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James C. Dobbins, *Jōdo Shinshū: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*. Religion in Asia and Africa Series, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989. xi + 242pp. Hardcover US\$35.00. ISBN 0-253-33186-2.

The author, professor of Religion and East Asian Studies at Oberlin College, passed several extended periods in Japan to research the present work and is evidently well versed in the Japanese language.

A reviewer can of course make no more flattering remark about a book under review than by saying that he wished he had written it himself. Those are exactly the feelings of the present reviewer. Analyzing the reasons for this envious admiration, the following come to mind. First of all, the book really responds

to a need, by filling much of the hitherto existing gap, at the least for the non-Japanese audience, between Shinran's doctrine (recently available in part through good translations and some fine commentaries) and the sociological facts of present-day Shinshū with its mighty organization, its many branches, its temples and temple priests, its attitudes towards Japanese society, and the practices of its faithful. It might not be an exaggeration to compare the situation we were in up to now to that of a Chinese or Japanese who knew of Christianity only by reading the gospels, and then finding himself confronted all of a sudden with the reality of Christianity, say in Rome.

Second, Dobbins treats his subject critically but at the same time with great empathy as shown, for example, by his general evaluation: "Shinran's teachings were not so much a distortion of Buddhism as an emphasis of certain Buddhist principles over others" (p. 7). Third, the author goes about his task in a thoroughly professional way, relying mainly on primary sources and on the abundant literature in Japanese, and providing us with 45 pages of well-researched notes. Fourth, Dobbins tells us what happened in and to the sect and to its main representatives during that formative period, the somewhat more than 200 years between Shinran's death in 1262 and Rennyo's death in 1499. But far from limiting himself to institutional history, he devotes at least as much attention to the doctrinal issues, and the relationship between the doctrinal and the institutional. Fifth, the author never buries us under a mountain of details but shows a knack for getting straight to the heart of the question and presenting the relevant facts and ideas in masterful summary. Or, to say it another way, I found in this book answers to most of the questions I had with regard to this period of Shinshū history, and very few passages irrelevant to these questions. Finally, I am grateful for the readable prose and the careful editing. Typos are nearly non-existent even in the diacritical marks (which is quite a feat!); the Index is very helpful and the extended Glossary of Chinese and Japanese Terms a real boon. (However, incorporation of the characters into the body of the text would have been ideal!)

Let us come now to the contents of the book. The first three chapters are introductory. They put the accent on doctrine right from the beginning and together form as good an introduction to Shinshū doctrine as any I know. On page 7, the author defines the aim of his study as follows: "This study, while following the vertical or diachronic transmission of Shin teachings, seeks also to define the horizontal or synchronic environment in which they evolved, and to identify the external influences which also left their mark on the school." Soon afterwards he betrays his special interest in questions of orthodoxy and heresy. This is evidently a carry-over from the author's Ph.D. dissertation at Yale University: "The Emergence of Orthodoxy: A Historical Study of Heresy in the Early Jōdo Shinshū" (1984). But he argues rather convincingly for the fruitfulness of this slant as a "conceptual framework for examining Shinshū development" (p. 8), and anyway this special stress never becomes a burden to the reader.

In Chapter 1, “Jōdo Shinshū,” we are given an overview of the history of the Pure Land movement within Buddhism, as perceived by Shinran and his followers. This is important for, indeed, “This view of Shin history is part and parcel of the sacred story that gives the school definition” (p.7). Chapter 2, “Hōnen, the Exclusive Nembutsu, and Suppression,” is an admirable thumb sketch of the figure and role of Shinran’s teacher. Special attention is given here to the reactions his appearance provoked in the traditional Buddhist sects, the persecutions, and the defensive attitude imposed thereby on the nenbutsu followers. Chapter 3, “Shinran and his Teachings” (nearly three times as long as the preceding ones), offers us a balanced picture of Shinran’s doctrine and its evolution against the background of his life. The rather detailed analysis of Shinran’s main work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (pp. 31–38), is particularly helpful but equally enlightening is the presentation of some new stresses appearing in the smaller works of Shinran’s old age (pp. 42–45). If I may voice one reservation here: I missed the role of the 17th Vow in the presentation of the “Practice” Chapter of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*.

Chapter 4 (“Licensed Evil”) forms as it were the transition to the post-Shinran period by exploring the doctrinal disputes among Hōnen’s and Shinran’s disciples, thereby clarifying the delicate and somewhat different positions of Hōnen and Shinran themselves on these points. Licensed evil is thereby singled out as the main (and possibly most destructive) heresy of Shinran’s time. The author judiciously points out that Shinran’s stress on “faith only” legates the problem of the relationship of this faith to everyday life in society as an eternal problem to his followers. Chapter 5, “The Early Shinshū,” tackles the first institutionalization of Shinshū, a hazardous task since Shinran himself was not concerned with organizational aspects and his “religious views were difficult to institutionalize” (p. 64) anyway. Attention is given here to the *dōjō* (meeting places), which emerged as the basic local unit of religious organization and for which rules of conduct were soon drawn up, and to the *Tannishō* as a mirror of the early community and its tribulations. In Chapter 6, “Kakunyo and the Creation of the Honganji Temple,” the spotlight focuses on the organization which will eventually become the indisputable center of the Shinshū movement. The person of Kakunyo (1270–1351), Shinran’s great-grandson and the first to envisage this role for the Honganji, which was originally nothing more than a modest memorial hall for Shinran, is highlighted here and his writings analyzed. The personality and contribution of his elusive son, Zonkaku, also get their due share of attention. While both are at logger heads most of the time, they form a rather united front against heresies inside and attacks from the outside. All in all, a balanced and credible picture of the origins of the Honganji.

Chapter 7, “The Shinshū and the Rival Schools of Buddhism,” then widens the angle of vision to give us a look at the reactions of the established Buddhist sects to this still unorganized upstart, and at the still very fluent relationships of Shinshū with the other branches of the nenbutsu movement. It would appear

that, among Hōnen's disciples, the Seizan branch especially influenced Shinshū thinking, particularly through the *Anjin ketsujōshō*. Of the other Pure Land movements, a good vignette is offered of Ippen's Jishū and of the Ikkōshū, with which Shinshū will often be confused. In Chapter 8 we come back to Shinshū itself to be introduced to the origin, specific traits, relative importance, and mutual relationships of the various "Shinshū Factions." The Bukkōji, Kinshokuji, Senjuji, and Sanmonto branches pass the review one after the other. Although the choice of these branches and the names they are called by are historically sound, a little more attention to the present sectarian spectrum might have made things easier for the non-specialist. The chapter ends with a short description of the developments in the Honganji after Kakunyo's time, which can be seen in retrospect as preparatory steps for the definitive break-through with Rennyo.

The figure of that giant in Shinshū's history is subjected to sympathetic scrutiny in the final Chapter 9, "Rennyo and the Consolidation of the Shinshū." The secret of the phenomenal success of this "second founder" in "bringing the Shinshū into the highest ranks of Japanese Buddhism" (p. 132) and building up the Honganji into an organization that "throughout most of the sixteenth century . . . wielded authority and influence on a par with the greatest political forces of Japan" (p. 154) is here ardently pursued but, not surprisingly, appears to elude even so able a detective. Much importance is attached on this point to Rennyo's Yoshizaki period (1471–1475) but, unfortunately, the social factor which is pointed out several times as influential, namely the formation of autonomous villages, is left unexplained (and the sole footnote devoted to it, nr. 120, appears 13 pages late). Still, we are offered a very revealing picture of the life, character, and activities of this "complex and multifaceted figure," and a penetrating investigation into the moot question of the relationship of Rennyo's doctrine to that of Shinran. Finally, in a short Afterword, the legitimacy of Shinshū within Buddhism is ably defended by presenting Shin Buddhism as "the most fully developed form of lay Buddhism in existence" (p. 159).

Next, to prove that I did my homework as a reviewer, let me indicate a few flies in the ointment. As to content, I would have liked to find a few more elements of an answer to the following two questions. Why, how, and in what sense did Shinshū priests emerge so quickly? (In speaking of the transformation of *dōjō* into temples, the author pays attention to the temple names, but were not temple priests a further requirement?) And secondly, what was the impact of the fact that the early Shinshū priests (to begin with the Honganji head priests) were educated in traditional temples on Shinshū "theology" and practice? And as for the bibliography, I would have liked some justification for the choice of the secondary sources in Japanese. On the one hand, it seems that more recent works by authors, who are otherwise well represented, are not included (the doctoral dissertation still preponderant?); and, on the other, I regret the total absence of authors like Soga Ryōjin and the poor showing of others like Kaneko Daiei (a "nishi" bias?).

But, after these petty quibbles, I am happy to return to a more Shinranesque mode and to thank the author for writing this book for me. It taught me much and gave me much reading pleasure. This work appears to me so basically sound that it will undoubtedly remain, for a long time, an authoritative work on the formative period of Shinshū in any non-Japanese language. Warmly recommended to all students of Buddhism and of Japan.

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