

<Abstract>

A study of a distinctive use of characters common to works attributed to Prince Shotoku:

Consideration of the differences between 小 (shō) and 少 (shō)

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Various views have been expressed concerning whether the works attributed to Prince Shotoku *Sangyō Gisho* (“Annotated Commentaries on the Three Sutras”), *Jūshichijō Kenpō* (“Seventeen-Article Constitution”), and *Kan’i Jūnikai* (“Twelve Level Cap and Rank System”) should be recognized as Shotoku’s writings, whether they were prepared in the process of compilation of the *Nihon Shoki* (“Chronicles of Japan”), or whether they were documents prepared by the intelligentsia of the period and issued under Shotoku’s name.

As an effort to resolve this issue, this paper focuses on the author’s idiosyncrasies. These refer to errors unnoticed by the author, which could be used to identify the true author.

The results show that Prince Shotoku had an idiosyncrasy of mistakenly writing the character 少 (shō) when 小 (shō) was intended. This idiosyncrasy appears at a very high frequency. While customarily it is held that 小 and 少 were mixed commonly in ancient sources, in fact this characteristic appears commonly only in works attributed to Prince Shotoku and is almost nonexistent in other sources. As such, the customary view may be mistaken.

This idiosyncrasy appears with a frequency of 97.90% in the *Hokke Gisho* (“Annotated Commentary on the Lotus Sutra”), 100% in the *Jūshichijō Kenpō*, and 100% even in *Jōgū Hōō Shōtoku Teisetsu* (biography of Prince Shotoku), contained in the *Kan’i Jūnikai*. In contrast, its frequency is only 0.25% in the *Nihon Shoki* and 0% in the *Kojiki* (“Records of Ancient Matters”)—a statistically significant difference.

Thus, the characters written in the sources themselves imply that the *Sangyō Gisho*, *Jūshichijō Kenpō*, and *Kan’i Jūnikai* were penned by the same author.

Since authorship of an annotated commentary on the sutras requires a deep level of Buddhist knowledge, only a person affiliated with the Yamato court could promulgate a constitution, and adoption of the *Kan’i Jūnikai* requires a strong desire for political reform, conjecture regarding the author leads to the conclusion that only Prince Shotoku satisfies all of these conditions.

While these three writings include powerful evidence for the theory that Prince Shotoku was their author—a) the period of authorship, b) their ideological commonalities, and c) the author’s idiosyncrasies—no evidence was identified for the theory that they have been misattributed to Shotoku.