

Manga as Historical Medium: Depictions of Prince Shōtoku's Authorship of the *Sangyō-gisho* in Japanese Comic Books

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Abstract This article examines Japanese manga depicting the composition of the *Sangyō-gisho*, three canonical Buddhist texts traditionally attributed to Japan's Prince Shōtoku. It examines how those depictions of his authorship relate to both eighth century texts and modern scholarship, focusing on Shōtoku's relationship with Hyeja, his Buddhist teacher from the Korean peninsula. In so doing, this article shows how the manga, a particularly popular medium in Japan, differ with such scholarly works in the access they afford to these key Buddhist texts from early Japanese history.

Key words Prince Shōtoku; Shōtoku manga; Hyeja; *Sangyō-gisho*; *Nihon shoki*; Japanese Buddhism

This article examines Japanese *manga* depicting the composition of the *Sangyō-gisho*, three canonical Buddhist texts traditionally attributed to Japan's Prince Shōtoku (573? – 622? CE). Shōtoku is remembered as both a clever politician and first patriarch of Japanese Buddhism, credited not only with constructing temples, collecting sūtras, and inviting masters from abroad, but also with spreading the new religion by lecturing at court on Buddhist teachings and composing the *Sangyō-gisho* based on his lectures. We will consider below how Japanese manga portray the prince's lectures and role in the composition of these texts in relation to early primary sources and to the modern scholarly interpreters of those sources. In our examination of these materials, we will focus on Shōtoku's relationship with the Korean Buddhist monk Hyeja (dates unknown), who is described as the prince's main Buddhist teacher.

The authenticity of these records and their portrayal of the relationship between Shōtoku and Hyeja have been the focus of a great deal of modern scholarship, which has been guided by the search for the so-called "true record". That is, scholars have tried to determine what Shōtoku actually did and said, including whether he authored these texts. This search has produced two main academic positions: the true-composition-hypothesis, supported by a majority of scholars, and the false-composition-hypothesis. The former argues that Shōtoku is the rightful author of the *Sangyō-gisho*, and that his texts are profound works of a great thinker which capture the unique sensibilities of the Japanese mind. The other camp not only believes them to

be apocryphal texts written by a continental author and then falsely attributed to the prince, but also describes them as repetitive and unimaginative works, unworthy of their exalted canonical status. A few scholars advocate a third position, however, arguing that while Shōtoku may have played some role in their composition, he cannot be considered their sole author, nor even perhaps the main intellectual force behind their composition. Thus, the three texts should be understood as compositions co-authored by Shōtoku and one or more of his Buddhist teachers, possibly Hyeja.

Since scholars of all three camps view the *Sangyō-gisho* mainly as a body of ideas, they have generally been unconcerned with how these texts can appear and be used in other non-traditional forms that are unrelated to their content—for example, held in a temple’s sanctuary as sacred material objects, copied as a means of merit making, or remembered as a crucial historical event signaling the local mastery of Buddhist teachings and the translocal Chinese language. Indeed, the composition of these three texts by a Japanese author soon after Buddhism arrived on the archipelago has been seen as a defining historical moment that led to the development of legitimate and independent forms of Japanese Buddhism. As such, their composition has been remembered again and again in premodern artwork, poetry, and ritual, as well as in the distinctly modern forms of television docudramas, Wikipedia entries, YouTube clips, and Japanese manga. Even so, modern scholarship has generally ignored how the manga and other such non-traditional materials have helped to insure that knowledge of the texts would endure into modern times, shaping the perceptions of those lacking the skills or interest to read the *Sangyō-gisho* or the highly technical interpretive works of modern scholars.

Manga as a “Medium of Historical Expression”

As a quintessentially consumerist medium, manga may seem an unusual subject for the study of serious religious texts. Even so, Tessa Morris-Suzuki argues that this medium has, in fact, “reached a huge audience and had a profound effect on the historical imagination of Japan’s postwar generations,” shaping the Japanese public’s understanding of its history to the same degree as historical textbooks (Morris-Suzuki, 175). Indeed, in her work on media and memory, she argues that in our attempts to understand the events of the past, we must consider the logic and conventions of the “media of historical expression” by which we access, remember, and interpret those events, since our understanding will vary depending on whether we have used a historical novel, photograph, film, internet archive, or comic book.

She argues, moreover, that in this modern age of mass media, new conventions have emerged that are reshaping the ways in which we can engage the past, and so we must consider carefully how “varied representations of the same event enable us to understand the forces that shape the communication of historical knowledge” (28). But instead of searching for a single authoritative historical truth, one of the central goals of modern studies of Shōtoku’s texts, she calls for us to think in terms of “historical truthfulness,” which requires listening to multiple voices—the poetic and the artistic, the exegetical and even the comic. Each offers a distinct window into the past and possesses unique barriers to entry (temporal, monetary, linguistic, educa-

tional), capacities for communicating, and standards for verifying claims and conclusions.

For example, the Shōtoku manga, being simple, cheap, and disposable, keep barriers to entry low but have a potential for dispersion that is high. And unlike the work of Hanayama Shinshō, Tsuda Sōkichi, and the other scholars examined below, the manga can be read, or “consumed,” quickly, and offer no reliable means to verify their claims nor a recognized forum for challenging historical misrepresentations.¹ These manga omit citations of source materials, commonly using the phrase “it is said,” but failing to tell their audience by whom it was said and in what context. And while the manga often tell stories about the past in a straightforward, graphic format that clearly suggests the reader has entered a world created in the artist’s imagination, they commonly include images associated with time and space beyond the imaginary realm of the manga, often by intercutting photographs of material objects associated with Shōtoku (temples, artwork, or manuscripts), or by offering specific historical dates for the composition of his texts.

As such, the manga represent a powerful medium for perpetuating received narratives and for transmitting the texts’ value not simply because of their potential for dispersion but also because of their capacity to express, in just a few frames, the key markers cited by scholars to justify the texts’ canonical status. For example, the *Sangyō-gisho* are described in the manga as the oldest extant written Buddhist works by a Japanese author, which were crucial to the founding of a uniquely Japanese form of Buddhism. Another key marker of value we find is the recognition accorded the texts’ erudition by Hyeja, who is shown praising the texts and, in some manga, taking them back to the Korean peninsula as proof of the sophistication of the nascent Japanese Buddhist tradition. Indeed, these scenes of Shōtoku and Hyeja condense a long and complex pattern found throughout Buddhist history of transmission, apprenticeship, and mastery, whether we look to the northern traditions of China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet, or the southern traditions of Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand.

Shōtoku Manga and Early Accounts of the *Sangyō-gisho*

The *Nihon shoki*, compiled in 720, is one of the key early texts describing Shōtoku’s Buddhist activities and appears to be an important source for the Shōtoku manga. Written in classical Chinese and modeled on the Chinese dynastic histories, the *Nihon shoki* seeks to legitimize the Japanese royal house by describing an unbroken lineage of sovereigns that begins with Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, and tracing it through a line of human sovereigns, leading to Empress Suiko (554 – 628), Shōtoku’s aunt. The text depicts Shōtoku as an adroit politician who, after being appointed regent by his aunt in 593, played a key role in the government. He is credited with composing the *Seventeen Article Constitution* and two historical texts, the *Tennōki* and the *Kokki*, and with promoting diplomatic and religious contacts with the continent.

Shōtoku is also credited with promoting the Buddhist faith that had only recently arrived from the Korean peninsula. Indeed, the prince is depicted as not only a generous patron and devout practitioner of the foreign religion, but also possessed of a keen intellect that quickly grasped the doctrines of the new faith. His study under

Hyeja's tutelage led to lectures at court before Empress Suiko and other notables on the *Srīmālā-sūtra* and *Lotus-sūtra*, and eventually to the composition of the three *sūtra* commentaries that make up the *Sangyō-gisho*.

The *Nihon shoki*'s account, which does not state directly that Shōtoku composed the *Sangyō-gisho*, is elaborated in subsequent texts, some of which provide greater detail on his lectures and connect them to the commentaries. These texts include the *Jōgū Shōtoku hōō teisetsu*, a biography of the prince whose author and dates of composition are unknown, although scholars believe it is roughly contemporaneous with the *Nihon shoki*. Like the *Nihon shoki*, the *Teisetsu* describes Shōtoku's studies with Hyeja and his rapid mastery of Buddhist teachings, but also notes his composition of the *Hokke-gisho*, one of the three commentaries, and "other texts," a reference assumed by scholars to point to the *Shōmangyō-gisho* and the *Yuimagyō-gisho*, the other two *Sangyō-gisho* texts.²

Manga Depicting Shōtoku in Japanese Buddhist History

The Shōtoku *manga* repeat key elements of these early accounts whether describing Shōtoku's place in Japanese Buddhist history more broadly or focusing on his political and religious activities.³ As background to my study of Shōtoku manga, I was introduced to this genre and to the figure of Shōtoku over twenty years ago when I began studying Japanese in Tokyo in 1987. I purchased a few manga on Japanese Buddhism soon after starting intensive language classes after friends had recommended them as a good way to practice reading while learning the basics of Japanese Buddhism, which would later become my area of academic specialization. Within a year or so, I was able to make some sense of these manga addressing varied aspects of Japanese Buddhist history. Part of their appeal, and the reason I describe this experience here, is that manga generally offer a combination of drawings and simple text, often accompanied by diacritic markings called *furigana*, which give the pronunciations of difficult words and so are especially helpful for those learning the language—whether a child or a non-native speaker. As I wrote this article, I looked again at the three manga I still have from that period, which are now dog-eared, musty, and falling apart, each covered with my scribbles of the English equivalents of even the most basic Japanese words. One of the three, Itō Makoto's *Hannya Shingyō for Beginners*, offers an introduction to the *Heart Sūtra*, a short but important *sūtra* in Zen Buddhism. Like he does in many other manga that touch on aspects of Japanese Buddhist history, Prince Shōtoku appears as father of Japanese Buddhism. In this manga, he is drawn on a timeline depicting major events from the world's religious traditions, including an image of the Buddha in repose just before dying, a Christian cross, followed by Shōtoku's image in 607, the year of Hōryūji's construction. This image of Shōtoku was my introduction to the figure I would later study for my dissertation in the Buddhist Studies program at the University of Wisconsin.

Although this manga on a particular Buddhist *sūtra* does not mention Shōtoku's lectures or texts, we can find such information in other manga that address Japanese Buddhist history. Indeed, one of the other manga I have kept is titled *Nihon no Bukkyō* (Japanese Buddhism), which devotes five out of some one hundred seventy-

five pages to Shōtoku's role in the spread of Buddhism. The first frame of this section shows Shōtoku playing chess against an unseen opponent, while a miniature version of Empress Suiko sits atop his shoulder, intimating to him: "By leaving everything to you [as regent], I am at peace" (Umehara 34). Shōtoku thinks to himself: "I will rule the country with Buddhism as the foundation. Now, what's my next move?" (34). This section also recounts other well-known events from Shōtoku's life found in these early sources, including his alleged deathbed utterance: "The world is illusory, only the Buddha is real." This manga also includes six illustrations of Shōtoku's face, each accompanied by a brief description: Shōtoku-the-scholar, politician, philosopher, and so on. Beneath these six faces is written "Founder of Japanese Buddhism." And next to Shōtoku-the-scholar we find three hand-drawn scrolls labeled "*Hokkekyō*," "*Yuimagyō*," and "*Shōmangyō*"—the titles of the three sūtras that serve as the interpretive objects of the *Sangyō-gisho*. Just below those scrolls is a speech bubble attached to Shōtoku-the-scholar in which he simply asserts, "I wrote the *Sangyō-gisho*" (37).

Another section states that Shōtoku "has been understood to" have composed the *Sangyō-gisho*, but does not mention any of the sometimes heated scholarly debates over the texts' authorship that are taken up below. And as is true of manga dedicated solely to Shōtoku's life, *Nihon no Bukkyō* contains short selections of more sophisticated narrative that give the reader the impression of moving back and forth between intellectual registers, or between distinct temporal and spatial lenses. For example, one passage that is clearly distinct from the story-line states Shōtoku lectured on the *SSrīmālā-* and the *Lotus-sūtras* for Empress Suiko, and that "it is said"—although the source remains unstated—that Shōtoku composed the three texts that constitute the *Sangyō-gisho*. This passage concludes by describing Shōtoku as a deeply devoted scholar. Another example reproduces a painting of a well-known pictorial biography depicting Shōtoku as he lectures on the *Srīmālā-sūtra*, thereby offering the reader a mix of time periods and media types that include text and hand-drawn images intercut with a photographic reproduction—in this case, a modern photograph of a medieval painting of a scene from the seventh-century.

Manga Dedicated to Shōtoku

Manga dedicated to Shōtoku's life naturally offer more detailed accounts of his Buddhist activities and so draw more heavily from the accounts found in the *Nihon shoki* and other early texts. For example, *Shōtoku Taishi: Nihon bukkyō no so* (Prince Shōtoku: The Founder of Japanese Buddhism) is divided into five chapters that take up major events from his study, practice, and patronage of Buddhism. One chapter describes his reverence for the Three Jewels of Buddhism, while another addresses the One-Vehicle of the Mahāyāna, a central teaching of the *Srīmālā-sūtra*. I have translated below two passages from the latter chapter that are part of a ten-page sequence depicting Shōtoku's lectures at court on the *Srīmālā-sūtra* and *Lotus-sūtra*. This passage is noteworthy not only because Hyeja is absent, but also because it is the only example from the manga I examined that offers even modest information on the ideas expressed in either Shōtoku's lectures or texts. But even this account simply

repeats basic ideas from the parables of the *Lotus-sūtra*. Indeed, this scene concludes by affirming the sentiments expressed in the *Nihon shoki* and the *Teisetsu* and that are repeated in all the other manga examined below; that is, Shōtoku's lectures at court and composition of the *Sangyō-gisho* are crucial events in the founding of Japanese Buddhism.

These two excerpts are taken from a section titled "Lectures on the Sūtras" (Sachiya, 90–99). The first selection reads:

Narrator: Prince [Shōtoku], despite being busy [with his administrative duties], lectured on the sūtras before Empress Suiko, high government officials, and court ladies.

Shōtoku: Shōman (Sanskrit, *Srīmālā*) of the *Shōmangyō* (Sanskrit, *Srīmālā-sūtra*) is the name of a princess from Kuśala [in India] who married [a prince] from the land of Ayodhya. The sūtra [of which she is the protagonist] describes a path to enlightenment [that is also open to] women.

Empress Suiko: And so it says that even those possessing a woman's body, even a queen [like me] who does not renounce the world, can become a Buddha?

Shōtoku: It does.

Shōtoku: The foundation of the Buddha's teaching is that all humans are equal. He did not discriminate whether one was a man or woman, a monk or layperson.

Narrator: On another occasion, Prince [Shōtoku] lectured on the [*Lotus*]-sūtra at Okamoto Palace, his [primary] residence.

Man in audience: Those talks on the *Shōmangyō* were incredible, and it looks as if these [on the *Lotus-sūtra*] will be equally captivating.

Second man in audience: I'm really looking forward to them. The Prince's lectures on the *Shōmangyō* were very easy to understand, and, [having heard them], I felt as if I moved closer to the teachings of the Buddha.

The second selection reads:

Shōtoku: The sūtra known as *Hokkekyō* (Sanskrit, *Lotus-sūtra*), which contains the Buddha's ultimate teachings, describes seven parables, one of which is the story of the burning house. It tells of a wealthy man whose house goes up in flame while a number of children are playing inside. But the children are entranced by their games and don't notice the fire. No matter how many times [the wealthy man pleads] for them to run, they don't hear him. So he lines up carts pulled by a sheep, a deer, and a cow, and tells the children that he'll give them to those who come out of the house. Hearing this, the children come running out of the house with excitement. Pleased, the wealthy man says that later he'll give them an even better cart. So the wealthy man spared no expense and built a magnificent cart pulled by great white cows, and gave it to all of them. In this way, the wealthy man was able to save all of the children. In this parable of the burning house, the wealthy man represents the Buddha and the children are sentient beings, while the burning house points to the world in which we live. And the carts pulled by the sheep, deer, and cows are meant to represent the provisional teachings that lead to the ultimate truth of Mahāyāna Buddhism; it is the cart pulled by the great white cows that represents the truth of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Young man in audience: Oh, I see.

Shōtoku: In this way, the *Hokkekyō* has the power to save all sentient beings without exception, and it is known as the [text that teaches the] One-Vehicle.

Young man in audience: I see, and so even those of low standing like us can become buddhas.

Old man in audience: I'm very grateful. This is truly the teaching of the Buddha!

Young man in audience: I've made up my mind. From now on, I too will have faith in the Buddha.

Another man in audience: Me too!

Woman in audience: And me too!

Narrator: Based on these lectures that were given by Shōtoku with great conviction, the understanding of Buddhism of those in [Empress] Suiko's court deepened. And in due time, the faith of the people in Buddhism also increased. Soon thereafter, Hōryūji was built.

Modern Scholarship of the *Sangyō-gisho*

From among the accounts in the early texts that are repeated in the manga, modern scholars have been keenly interested in examining those related to the texts' authorship. Indeed, scholars have invested great intellectual effort, involving detailed study of the *Nihon shoki*, *Teisetsu*, and other texts, to recover the historical Shōtoku by proving whether particular achievements ascribed to him are credible. Those advocating the true-composition-hypothesis include Hanayama Shinshō, Kanaji Isamu, Nakamura Hajime, and other well-known Japanese scholars of Buddhism. Their studies include translations, critical editions, and interpretive works, many of which seek not only to confirm Shōtoku's authorship of the *Sangyō-gisho*, but also to reveal the historical significance of the texts, recover their original forms and meaning, and trace their intellectual antecedents to previous East Asian commentaries. By proving Shōtoku's authorship and revealing the indwelling profundity of his three commentaries, these scholars seek to validate their exalted status among the great religious scriptures of East Asia, including treatises by the Chinese monk Jizang (549–623), but also to defend them against the attacks of an increasing number of critics who argue that Shōtoku is not their rightful author.

To this end, Hanayama, Nakamura, and other scholars claim to have recovered Shōtoku's authentic voice and his intended meaning expressed in the *Sangyō-gisho*, texts that they believe reflect not only the author's genius but also the essence or spirit of the Japanese mind. For example, Hanayama, one of the most respected and prolific of this group of scholars, identifies qualities within the texts that he claims clearly exhibit the personality of Shōtoku and the characteristic way of thinking of the Japanese, thereby making skeptics' assertions of continental authorship untenable. And Nakamura describes Shōtoku as "one of the best and most benevolent of all the rulers of Japan and the real founder of Buddhism in Japan," claiming Shōtoku's spirit served as the foundation for the later development of "Japanese thought" (Nakamura, 3). He contends, moreover, that the *Sangyō-gisho* was of great importance for

Japanese Buddhism and the choice of the three texts was “entirely based on the Japanese way of thinking” (17). Thus, while these scholars do not deny Shōtoku studied under Hyeja and other continental Buddhist preceptors, they view the *Sangyō-gisho* as his work alone.

Although most studies of the *Sangyō-gisho* have sought to affirm Shōtoku’s position as Buddhist author and sage, a small number of modern critics have attacked these images and attempted to disprove the historicity of particular accounts. The studies of this group first appeared in the more open intellectual environment of the post-World War II period as scholars were able to challenge ideas which had been held inviolate under imperial orthodoxy. Tsuda Sōkichi was instrumental in beginning a process of identifying inaccuracies in the early myth-histories, such as the *Kojiki* (compiled 712) and the *Nihon shoki*, challenging the veracity of a number of early descriptions of Shōtoku. He argues, for example, that the record of the prince’s lectures at court was fabricated by pious Buddhists, and thus rejects Shōtoku’s authorship of the texts alleged to be based on those lectures.

Tsuda’s studies mark the emergence of the false-composition-hypothesis, which has been elaborated in various ways by Ogura Toyofumi, Fujieda Akira, Koizumi Enjun, Ōyama Seiichi, and other scholars. Those advocating this position offer evidence which they claim proves Shōtoku could not possibly have written the three texts, arguing instead that they must have either been written by a continental author or authors and brought to Japan, or been composed solely or jointly by an immigrant monk or monks from the Korean peninsula residing in Japan, after which they were falsely attributed to Shōtoku. To support their claims, these critics cite a lack of contemporaneous written records describing Shōtoku as an individual and the details surrounding his composition of the texts, noting that the earliest records that do exist are not only filled with embellishments and inaccuracies, but also postdate Shōtoku’s death by at least one hundred years. These scholars dismiss the work of Hanayama and the others as the delusions of the faithful who have, asserts Ōyama, been bewitched by the spell of the legends of Shōtoku’s greatness (Ōyama, 198). Indeed, Ōyama has taken this search for the authentic Shōtoku to its logical extreme, asserting there is no reliable evidence proving his existence prior to the compilation of the *Nihon shoki*; he argues that it was, rather, a confluence of political and religious interests of the eighth century that conspired to fabricate the prince.

Although the principal lines of debate have been drawn between these two camps, a middle position has been elaborated by Hirai Shun’ei and Inoue Mitsusada, proponents of a joint-composition-hypothesis. They believe that although Shōtoku may have participated in some meaningful way in the production of the commentaries, he may not have put brush to paper. Hirai argues that it is improbable that Shōtoku authored the commentaries alone and that he was most likely not even the principal intellectual force behind their production. He believes instead that Shōtoku participated in their planning and composition jointly with a scholar-monk or monks from the Korean peninsula who had immigrated to Japan. As such,

the doubts raised by Tsuda and others that Buddhism was too new in Japan to

have produced an indigenous exegete are logical only if we assume that the three commentaries were written by Shōtoku alone. But this argument would not hold true if they were a joint effort between Shōtoku and one or more immigrant monk-scholars. If this were the case, then even without the necessary time for indigenous thought to develop it would still be possible for the *Sangyō-gisho* to have been written during Shōtoku's lifetime (Hirai 536).

Hirai thus argues that only if one takes composition to be the act of setting brush to paper could the false-composition-hypothesis be accurate. He also argues that the composition of the commentaries by Shōtoku shows the prince's desire to fashion his image on the model of Emperor Wu of Liang (464 – 549) as part of a broader effort to elevate Japan's cultural status relative to that of Shōtoku's contemporary Emperor Yang (569 – 618) of the Sui dynasty (581 – 618). Hirai thus describes the composition of the three commentaries as part of a broader effort to assert the legitimacy of the emergent Yamato (the ancient name for Japan) Buddhist tradition. That is, Shōtoku sought to challenge the prestige of Emperor Yang by proving that local Japanese Buddhist traditions had, despite the relatively recent transmission of Buddhism to the archipelago, attained a high level of proficiency. Hirai argues that in Shōtoku's era a country's level of Buddhist competency and sophistication was an essential gauge of its status as a developed society. And while building temples, conducting rituals, and other such activities were considered basic indicators of this level of attainment, more important still was developing an indigenous commentarial tradition.

In his study of the *Sangyō-gisho*, Inoue Mitsusada identifies a gradual shift in the relative roles attributed to Hyeja and Shōtoku in the composition of the three texts. He argues that in the Nara period (710 – 784) it was widely accepted that Hyeja “symbolized the significant influence and participation of Korean monks in the composition of the three commentaries,” which agrees with Inoue's own hypothesis that they were written with the help of these monks (Inoue, 201). Over time, however, Hyeja's role diminished as a later group of texts described him as a participant in the composition of the second (referred to as the “extensive commentary”), not the first, version of the *Shōmangyō-gisho*. Inoue tracks the elaboration of stories by which Shōtoku's position and authority in the actual production of the commentaries gradually shifted, as he eventually came to be viewed not as a “disciple of a Korean monk-scholar but as the reincarnation of a holy Chinese monk” (301). At the end of this process, “Prince Shōtoku thus became established as a scholar greater than his principal preceptor Hyeja” (300).

Manga and Exegesis as Distinct Media of Historical Expression

While each of the three camps draws distinct conclusions regarding the relationship between Hyeja and Shōtoku in the composition of the *Sangyō-gisho*, they share a disciplinary history and scholarly medium that reflects the assumptions and methods of traditional Japanese Buddhist studies. As stated above, they have focused on recovering the details surrounding the texts' composition, and have produced highly detailed works of impressive scholarship that provide their readers with copious foot-

notes, useful comparisons to related texts and authors, and detailed analyses of the historical context in which the *Sangyō-gisho* were likely composed. Their study of that context includes critical historical analysis of texts like the *Nihon shoki* and the *Teisetsu*, an inventory of the Buddhist texts that would have been available in Japan during Shōtoku's lifetime, and an assessment of the degree to which members of the royal line would have been educated, among other such issues.

As suggested above, moreover, their work offers barriers to entry—temporal, monetary, linguistic, and educational—that are high. That is, the scholarly works of Hanayama, Tsuda, or Inoue are not only costly relative to the manga, but are also frequently written in complicated academic prose that freely incorporates passages of classical Japanese and Chinese as well as technical Buddhist terms. Assuming that readers will have mastered the requisite linguistic skills, this medium rarely includes the diacritic markings noted above, which are commonly inserted into manga and other sorts of texts to aid Japanese readers pronounce difficult or obscure words. As such, this body of scholarship, as a medium of historical expression, differs in key ways from the various non-traditional media that take Shōtoku's authorship of the *Sangyō-gisho* as a given and are unconcerned with these debates.

Among these alternative media, the manga offer a particularly illuminating contrast because they represent, in many ways, the antithesis of these scholarly studies since they are inexpensive, readily available, and popular. They offer a combination of simple written and graphic material in a disposable form that is meant to be consumed quickly and then discarded. Indeed, Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes that a typical Japanese manga reader takes just 3.75 seconds to read a single page. Thus, the selections from *Shōtoku Taishi: Nihon bukkyō no so* described above would take an average reader less than one minute to complete. In less than sixty seconds, this average reader would obtain essential information about these key events from Japanese history that have been the subject of extensive scholarly research. Typically, Shōtoku expresses interest in Buddhism at a young age; Hyeja and other Buddhist monks from the Korean peninsula arrive in Yamato; Shōtoku studies under Hyeja and quickly masters Buddhist teachings; the prince lectures on those teachings at court; the audience is deeply moved and Empress Suiko rewards Shōtoku with a gift of land that he donates to Hōryūji; the Buddha-Dharma flourishes on the archipelago with Shōtoku as its first Japanese patriarch.

Manga Depictions of Shōtoku's Relation to Hyeja in the Composition of the *Sangyō-gisho*

Each of the following manga, which are dedicated to Shōtoku's life, offers a mix of these elements, portraying his study of Buddhist teachings under Hyeja but depicting the composition of the *Sangyō-gisho* as his individual work. One example is *Shōtoku Taishi: Asuka Jinbutsuden*, which is translated into English on the cover as "Shōtoku Taishi: The Legendary Hero of the Asuka Era." In this manga we see Shōtoku as a young man seated before a scroll, with accompanying text that reads, "The young prince assiduously studied Buddhism." Soon thereafter, we see Hyeja's arrival in Japan and the development of an increasingly close relationship with the prince (Hayakawa 19).

166). In another section, beneath a photograph of what is described as Shōtoku's own handwritten manuscript of the *Hokke-gisho*, is written: "The *Hokke-gisho*, composed by the prince, is the oldest extant commentary on a Buddhist sūtra [in Japan], and is one of [the three texts] that constitute the *Sangyō-gisho*" (166). The manga also depicts a conversation between the prince and Hyeja dated to the eleventh month of 615. Hyeja tells Shōtoku, "We must say goodbye again. I've taught you everything. It's no longer necessary for me to be by your side" (166). Before he returns to his homeland, Hyeja says to his student: "The *Sangyō-gisho* is a splendid [piece of work]. I will take it back to my country" (179).

Another example is *Shōtoku Taishi: Hōryūji o tateta seijika* (*Prince Shōtoku: The Statesman who Built Hōryūji*). On one of the first few pages we see Shōtoku seated in the traditional seiza position at his desk with brush in hand, an illegible scroll laid out before him. His table and cushion appear to be suspended in air in front of Hōryūji's Yumedono (Hall of Dreams), where Shōtoku had been known to engage in meditation. In the middle of the manga, we find a short section showing Shōtoku studying the *Srīmālā-sūtra* with Hyeja. The prince asks his teacher about the essence of the sūtra and is told it teaches that one must be willing to sacrifice everything to follow the true Buddhist path—that one must be prepared to offer even one's own body to a hungry lion.

But a later section, titled "*Sangyō-gisho*," describes Shōtoku's composition of the three texts with no mention of his teacher: "After removing himself from political life, the prince put forth great effort, from early morning to late evening, studying Buddhism. In this way, he composed commentaries on three Buddhist sūtras: the *Lotus*, the *Vimalakīrtinirdesa*, and the *Srīmālādevī*. It is said that the [texts] he composed were of the highest quality" (Nagahara, 116). The next frame shows Shōtoku standing with a scroll in hand, saying, "Finally, it's complete. I will give this to Empress Kashikiyahime (Empress Suiko)" (116-7). Similarly, the next panel states: "It is said that the *Sangyō-gisho*, which are commentaries on three sūtras (*the Srīmālādevī*, *Lotus*, and the *Vimalakīrtinirdesa*), are our country's earliest scholarly books. And while they are called commentaries, they are not simply explanations of [these sūtra's individual] words; rather, in a number of passages, Shōtoku offers his own interpretations of these texts. The content of these three texts are as follows: the *Srīmālādevī-sūtra* is the story of Queen Srīmālā, the daughter of India's King Prasena-jit, who expounds the teachings of Sākyamuni. The *Vimalakīrtinirdesa* tells the story of the layman Vimalakīrti, who, in an unexpected turn of events, teaches the monks [the Dharma]. Finally, the *Lotus-sūtra* teaches that all beings who follow the Buddha's Dharma will be saved. Although it is said that Prince Shōtoku alone composed the *Sangyō-gisho*, one hypothesis is that while Shōtoku was the main contributor, the monks and scholars [in his service], just as they had done with the [historical texts known as the] *Tennōki* and the *Kokki*, contributed [in some way to their composition]" (116-7). This example is noteworthy for its invocation of key markers of the texts' value using the phrase "it is said": that is, it is said that Shōtoku's texts are of the highest quality and that they are Japan's earliest scholarly books. But the passage is also of interest because it is the only example to address even indirectly

the possibility that Shōtoku was not the sole author of the *Sangyō-gisho*. Even so, it describes him as the main contributor to the texts' composition and says nothing about the doubts of Tsuda and his successors.

We conclude by returning to *Shōtoku Taishi: Nihon Bukkyō no so*, where we find the same pattern: we see the prince studying Buddhist doctrine under Hyeja, but his teacher is absent from the scenes depicting the texts' composition. Indeed, in the scene reproduced below, we read: "Prince [Shōtoku] composed commentaries on three sutras: the *Lotus*, *Vimalakīrti*, and *Srīmālā*. He put all his effort into writing these texts, which came to serve as the foundation for the spirit of the Japanese people," clearly echoing the sentiments expressed by Nakamura Hajime (114).⁵



But this manga is also interesting because of what we discover about its artist and writer. The biographical information states it was illustrated by Shiba Jōtarō, whose artistic work has focused mainly on Buddhism and Japanese history, while the narrative was composed by Sachiya Hiro さちやひろ, who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Indian Philosophy from the Humanities Department of Tokyo University, where he also completed graduate work. We are told that his pen name, "Sachiya Hiro," is based on the Sanskrit term *satya* ("truth") and the Greek word *philo* ("love"). His biography lists just a few of his many publications on Buddhism, including titles on Śākyamuni and his disciples, the history of Buddhism, and a collection of Buddhist stories. He is described as an individual "seeking out

the meaning of Buddhist thought for people living today, and the simplicity of the style with which he explicates these issues has attracted widespread attention” (154).

The popularity of Sachiya Hiro’s work and the Shōtoku manga more broadly suggests that this medium resonates with readers and that their depictions of the *Sangyō-gisho* must be considered part of a living textual tradition. That is, just as Tessa Morris-Suzuki argues, it is crucial to listen attentively and seriously to the range of voices that tell us about the past, whether expressed in medieval poetry, exegesis, and artwork, or in modern scholarly monographs, manga, or YouTube clips. Indeed, the large body of received scholarship on the *Sangyō-gisho* has operated largely in isolation from other academic fields, and has, by privileging the exegetical and erudite as the only serious way to understand the *Sangyō-gisho*, deprived readers of the opportunity to investigate how communities outside monastic elites or modern academics have come into contact with and understood this important event from early Japanese history. Our understanding of other non-traditional materials will help us to think more broadly about the original texts they are based upon. Pondering questions about format, access and transmitted values in relation to media like manga, sheds light on how different audiences are understanding and perhaps even recasting traditional texts. Such transformations are no less—and perhaps increasingly more—relevant to understanding a living work than the received scholarship itself.

Notes

1. Tessa Morris-Suzuki addresses this issue in describing the recent controversy in Japan over manga produced by Kobayashi Yoshinori. In his work he attempts to justify Japanese colonialism in Taiwan and Korea, dismisses the historicity of the “comfort women”, and has made other controversial claims. And while his work has elicited harsh criticisms from social commentators and historians, it highlights the “fundamental dilemmas of debating history through the medium of the comic book. Written critiques of Kobayashi’s texts expressed in academic essays and magazine articles, however valid their arguments, seem to have only a rather limited power to reduce the impact of the comics on the imagination of readers” (Morris-Suzuki 189).

2. These images of Shōtoku have also been transmitted through a wealth of non-literary material that includes statues, and pictorial biographies, some of which are believed to date from soon after Shōtoku’s death. A Shōtoku discourse was also transmitted through the performance of rituals at Hōryūji commemorating the prince’s lectures on the *Srīmālā-* and *Lotus-sūtras*, and through the interpretive accounts of these pictorial biographies given by monks to lay believers, among other means. Over time, such images were embellished through the appearance of a body of auspicious omens, predictions, and supernatural events. These accounts claim, for example, Shōtoku could speak at birth, faced the east and chanted “hail to the Buddha” at the age of two, and at seven was capable of reading Buddhist texts sent from the continent. He was believed to possess the gift of clairvoyance and the Solomon-like ability to listen simultaneously to the claims of ten men and produce a sagacious judgment for each. Shōtoku was also connected by rebirth or other means to central Buddhist figures including Śākyamuni Buddha, Maitreya (the Buddha of the future), Avalokitesvara (the bodhisattva of compassion), Queen Srīmālā (the protagonist of the *Srīmālā-sūtra*), Bodhidharma (the first patriarch of Chan Buddhism), and Huisi (515-577; the third patriarch of Chinese Tiantai). He later was said to have reappeared to the faithful as he reincarnated or manifested in dreams or

other forms, including as Emperor Shōmu (701 – 756), and other prominent figures.

3. While many manga focus on the significance of Shōtoku's political and religious achievements, others are more concerned with the prince as an individual and his personal relationships. For example, the exquisitely drawn seven-part manga titled *Hizuru tokoro no Tenshi* (*The Prince from the Land of the Rising Sun*) by Yamagishi Ryoko, focuses on Shōtoku's relationships with the women in his life, particularly his amours, and is somewhat risqué as it displays partial female nudity.

4. I wish to thank Furuta Ayako for her kind assistance in securing permission to reprint images from *Shōtoku Taishi: Asuka Jinbutsuden* and from *Shōtoku Taishi: Nihon bukkyō no so*. I also wish to thank Popurasha for granting me permission to reprint these images from *Shōtoku Taishi: Asuka Jinbutsuden*, and also the team that produced it: author Mizutani Toshiki, editor Kaku Kōzō, and artist Hayakawa Daisuke.

5. I wish to thank Suzuki Publishing Co., Ltd., Sachiya Hiro (the writer), and Shiba Jōtarō (the artist) for giving me permission to reproduce this image from *Shōtoku Taishi: Nihon bukkyō no so*.

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