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# An Investigation of the Relationship Between Prince Shōtoku's Shōmangyō-gisho and Two Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts: A Debate over Originality and Canonical Value

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# An Investigation of the Relationship Between Prince Shōtoku's Shōmangyō-gisho and Two Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts: A Debate over Originality and Canonical Value

## **Abstract**

This article investigates the relationship between two manuscript fragments discovered in Dunhuang, China referred to as Nai 93 and Tama 24, and the Shōmangyō-gisho, a Buddhist text written in classical Chinese attributed to Japan's Prince Shōtoku (574-622). Shōtoku is remembered in Japanese history as the country's first patriarch of Buddhism, revered for his patronage of the nascent faith and his great erudition. His studies under a Korean Buddhist monk led, according to early historical texts, to his composing the Shōmangyō-gisho and two other Buddhist commentaries that have been greatly valued throughout Japanese Buddhist history.

But the discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts, which are quite similar to and predate Shōtoku's Shōmangyō-gisho, called into question the text's perceived value. The article examines scholarship on this discovery published in the late 1960s and 1970s, which represents the search for "the true record" of Prince Shōtoku, the dominant paradigm of the field. It is meant to be a preliminary piece to a more detailed study of the intellectual history and exegetical tradition of the three texts attributed to Shōtoku.

## **Keywords**

China, Japan, Buddhism, Dunhuang, Shōmangyō-gisho, Shōtoku, Korea, monasticism, manuscript, fragment

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# An Investigation of the Relationship Between Prince Shōtoku's *Shōmangyō-gisho* and Two Dunhuang Buddhist Manuscripts *A Debate over Originality and Canonical Value*

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MARK DENNIS  
*Texas Christian University*

THIS ARTICLE INVESTIGATES THE relationship between two manuscript fragments discovered at Dunhuang,<sup>1</sup> referred to as *Nai 93* and *Tama 24*, and the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, a Buddhist text written in classical Chinese that has traditionally been attributed to Japan's Prince Shōtoku (574–622). The determination of Fujieda Akira and Koizumi Enjun that the text attributed to Shōtoku postdated and was strikingly similar to these manuscripts caused a heated scholarly debate. Indeed, much intellectual effort was spent in the late 1960s and 1970s seeking to clarify the texts' relationship because the *Shōmangyō-gisho*'s originality was central to its perceived value and canonical status. This scholarship, which continues in the present, can be viewed as part of the broader search for "the true record" (Japanese, *jitsuroku*) of Shōtoku studies, which informs much, but not all,

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1 Dunhuang is located in northwest China's Gansu province. In 1900, the Daoist monk Wang Yuanlu discovered a large cache of manuscripts in the Mogao caves. Those manuscripts included a large number of Buddhist texts, many composed in classical Chinese, but also manuscripts written in other languages representing Buddhism and other religious traditions. See <http://idp.bl.uk> for a link to the International Dunhuang Project (IDP).



scholarship on the *Shōmangyō-gisho* and two other Buddhist commentaries attributed to the prince.

As background, Prince Shōtoku appears in the *Nihon shoki* (compiled in 720) and other early texts as an accomplished politician and key patron of the nascent Buddhist community in Japan, which was beginning to develop with the support of continental immigrants. These texts credit him with composing a seventeen-point constitution and promoting diplomatic contacts with the Chinese dynasties and Korean kingdoms from which Buddhist teachers brought their texts and traditions. To promote the local assimilation of Buddhism, Shōtoku is said to have donated land to the community, built temples, and collected texts written in classical Chinese. He is also described as a brilliant and devout practitioner of the new faith who quickly mastered its teachings under the tutelage of Hyeja, a Buddhist monk from Paekche (one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea). Although differing in details, these texts mostly agree that Shōtoku's tutelage under Hyeja led to lectures by the prince on key Buddhist texts at court; those lectures served, in turn, as the basis for his composition of the *Shōmangyō-gisho* and two other Buddhist texts known as the *Sangyō-gisho* (Commentaries on the Three Sūtras).

In this earliest period of Japanese Buddhism, the *Sangyō-gisho* were quickly recognized as valuable religious texts; their value was evident in, for example, their inclusion in early versions of the Buddhist canon. Although Chikō (708?–780?), Saichō (767–822), and other figures from this period used the *Sangyō-gisho* texts to understand and illuminate other Buddhist texts, it seems that the very act of their composition by a local Japanese author was crucial to their perceived value. Some five hundred years after Shōtoku's death, Gyōnen, a Kamakura-era Buddhist monk of the Kegon school, wrote the first detailed treatises on each of the *Sangyō-gisho* texts, thereby inaugurating an exegetical tradition that survives into the present day as one key element of Shōtoku studies.

### *The Search for the “True Record”*

A key point in the modern period of Shōtoku studies is marked by the 1905 publication of Kume Kunitake's *Jōgū Taishi Jitsuroku* (The true record of

Jōgū Taishi).<sup>2</sup> Since its publication, scholars, artists, novelists, and others have produced a massive body of Shōtoku-related materials, including highly technical scholarly studies as well as novels and *manga*, television dramas, and online blogs that depict, discuss, and debate key events from Shōtoku's life, including his patronage of Buddhism and study of Buddhist teachings with Hyeja.<sup>3</sup>

The focus of many of these scholarly studies has been recovering the “true record” of Shōtoku by sifting fact from historical embellishment. This goal has also sharply defined *Sangyō-gisho* scholarship, a subdiscipline within Shōtoku studies, wherein most scholars fall into one of two main camps known as the true-composition hypothesis and the false-composition hypothesis.<sup>4</sup> Proponents of the former position have expended great intellectual effort trying to prove not only that Shōtoku authored the three *Sangyō-gisho* texts, but also that they are original works of a brilliant Japanese mind, certainly deserving of their valued canonical status. Hanayama Shinshō, Kanaji Isamu, and other scholars from this camp have tried to defend the texts' canonical status by revealing their uniqueness, lucidity, and profundity, which requires, in part, detailing their distinctiveness from intellectual models and predecessors. In the case of the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, for instance, these scholars have scrutinized the relationship between Shōtoku's *Shōmangyō-gisho* and a text it refers to regularly as the *hongi*, or “model text,” and also its relationship to a group of texts it refers to as “other commentaries.”

Much true-composition-hypothesis scholarship has been devoted to responding to the assertions of Tsuda Sōkichi and his false-composition-hypothesis successors who reject Shōtoku's authorship of the three *Sangyō-gisho* commentaries. Their scholarship represents one part of a broader

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2 Jōgū Taishi is one of Shōtoku's names. After publishing *Jōgū Taishi jitsuroku* in 1905 (Osaka: Sekibunsha), Kume published *Shōtoku Taishi jitsuroku* in 1919 (Tokyo: Heigo Shuppansha), which was reprinted in 1942 (Tokyo: Ryūginsha).

3 Examples include a three-hour NHK drama titled *Shōtoku Taishi* that was broadcast in 2001 and a large number of *manga* either dedicated to the prince or discussing his contribution to, for example, the history of Japanese Buddhism. There are also Shōtoku Taishi T-shirts, figurines, and jigsaw puzzles, among other such items of popular culture.

4 There is a third position that posits joint authorship in which Shōtoku played some sort of meaningful role in their composition. See note 9.

attack on the received narrative of Shōtoku as a pivotal figure of early Japanese history. Tsuda and other proponents of this position offer evidence they claim proves Shōtoku could not possibly have written the *Sangyō-gisho* texts, arguing instead that they were written by a continental author or authors and brought to Japan, or were 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. Since the publication of Tsuda's scholarship in the 1930s and 1940s, Fujieda Akira, Koizumi Enjun, and other false-composition-hypothesis scholars have elaborated and refined his assertions.

### *The Discovery of the Dunhuang Manuscripts*

While rejecting Shōtoku's authorship of the three *Sangyō-gisho* texts, Fujieda and Koizumi have also challenged the *Shōmangyō-gisho*'s originality by revealing its high degree of correspondence with *Nai 93* and *Tama 24*—the two Dunhuang manuscripts mentioned above, which, scholars agree, pre-date Shōtoku's text.<sup>5</sup> Yang Yufei notes that *Nai 93* is thirty-six pages in

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5 For a discussion of these findings, see Fujieda Akira, "Hokuchō ni okeru *Shōmangyō* no denshō," *Tōhō Gakkai* 40 (March 1969): 325–49; Fujieda Akira, "*Shōmangyō-gisho*," in *Nihon shisō taikei 2: Shōtoku Taishishū*, ed. Ienaga Saburō (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), 484–544; Fujieda Akira and Koizumi Enjun, "Sankō E hon *Shōman-gisho hongī* tonkōhon," in *Nihon shisō taikei*, vol. 2: *Shōtoku Taishishū*, ed. Ienaga Saburō (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), 429–62; and Koizumi Enjun, "Tonkōhon *Shōmangisho hongī*," *Shōtoku Taishi Kenkyū* 5 (1969): 59–141. For a discussion of the relationship between the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, the Dunhuang manuscripts, and the *hongī* from the perspective of the true-composition hypothesis, see Kanaji Isamu, "Tonkō hakken no *Shōmangyōsho (Nai 93)* to *Shōmangyō-gisho* to no hikaku: omo toshite bunshō kadan ni tsuite," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 18, no. 2 (1970): 835–841; Kanaji Isamu, "*Shōmangyō-gisho* to *Shōmangyōsho (Nai 93)* to no hikaku kenkyū-2: omo toshite sono gakkai ni tsuite," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 18, no. 2 (1970): 270–273; Hirakawa Akira, "*Shōmangyō-gisho* to *Nai 93* to no kankei ni tsuite," in *Shōtoku Taishi ronshū*, ed. Kokumin Bunka Kenkyūkai Shōtoku Taishi Kenkyūkai (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1971), 207–30; Kanaji Isamu, "*Shōmangyō-gisho* no '*hongī*' ni tsuite," *Shōtoku Taishi Kenkyū* 7 (1972): 25–38; Fujii Kyōkō, "*Shōmangyō-gisho hongī*," in *Shōtoku Taishi jiten*, ed. Ishida Hisatoyo (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 1997), 142–43.

length but is missing material that would have appeared at the beginning of the manuscript, while *Tama 24* is thirteen pages and corresponds to material from the last section of *Nai 93*. He describes both manuscripts as being skillfully brushed in *gyōsho*, a semi-cursive script.<sup>6</sup>

The revelation of this high degree of correspondence between the *Shōmangyō-gisho* and these Dunhuang manuscripts is considered by scholars to be one of the most important modern discoveries in *Sangyō-gisho* studies.<sup>7</sup> Its significance is attested to by the flurry of subsequent scholarly activity seeking to determine the precise relationship between these manuscripts and the *Shōmangyō-gisho*.

In their initial findings, Fujieda and Koizumi identified the Dunhuang manuscripts as the *hongī* of the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, and thus referred to them as the “*Shōmangyō-gisho hongī*” (the model text of the *Shōmangyō-gisho*).<sup>8</sup> But further study revealed the existence of material in the *Shōmangyō-gisho* that differed from *Nai 93–Tama 24*, and thus seemed to point to a different *hongī* pre-dating the Dunhuang manuscripts. These differences led them to conclude that *Nai 93–Tama 24* and the *Shōmangyō-gisho* were composed

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6 See Yang Yufei, “Chūgoku Nanbokuchō Jidai ni okeru Bonnōron: *Shōmangyō* no Shochūshakusho o Chūshin Toshite,” *Sengokuyama Journal of Buddhist Studies* 8 (2016): 153–54.

7 Its importance is evident in other ways: for example, Kanaji Isamu notes that these findings were reported in the 28 August 1968 edition of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, one of the main Japanese daily newspapers. And the preface to one of the critical editions of the *Shōmangyō-gisho* notes that its production was motivated, in part, because none of the previous editions had been produced after the publication of Fujieda’s and Koizumi’s research. See Kanaji, “*Shōmangyō-gisho*” no shisōteki kenkyū (Tokyo: Sankibō busshorin, 1971), 23.

8 Koizumi’s reconstruction of *Nai 93* can be found in “Tonkōhon *Shōmangisho hongī*,” *Shōtoku Taishi kenkyū* 5 (1969): 59–141. Fujieda notes that although *Shōman-gisho* would have been a more appropriate title, since other commentaries were already known by that name, the former was selected (Fujieda, “*Shōmangyō-gisho*,” 487). Based on the brush work, Koizumi concludes that both manuscripts are sixth-century texts from the Northern Dynasties period, but concedes that while it is possible they were transmitted from the south, they were, at a minimum, copied and read in the north. Although there are differences between *Nai 93* and *Tama 24*, Koizumi notes that the meaning of the text is not significantly altered by them and that they are clearly copies of the same text. Most of these differences are related to specific characters: variants that have the same sound (Japanese, *ontsū*) or the omission of characters in one or the other manuscript (Japanese, *datsuji*). Koizumi, “Tonkōhon,” 11.

based on the same *hongī*, which Koizumi labels the “hongī genpon” (source text of the model text).<sup>9</sup>

Based on his reconstruction of *Nai 93*, the more complete of the two manuscripts, Koizumi estimates that of the *Shōmangyō-gisho*'s roughly 1,400 lines, only about three hundred differ with these manuscripts, and thus over three-quarters of the *Shōmangyō-gisho* was taken directly from the *hongī*.<sup>10</sup> He and Fujieda thus argue that because the *Shōmangyō-gisho* relies so heavily on this earlier text, it exhibits very little originality regardless of the latter's identity and their precise relationship. This high degree of correspondence between the Dunhuang manuscripts and the *Shōmangyō-gisho* leads Fujieda to conclude that the latter should be understood as no more than a “revised text.”<sup>11</sup> These sorts of texts, he notes, are not uncommon in the East Asian commentarial tradition and function mainly “to supplement, correct, and abbreviate their root texts.”<sup>12</sup> Fujieda further questions the originality of the *Shōmangyō-gisho* by noting that over half its differences with *Nai 93–Tama 24* are based on short summaries of the succeeding section that appear at the beginning of section breaks in the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, but which are not found in the Dunhuang manuscripts.<sup>13</sup>

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9 Koizumi Enjun, “Tonkōhon,” 11.

10 Koizumi Enjun, “Tonkōhon,” 9.

11 Fujieda, “*Shōmangyō-gisho*,” 504. In a similar way, Watanabe Shōkō describes the three commentaries as “notebooks,” which could have been written by a student studying with a Chinese master. See Watanabe, “*Sangyō-gisho* no sakusha mondai: nihon bukkyō no ayumi” (6), *Daihorin* 24–28 (1957): 154. In assessing the originality of the *Sangyō-gisho*, Hirai Shun'ei writes, “Because the *Sangyō-gisho* relies on the *hongī* for over two-thirds of its interpretations, and also draws on the [thought of scholars cited in the] work of Jizang, [these commentaries] should be considered patchworks. And because there are so few quotations of the sūtras and other commentaries, they are basic texts that are rather unsophisticated. In this way, as is pointed out by Ōno [Tatsunosuke], it would not be unusual if they were produced in the Asuka period. But in that case, just as is asserted by the false-composition-hypothesis, it is with the assumption that they were not the work of Shōtoku Taishi alone.” Hirai Shun'ei, “*Sangyō-gisho* no seiritsu to Kichizōso,” in *Sanron kyōgaku no kenkyū*, ed. Hirai Shun'ei (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1990), 533.

12 Fujieda, “*Shōmangyō-gisho*,” 504.

13 Fujieda, “*Shōmangyō-gisho*,” 501–4.

## The True-Composition-Hypothesis Response to the Dunhuang Manuscripts

While Hanayama, Kanaji, and other true-composition-hypothesis scholars acknowledge these relationships and the *Shōmangyō-gisho*'s reliance on its intellectual predecessors, they have sought with great effort to prove that it is not, as Fujieda and Koizumi argue, simply a rehashing of the Dunhuang manuscripts and the *hongī*, but a valuable religious work in its own right. If it were reclassified as no more than an unoriginal copy, this would be seen as a crucial blow to the large corpus of scholarship extolling Shōtoku's great intellect and position as first patriarch of the nascent Japanese Buddhist tradition. Moreover, this proof is, naturally, crucial to maintaining the text's value because even if it were proven that Shōtoku had composed it, if it is little more than a restatement of the *hongī* and other commentaries, its value would diminish significantly. To this end, they stress that although the *Shōmangyō-gisho* is similar in some ways to *Nai 93–Tama 24*, and possibly to an even earlier *hongī*, it is also true that a number of its passages do not agree with these manuscripts, as some appear to address the work of Chinese Buddhist exegetes whose work is lacking in the Dunhuang manuscripts, while still others are unique to the *Shōmangyō-gisho*.

Hanayama argues that while Shōtoku relies on the *hongī*, he does not “follow it blindly,”<sup>14</sup> and that although he accepts some of the interpretations of his Chinese predecessors, he criticizes them at other times, and thus exhibits a “critical attitude” toward the work of these exegetes. He writes, “Based on my research into the thought, sentences, language, and so forth of the entire *Shōmangyō-gisho*, and on comparisons to other extant commentaries [on the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*], I estimate there to be approximately one hundred eighty passages that reveal the author's own interpretations.”<sup>15</sup>

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14 Hanayama Shinshō, *Shōmangyō-gisho no Jōgū ōsen ni kansuru kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1944), 405. In this regard, he cites Shōtoku's use of phrases such as “I believe that these views are insufficient,” among others, as proof of Shōtoku's “critical attitude” (313).

15 Hanayama, *Jōgūōsen*, 408.

For Hanayama, therefore, although the text attributed to Shōtoku participates in and transmits the Chinese exegetical tradition, it represents a crucial, locally produced interpretive development. It is thus justified as an object of value and reverence, and worthy of detailed exegesis in the model established in the Kamakura era by Gyōnen.

And while Kanaji also acknowledges that the *Shōmangyō-gisho* relies on this body of previous scholarship, he too argues that it exhibits unique interpretations,<sup>16</sup> writing:

When we think in these terms, it is not then so important [to determine] to what extent the interpretations of the *hongī* [appear] in the *Shōmangyō-gisho* and to what degree they are the individual [ideas] of [Shōtoku] Taishi. Since there is no meaning to the *gisho* apart from the *hongī*, a more important concern is how the *gisho* was composed based on [Shōtoku's] interpretation of the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*. If we search too deeply in this way, we will not only lose the vitality of the *gisho*, it is also possible that our understanding of the sūtra itself will become muddled. We must seek, therefore, to understand how, based on the *hongī*, Shōtoku read and interpreted the sūtra, and then to make his way of reading and accepting it our own as we too taste again the sūtra itself. If we do not, we have not truly read the *gisho*. And in this way, there are no obstacles to taking the *gisho* as a whole as the work of [Shōtoku] Taishi. That is, [while it is true] he used the *hongī* to understand the sūtra, it is still his own work because it is not simply [the repetition of the *hongī*'s ideas]; rather, [Shōtoku's commentary] surpasses the *hongī* by putting forth such new interpretations.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Kanaji discusses what he describes as the *Sangyō-gisho*'s "special characteristics" in a number of articles and books, including *Shōtoku Taishi kyōgaku no kenkyū: Sangyō-gisho ni tsuite* (Osaka: Shōtoku Taishikai, 1962), 27–52, 194–217. See also Kanaji's *Jōgūōsen "Sangyō-gisho" no Shomondai* (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1985), 75–94. See also Watanabe Kōjun, "Shōmangyō-gisho no tokuchō ni tsuite," in *Shōmangyō-gisho ronshū*, ed. Nihon Bukkyō Genryū Kenkyūkai (Kyoto: Nihon Bukkyō Genryū Kenkyūkai, 1965), 126–32.

17 Kanaji, "Shōmangyō-gisho" no shisoteki kenkyū, 24.

In this way, the *Shōmangyō-gisho* participates in the East Asian commentarial tradition but exhibits a “progressive, interpretive step forward.”<sup>18</sup> But even though Kanaji argues it is not so important to separate the interpretations of the *bongi* from those of the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, the great intellectual effort that he, Hanayama, and others have made to prove the latter’s uniqueness seems at odds with this claim. Kanaji also observes that determining the text’s authorship is a complex project, and writes, “Even if we knew that a single individual wrote the *Sangyō-gisho*, proving conclusively that it was Shōtoku Taishi is difficult. Thus, even Hanayama’s work must be understood as a hypothesis.”<sup>19</sup>

These comments raise the following questions that I plan to pursue as part of a broader project on the intellectual history and exegetical tradition of *Sangyō-gisho* studies. Given this complexity and these seemingly inconclusive results, why do these scholars persist in searching for the true record? And in seeking to prove or disprove Shōtoku’s authorship of the text and its inherent originality in their pursuit of the “true record,” what intellectual roads and angles of critical vision have been foreclosed? This project will take the form of a monograph, in which I will bring to bear scholarship on authorship, canon, and value to investigate these questions. One section of the monograph will investigate how more recent scholarship has dealt with the Dunhuang discovery.

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18 Kanaji, “*Shōmangyō-gisho*” no *shisoteki kenkyū*, 23.

19 Kanaji, “*Sangyō-gisho*” no *shomondai*, 64.



## LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS CITED

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