

Princess Sen: Solace in Prayer

Death of Princess Sen's Son

If a woman in feudal Japan wanted to end her marriage, she first had to enter an *enkiri-dera*, a “relationship-severing temple,” which was required even if her husband died. Women seeking divorce and widows who wished to remarry had to spend a period of work and prayer at one of these special temples. Princesses received special dispensation though, and rather than enter an *enkiri-dera* herself, Princess Sen (1597–1666) sent a proxy to sever ties with her deceased first husband, Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615).

She came to regret the shortcut. Princess Sen's son, Kōchiyo (1618–1621), died of illness as a young child, and Princess Sen suffered repeated miscarriages trying to bear another child. A fortune teller blamed the angry spirit of Hideyori as the malevolent force behind these misfortunes. Princess Sen responded by commissioning a statue of Kannon, the Buddhist deity of mercy and compassion. Inside it, she placed a written prayer pleading for release from Hideyori's curse. She ordered priests in the Keikōin Temple in Ise province (in today's Mie Prefecture) to pray on her behalf.

Turning to Religion

Princess Sen was a devotee of the Shinto god Tenjin. She ordered that a shrine to the deity be constructed on Otokoyama, a hill visible from Himeji Castle, and there she installed a wooden Tenjin statue that had previously been housed in the castle. From her apartments in the gallery of the West Bailey, she offered daily prayers for the birth of another son.

Those prayers went unanswered. Princess Sen never had another child, and her husband Honda Tadatoki (1596–1626) died of illness in 1626, barely into his thirties. After Tadatoki's death, Princess Sen left Himeji and became a nun, cutting her hair and taking the religious name Tenjuin. She spent the rest of her days praying for the souls of Tadatoki and Kōchiyo. She died in 1666 at the age of sixty-nine.

Kannon statue commissioned by Princess Sen

Princess Sen placed a written prayer inside this statue of the Buddhist deity Kannon, asking to be released from a curse.

Statue of Tenjin dedicated by Princess Sen to Senhime Tenmangū Shrine

Princess Sen had this statue of the Shinto god Tenjin transferred from the castle to Otokoyama Tenmangū. She is said to have prayed to it every morning and evening.