted from this gold under Shakyamuni's watchful gaze. Bathed in the radiance of Amida, the statue was imbued with life, marking the birth of the living image of Amida.



3 From India, Through the Korean Peninsula, to Japan

The Amida statue, declaring its intention to save humanity, traveled from India through the Korean Peninsula and arrived in



icon in the country. However, the Mononobe clan, who opposed Buddhism, sought to destroy the statue. Their men struck the statue, set it ablaze, and cast it into the sea at Naniwa Bay.



Japan, becoming the first Buddhist

The Illustrated Biography of the Zenkōji Buddha (Zenkōji Nyorai Eden)

1 The Amida Buddha of Zenkōji appears!

There was a wealthy man in India called Somachattra (in Japanese, Gakkai). Due to Somachattra's miserly nature, a severe illness spread throughout the land. His beloved daughter, Princess Nyoze, also fell ill, and no physician, no matter how skilled, could cure her. Somachattra visited the Buddha Shakyamuni, who

was delivering a sermon at Vulture Peak. Upon seeking Shakyamuni's teachings, Amida Buddha appeared in the human world. The great radiance emitted by Amida dispelled the illness from the land, saving Princess Nvoze as well.



Princess Nyoze





The Honshōji Edition, The Illustrated Biography of the Zenkōji Buddha

Zenkōji Nyorai Eden



The Zenkōji Buddha Icon and the Illustrated Biography of the Zenkōji Buddha

he central figure of the Illustrated Biography of the Zenkōji Buddha is the principal deity of Zenkōji Temple n Nagano Prefecture, known as Zenkōji Buddha. Buddhism, which originated in India, traveled through China and the Korean Peninsula before reaching Japan, where it was propagated by Prince Shōtoku. Within the historical context of Buddhism's arrival in Japan, the icon of Zenkōji is revered as the first Buddha to have been introduced to the country. It has been widely worshipped throughout Japan since the Heian period. The "Illustrated Biography of the Zenköji Buddha" forms the foundation of faith in the Zenkōji Buddha icon, vividly depicting its origins and mythology as a sweeping historical narrative.

Long ago, in the land of India, when Shakyamuni Buddha was preaching his teachings, a severe illness spread across the country due to Somachattra's (in Japanese, Gakkai) miserly nature. As a result, Princess Nyoze, the daughter of Somachattra, also fell ill. At this time, Shakyamuni invited Amida Buddha to intervene. Amida Buddha is a compassionate Buddha who vowed to save all living beings and for that purpose he established the Western Pure Land. It is believed that anyone who chants Namu Amida Butsu (the chant known as nenbutsu), can be reborn in the Pure Land and be saved. Through the great salvific light of Amida, both Princess Nyoze and the people of the country were saved from the grievous illness.

Filled with joy, Somachattra wished for a statue of Amida to be created. This statue journeyed from India to the Korean Peninsula and eventually to Japan. Later, it was transported by Honda

Yoshimitsu-revealed to be the reincarnation of Somachattra -to Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture). There, Zenkoji Temple was established, and the statue became known as Zenkōji Buddha. Interestingly, the name of Yoshimitsu (善光), pronounced as "Zenkō," inspired the naming of Zenkōji Temple.

The Zenkoji Buddha statue is characterized by its visual depiction of Amida Buddha at the center, flanked by Kannon Bodhisattva on the right and Seishi Bodhisattva on the left, all of whom are depicted within a great salvific light. This configuration is referred to as *ikko sanzon* ("One Light, Three Deities").

During the Kamakura period, Zenkōji worship became a widespread phenomenon, attracting devotion from powerful men such as shoguns and women alike. Statues of Zenköji Buddha were enshrined across the country, and Zenkoji Buddha illustrated narratives (eden) were also created. Many of these illustrated works were transmitted alongside the biographies of Prince Shōtoku.

The Illustrated Biography of the Zenköji Buddha at

Honshōji Temple is particularly notable. Its third panel depicts Prince Shotoku defeating Mononobe no Moriya, along with other episodes involving the Prince. This intertwining of Prince Shōtoku worship with the worship of the Zenkōji Buddha icon illustrates their interconnectedness, a fascinating feature of the scrolls.



The Zenkōji Buddha statue

Panel 9





Shōtoku Taishi passed away alongside his beloved consort and was laid to rest in the Shinaga tomb at Osaka.



18 Ten Years After His Death

Shōtoku's family was decimated by Soga no Iruka. Shōtoku's soul is said to have ascended into the sky from the Five-Storied Pagoda of Hōryūji temple.







15 At Age 42

As was foretold in his previous life on Mount Heng, Shōtoku encountered the famous monk Bodhidharma, who had been reborn as a beggar on Mount Kataoka. Shōtoku provided him with clothing, and they exchanged Japanese waka poems with one another.

16 At Age 43

Mimashi came to Japan from the Kingdom of Paekche and introduced Gigaku, a form of masked dance-drama, to Japan. This became the origin of the Bugaku dance performances at Shitennōji.









14 At Age 37

Shōtoku secluded himself in the Hall of Dreams (Yumedono) at Ikaruga Palace. His soul transcended his body and rode a chariot pulled by a green dragon. It journeyed to Mount Heng in China, where Shōtoku retrieved the Lotus Sutra from one of his past incarnations.

Panel 7









11 At Age 27

Shōtoku rode a kurokoma (black horse), accompanied by his attendant Chōshimaro, and soared through the sky to ascend



12 At Age 33 Shōtoku formulated the Seventeen-Article Constitution: Article 1 Cherish harmony. Article 2 [To achieve this], one should deeply revere the Buddha, the teachings, and the monastic community.



9 At Age 19

Shōtoku underwent the coming-of-age ceremony.

10 At Age 22

Empress Suiko ascended the throne. Shōtoku became the Crown Prince and served as regent, assisting in governance. Shōtoku established Shitennö ("Temple of the Four Heavenly Kings").





7 At Age 14

Mononobe no Moriya, deeply opposed to Buddhism, destroyed Buddhist statues and temples by setting them ablaze.



8 At Age 16

Shōtoku carved statues of the Four Heavenly Kings at Mount Shigi and prayed before them for victory, subsequently triumphing in the battle against Moriya.









654

Panel 3

Panel 2





5 At Age 10

As foretold by the previous prophecy, a group of barbarians invades Japan from the East. However, Shōtoku 🔬 manages to resolve the conflict and pacify the



6 At Age 11

While he was playing with the young princess, Shotoku exhibited exceptional talent in the dual traditions of literary arts and martial prowess. He was able to listen to and distinguish between many people speaking at the same time, and therefore, he

The Illustrated Biography of Shōtoku Taishi (Shōtoku Taishi Eden)

1 The Annunciation

World-saving Kannon (Guze Kannon), the Bodhisattva of Salvation, appears in the form of a golden monk to Shōtoku's mother, and enters her womb.

2 Birth

The mother gives birth to Prince Shōtoku, who is born in front of a stable (*umaya*), later earning him the name Prince Umayado ("Prince Stable Door").

3 At Age 2

On the morning of the fifteenth day of the second month, Shōtoku steps forward facing east, joins his hands together in prayer and chants "Namu Butsu" (Homage to the Buddha

4 At Age 9

The planet Mars appears in the sky. Shōtoku predicts the future based on this wondrous vision.





