The Birth of Kūkai as a Literary Figure: A Translation and Analysis of Shinzei’s Preface to the Henjō Hokki Shōryōshū

Matsuda, William
Kyushu University: Visiting Associate Professor

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The Birth of Kūkai as a Literary Figure: A Translation and Analysis of Shinzei’s Preface to the *Henjō Hokki Shōryōshū*

WILLIAM MATSUDA

**Introduction**

Along with such celebrated literati as Emperor Saga 嶋嶋天皇 (786–842, r. 809–823), Ono no Minemori 小野岑守 (778–830), and Yoshimine no Yasuyo 良岑安世 (785–830), Kūkai 空海 (774–835) is often considered one of the outstanding *kanshi* 漢詩 poets of the early Heian period. Indeed, even a brief glance at his poetic output amply demonstrates his vast erudition in the Chinese classics and his creative prowess. In modern times, the image of Kūkai as a canonized literary figure is reinforced by the inclusion of a volume devoted to his writings in the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系 (henceforth, NKBT), a 102-volume collection of the premodern literary “classics.” The addition of Kūkai’s works to this anthology in 1965 was a declaration that he could be appreciated as a figure worthy of membership at the highest echelons of the Japanese literary world, not just as an esoteric theologian or the protagonist of innumerable legends. Nevertheless, modern collections of “literary classics” are deceptive because the anthologized texts are presented as timeless monoliths of uncontroversial canonicity. The presence of Kūkai’s poetic oeuvre among premodern masterpieces lends the impression that the “literary” quality of his work was immediately apparent from the onset. Yet, despite the laudatory assessment that Kūkai’s compositions have received in later centuries, his reputation as a poet was not firmly established during his lifetime. This paper argues that Shinzei 眞済 (800–861), one of Kūkai’s senior disciples, was responsible for the earliest attempts at portraying Kūkai as a literary figure. Textual evidence for Shinzei’s agenda is present in the preface he penned for the *Henjō hokki shōryōshū* 遍照発揮性霊集, an anthology of Kūkai’s poetry and prose that Shinzei edited. An analysis of this preface suggests that Shinzei’s attempts at literary canonization were intended to generate political and cultural capital for himself in the turbulent years immediately following Kūkai’s death.

**About the *Henjō hokki shōryōshū***

Compared to Kūkai’s doctrinal works, the texts collected in the *Henjō hokki shōryōshū* (henceforth, *Shōryōshū*) are not widely studied by scholars either

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1. Possible translations of this title will be discussed below.
2. A note on the transcription: while texts from the Heian period transcribe the characters 性霊集 as *Seireishū*, this study will follow modern conventions and transcribe the collection’s title as *Shōryōshū*. 
in Japan or abroad. This is not surprising, since the Shoryoshū lacks the thematic cohesion and philosophical synthesis of his religious treatises. Nevertheless, the Shoryoshū contains many important documents: letters that Kukai wrote to various officials while in Tang China, the epitaph he dedicated to his departed master Huiguo (746–806), along with numerous poems, memorials, and votive documents.

David Gardiner, who has published translations of two documents from the Shoryoshū, offers the following comments:

Although the Shoryoshū does not contain any of Kukai’s major doctrinal works, many of its texts portray esoteric Buddhist theories as refracted through the lens of actual practice, thereby revealing how Shingon Buddhism took shape in its initial stages, during his lifetime. The Shoryoshū is an important historical resource for understanding the concrete means by which Kukai propagated Shingon Buddhism.

Indeed, since the Shoryoshū is a collection of miscellaneous documents on a variety of subjects produced over the course of Kukai’s life, it provides a variety of insights into his everyday activities in religion, politics, and literature.

The 111 pieces of prose and poetry contained in the Shoryoshū are divided into ten volumes, with each volume generally dedicated to a specific category of writing, such as poetry, epistles, epitaphs, or votive documents. Textual studies on the transmission of the Shoryoshū text show that the first seven chapters of the collection have remained intact since their original compilation by Shinzei. However, at some point during the mid-Heian period the last three volumes were lost, so in 1079 Saisen 濟暹 (1025–1115), a scholar-monk at the Ninnaji 仁和寺 temple in Kyoto, visited various temple libraries and recompiled the missing volumes using primary source texts he located. Yamazaki Makoto has suggested that Saisen’s efforts at recovering the Shoryoshū were an attempt to reassert Kukai’s prestige in the face of Tendai revivalism. Strictly speaking, the last three volumes are referred to as the Shoryoshū hoketsushō 性靈集補闕鈔 (Supplement to the Shoryoshū), but for the purposes of this study, the entire collection will be referred to as the Shoryoshū. While Saisen presents the entire collection as Kukai’s work, modern scholarship generally agrees that the authorship of a number of the texts in the Shoryoshū hoketsushō cannot be positively attributed to Kukai.

The documents in the Shoryoshū provide a glimpse into the multiple facets of Kukai’s complex life that cannot be readily discerned solely from his doctrinal writings. They demonstrate that Kukai was not only an innovative theologian and erudite writer, but also a shrewd politician, a formidable advocate, and a passionate educator. Also, as these texts were produced by Kukai during his actual lifetime, the Shoryoshū makes it possible to extricate Kukai from the discourse of the Köbō Daishi legend and squarely position him within the political, social, and literary milieu of his day.

Several years before Kukai’s death in 835, Shinzei started gathering the documents that appear in the collection. In addition, Shinzei authored the preface, a key text to understanding his attempt to canonize his master and generate political capital for himself. A complete, annotated translation of the preface is presented below.

Shinzei’s Preface to the Shoryoshū

西山禅念沙門真濟撰集

Compiled by Shinzei, Meditation Monk in the Western Mountains


6 Translation by William Matsuda. NKBT vol. 71 used as the source text (see note below).

When I was young, I had deep respect for the scholarly ways of my ancestors. But after reaching the age of “aspiration to learning,” I found solace in tranquility and lost interest in the Confucian teachings. Revering the profound actions of profound people, I immersed myself in the great mysteries of the Great Way. There is a saint named Dai Henjō Kongō. In the spring and fall of his student days he wore a blue collar and plucked the fruits of the forest of learning. Then, he displayed the scarlet curtain of a teacher and collected the flowers of the mountains and rivers. Despising the shallow wisdom of our isolated land, he yearned for the transcendent and the profound. He left the false and obtained the pure.

8 The age of fifteen, as recorded in the Analects: “The Master said, 'At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line'” (D.C. Lau, trans., The Analects (London: Penguin Books, 1979, 62); Kanaya Osamu, 金谷治, ed. Rongo 論語 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 28.

9 “Profound people” is a Maitreya appears in the world. (Watanabe and Miyasaka, 150.)

10 Blue collars as student emblems are based on a poem in the Book of Songs: 青青子衿，悠悠我心。青青子衿，悠悠我心。故不我辭。 symptoms against Heaven, nor do I blame Man. In my studies, I start from below and get through to what is above. If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven.” 子曰不怨天不尤人 下學而上達 知我者其天乎

11 The phrase “sent on a mission on the ruler’s orders” 衝君命而使 appears in the Li ji 礼記 (Book of Rites). Watanabe and Miyasaka, 150.

12 The beauty of the towering peaks and wide valleys and the variety of holy trees and sacred grasses tantalized his eyes and ears, and he could not help but be astounded. He frequently lamented, “It has been an eternity since the bodhi leaves fell. What spring does the dragon blossom tree await?” As I was born foolish, whom shall I rely upon to return to the Source? Yet, surely this Dharma exists, and what shall guide me is Heaven.” The emperor, assenting to his prayer, finally selected him to be a Dharma-seeking monk. At the end of the Enryaku reign, an era now long past, he journeyed to Tang China on the emperor’s orders. In the capital, he happened to meet the acharya Huiguo, the revered priest of the Qinglongsi temple.

13 This is an allusion to the Analects: “The Master said, ‘There is no one who understands me.’ Tsu-kung said, ‘How is it that there is no one who understands you? The Master said, ‘I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame Man. In my studies, I start from below and get through to what is above. If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven.” 子曰莫我知也夫子貢曰何為其莫知子也子曰不怨天不尤人下學而上達 知我者其天乎

14 Emperor Daizong 代宗 ruled from 762–779.
and quickly receive my teachings.” Then Huiguo conferred the teachings of the dual Womb and Diamond mandalas and more than one hundred \(^{16}\) texts from the secret treasury. Saint Kūkai’s nature was such that he could understand the import of what he heard, and whatever his eye passed over was retained by his tongue. He accumulated years’ worth of effort and learning in a single season.

The Great Master Huiguo suddenly went to his death.\(^7\) That is why when Huiguo transmitted the Dharma to Dai Henjō Kongō he said, “Now, there is a monk from Japan who came to seek the sacred teachings, embodied in the secret rituals and mudras of the Womb and Diamond platforms. He has taken the pledge in both the Womb and Diamond mandala chambers. Whether in Chinese or in Sanskrit, he received the teachings in his heart; it was like pouring water from one jar into another. How fortunate that I transmitted the lamp to you! My prayers have been fulfilled.” My master is the eighth in line from Vajrasatta, who sought Mahāvairocana’s cosmic palace and serves as his interlocutor. This is considered the second patriarch of esoteric Buddhism. In the Mahāvairocana sutra, Vajrasatta resides in Mahāvairocana’s cosmic palace and serves as his interlocutor for his discourses on all-embracing wisdom and enlightenment.


Our Emperor Kanmu, a sage whose like appears once every thousand years, spread his vast virtue throughout the realm, making it possible for Kūkai to bring peace to future generations with these new teachings from India. Ah! Lost, I ask for the way to the ford; how can I see thousands of li ahead?\(^{20}\) I, his disciple, have long sought a world free of dust, so I reverently received his teachings. Just as a bell and flute are in perfect harmony, newly acquainted people may speak to each other as though they were old friends. Though I have served him for many years, I have yet to see anything shallow in his thought. The dual forces of yin and yang transforming into a dragon and then forming clouds that create thunder—I now know that this is not an empty saying!\(^{20}\) Long ago, when the master was in China, he composed a poem in the *li he* style and presented it to Weishang, a local monk.\(^{21}\) Ma Zong, the former Inspector General

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16 According to the Goshōrai mokuroku, there were 142. Ibid.
17 化 is an abbreviation of 達化, which refers to the death of a high priest. Ibid.
18 Vajrasatta 金刚薩埵 is considered the second patriarch of esoteric Buddhism. In the Mahāvairocana sutra, Vajrasatta resides in Mahāvairocana’s cosmic palace and serves as his interlocutor for his discourses on all-embracing wisdom and enlightenment. Ryuichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 131–2.
19 In the Analects, Zilu (Tsu-lu) 子路 asks two men plowing a field for directions to the river crossing. Upon learning that Zilu was a disciple of Confucius, one of the men says (in derision) that Confucius should already know the way. Watanabe and Miyasaka, 152; Lau, 150; Kanaya, 253–4. Here, it seems that Shinzei has inverted the rhetorical thrust of the source text and turned it into an expression of humility.
20 Modern commentators have opposing interpretations: Shinzei is praising his ability to immediately absorb Kūkai’s teachings, Imataka et al., 154, or the inability of his disciples to perceive fully the profundity of his actions, Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154. The second interpretation draws on commentary to the Daode jing. Ibid.
21 Weishang was one of Huiguo’s disciples, and was mentioned in the epitaph that Kūkai composed for Huiguo (refer to Chapter Two). Lihe 离合 (separating and joining) refers to a “miscellaneous” style of Chinese poetry where the component of the Chinese character (such as the radical or the remainder) used to start the first line is then used to begin the second line. Although the *li he* poems that Kūkai and Weishang exchanged are no longer extant in any sources from the period, the Kansekishō 緘石抄, a commentary on the Shōryōshū written by Saisen, claims to contain one of the *li he* poems Kūkai wrote in China:

授若人以安來者矣。于啼迷方間津何得千里即目。弟子久渴清塵恭至下風。鐘籟相響新扣如舊。執事年深未見其淺。誠知二氣變龍雲雷成章。信不虛言哉。和尚昔在唐日作離合贈士僧惟上。前御史大夫泉州別駕馬總一時大才也。覽則驚怪因送詩云。

Our Emperor Kanmu, a sage whose like appears once every thousand years, spread his vast virtue throughout the realm, making it possible for Kūkai to bring peace to future generations with these new teachings from India. Ah! Lost, I ask for the way to the ford; how can I see thousands of li ahead?\(^{20}\) I, his disciple, have long sought a world free of dust, so I reverently received his teachings. Just as a bell and flute are in perfect harmony, newly acquainted people may speak to each other as though they were old friends. Though I have served him for many years, I have yet to see anything shallow in his thought. The dual forces of yin and yang transforming into a dragon and then forming clouds that create thunder—I now know that this is not an empty saying!\(^{20}\) Long ago, when the master was in China, he composed a poem in the *li he* style and presented it to Weishang, a local monk.\(^{21}\) Ma Zong, the former Inspector General
and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou, was one of the great talents of his generation. He saw Kūkai's poetry and was astounded with disbelief. Therefore, he sent Kūkai the following poem:

何乃万里来  Why have you come from so far away?
可非衒其才  Surely not to flaunt your talents!
增学助玄機  Study even harder and aid the profound teachings!
土人如子稀  People here like you are rare

The phrase Shinzei lists two distinct titles for Ma Zong: former Inspector General and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou, and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou, which was one of the higher provincial official ranks under the Tang Dynasty. Imataka et al., 154. Ma Zong claimed also to have erected bronze pillars at the same site around the 14th–49th centuries, which would be the descendant of Ma Yuan, the famed Han general who suppressed a rebellion in what is modern-day Vietnam and erected “bronze pillars” to mark the southern boundaries of the Han state. Historical veracity notwithstanding, Ma Zong apparently encountered in China, but very little is known about him, and the specific location of Piling cannot be ascertained from Chinese gazetteers of the period. Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154, 493.

Afterward, his fame spread throughout the land, and he was revered by both laymen and clergy. Poems and rhapsodies were exchanged back and forth, and before long his letterbox was filled with poetry. In this way he let out his laments in a faraway land, and gave expression to his feelings in a foreign country. His diction and writing were both beautiful, and he truly adopted the style of the Eastern gentleman. That is why Hu Bochong of Piling said in his song:

天假吾師多伎術。就中草聖最狂逸。不可得難再見。是以啄雞奔獣之點獨留九州。涌雲廻水之画盛變八紘。或臥煙霞而獨嘯任意腑詠。或對天問以献納随手成章。至如慕仙詩。高山風易起。深海水難量。又遊神泉。高台神構非人力。池鏡泓澄含日暉。

The heavens have granted my master many skills, but none as extraordinary as his grass script. How rare—it will be difficult to see such talent again! It is for this reason that the calligraphic styles depicting the power of a rooster's beak or a charging beast have remained in the Nine Provinces of China, and brushwork like floating clouds and flowing water have spread to Japan. One day, Kūkai lay in the mist talking to himself and committed his thoughts to poetry. On another day, he presented a poem in reply to the emperor, and it was as though the writing just flowed from his hand. In a poem where he seeks the mountain sage, he wrote, “On tall peaks, the wind is easily aroused/In deep seas, water is difficult to measure.”

**注释**

22. Shinzei lists two distinct titles for Ma Zong: former Inspector General and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou, and Vice-Governor of Quanzhou, which was a fairly high position (Junior Third Rank, one step below the Ministers of State) and responsible for supervising government officials. A provincial vice-governor was classified as Fifth Rank, Lower. The *Old Records of the Tang* 旧唐書 and the *New Records of the Tang* 新唐書 both mention that Ma Zong was appointed vice-governor as a demotion, but not his former service as an Inspector General. Imataka et al., 154. Ma Zong claimed also to be the descendant of Ma Yuan 馬元 (14–49), the famed Han general who suppressed a rebellion in what is modern-day Vietnam and erected “bronze pillars” to mark the southern boundaries of the Han state. Historical veracity notwithstanding, Ma Zong also claimed to have erected bronze pillars at the same site to commemorate his great-ancestor’s achievement. L. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu, HI: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 7, 102.

23. The phrase *是諸仏教* is an abbreviated quotation of a line from the *Records of the Han* 名声是諸仏教. Imataka et al., 154–5.

24. The “Records of Eastern Barbarians” 東夷伝 chapter of the *Records of the Later Han* 後漢書 refers to a land of gentlemen across the eastern seas. Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154.

25. Hu Bochong 胡伯崇 (dates unknown) was a poet whom Kūkai apparently encountered in China, but very little is known about him, and the specific location of Piling cannot be ascertained from Chinese gazetteers of the period. Watanabe and Miyasaka, 154, 493.

26. This is likely to be from a *gatha*偈 (Chn. ji, Jpn. ge) known as the *Gatha on the Admonitions of the Seven Buddhas* 七仏通戒偈, a compilation of the common teachings of the historical Buddha and the six Buddhas who came before him. The “four verses” are:

説四句演毘尼 Preaching on the Four Verses

和経五教 Preaching on the Precepts

凡夫聴者盡皈依 All those who hear these shall take refuge

Surely not to flaunt your talents!

How rare—it will be difficult to see such talent again! It is for this reason that the calligraphic styles depicting the power of a rooster’s beak or a charging beast have remained in the Nine Provinces of China, and brushwork like floating clouds and flowing water have spread to Japan. One day, Kūkai lay in the mist talking to himself and committed his thoughts to poetry. On another day, he presented a poem in reply to the emperor, and it was as though the writing just flowed from his hand. In a poem where he seeks the mountain sage, he wrote, “On tall peaks, the wind is easily aroused/In deep seas, water is difficult to measure.”
Also, when he visited the Shinsen’ en Garden, he wrote, “The high dais is the work of the gods and not of man;/The mirror-like surface of the pond is crystal clear and absorbs the sunlight.”

In these verses simile and metaphor vie with each other, and instruction and odes shine throughout. The poems, rhapsodies, laments, and praises he composed and the monuments, prayers, petitions, and calligraphy he produced were created on the spot without benefit of a draft. If you did not seize a text as soon as he finished it, you would never see it again. I, his disciple Shinzei, worry that the gold and jade will mingle with stones in the riverbed, and lament that the orchids and cassia will be overrun by the autumn mugwort. Serving at his side, I have collected and transcribed his writings, accumulating over five hundred pieces of paper. In addition, I have included his correspondence with people of Tang as outstanding examples of poetry and prose. This collection of ten volumes I have named the Henjō hokki shōryōshū. Extraneous texts that fall outside the categories presented in these volumes have been excluded for the time being. It is my wish that Kūkai’s disciples savor his writings for years to come, and that they occasionally open and read these volumes as respite from their meditation. Mere amusement for the eye while alone in one’s hut—who would think of peddling them to others?

Situating the Preface

The first half of the preface provides a summary of the key elements common to hagiographic narratives on Kūkai: his first encounter with Huiguo, how this encounter was predicted by Huiguo, and how transmitting the esoteric teachings to Kūkai was as simple as “pouring water from one jar into another.” Kūkai’s facility in Chinese and Sanskrit—staples in any account that mentions Kūkai’s sojourn in Tang China—are also mentioned.

Once the requisite details establishing Kūkai’s background and lineage are provided, Shinzei describes Kūkai’s literary accomplishments. He does not attempt to situate Kūkai’s literary output into an overtly Confucian “statescraftism” or esoteric Buddhist discursive frame; rather, he presents Kūkai as a literary talent in his own right. By mentioning Kūkai’s encounters with literati-bureaucrats such as Ma Zong 馬総 (?–823), who declares Kūkai to possess a talent rarely found even in China, Shinzei establishes Kūkai as a literary figure on a par with the Chinese, something that very few Japanese literati (even those who were prolific poets in Chinese) could claim. However, this strategy should not be interpreted as an attempt to marginalize kanshi composed by other Japanese as inferior. Rather, Kūkai’s experiences in China are used to compensate for his lack of proper credentials, especially the completion of a course of study at the State College. In other words, since Kūkai was not in a privileged position as a canonical writer, “China” is evoked to provide an alternative source of legitimacy, not to challenge the quality of Japanese kanshi. Finally, Shinzei cites specific poems composed by Kūkai and presents them as examples of “simile” 比 (Ch. bi) and “metaphor” 興 (Ch. xiao), demonstrating Kūkai’s mastery of poetic forms found in canonical sources such as The Book of Songs.

Shinzei also explicitly states another major objective in compiling the Shōryōshū: collecting and preserving Kūkai’s best literary works for the benefit of his disciples and for future generations. He also presents the potential for Kūkai’s writings to serve as a diversion by...
sugests that the monks read them when taking a break from meditating. Finally, Shinzei hints at sharing Kūkai's writings with a wider readership when he says "Mere amusement for the eye while alone in one's hut—who would think of peddling them to others?"

The title of the collection, *Henjō hokki shōryōshū*, reveals a great deal about Shinzei's motives. While Kūkai saw himself as a religious and philosophical pioneer, and part-time statesman, Shinzei wanted to use the *Shōryōshū* to establish Kūkai as a literary figure. The title itself is infused with an amalgam of continental literary and philosophical aesthetics. *Henjō* (shines) throughout the world, i.e., *Vairocana*, was often used in part of Kūkai's Buddhist name *Henjō Kōngō* (the adamantine that shines throughout the world). The expression *hokki* (essence) is taken directly from a line in the *Yijing* (Book of Changes) that states, "The six lines, as explained (by the Duke of Kau [Zhou]), bring forth and display (its meaning), and everything about it is (thus) indirectly exhibited". In other words, this phrase refers to the manifestation of latent abilities. *Shōryō* (spontaneous) literally means "the spirit of the essence," in this case, the "essence" of Kūkai's writings. Shinzei appropriated the concept of *shōryō* from a line in the *Wenzhang* (Essay on Literature) section of the *Yanshi jiaxun* (Family Instructions for the Yen [Yan] Clan) by Yan Zhitui (531–591). The *Yanshi jiaxun* was composed during the turbulence of the late Northern and Southern Dynasties period (420–589), and its author rebuked the decadent tendencies of southern literature, as opposed to the relative austerity of northern culture. Specifically, the line Shinzei quoted reads, “I have often thought, on the basis of accumulated (experience), a body of essays exhibits the writer's interests, develops his nature, and makes him proud and negligent of control as well as determined and aggressive." This collection is also considered the prototype for the *Jiaxun* genre of writing. As a devout Buddhist, Shinzei strongly affirms Shinzei's stance and views the anthology as a literary monument to his master. After Kūkai's death, rivalries among Shingon-affiliated temples, particularly Tōji and Kōyasan, meant that there was no central temple, or unified voice, for the fledgling Shingon

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32 Perhaps this is not such a surprise, considering that the major scholarly treatments of the Shōryōshū have been by scholars with sectarian affiliations. One of earliest attempts to provide a modern interpretation of the Shōryōshū is Sakata Kōzen’s *Shōryōshū kōgi* (Shōryōshū Collection, published in 1942. Sakata was a professor at Kōyasan University, and the volume is a compilation of his lectures on the collection. The work itself is impressive: it presents each text in the Shōryōshū line by line, with phonetic glosses, explanations of difficult characters, a summary in modern Japanese, and a few interpretative comments. However, he provides no background information aside from what Shinzei presents in his preface, which he appears to accept uncritically. The liberal use of honorifics to refer to Kūkai and describe his actions reveals the author's sectarian bias. Sakata Kōzen, 薩田光全, *Shōryōshū kōgi* (Shōryōshū Collection, published in 1942). Watanabe and Miyasaka, the co-editors of the NKBT edition used as the primary source for this study, provide much more historical detail regarding Shinzei’s life, but do not entertain the possibility of political motivations.
school.\textsuperscript{35} While there appeared to be no direct animosity among his disciples, differing political loyalties inevitably put them at odds.\textsuperscript{36} One such example is Shinzei's acceptance of a request from Emperor Montoku 文德天皇 (827–858, r. 850–858) in 850 to perform prayers so that his son, Prince Koretaka 惟雑親王 (844–897), could ascend to the throne.\textsuperscript{37} Koretaka's mother was Ki no Seishi 續静子 (?–866), the daughter of Ki no Natōra 續名虎 (?–847), so Shinzei was a blood relative of the prince.\textsuperscript{38} However, the ascent was opposed by the Minister of the Right, Fujiwara no Yoshifusa 藤原良房 (804–872), whose daughter Meishi 明子 (829–900) was a consort to Montoku and mother of Prince Korehito 惟仁親王 (850–881). Yoshifusa enlisted the services of Shinga 真雅 (801–879), another disciple of Kūkai, who established the Shingon-in at the Tōdaiji temple, to perform similar prayer rituals on behalf of Korehito. Thus, Shingon priests representing two different temples were used as pawns in a proxy struggle between the Ki and the Fujiwara, with the latter emerging victorious.\textsuperscript{39} After Montoku's abdication, Korehito assumed the throne as Emperor Seiwa 清和天皇 (r. 858–876), allowing Yoshifusa to consolidate his power base.

Therefore, Shinzei's compilation of the Shōryōshū was a monument to Kūkai's literary talents and an embodiment of his wish to preserve the best examples of Kūkai's writings for future generations. Situating the Shōryōshū within the political milieu of its day reveals another agenda: creating political and cultural capital for Shinzei after Kūkai's death. A lack of unity in the newly formed Shingon “school” inevitably put Kūkai's disciples at odds, so Shinzei drew on his background as a member of the erudite Ki clan to recast his departed master as a literary figure. In the preface, he established himself as an authority on Kūkai's writings by highlighting his unparalleled access and editorial powers. The interpretation and transmission of Kūkai's legacy in the years following his death are often understood within the framework of hagiographies based on the Kōbō Daishi legend. In contrast, the Shōryōshū and its preface present an opposing tradition, where Kūkai is venerated as a real person navigating the literary and political milieu of his day.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Shinzei's preface to the Shōryōshū was a monument to Kūkai's literary talents and an embodiment of his wish to preserve the best examples of Kūkai's writings for future generations. Situating the Shōryōshū within the political milieu of its day reveals another agenda: creating political and cultural capital for Shinzei after Kūkai's death. A lack of unity in the newly formed Shingon “school” inevitably put Kūkai's disciples at odds, so Shinzei drew on his background as a member of the erudite Ki clan to recast his departed master as a literary figure. In the preface, he established himself as an authority on Kūkai's writings by highlighting his unparalleled access and editorial powers. The interpretation and transmission of Kūkai's legacy in the years following his death are often understood within the framework of hagiographies based on the Kōbō Daishi legend. In contrast, the Shōryōshū and its preface present an opposing tradition, where Kūkai is venerated as a real person navigating the literary and political milieu of his day.

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\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{38} Sakae Yasutoshi 坂上俊俊, \textit{Ritsurō kokka no tenkan to “Nihon” 仏愣国家の転換と「日本」} (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 216.

\textsuperscript{39} A somewhat corrupted version of this event is recreated in Chapter Eight of \textit{The Tale of the Heike}. Helen Craig McCullough, trans., \textit{The Tale of the Heike} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 260–1.
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