

The Prince and the Monk: Shōtoku Worship in Shinran's Buddhism, by Kenneth Doo Young Lee, State University of New York Press, 2007. 242pp., hb., \$74.00/£53.25, ISBN-13: 9780791470213; pb. \$25.95/£16.25. ISBN-13: 9780791470220

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Keywords

Japanese Buddhism, Shinran, Shōtoku

Revered by generations for his instrumental role in introducing Buddhism to Japan, Prince Shōtoku (circa. 574–622) or Shōtoku Taishi is undoubtedly one of the most illustrious symbols of Japan's past. His image as the founder of Japanese Buddhism lives on in contemporary literature and popular media. The fact remains, though, that there is little in the way of evidence to demonstrate convincingly that he was a real historical character. Rather, our assumption that he existed bears testimony to the success of tales and legends in imbuing him with a sense of lived reality.

In this regard, Lee's compelling study on the worship of Shōtoku by Shinran (1173–1262), the founder of Jōdo Shin Buddhism (or True Pure Land Buddhism) in medieval Japan, is of special merit. In his book, Lee has undertaken, with erudition and rigor, the task of analyzing how the image of Shōtoku was developed and perpetuated. According to him, 'what is centrally important is not proving the truth of Shōtoku's miraculous exploits or other stretched truths, but understanding how Shōtoku was worshipped during the early and medieval period in Japan' (35). He is deeply concerned with questions that are crucial for contextualizing Shinran's relationship with Shōtoku. Why did Shōtoku occupy a prominent role in Shinran's life? How was Shōtoku's image promoted? What religious meanings did Shinran associate with Shōtoku?

One of the most notable strengths of this book is the focus in chapter one on Shinran's dream involving Shōtoku and the *bodhisattva* Kannon in Rokkakudō, a temple supposedly founded by Shōtoku. In the dream, Shōtoku revealed to Shinran that Kannon would manifest as his wife Eshinni and ensure his rebirth in the Pure Land. In Lee's view, this dream has been overlooked 'because of the mistrust of sectarian theorists who use mythical anomalies to establish Shinran as the charismatic founder of the Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism' (12). Of particular significance is a letter that Eshinni wrote to Kakushinni, Shinran's youngest daughter. Lee refers to it to illustrate discrepancies in the details surrounding Shinran's dream. This letter by Eshinni described Shōtoku as the one whom Shinran encountered in the dream. But, according to *Honganji Shōnin Shinran denne*, the biography of Shinran written by his great-grandson Kakunyo, instead of Shōtoku, it was Kannon who appeared in Shinran's dream as a monk dressed in white and seated on a lotus (18–19).¹ In Kakunyo's version, Kannon promised to turn himself into

1. See also James C. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval*

a woman and accompany Shinran throughout his life and afterlife. In the face of these two variant accounts, Lee is inclined to believe that 'Eshinni's recollection is likely to be more accurate than Kakunyo's because she probably heard it firsthand from Shinran' (20). At the same time, he does not completely dismiss Kakunyo's account, citing it as evidence of the growing practice of worshipping Kannon as a female divinity (19). The confusion between Shōtoku and Kannon in these secondary accounts is largely due to ambiguities in the language used to describe the content of the dream. As Lee shows, Shinran elevated Shōtoku to a level on a par with Kannon by referring to them both as *guze* (world-saving) (29). Thus worshipping them was, in a concrete sense, a mode of salvation.

Lee has consistently made it clear that it is most productive to understand how Buddhist clerics embellished Shōtoku's image and exploited accounts of his sanctity to their own advantage. In his treatment of Shōtoku-inspired legends throughout chapters two, three, and four, Lee meticulously examines the ways Shōtoku's image was continually re-endorsed in early and medieval Japan. His observations about Shōtoku's representations in imperial historical records and hagiographical accounts are striking in three ways. The first is that Shōtoku was injected into the historiography of the Nara court and used as part of a political strategy to sustain the authority of Buddhist institutions within the newly codified court system. By portraying Shōtoku as a learned scholar of Confucianism and Buddhism, historiographers not only aimed to eclipse the accomplishments of the ruling Soga clan members in Asuka but also sought legitimacy for the Fujiwara lineage of descent, which found itself in direct competition with the Soga clan lineage over imperial authority (46–47). Secondly, Lee notes that Shōtoku's image was greatly aided by the prevalence of *honji suijaku* or the manifestation of Buddhist divinities as Shinto deities, a religious phenomenon that took root early in medieval Japanese society as Shinto and Buddhist traditions fused together (76). Through *honji suijaku*, Shōtoku was easily conceived of as a *kami* with Kannon as his *honji*. The *honji suijaku* religious paradigm thus closed the divide between native Shinto *kami* and Buddhist divinities and encouraged the worship of Shinto *kami* in the Buddhist schema. Thirdly, he clearly illustrates that prior to Shinran's time, many Buddhist sects were already actively worshipping Shōtoku, and famous temples like Hōryūji and Shitennōji had been established for this purpose, thereby demonstrating that Shinran's reverence of Shōtoku stemmed from a common heritage.

The final chapter reads, in part, like a collection of Lee's reflections on significant episodes in Shinran's career. With the rise of new Buddhist sects preaching *senju nembutsu* or exclusive *nembutsu*, it is tempting to subscribe to the view that Shinran subverted orthodox Tendai doctrines in order to assert the independence of his own Jōdo Shin Buddhist sect. However, Lee argues that Shinran did not deviate from the core Mahāyāna principles of emptiness and non-duality (116–117). In his defense of Shinran, Lee suggests that Shinran's teachings were branded as heterodoxy mainly because the state-sanctioned Nara schools of Buddhism feared losing wealthy aristocratic patrons to upstarts like Shinran,

Japan in Medieval Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 25–27. Lee provides a partial translation of Eshinni's letter to Kakushinni. For the interested reader, Dobbins provides a discussion of Eshinni's letters and explains how they relate to our understanding of Jōdo Shin Buddhism.

thereby threatening the stability of their financial bases (123). Shinran unsettled them because, through the practice of *nembutsu*, he made Buddhism accessible to the lay people (123). In particular, he appealed to his followers to show personal faith in the grace of Amida Buddha through *tariki* ('other-power', as opposed to *jiriki*, 'self-power'). By so doing, and thereby bypassing secret *Dharma* transmission, the attainment of enlightenment was no longer the preserve of elite *kenmitsu* or Exoteric-Esoteric Buddhism. Also, Lee sees a special role for Shōtoku in Shinran's teachings. He argues that, 'Shinran's worship of Shōtoku as *guze* Kannon undermined the imperial and political authorities' efforts to legitimize their rule through their imperial connection to Shōtoku' (124). In stressing Shōtoku's saving grace and envisioning him as the archetypal religious king, Shinran initiated a veiled critique of the imperial politics of the day.

Although Lee's book sheds light on less familiar aspects of Shinran's life and thought, several crucial points were not adequately addressed. First, Lee states in his introduction that, 'My thesis is that Shinran's thought has been misunderstood among nearly all the major branches of Buddhism he founded precisely because his heirs in the dharma failed to appreciate the central importance of his worship of this historical and legendary figure of Shōtoku' (2). What this thesis implies is that Shōtoku worship ended with Shinran's demise. However, this is not true. In his typological study of Shōtoku-related relics scattered across temples in present-day Ishikawa prefecture, the Japanese scholar Hamaoka Shinya draws attention to a large number of Buddhist sculptures of Shōtoku and *emaki* narrative scrolls visualizing the life of Shōtoku.² This corpus of artifacts postdating Shinran indicates that Shōtoku worship was carried out throughout the medieval period and was concentrated in specific geographic regions like Ishikawa. In the light of this material evidence, Lee could have expanded his analysis to explore how Shinran's ideas about Shōtoku were enforced within the Jōdo Shin Buddhist lineage and discussed the ways in which social and institutional mechanisms on the local level helped to sustain belief in Shōtoku.

Second, the discussion regarding handwritten accounts of Shinran's Rokkakudō dream could have benefited from a consideration as to whether the discrepancies were merely accidental or intentional. If it were the latter, what might have been the reasons for Eshinni to identify Shōtoku in Shinran's dream? Was gender a contributing factor as well? Third, perhaps Lee could have clarified whether Shinran's worship of Shōtoku was truly distinct among the new schools of Kamakura Buddhism. If Shinran's appropriation of Shōtoku can be interpreted as a resistance against political authority, did the Nichiren or Sōtō Zen sects resort to this same strategy? What distinguished Shinran's brand of worship from other pre-existing forms of worship? More space could have been devoted to each of these questions.

Overall, Lee is to be applauded for this welcome contribution on the relationship between Shōtoku and Shinran. Situating his research at the intersection of history and religion, Lee has written a book that will appeal to scholars interested in questions about how the ancient past was refracted through Shōtoku and how the religious culture of medieval Japan evolved through the appropriation

2. Hamaoka, Shinya 濱岡伸也, 'Ishikawa no Taishi shinkō to Shinshū' 石川の太子信仰と真宗, in *Nihon no rekishi to Shinshū* 日本の歴史と真宗, ed. Chiba Jōryū 千葉乗隆 (Kyoto: Jishōsha Shuppan, 2001), 157–174.

of his image. His study underlines the permeability of the present and the ways in which relevant pasts are continuously constructed, interpreted and re-interpreted to suit prevailing discourses.