And in obedience to the imperial command
Serve with a manly heart,
Passing from garrison to garrison;\(^{40}\)
And when your duty is done, may you return
In happiness and health!"\(^{41}\)

So she prays,

Putting the sacred wine-jar at her bedside.
Pining and waiting for you these long days,
And her black hair spread out—\(^{41}\)
Your sweet young wife!

**Envoys**

When the soldier-husband went forth
Carrying a quiver on his shoulder,
How bitterly she must have wailed—
His wife so loath to part!

How sad was the parting
Of the Eastlander from his wife—
He brooding on the long years
Of separation!

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**Buddhism as Protector of the Nation**

Buddhism came to Japan in 552 A.D. (or 538), and contributed to the establishment of new national institutions and to the development of a new set of values. Its images, paintings and psalmody were beautiful and overpowering, bridging the distance between this world and the other world. They seemed to contain magical powers far more potent than those found in the liturgies of the indigenous Shinto cult.

The power of Buddhism was not overlooked by the ruling sovereigns. For example, after the Jinshin rebellion, Emperor Tenmu periodically decreed observance of Buddhist practices and payment of stipends to Buddhist monasteries (Document 6), obviously in an attempt to acquire merits and to achieve peace and harmony in his realm.

The most popular Buddhist sутra in Japan through the Nara period was the Sūtra of the Golden Light (Document 7). It claimed that if the sутra were studied diligently, the Four Deva Kings would come to defend the country from calamities and from pestilence. The scripture was presumed to have the power of protecting the state, and could provide rules for administration. In 741 Emperor Shōmu ordered that provincial monasteries and nunneries be established throughout the country, and provided sustenance households for them (Document 8). He was the same emperor who erected the statue of Rosahan Buddha and built the Todaiji (temple). The new faith was well provided for, and in return “protected” the nation.

The idea that Buddhism could protect the nation was not created in Japan, but its origin can be traced to the Buddhism of the northern dynasties in China. Its application in Japan was both an act of faith and a shrewd political move. The monasteries and nunneries became the outposts for the influence of the imperial power. The imperial court, which lacked physical power to gain allegiance from remote provinces, was able to bring the remote provinces securely under its fold through the moral suasion provided by the newly found faith.

There is no doubt that the acceptance of Buddhism before and during the Nara period was motivated mainly by a desire for greater material and political benefits and there was very little spiritual quest. However, at the same time, Buddhism was also able to serve as a “magic garden” to stir Japanese imagination for greater creativity, in architecture, sculpture, and literature.

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6 **Temmu’s Propagation of Buddhism, 676–685 A.D.**\(^ {42}\) On this day [Autumn, eighth month, 17th day, fifth year of the reign of Temmu, or 676], the Emperor ordered all the provinces to release living things.

Winter, eleventh month, 20th day. Messengers were sent to all parts of the country to expound the Sūtra of the Golden Light and the Ninnō Sūtra.\(^ {43}\)

Summer, fifth month, 1st day [680]. By the imperial command, a gift of varying amount consisting of coarse silk, floss silk, raw silk, and cloth was made to each of the twenty-four temples located within the capital.

The expounding of the Sūtra of the Golden Light was begun this day in the imperial palace and in the temples.

Winter, eleventh month, 12th day. The Empress was taken ill. The Emperor in praying for her recovery made a vow on her behalf, and began the erection of the

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\(^ {40}\) The frontier guards posted at one garrison were shifted to another at the end of each season.

\(^ {41}\) A form of magic to ensure the safe return of an absent person.

\(^ {42}\) Nihon Shoki, op. cit., pp. 342, 343, 353, 355.

\(^ {43}\) Karunikaraja-prajnaparamita Sūtra (or Sūtra of the Benevolent Kings). In this sутra the Buddha explained to King Prasenajit and fifteen other benevolent kings how they could protect their countries against all kinds of calamities by means of the divine power of the Great Bodhisattvas of the Five Quarters. (See M. W. de Visser, Ancient Buddhism in Japan, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1935), pp. 12–13.)
Yakushiji. He ordered the ordination of one hundred persons to enter the Buddhist priesthood. As a result the Empress recovered and an amnesty was proclaimed.

Spring, third month, 27th day [685]. The Emperor decreed that every household in every province should erect a family Buddhist shrine in which to place an image of Buddha along with Buddhist sutras. These shrines were to be worshipped and offerings of food were to be made to them.

7 Sutra of the Golden Light of the Most Excellent Kings

At this time, the Four Deva Kings and others in unison replied to the most Gracious Lord: “Fitting indeed! If there are kings who propagate and study this precious Sutra of the Golden Light, we the Four Deva Kings shall come to protect them always, and be with them at all times. Whatever calamities may befall or curses cast upon them, we the Four Deva Kings shall extinguish them. Eradicating all fears and pestilence from among them, we shall increase their longevity, and let them share in the propitious happiness of heaven. Their hearts’ desires shall be fulfilled and there shall be an outpouring of joy. We shall also make all soldiers in their countries to become strong...”

Buddha replied and said: “If a king studies this Sutra of the Golden Light and lets its knowledge spread throughout his country, there will be four kinds of benefits for his ministers and functionaries. The four are as follows: First, the ministers and functionaries will become friendly, respectful and loving toward each other. Second, they will become cherished ones in the heart of the king and will be revered by priests, brahmans, large countries and small countries alike. Third, they will respect the law, pay less attention to material wealth, and seek no worldly gains. And their good names shall be known everywhere and venerated by the people. Fourth, their lives shall be prolonged and become peaceful and joyful. These are then called the four benefits. If there is a country where this sutra is preached, priests and brahmans shall gain four kinds of victories. The four-are as follows: First, they will not be in want of clothing, food, sleeping quarters, and medicine. Second, they will all gain peace of mind, and meditate and study the sutra. Third, they will find a good place of abode by the mountains and trees. Fourth, they will all become content according to their hearts’ desires.

8 Erection of Provincial Temples

In the thirteenth year of Tempyō [741], 24th day of the third month, the Emperor [Shōmu] decreed, saying: “We, even though lacking in virtue, have been entrusted with the responsibilities of governing the country. We have not been able to spread our beneficent rule, and day and night We are besieged with the feeling of inadequacies. Of old, enlightened kings carried on the work of former sovereigns, and brought peace to the nation and joy to the people. They eradicated calamities and brought about happiness. What was the secret behind their beneficent rule which enabled them to attain these goals? Lately, annual grain crops have not been abundant, and we have been visited by pestilence frequently. Remorse and trepidation are mixed in Our mind, and We work diligently to atone for Our sins.

“Seeking widely to benefit all sentient beings, and to gain happiness for all uniformly, We sent messengers in past years on fast horses to shrines everywhere in our country and increased their stipends. Last year We ordered that every province should erect one golden image of Buddha Skakamani, sixteen feet in height, and write out one copy of the Daishoninkyō.

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44 Dedicated to Yakushi Nyorai (Sansk. Bhechadjiyaguru), the teacher of medicine. This temple was completed in 697 but later moved to a site near Nara. Today it still serves as the main temple for the Hossō sect.

45 Bussha or miyarak. It is probably similar to the present-day butsudan (household Buddhist shrine).


47 The Four Deva Kings are Vaishravana, Dharatrastra, Virudhaka and Virupaksa. All of them are given the task of protecting Buddhist nations.


49 Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra (or Sutra of Great Wisdom), translated into Chinese in six hundred volumes by the famed Tang monk, Xuan Zang between 600 and 663. The sutra teaches that all objects, differing in nature one from the other, are homogeneous with the absolute reality, and vice versa. The distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds is but subjective; they are in fact of our own making, the product of our own mind. The sutra is believed to have the power of setting men free from all evils. (See Harper H. Coats and Ryugaku Ishizuka, Hōnen, the Buddhist Saint: His Life and Teaching (Kyoto: Chionin, 1925), pp. 269–270.)
"From the past spring until the harvest time in the fall, the wind and rain were orderly and the five crops grew abundantly. It happened in this manner, as if the spirit, the seer, has answered Our supplications, recognizing Our sincerity. With fear and trembling, and without engaging in Our own speculations. We have consulted the scriptures. It is said that in the countries where the Sutra of the Golden Light was explained, read and propagated devoutly, the Four Deva Kings would always come to protect them. Thus all calamities would be eradicated and fear and pestilence would be extinguished. The hearts’ desires would be fulfilled, and there would be continuous joy.

"Thus We command that each of the provinces shall with reverence erect a seven-storied pagoda, and write out a copy each of the Sutra of the Golden Light and the Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law.⁵⁰ We also plan to make special copies of the Sutra of the Golden Light in golden characters, and deposit a copy in each of the pagodas. It is Our desire that the Sacred Law prosper, and be transmitted eternally, coeval with heaven and earth. The benefit of the protection of the Sacred Law encompasses both this world and the world on the other shore. It must be made known to all. The building of a temple is, at the same time, the finest decoration for the state. Thus a good location must be found, which must be made permanent. If the location is too near a population center, unwittingly it may acquire the undesirable stench. If it is too far away from a population center, unwittingly it may make the gathering of the people a burdensome chore.

"Ye provincial governors (kuni no tsukasa) must perform your duties diligently, and make yourselves pure. Let the heaven know of your sincerity that it may abide by you and protect you. Let the people near and afar know Our august wishes."

The Early Heian Period

Near the end of the Nara period, the monk Dōkyō made an abortive attempt to usurp the throne. It was symptomatic of the corruption of Buddhism and of its political power, and the lesson was not lost to the later rulers of Japan. Emperor Kammu moved the capital from Nara first to Nagaoka (784) and then to Heian (the present-day Kyoto) in 794. He did so, at least in part, to escape the corrosive influence of the six Buddhist sects of Nara. In addition, he closely scrutinized commendation or purchase of lands by the temples. On a more positive side, he permitted and even encouraged monks to study in mountains and forests, away from established Buddhist centers.

These measures created a climate for the growth of a new type of Buddhism, and two new faces responded to the challenge. The first was Saichō, who was born in 767. He was ordained in 785 at the Tōdaiji in Nara, but instead of remaining in that Buddhist center, he withdrew to Mt. Hiei. In 804, he accompanied the Japanese embassy to Tang China and remained there for eight months. He studied the scriptures, organization of monasteries, methods of instruction and Buddhism’s relations to the secular power. On his return he received the imperial assent to establish a new Tendai sect in Japan which was based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra (Document 1).

One of the crowning achievements of Saichō was to have the Imperial Court grant Mt. Hiei the right to ordain its own priests, which came shortly after Saichō’s death in 822. As a young man, Saichō questioned the wisdom of ordaining only those people who were “not prisoners, debtors or slaves,” which seemed to imply inequality of men before Buddha as well as the over-pervasive power of the state. By obtaining the power to ordain its own priests, Mt. Hiei was able to challenge the authority of the six Nara sects and to ascertain a certain measure of independence from the temporal power of the state.

Kūkai (774–835) was another of the most notable Buddhist masters of this