

Li Narangoa, *Japanische Religionspolitik in der Mongolei 1932–1945. Reformbestrebungen und Dialog zwischen japanischem und mongolischem Buddhismus*. Studies in Oriental Religions 43. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998. xiv + 299 pp. 98,00 DM paper, ISBN 3-447-04028-9. (In German with English summary)

IN RECENT YEARS, colonialism and its impact on the affected cultures and peoples have increasingly attracted the attention of researchers in various disciplines. One of the specific topics that has invited new reflections and reappraisal is the relationship between colonialist policies and the missionary efforts of religious organizations. Since colonialism is taken to have been a policy of Western or European powers, it is not surprising that missionary work is primarily understood as an activity originating from the religion forming part and parcel of these powers, i.e., some brand of Christianity. It is, therefore, interesting that the present volume draws attention to missionary efforts of Buddhist groups in cooperation with the political intentions of a non-Western power, i.e., Japan. Using a great amount of Japanese, Chinese, and Mongol sources, Li throws light on the relationship of Japanese Buddhist groups to Japanese efforts in consolidating Japan's political rule over Manchuria and parts of Mongolia, and on the character of missionary efforts by these groups in support of their government's policies. The general thrust of these policies was to protect the Japanese acquisitions in East Asia against the threat of communism by winning support from the Mongol rulers for the Japanese case. The Japanese understood that in order to achieve this goal they needed to reckon with Lamaism because of the important role this religion played among the Mongols and because of the high esteem it enjoyed

among both the Mongol rulers and the population. However, they did not accept Lamaism as a brand of Buddhism equal to theirs; rather, they conceived it as a religion plagued by superstition and, therefore, in need of reform. Lamaism reformed at the hands of Japanese would then be more akin to the general aims of the Japanese administration. In order to achieve such a reform the missionary activity of Japanese Buddhist groups in agreement with general policies was considered to be important.

According to the author, the beginning of missionary activities on the Asian continent by Japanese Buddhists goes back to the end of the Russo-Japanese war. However, at the time, Buddhists offered religious and welfare services first of all to Japanese soldiers and settlers. This situation changed significantly as a consequence of the sharp increase in politico-military tension after 1937. From this time on, religious groups did not only become considerably more active, but also started to work in close cooperation with political institutions to such a degree that propagating their religion was relegated to second rank. They established local schools where Japanese language and modern methods in medicine and agriculture were taught. They also invited young lamas to Japan in order to have them study Japanese Buddhism. This would prepare them for the mission entrusted to them (namely, to reform Lamaism at home), and it would also cultivate among them a new kind of loyalty, one for both the Japanese and the Japanese-installed Manchu emperor.

The author briefly characterizes the general historical situation in the eastern part of Inner Mongolia and highlights the machinations engaged in by the Kwantung Army in its effort to enlist the cooperation of ranking lamas. This sets the general background for the book's main section where the author takes up five groups, one after another, to describe their advances on the mainland and their efforts to educate young lamas at their home institutions in Japan. The groups are Jōdo Shinshū, Tendai, Jōdo-shū of Chion-in, Nichiren, and Shingon of Mt. Kōya. Here surface some remarkable facts about the methods employed by the Japanese missionaries. They soon realized that in order to understand Lamaism they would need to enter its monasteries. There they would not only get at the source of Lamaist thinking, but they would also reach the people who gathered there from their homes that were widely scattered over great stretches of land and who were thus difficult to reach. As already mentioned, much of the missionary effort was directed at teaching Japanese and modern skills, and through this at fostering loyal feelings towards Japan among students. Promising Mongolian students were chosen with government approval to be sent to Japan in order to be further instructed in Buddhism at such centers as Mt. Kōya, Mt. Hiei, and Chion-in. As an example of the close cooperation of religion with political purposes, the author refers to a legend about Nichijin Shōnin, a disciple of Nichiren. According to this legend Nichijin Shōnin did early missionary work among the Mongols, and so the story served as a justification for government intervention in Mongolia, and this, as the author points out, without the adherents of Nichirenshū noticing it (166).

In a short section about the reaction against these Japanese efforts, the

author mentions that the Japanese efforts at reforming Lamaism prompted intense discussions about the pros and cons of reforms. While no consensus could be reached on how the reforms should be performed, there was a sense that reforms were necessary, and a consensus that they could not be of the kind proposed by the Japanese. The sheer amount of detail the author adduces is testimony to the extent of the Japanese missionary effort to win the hearts of the Mongols; and yet, as she concludes, the religious reformation of Lamaism was a failure because the lamas were not prepared to change their beliefs. Not only that, the Japanese efforts at reforming religion had a quite different effect. Those who had become the target of intense missionary efforts with the intention not only to reform their religion but to make them loyal to Japan, became, in fact, more aware of their own proper values as Mongols, a phenomenon the author calls “national emancipation” (232).

In view of the material analyzed by the author it is understandable that the book presents mostly the Japanese view. This view is characterized by the assumption that Mongolian Buddhism had to be reformed in order to make the Mongols more adapted to Japanese religious, and even more importantly, political intentions. It is not quite clear where “dialogue” comes into the picture, although the author mentions the term explicitly in the book’s subtitle. As is made clear by the author, some of the ideas propagated by the Japanese did interest reform-oriented people in Mongolia, but there is hardly anything in the book that would suggest that the Japanese side considered learning about Mongolian Buddhism in order to enter into a dialogue and not merely attempt a unilateral “reform.” For a dialogue the partners were too unequal. On the one side the Japanese Buddhists tended to forget that they actually followed the instructions of a hidden player in the game. The Mongols, on the other side, had their doubts about the seriousness of the Japanese monk-students in their monasteries, and suspected them to be in fact spies because they observed them writing notes late at night. Unfortunately the author remains silent on the effects such suspicion had on the “dialogue” between Mongols and Japanese.

Readers will be grateful to the author for the vast amount of detail laid out in this book and for her lucid presentation. This is particularly praiseworthy since German is not the author’s native language. There is, however, a question that remains unaddressed. Even if one understands the eagerness of Japanese Buddhists to reform Lamaism, one would like to receive some illumination about what might have been the reasons that all these major Buddhist groups were so eager to promote the consolidation of Japanese rule on the continent. Although they claimed to support the promotion of peace within Great East Asia, they also supported their government in the war it was waging on the continent. This book may perhaps become an incentive to ponder that question.

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