

Sanmi no Tsubone: Ashikaga Wife, Imperial Consort, Buddhist Devotee and Patron

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This article examines the life of Kiyohara (Furuichi) Taneko, better known as Sanmi no Tsubone (1583–1658), to spotlight the role that Buddhism played in the lives of elite widowed women. Married to the son of an Ashikaga shogun and later, after his death, to Emperor Goyōzei (r. 1586–1611), she bore three sons who became heads of imperial monasteries called *monzeki*. After Goyōzei's death, she retired to Iwakura north of Kyoto and constructed a splendid hall and other buildings on the grounds of her new residence, which she filled with images symbolic of teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. The sculptures were all carved by the famous Nichiren priest-sculptor, Nichigo (1580–1649). Sanmi no Tsubone also patronized the neighboring temples, Jissōin and Daiunji, donating a set of paintings to the former and commissioning a substitute image of the latter's *hibutsu*. After her death, Sanmi no Tsubone's residence was officially designated as the temple Shōkōji by Emperor Gomizunoo and, for the next century and a half, it was headed by a succession of Nichiren priests. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the temple fell into ruin and the images and records were transferred to Daiunji and Jissōin. I seek to recreate the layout of Sanmi no Tsubone's "Lotus Sutra universe" through extant images, textual records, and images by the same sculptor preserved at other temples.

Keywords: Sanmi no Tsubone 三位局, Kiyohara (Furuichi) Taneko 清原 (古市) 胤子, Hōseiin 法誓院, Hokke sect 法華宗, *Lotus Sutra* 法華經, Nichigo 日護, Shōkōji 證光寺, Jissōin 実相院, Daiunji 大雲寺, Sanpōji 三宝寺

Introduction

This article will examine the life of Kiyohara (Furuichi) Taneko 清原 (古市) 胤子, better known as Sanmi no Tsubone 三位局 (1583–1658), highlighting her religious convictions which were manifested in the sacred realm she created at her private residence.¹ Born into an era of political and social upheaval, she was married to the eldest son of the last Ashikaga shogun and later, after his death, became a consort of Emperor Goyōzei 後陽成.

1 Texts alternately cite Taneko's surname as Kiyohara or Furuichi. See below n. 8.

After Emperor Goyōzei's death, she retired to Iwakura 岩倉 in the mountains north of Kyoto and constructed a splendid hall and other buildings on the grounds of her villa, which she filled with sculptures representing teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*. Following her death at age seventy five, Sanmi no Tsubone's temple-residence was officially designated by Retired Emperor Gomizunoo 後水尾 as the Hokke sect temple Hōenzan Shōkōji 法圓山證光寺. With initial backing from the retired emperor, Empress Tōfukumon'in 東福門院, and Sanmi's three sons, for the next century and a half it was headed by a succession of Nichiren priests.² Under the leadership of the first priest Nittō 日任, the temple's landholdings were expanded to provide further financial support.³ It became recognized as one of the sixteen Hokke 法華 sect head temples (called *honji* 本寺 or *honzan* 本山) in Kyoto.⁴ The combination of this status and the temple's imperial connections helped to attract notable priests.

Unfortunately Shōkōji has not survived. Sanmi no Tsubone's grave is all that remains near where her temple once stood in Iwakura. Records reveal that after Shōkōji fell into ruin during the late nineteenth century, the objects and documents, and even buildings, were transferred to the nearby related temples Jissōin 実相院 and Daiunji 大雲寺.⁵ However, over the course of the century that followed, the majority of the artifacts were dispersed. To date, I have only been able to locate a carved wooden plaque bearing the temple's name that once hung above the entranceway and about one third of the original icons, but by examining extant textual records as well as imagery by the same sculptor preserved at other temples, I will attempt to describe the layout and imagery originally at Shōkōji and the iconographic "universe" Sanmi created for herself.

Among the primary sources I have utilized is the history of Sanmi no Tsubone's temple compiled by one of its later priests, *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki* 法圓山證光寺記 (Record of Hōenzan Shōkōji, 1720), as well as Edo and Meiji period temple inventories and documents preserved at Jissōin 実相院 where her son Gison 義尊 had served as abbot.⁶ The Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives 京都府立総合資料館 and Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo 東京大学史料編纂所 also house important documents.

Since she is virtually unknown, I will begin with a brief biography of Sanmi no Tsubone, whose childhood name was Taneko 胤子.⁷ The daughter of the samurai Kiyohara

2 Brief biographical information on these priests can be found in the handscroll version of the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki* 法圓山證光寺記 (1720) preserved in the Jissōin Archives.

3 According to the *Rinji shūzen shibarai bo* 臨時修繕支拂簿 (1870, Jissōin Archives) funds to purchase land came from Tōfukumon'in.

4 In addition to textual sources (*Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*) noting Shōkōji's designation as one of the sixteen, there is a woodblock preserved at Jissōin with a map showing the sixteen Hokke sect temples, with Shōkōji prominently featured in the top center.

5 Shōkōji was an affiliate temple of Jissōin, which in Sanmi no Tsubone's day, was headed by one of her sons, Gison. Gison helped to restore the adjacent temple Daiunji and thereafter it was administered by Jissōin as well. Currently Daiunji is an independent temple.

6 The *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki* was compiled by Nissui 日遂, chief priest of Shōkōji, in 1720. There are two manuscript copies in the Jissōin Archives. I am grateful for the cooperation of Iwaya Chizuko 岩谷千寿子 of Jissōin who, on numerous occasions beginning in 2006, has allowed me to examine boxes of documents related to Shōkōji and Sanmi no Tsubone.

7 Primary biographical sources include *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki* 法圓山證光寺記 (1720); "Hōseii Sanmi no Tsubone jijitsu" 法誓院三位局事实在 *Kyōto fu jishikō* 京都府寺誌稿 62: *Jissōin* 実相院 (1905, collection of Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives); Fujii Jōji 藤井譲治 and Yoshioka Masayuki 吉岡真之, comp. *Goyōzei Tennō jitsuroku* 後陽成天皇実録, 2 vols. (Yumani Shobō, 2005).

(Furuichi) Taneyoshi 清原 (古市) 胤榮 (d. 1598)⁸ and Keikōin 桂光院 (d. 1615), a woman of the aristocratic Konoe 近衛 family, Taneko was wed to Ashikaga Yoshihiro 足利義廣 (1572–1605), son of the fifteenth and last Ashikaga shogun, Yoshiaki 義昭 (1537–1597). Around the time Yoshihiro was born, Ashikaga Yoshiaki was enmeshed in a power struggle with the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582). Yoshihiro was sent to Nobunaga as a hostage in the year following his birth (1573), and later (ca. 1587) took the tonsure and entered the Daijōin 大乘院 subtemple at the Fujiwara ancestral temple Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nara, where Taneko's father served as a vassal.⁹ The marriage between Taneko and Yoshihiro was probably arranged before Ashikaga Yoshiaki's death in 1597. Both families had ties with the Konoe court family: Taneko's mother was either the daughter or sister of Konoe Sakihisa 近衛前久 (1536–1612),¹⁰ and Ashikaga Yoshiaki's mother was a daughter of Konoe Hisamichi 近衛尚通 (1472–1544). The marriage of Taneko and Yoshihiro follows the trend for the Konoe family to wed their daughters to members of the Ashikaga shogunal family.¹¹

Yoshihiro succeeded as Yoshiaki's heir, and the couple had two sons.¹² However, within a few years Yoshihiro became ill and died, whereupon Taneko went to live with her Konoe mother.¹³ With her elite family background, one can assume that Taneko was literate and skilled at poetry and other accomplishments. Arrangements were made for her to serve as an attendant in the imperial palace, where she flourished and subsequently became a consort of Emperor Goyōzei (1571–1617). By this time, conditions in Kyoto were beginning to stabilize. Taneko presumably passed her days caring for the needs of the emperor as well as engaging in cultural pursuits and participating in court ritual observances. It was here that she came to be called Sanmi no Tsubone. Her entry into the palace was no doubt facilitated by her Konoe mother, whose sister was Emperor Goyōzei's first and principal consort, Chūwamon'in 中和門院 (Konoe Sakiko 近衛前子, 1575–1630). Taneko seems to have entered after the famous 1609 scandal when several of Emperor Goyōzei's consorts were caught having illicit meetings with young courtiers.¹⁴ The fraught emperor decided to abdicate later that year, although the abdication did not officially take place until 1611.

8 Several sources cite Furuichi 古市 as his surname. The Furuichi was a well-known warrior chieftain family in the old province of Yamato; it is also the name of a place in Yamato. I have used the names for Taneko's father that are recorded in manuscript versions of the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki* in the Jissōin Archives, one of which includes *furigana* for the characters 胤榮 reading "Taneyoshi." Alternate readings for 胤榮 appearing in secondary sources are Tanehide and Tanesakae. There is more than one person with the name 胤榮 in the Furuichi family lineage. Taneko's father is not to be confused with an earlier 胤榮 (d. 1505), who was a well known cultural figure and practitioner of tea. The death date of 1598 for Taneko's father appears in the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*. His posthumous Buddhist name is recorded as Genkōin Kahōin'ei 源光院花實胤榮.

9 The custom of political hostages was common during Japan's Warring States period, when samurai would give members of their family (usually sons) to another samurai as proof of their allegiance. Upon tonsure, Yoshihiro was given the name Gijin 義尋.

10 Sources differ as to whether Keikōin was the daughter or sister of Konoe Sakihisa 近衛前久. Kubo Takako 久保貴子 speculates that she was Sakihisa's daughter. See Kubo 2008, p. 168. I side with Kubo because this is the information given in the 1720 version of the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*, written approximately seventy years after Taneko's death by the chief priest of Shōkōji at that time. Shōkōji maintained close relations with the three imperial monasteries where Taneko's sons had been abbots, so information about her family stands a fair chance of being correct.

11 Kurishima 2004, p. 234. For example, Ashikaga Yoshiteru 足利義輝 was married to a daughter of Konoe Taneie. I am grateful to Gaye Rowley for drawing my attention to this trend and recommending sources.

12 Gison 義尊 (1601–1661) and Jōson 常尊 (1604–1671).

13 His posthumous Buddhist name became Hōgen'in Kōzan Daizenjōmon 法源院高山大禪定門.

14 This was known as the "Inokuma Incident" 猪熊事件 after one of the primary malefactors, the court noble Inokuma Noritoshi 猪熊教利.

Judging from the birth dates of Taneko's children by the emperor, it appears likely that their relationship began a year or so after the incident. Sanmi no Tsubone became the eighth of his nine consorts and bore him three imperial children. The two daughters both died in infancy (1611, 1613). Her son by the emperor was appointed prince-abbot of Shōgoin Imperial Monastery 聖護院門跡,¹⁵ and her two older sons fathered by Ashikaga Yoshihiro were appointed as prince-abbots of the imperial monasteries Jissōin 実相院 and Enman'in 円満院. After Emperor Goyōzei's death, at the age of thirty six, Sanmi herself took vows from a Nichiren sect priest,¹⁶ adopting the Buddhist name Hōseiin 法誓院.¹⁷ It was not uncommon for women of high birth in the early Edo period to become followers of the Hokke or Nichiren sect. Oman no kata お万の方 (Yōjuin 養珠院, 1577–1653), a consort of Tokugawa Ieyasu contemporary with Sanmi no Tsubone, was a zealous devotee, as were other women of the Ōoku 大奥 or women's quarters of Edo castle.¹⁸ Oman no kata allegedly convinced Ieyasu to spare the life of the Nichiren priest Nichion 日遠, and constructed a temple on his behalf, Honnonji 本遠寺, thus playing an active role in the sect's perpetuation.¹⁹ The Hokke sect had powerful adherents in Kyoto, too, including prominent members of the Konoe family.²⁰ It seems likely that Sanmi no Tsubone's inclination toward this sect was fostered in her maternal home. The Hokke sect flourished in Kyoto during Sanmi no Tsubone's lifetime, especially among elite townsmen class (*machishū* 町衆), many of whom cultivated relationships with the court. Emperor Goyōzei was known to have been sympathetic toward the Hokke sect, helping to establish Zuiryūji 瑞龍寺 (ca. 1596), the only Nichiren sect imperial convent in Kyoto.²¹

The Hokke sect's appeal for women undoubtedly lay in its emphasis on the *Lotus Sutra*, which contained passages stating that women were capable of attaining buddhahood. Nichiren himself had proclaimed that women could achieve salvation in their present form through faith in the power of the *Lotus Sutra*, citing as evidence the Devadatta chapter, which contains the well-known parable of the Dragon King's daughter.²² Sanmi no Tsubone was no doubt drawn to the Hokke sect because its teachings focusing on the *Lotus Sutra* resonated with her. The prominence of female deities in this sect, which I will discuss below, may possibly have been a determining factor.

Through the auspices of Emperor Goyōzei's successor son, Gomizunoo, who owned considerable land in Iwakura (approximately 1900 *koku*),²³ Sanmi no Tsubone around

15 Dōkō Hosshinnō 道晃法親王 (1612–1678). A half brother to Gomizunoo, he was favored at court and a frequent guest at cultural events hosted by the retired emperor.

16 Some sources relate that it was Nittō 日任, others Nichigo 日護. Following Emperor Goyōzei's death, she reportedly attended lectures by the chief priest of the Hokke sect temple Honmanji 本満寺 (*Hōzenzan Shōkōji ki*).

17 Her full Buddhist name is Hōseiin Myōkō Nissō Daishi 法誓院妙弘日證大師.

18 Mochizuki Shinchō 1989 and 2002.

19 Mochizuki Seiichi 2007.

20 Beginning with Konoe Masaie 政家 (1445–1505) and his son Hisamichi 尚通. See Nakao 1999, chapter 3, section 1.

21 Founded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's tonsured sister, Nissū 日秀, Zuiryūji was relocated to Ōmi Hachiman in Shiga prefecture in 1961.

22 Nichiren was actively engaged in teaching women and had a significant number of women followers, including lay nuns and married women. Letters written to them can be found among those translated by Burton Watson and others (Watson et al. 1996). See also Watson et al., 1990, pp. 120–121, for a specific reference to the Devadatta chapter and the Dragon King's daughter.

23 Nakamura 2007, p. 109.

1638 moved to northern Iwakura, not far from Jissōin Imperial Monastery headed by her eldest son. Emperor Gomizunoo and Empress Tōfukumon'in often made excursions to this hilly area to view the scenery, hold tea ceremonies, and enjoy such pastimes as gathering mushrooms.²⁴ They had a villa constructed for their daughter Sannomiya 三宮 (1625–1675), known as the Iwakura Goten 岩倉御殿, not far from Sanmi no Tsubone's residence around 1656.²⁵ Prior to the completion of their Shūgakuin villa, they frequently visited Iwakura as well as neighboring Nagatani 長谷 and Hataeda 幡枝, where they had villas as well. Sometimes they sojourned in the area for close to a month.²⁶ Some of these imperial excursions are recounted in priest Hōrin Jōshō's 鳳林承章 *Kakumeiki* 隔莫記 diary (ca. 1635–1668), which specifies visits to Sanmi no Tsubone's residence in 1648 and 1657, during which the retired emperor and empress were served meals or refreshments.²⁷ An inventory of objects at Shōkōji compiled approximately thirty years after Sanmi no Tsubone's death includes a significant number of tea utensils among the large quantity of serving dishes, suggesting that she shared their interest in the tea ceremony.²⁸

Sanmi no Tsubone Transforms Her Residence into a Sacred Realm

Dedicating her days to Buddhist practice centering upon devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*, Sanmi no Tsubone decided to turn her residence into a worship space. For centuries faithful practitioners believed that they could cultivate merit by building structures and commissioning images—acts which would propel them along the path to salvation. Sanmi no Tsubone had a special hall constructed and commissioned the famous Nichiren priest-sculptor Nichigo 日護 (Chūshōin 中正院, 1580–1649) to carve an assembly of deities especially revered in the Hokke sect.²⁹ Nichigo's patrons included Emperor Gomizunoo and Empress Tōfukumon'in as well as the above mentioned consort of Ieyasu, Oman no kata. One source suggests that the emperor and empress may have contributed funds for commissioning the imagery.³⁰

The assembly of icons formed a three dimensional Lotus Mandala (*Hokke mandara* 法華曼荼羅), a composite of deities appearing in events drawn from different chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*.³¹ The central grouping represented a scene from chapter 11 where, as Shaka (Sk. Sakyamuni) was expounding the *Lotus Sutra* to a large assembly on Vulture Peak, Tahō (Sk. Prabhurātna; one of the buddhas of the past whose name means “many treasures”) appeared in the sky in a

24 Nishi 1995, pp. 70–75.

25 For further information, see Ozawa and Nishi 1996, pp. 127–128.

26 After a fire at the imperial palace in 1661, the retired emperor is said to have resided here for a while. Nakamura 2007, p. 107, n. 150; he cites *Kinsei no tenkai* 近世の展開, vol. 5 of *Kyōto no rekishi* 京都の歴史 (1972), p. 506.

27 Akamatsu 1997, vol. 2, pp. 316–317; vol. 4, pp. 206–207.

28 *Shōkōji jūmotsu shodōguchō* 證光寺什物諸道具帳.

29 This hall is described in the *Hōenzen Shōkōji ki* as an *udō* 宇堂. Basic biographical information about Nichigo can be found in “Kishū Yōshūji dainidai Chūshōin Nichigo Shōnin den,” pp. 417–418; but perhaps the best source is “Chūshōin Nichigo Shōnin den” 中正院日護上人傳 written by the Zen prelate Isshi Bunshū 一絲文守. Priest Isshi's original document is preserved at Sanpōji 三宝寺, but the text has been published in *Nichirensū shūshi kenkyū* 日蓮宗々史研究 (Kōkandō Shuppanbu, 1950), vol. 1, pp. 191–196. The former chief priest of Sanpōji, Suzuki Eishō 鈴木英正 published a somewhat fictionalized account of Nichigo's life, *Nichigo Shōnin monogatari* 日護上人物語 (Sanpōji, 2002).

30 “Hōenzen Shōkōji ryaku denki.”

31 The term “mandala” (Jp: *mandara*) is employed loosely in Japan to describe various kinds of religious paintings, often with assemblies of deities or visualizations of a sacred realm.

jeweled stupa and invited the historical Buddha to sit with him. The paired buddhas were common devotional icons at Nichiren sect temples, and positioned around them were other deities singled out for veneration. This kind of configuration can perhaps best be understood through mandalas like the *Hōtōe mandara* 宝塔繪曼荼羅 (Jeweled Stupa Mandala) illustrated in Figure 1, since the sculptures in three dimensional mandalas were often damaged or moved around and original layouts difficult to ascertain. The iconographic program at Sanmi no Tsubone's temple residence was simpler than Figure 1, with fewer deities as will be described below. However, the images were probably arranged on the altar in a similar configuration, arrayed around the paired Buddhas. The installation was completed in 1646. The rituals and devotions performed by Sanmi no Tsubone no doubt including reciting the sutra itself, with the visualization of deities serving as an important device for meditating upon the Buddha realm.

Meiji period records indicate that, after Shōkōji was deserted, the images were transferred to nearby Daiunji where they were enshrined in a hall called the Hokkedō 法華堂 (Lotus Flower Hall).³²

It is possible that the Hokkedō itself was a building from Shōkōji, as represented in a Meiji period woodblock print illustrating the Daiunji temple compound and surrounding temples and shrines (Figure 2).³³ Adjacent to the Hokkedō (see Figure 2a) is a small shrine-like building labeled *chinju* 鎮守, which may possibly have been transferred from Shōkōji as well since the main worship hall and shrine there were conceived together as parts of a



Figure 1. *Hōtōe mandara*. 16th century. Myōshōji 妙政寺, Hiroshima. Image reproduced from *Dai Nichiren ten*.

32 This occurred in 1871. Temple inventory labeled *Meisaisbo* 明細書 [Daiunji] (1895), Jissōin Archives. The same information appears in *Jiin meisaichō* 寺院明細帳 14, Atago 愛宕 4, section on Daiunji (collection of Kyoto Prefectural Library and Archives).

33 The title of the print, dated 1900, is “Iwakurazan Daiunji oyobi Iwakura Jinja, Jissōin nado no kei” 岩倉山大雲寺及石座神社實相院等之景 (View of Daiunji, Iwakura Shrine, and Jissōin in the Iwakura Mountains). I am grateful to Sherry Fowler for finding and presenting this print to me. The explanatory text states that the Hokkedō at Daiunji was constructed by Sanmi no Tsubone. The same information is recorded in the section on the Hokkedō in the *Jiin meisaichō* with a note that it was originally part of Shōkōji, but after Shōkōji “merged” with Daiunji in 1871, the building came to be called the Hokkedō. Since the construction of a Hokkedō is not mentioned in accounts of Daiunji’s rebuilding in the seventeenth century, I think it is likely that it is the main worship hall from Sanmi no Tsubone’s Shōkōji, which was relocated to Daiunji at the time of the former temple’s dissolution.

unified iconographic program. The Hokkedō no longer exists, however, and the current chief priest at Daiunji has been able to locate only a few of the images originally housed there. To help understand what Sanmi no Tsubone’s sculptural Lotus Mandala looked like, I examined a similar configuration of icons at a temple in northwestern Kyoto founded by the priest-sculptor Nichigo—Sanpōji 三宝寺, which is still more or less intact.³⁴ Using the combined resources of the textual account of Sanmi no Tsubone’s sculptural configuration recorded in the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*, surviving Shōkōji sculptures, and the Sanpōji images

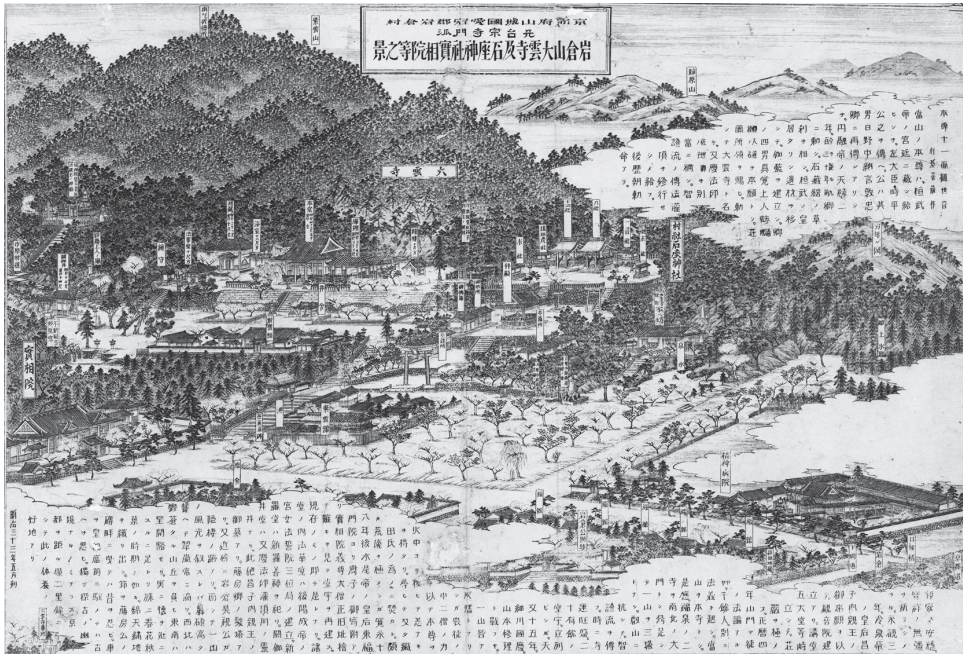


Figure 2. Iwakurazan Daiunji oyobi Iwakura Jinja, Jissōin nado no kei 岩倉山大雲寺及石座神社實相院等之景. 1900. Private collection.



Figure 2a. Detail.

34 Sanpōji seems to have maintained close connections with Shōkōji. The fourth generation head of Sanpōji, Nitsū 日通, also served as chief priest at Shōkōji (fifth generation).

as reference, I will attempt to recreate the layout and imagery originally in Sanmi no Tsubone's worship complex.



Figure 3. Nichiren, Shaka, and Tahō, by Nichigo. 17th century. Sanpōji, Kyoto.

At the center of the main altar were the paired Buddhas Shaka (left) and Tahō (right) seated together on a lotus pedestal. In between them was a wooden tablet inscribed with the characters making up the sutra's title, "Namu myōhō renge kyō" 南無妙法蓮華經 (Praise to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma).³⁵ Positioned around the paired buddhas were four bodhisattvas floating on clouds and four guardian kings (*shitenmō*). An image of Nichiren was placed in front or to the side. The whereabouts of this central group of icons from Shōkōji is unknown, but Figure 3 shows the paired Shaka and Tahō sculptures by Nichigo, as well as a sculptural portrait of Nichiren, from the main hall (*bondō*) at Sanpōji. In the worship hall at Shōkōji, perhaps in subsidiary altar alcoves located to the right and/or left of the central altar, were placed two tabernacles or *zushi* 厨子, enshrining images of Kishimojin 鬼子母神 (Sk. Hārīti) and Shaka surrounded by one thousand small Buddhas (*sentabutsu* 千躰仏), respectively.

The Kishimojin image that Nichigo created for Shōkōji has survived and is presently housed in the *bondō* at Daiunji (Figure 4). Kishimojin is the child-eating ogress in Indian lore who, after converting to Buddhism, became a protector of women and children. In addition to being worshipped independently, she was linked to the Jūrasetsunyo 十羅刹女, ten daughters of demons known as *rasetsu*.³⁶ According to the Dhāraṇī chapter 陀羅尼品 (chapter 26) of the *Lotus Sutra*, they went with Kishimojin to visit the Buddha and in unison vowed to "shield

35 The name of the *Lotus Sutra* itself was considered a central object of worship in the Hokke sect; this sacred tablet with the name of the sutra inscribed on it was called the *daimoku* 題目.

36 For information on the Jūrasetsunyo and a discussion of links between this subject and female patrons, see Fabricand-Person 2002.

and guard those who read, recite, and uphold the sutra and spare them from decline or harm,” claiming that anyone who failed to heed their spells would have their head split into seven pieces.³⁷ Together, Kishimojin and the Jūrasetsunyo were believed to protect devotees and defend the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and thus became important guardian deities in the Nichiren sect which based its doctrines on this text.³⁸

The former Shōkōji Kishimojin sculpture by Nichigo stands about one meter high (Figure 4a). It was somewhat roughly carved of wood and painted; traces of red pigment are still visible on the goddess’s face and robes. Following the standard iconography, Kishimojin cradles a baby in her left arm and holds a sprig of pomegranate (perhaps symbolic of fertility) in her right hand. The door panels for the black lacquered *zushi* bear detailed paintings of the Jūrasetsunyo or ten demon daughters (Figure 4b).³⁹ Portrayed as beautiful women rather than threatening demons, the colorful robes of each demon daughter differ, as do the attributes they possess.⁴⁰ There are five figures painted on each door, positioned so that when the doors are opened, they face inward toward the central icon of Kishimojin. The demon daughters appear to be descending from the sky, and Kishimojin herself stands on a base which appears to be carved to resemble curling rock forms, perhaps alluding to their visit to Vulture Peak to hear Shaka preach. It is believed that Nichigo did the paintings as well as the sculpture of Kishimojin.



Figure 4. Kishimojin, by Nichigo. 17th century. Daiunji, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji)

Figure 4a.
Detail.

Figure 4b.
Jūrasetsunyo.

37 Watson 1993, p. 310.

38 For a detailed discussion of how these deities were regarded by Nichiren and came to be worshiped as guardians of the *Lotus Sutra*, see Miyazaki 1958.

39 Only the right-hand door is illustrated here because the left-hand one is partially broken and in need of restoration.

40 For canonical descriptions of their forms, see Fabricand-Person 2002, pp. 346–347.

Another large *zushi* that was originally part of Sanmi no Tsubone's arrangement of icons at Shōkōji, presently kept in Daiunji's *bondō*, contains a group of images identified as *sentabutsu* or one thousand buddhas (Figure 5). Representations of "thousand buddhas" often appear in scenes showing the paired buddhas Shaka and Tahō seated in the jeweled stupa, their quantity intended to symbolize the buddhas' infinite salvation power.⁴¹ In the center of the former Shōkōji one thousand buddha *zushi* is a standing Shaka, carved of wood and gilded with gold, approximately 35 centimeters tall. The surrounding buddhas are lined up in 22 tiers in the center and in 10 tiers on the right and left (not visible in the photo). Each buddha is approximately eight centimeters in height and its hands form the same mudras, the *abhaya* (dispelling fear) and *varada* (bestowing blessings) *mudra*. The images are comparatively roughly carved, and the wood left unpainted. Similar examples of *sentabutsu* by Nichigo can be found at various Nichiren temples in western Japan.⁴²

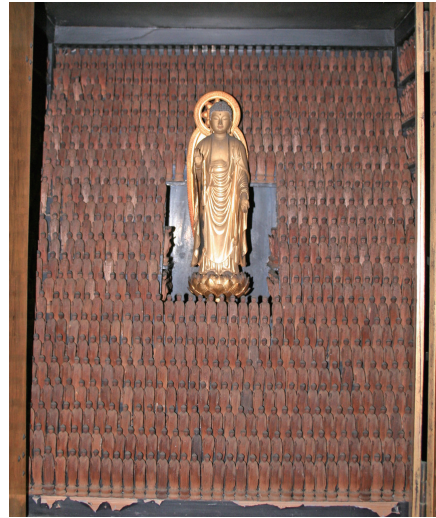


Figure 5. Sentaibutsu 千体仏, by Nichigo. Daiunji, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji)

One of the most unusual icons originally enshrined in Sanmi no Tsubone's main worship hall, depicting a female deity closely linked with the *Lotus Sutra*, Merōfu Kannon 馬郎婦観音, is preserved at Jissōin (Figure 6). It was crafted from fabric by Empress Tōfukumon'in, who presented Sanmi no Tsubone with many gifts over the years.⁴³ According to Buddhist chronicles, Merōfu (literally the "wife of Master Ma") was a beautiful woman living in Jinshatan 金沙灘 in Shanxi 陝西 during the early ninth century who promised to marry any man who could memorize the Fumon 普門 chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Kannon kyō* 観音経) in one night.⁴⁴ By the next morning, twenty men could recite the scripture. Since she could marry only one of them,



Figure 6. Merōfu Kannon, by Tōfukumon'in. Jissōin, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji)

41 For example, the national treasure Hasedera bronze plaque dated to the late 7th or early 8th century.

42 For example, Myōkenji 妙顕寺 and Sanpōji 三宝寺 in Kyoto; Myōhōji 妙法寺 in Maizuru; Myōenji 妙圓寺 and Myōshōji 妙照寺 in Miyazu.

43 Among these gifts, but no longer extant, was a pair of screens with portraits of poets crafted from fabric by Tōfukumon'in accompanied by *waka* written by famous courtiers. For information on Tōfukumon'in's collage-like depictions of Merōfu, see Fister 2007.

44 For historical background on the worship of this deity, see the article cited in n. 44.

the young woman tried to narrow down the field by asking them to memorize the *Diamond Sutra* 金剛般若經. Half of the men completed this task, at which point the woman said she would marry the one who could memorize the entire *Lotus Sutra* within three days. The only man who passed this test was a man named Ma 馬. However, the young woman became ill on the wedding day and died. Her body rapidly putrefied and she was quickly buried. A few days later, an elderly monk stopped by Ma's house and inquired about the health of his new wife. Upon being informed of her death, he asked to be taken to her burial place. They opened the casket and found the bones of her skeleton linked by a gold chain. Since bones linked by a golden chain were regarded as a sign of a holy person, the monk declared that the young woman was a manifestation of a great sage who had appeared to help the people in this region overcome their evil karma. After washing the bones, he carried them on his staff and flew away. Other accounts of this story have minor variations; for example, in one version, in the coffin they discovered two bones that had changed into gold and the bones then flew away.

In later versions of the tale, the woman came to be identified as a manifestation of Fugen or Kannon Bodhisattva, and her miraculous appearance inspired many people of the region to convert to Buddhism. This linkage of Merōfu with Kannon is difficult to date, but had probably occurred by the twelfth century. Merōfu appears often as a subject in the poems and paintings by Southern Song and Yuan dynasty Chan priests. Examples were brought to Japan, and Merōfu came to be included among the thirty three forms of Kannon. Japanese court women, in particular, found Merōfu to be an inspiring role model. Women were often associated negatively with sexuality, but by encouraging men to focus on sutras, Merōfu led them toward the path of detachment and inner peace and, in the end, she herself remaining undefiled.

Merōfu is depicted as a lovely, gentle woman who looks intently at the scroll (presumably the *Kannon kyō*) she is holding. Women such as Sanmi no Tsubone were no doubt attracted to the theme of beautiful, literate laywoman as bodhisattva—a role model to which they could relate. Represented as an ordinary woman—no auxiliary arms or heads and not even a halo—she was a potent symbol of female lay piety.

Empress Tōfukumon'in created this Merōfu image by cutting out forms from stiff paper and covering them with cloth, carefully folding over the edges so stray threads would not show. The cloth-covered cutouts were then arranged and glued onto a plain weave silk background, which was mounted on a panel and then placed within the same type of tabernacle used for sculptural imagery, underscoring the fact that it was intended as an icon. Several nearly identical Merōfu images by Tōfukumon'in are known, and in the autumn of 2009 I discovered yet another Merōfu by her, which she presented to the Nichiren priest-sculptor of Sanmi no Tsubone's icons, Nichigo, preserved at his temple Sanpōji.⁴⁵ All of Tōfukumon'in's Merōfu are in temple collections, but in most cases there is no record of where they were originally placed. Shōkōji temple inventories clearly document that the Merōfu image was enshrined in Sanmi no Tsubone's main worship hall, confirming the importance of this deity to her.

Separate from the main worship hall, in a small shrine building⁴⁶ (formally consecrated in 1653) located on the hill behind Sanmi no Tsubone's living quarters were installed a group

45 Merōfu images by Tōfukumon'in can be found in the collections of Eigenji 永源寺 (Shiga prefecture), Enshōji 円照寺 (Nara), and Enjuji 延寿寺 (Hikone).

46 Referred to as *gūshi* 宮祠 in the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*.

of Shinto related deities often found at Nichiren temples. (Shinto deities were incorporated into Nichiren worship practices from the time of its founder.) Included were the *sanjū banjin* 三十番神 (thirty protectors of the *Lotus Sutra*, one deity for each day of the month) and the *sankō tenshi* 三光天子 (three heavenly gods of light—sun, moon, stars).⁴⁷ A lacquered *zushi* containing the *sanjū banjin* and *sankō tenshi* from Sanmi no Tsubone’s compound is preserved in the *hondō* at Daiunji (Figure 7). The *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki* (Record of Hōenzan Shōkōji) does not specify, but these were presumably made by the sculptor of her Buddhist imagery, Nichigo, since he did a similar set for his temple Sanpōji. The small seated wood *sanjū banjin* sculptures, approximately six to seven centimeters in height each, are organized in six tiers like traditional Japanese doll arrangements. Among them are three female gods, one of whom is Amaterasu. Each of the *sanjū banjin* is seated on a dais and, as is typical for tutelary deities, many are dressed in court costumes. In the center of the uppermost tier stand the three heavenly gods of light or *sankō tenshi* 三光天子 (Figure 7a). They, too, form part of the assembly of deities appearing in the *Lotus Sutra* and are regarded as protectors of the Buddhist teachings.

Another divine protectress venerated and enshrined by Sanmi no Tsubone at Shōkōji was Shichimen Myōjin 七面明神, the tutelary deity of Mt. Shichimen 七面山 located north of Mt. Minobu 身延山, the sacred mountain in present day Yamanashi prefecture where Nichiren lived in exile. According to tradition, the goddess Shichimen Myōjin made a vow to protect the *Lotus Sutra* after hearing Nichiren’s sermons. Oman no kata made a famous pilgrimage in 1619 to the summit of Mt. Minobu, which was off limits to women, to worship Shichimen Myōjin, thus paving the way for the worship of this divinity among elite women.⁴⁸ Sanmi no Tsubone is said to have been a fervent devotee.⁴⁹

The whereabouts of Shōkōji’s Shichimen Myōjin, presumably sculpted by Nichigo,

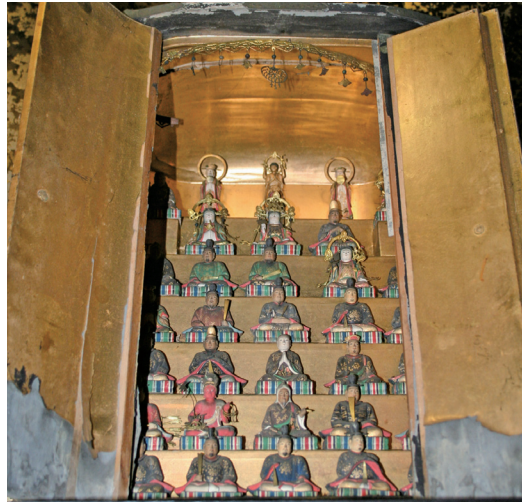


Figure 7. Sanjū banjin, by Nichigo. Daiunji, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji)



Figure 7a. Sankō tenshi, by Nichigo. Daiunji, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji)

47 See Miyazaki 1958, pp. 77–93 for a discussion of Nichiren and the *sanjū banjin*, and the latter’s incorporation into the Nichiren sect’s pantheon of guardian deities. Lucia Dolce has also published an article tracing the history of their worship. See Dolce 2003.

48 Mochizuki Shinchō 1996.

49 *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*.

originally installed in a small shrine building (possibly together with the *sanjū banjin* discussed above) within her temple compound, is presently unknown but one can assume it resembled another image of Shichimen Myōjin by Nichigo preserved at the Nichiren sect temple Hōzenji 法善寺 in Tokyo (Figure 8).⁵⁰ The round-faced goddess, approximately 30 centimeters in height, holds a magic jewel in her left hand and key to the sutra treasury (*hōzō* 法蔵) in her right hand. She is crowned and dressed in brilliant brocaded Chinese robes and stands firmly on a pedestal carved to resemble rocks, presumably evoking her home on Mt. Shichimen.

Most of the female divinities worshipped by Sanmi no Tsubone—Kishimojin, Merōfu Kannon, Shichimen Myōjin, and the female members of the *sanjū banjin*—to some extent resemble court ladies. This made them more approachable to elite women, for whom they served as role models, illustrating the spiritual powers that could be attained through faith in the *Lotus Sutra*. The modeling of female Shinto deities after courtly women conforms to a long tradition in Japan, stemming from beliefs that the imperial family had descended directly from *kami*.⁵¹

Lastly, installed in a separate *zushi*, possibly within the *banshindō* 番神堂 in Sanmi no Tsubone's compound, was a sculpture of Myōken Bosatsu 妙見菩薩, the North or Pole Star deity believed to ward off disaster and increase happiness.⁵² In addition to being a protector of the land, Myōken Bosatsu came to be regarded as a protector of the *Lotus Sutra*. An eighteenth century inventory of Shōkōji, however, records that Sanmi no Tsubone's Myōken Bosatsu was missing after a period when no priest was in residence.⁵³ A replacement was commissioned by the eighteenth chief priest of Shōkōji, Nichigi 日義. While the original does not survive, an image of the same deity by Nichigo is preserved at his temple Sanpōji (Figure 9).



Figure 8. Shichimen Myōjin, by Nichigo. Hōzenji, Tokyo.



Figure 9. Myōken Bosatsu, by Nichigo. Sanpōji, Kyoto.

50 The 1687 temple inventory *Shōkōji jūmotsu shodōguchō* includes Shichimen Myōjin in the list of objects in the *banshindō*, the name frequently used for shrines enclosing the *sanjū banjin*.

51 Guth Kanda 1985, p. 2.

52 The temple inventory *Shōkōji jūmotsu shodōguchō* (1687) includes Myōken Bosatsu in the list of objects in the *banshindō*.

53 [*Shōkōji*] *jūmotsuki*. Recorded in the section at the end listing contributions of Nichigi. The inventory was originally compiled by the priest Nisshun in 1753 and the addendum added by Nichigi in the 1780s.

Sanmi no Tsubone's Patronage of Neighboring Temples

At the same time she was creating her own *Lotus Sutra* universe, Sanmi no Tsubone also patronized the Jissōin Imperial Monastery, headed by one of her sons and its affiliate temple Daiunji (both were Tendai sect temples). She presented two large Buddhist scroll paintings to Jissōin in 1643,⁵⁴ and in 1645 donated to Daiunji a substitute (*mikage no honzon/shinzō* 御影の本尊/新像) of the temple's main image of Eleven-headed Kannon, which was a *hibutsu* 秘仏 (literally “secret buddha”)—an icon ordinarily kept enclosed in a *zushi* and out of view. Sanmi no Tsubone commissioned this “substitute” image from Nichigo, the priest-sculptor responsible for most of the sculptures at Shōkōji.⁵⁵ The substitute Kannon sculpture was donated upon the completion of the refurbishing of Daiunji's *hondō* spearheaded by her son, Gison, the prince-abbot of Jissōin. At this time, many temples and shrines in the Iwakura area, which had been devastated during the Warring States period, were being rebuilt by the combined forces of the imperial family and shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu. On my visits to Daiunji in December 2009, March 2010, and April 2011, I was told that the substitute Kannon was away being conserved, so I have not been able to examine it.

The Sculptural Portrait of Sanmi no Tsubone

Approximately 125 years after Sanmi no Tsubone's death, in 1783, a small portrait sculpture of her (Figure 10) was commissioned by the then chief priest of Shōkōji, Nichigi. The text of a letter from Nichigi appealing for financial support from the three imperial monasteries where her sons had served as abbots—Jissōin, Enman'in, and Shōgoin—survives at Jissōin.⁵⁶ In it, he proposes having a sculpture made modeled upon the cloth picture of Sanmi no Tsubone by Empress Tōfukumon'in. In other words, the Merōfu Kannon discussed earlier had by this time become misidentified as Sanmi no Tsubone.⁵⁷ This was no doubt the result of the



Figure 10. Portrait Sculpture of Sanmi no Tsubone. 1784. Jissōin, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji)

54 A large scroll of the Jūnitenn 十二天 (Twelve Deva Guardians) and a large scroll of the wrathful protective deity Kongō Dōji 金剛童子 (Sk. Vajrakumara). Recorded in the *Kyōto fu jishikō* 62: *Jissōin*, an inventory of the temple's holdings. At present, Jissōin has been unable to locate these paintings.

55 Recorded in the *Daiunji engi*.

56 Transcribed in vol. 3 of the *Onkyūki* preserved in the Jissōin Archives. I am grateful to Hanafusa Miki 花房美紀 for calling my attention to this document and helping to decipher it.

57 An examination of Shōkōji inventories in the Jissōin Archives reveals that the “reidentification” occurred between 1705 and 1720. A helpful document in understanding the circumstances at this time is the *Hōenzan Shōkōji ki*. According to this record, Shōkōji had seen numerous Nichiren sect priests come and go since Nittō 日任 moved in after Sanmi's death. One priest (Nikkan 日侃), sold a number of the buildings, and then became sick and died in 1709. He was succeeded by Nichiji 日慈, who died the following year. Nichiji's successor, Nichiju 日寿, lived there for nine years and repaired some portions of the temple, but by the time his successor Nissui 日遂 moved in (1718) the roof of the shrine had completely collapsed and so the three *zushi* were moved into the main worship hall. Distressed at the dilapidated condition, Nissui appealed to Jissōin for help and received some funds for rebuilding. The *gūshi* 宮祠, *honsha* 本社 (*honden* 本殿), and *haiden* 拜殿 were rebuilt, the *zushi* reinstalled inside the *gūshi* or shrine, and other temple treasures remounted and placed in boxes for preservation.

combination of faded memories, deaths of informed people, the absence or loss of written records, and lapse of rituals that served to keep the name and identity of the Merōfu image “alive.” The Nichiren priests who later served at the temple and compiled inventories were apparently not familiar with Merōfu Kannon, perhaps because the iconography is ambiguous, and to the untrained eye, Merōfu appears to be a court lady, hence the misidentification.

The newly commissioned sculpture of Sanmi no Tsubone was placed inside the *zushi* with the cloth picture of Merōfu Kannon (Figure 11).⁵⁸ One can see that the costume, coiffure, and pose of the portrait sculpture are indeed similar to the cloth picture. Although one of the statue’s arms is broken off, no doubt it once held a scroll. The sculpture of Sanmi no Tsubone eventually became the centerpiece, in fact the signature icon of Shōkōji. As evidence, I introduce in Figure 12 a woodblock, probably late Edo period, which was recently discovered at Jissōin. It had been used by Shōkōji to print votive images known as *ofuda* お札 that were distributed or sold to pilgrims as protective amulets. These were often then placed in household altars. I have reversed the photographic image so the inscriptions can be more



Figure 11. Portrait sculpture of Sanmi no Tsubone, enshrined with Merōfu Kannon. Jissōin, Kyoto. (Formerly at Shōkōji) Image reproduced from Jissōin pamphlet.



Figure 12. Woodblock for printing *ofuda* for Shōkōji. Jissōin, Kyoto.

58 The sculpture was done by a Buddhist sculptor employed by the imperial palace and dedicated in 1784. The date of the image’s consecration and name of the craftsman are recorded by Priest Nichigi on the back of the base: 維時天明四稔甲辰三月開眼之也 御所大佛師左京刻焉 (Eye opening ceremony on the third month of the fourth year of the Tenmei era, *kinoetatsu* [year in the sexagenary cycle]; carved by the imperial palace sculptor of Buddhist images, Sakyō). The dedicatory inscription on the back of the figure reads: 法誓院殿之尊像 三宮御寄附也 (Image of Hōseiin; donated by the three imperial monasteries). Previously I mistook the characters 三宮 to be Sannomiya, princess-daughter of Emperor Gomizunoo and Empress Tōfukumon’in. Later I realized that 三宮 is a reference to the three imperial monasteries (Enman’in, Jissōin, Shōgoin) where Sanmi no Tsubone’s sons had served as prince-abbots.

easily read. Above the figure of Sanmi no Tsubone are the characters “Namu myōhō renge kyō” 南無妙法蓮華經. The text to the right states that the temple’s founder, Hōseiin, formerly Sanmi no Tsubone, a consort of Emperor Goyōzei, was the mother of an abbot of Jissōin.⁵⁹ The second line mistakenly relates that the sculpture was carved by Empress Tōfukumon’in, and goes on to boast that the image is Japan’s number one good luck charm. The line of characters at the left records that the palace residence turned temple is located in the sacred area of Iwakura of Japan’s pre-eminent imperial capital [Kyoto] and named Hōenzan Shōkōji by imperial rescript.⁶⁰ And so, inadvertently deified as Merōfu, perhaps a karmic result of her unstinting devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*, in the end Sanmi became a kind of symbol and object of worship herself. The case discussed here is one of countless instances of the shifting identities of images and other artifacts in Japan and elsewhere.⁶¹ In some cases Buddhist icons were physically altered to conform to the iconography of their new identity as a different deity. In other cases where the iconographies were similar, modifications were unnecessary, and images were simply given a new name/identity.

Conclusion

Researching Sanmi no Tsubone and her temple Shōkōji has made me keenly aware of just how imperfect our histories and records are. So much was altered or destroyed when the Meiji government forcibly separated Buddhism and Shinto and deprived imperial temples of financial support. Sanmi no Tsubone has nearly vanished from history, despite the fact that she was married to both the son of an Ashikaga shogun and an emperor, bore three sons who served as prince-abbots of *monzeki*, and created a celebrated temple in Iwakura. By researching temple collections, inventories, and other documents, I have tried to resurrect the sculptural *Lotus Sutra* mandala at Shōkōji, and to imagine how Sanmi no Tsubone, at her residence nestled in the hills north of Kyoto, quietly pursued her religious and cultural activities. I am still searching for documents with information about her earlier life, and plan to investigate the archives of Shōgōin and Enman’in imperial monasteries where her sons served as prince-abbots. It is my hope to restore her and other eminent laywomen and nuns to the pages of Japanese religious and cultural history by documenting their multifaceted roles as religious devotees and patrons.

The author would like to acknowledge the generous cooperation of Daiunji, Hōzenji, Jissōin, and Sanpōji, who permitted me to examine and photograph their precious images. In addition, I would like to thank Sherry Fowler, Gaye Rowley, Barbara Ruch, and the anonymous referees for their helpful comments and criticisms.

59 Inscription on right: 後陽成院帝官女三位局 開基法誓院殿者 実相院御門住義尊大僧正御母儀東福門院様御手自御彫刻 日本第一開運出世之御像也。

60 Inscription on left: 大日本最上帝都振本之靈場北岩倉南御殿一本寺 勅語 法圓山證光寺。

61 Gregory Levine discusses this phenomenon in Levine 2005, especially in his chapter titled “The Frailty of Likeness.” See also chapter 5, “Shifting Identities and Trading Places in the Golden Hall,” in Fowler 2005.

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