

S. A. THORNTON, *Charisma and Community Formation in Medieval Japan: The Case of the Yūgyō-ha (1300–1700)*. Cornell East Asia Series, no. 102. Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1999. xvi + 290 pp. \$28.00 cloth, ISBN 1-885445-62-8. \$17.00 paper, ISBN 1-885445-02-4.

AT LAST A BOOK has appeared in English that tells the story of the survival and transformation of the teachings of Ippen the holy man. Ippen (1239–1289) was a Pure Land Buddhist teacher who preached widely throughout Japan while adopting a life of itinerancy and pilgrimage. The name, Yūgyō-ha (itinerant school), that occurs in the book's subtitle refers to the most successful of the religious orders descended from Ippen. The Tokugawa government granted the Yūgyō-ha the status of an officially recognized Buddhist sect and permitted it to take control of other, related orders. The sect was called the Jishū, a name that is also used to refer generally to all of Ippen's lineages throughout their history.

Ippen remains today one of the attractive personalities of Japanese Buddhism. Western scholars have published detailed studies of Ippen and of the texts and illustrated biographies associated with him, but they have neglected the Jishū. A common perception has emerged of the Jishū as merely the smallest of the Pure Land schools begun in the Kamakura period. It may come as a surprise, then, to read S. A. Thornton's account of the constancy with which Japan's military elite—from the Ashikaga to the Tokugawa—protected and patronized the Yūgyō-ha, or to find the Jishū characterized as “one of the most prestigious Buddhist institutions” of seventeenth-century Japan (2).

The book uses an interpretive model drawn from the sociology of religion. For Max Weber, the “charisma” of the religious leader involved not only assertion of religious authority but also followers' acceptance of that claim. Weber used the term, “routinization of charisma,” to describe the way a community begun by a charismatic leader survives, transforming itself in response to practical considerations and changing circumstances. Alan Byrman argued that successful charismatic leaders base themselves upon some specific, culturally-derived model for religious careers. He described the formation of religious community as a process of negotiating a reciprocal exchange of power between leader and followers. These constructs provide the framework for Thornton's exploration of how the Yūgyō-ha established a long-lived and widespread religious community.

Although Thornton does not attempt to produce a straightforward chronological account of the Jishū, she does encompass most of its history in her study. The central focus upon the years 1300 to 1700 is bracketed with

discussion of Ippen in the thirteenth century and with an epilogue about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century developments. As the first detailed account of much of this material in English from any methodological perspective, the book makes a considerable contribution to the field of Japanese studies.

The temples of the Jishū preserve a rich heritage of biographies, tracts, recorded sermons, chronologies, poems, and letters. Thornton's study serves to introduce this wealth; it includes welcome, brief translations of primary sources. The author also draws upon the extensive secondary scholarship in Japanese, begun decades ago by scholars from within the Jishū and continued today in a wider scholarly context. But she is also aware of the pitfalls of using this material uncritically. Her Weberian articulation signals an attempt to set aside ingrained biases and find a new critical path through the material.

Thornton's choice of the Weberian model is understandable: Whereas Ippen positioned himself on the margins of Japanese society, within decades of his death in 1289, his followers were acquiring temples and creating structures of authority. But looking at a complex cultural phenomenon through any sort of lens can result in oversimplification. When Ippen's career serves as a conceptual foil for his successors', the contrast may be overdrawn. Thornton characterizes Ippen as a mystic who did not have to come to terms with the "real world" the way his successors did (3, 60). The earliest biography of Ippen, the illustrated *Ippen Hijiri-e* of 1299, does suggest that Ippen did not strive to perpetuate his teaching after his lifetime, but it also shows that Ippen was no stranger to negotiating reciprocal relationships and to solving practical problems. He fed and clothed a band of itinerants and created forms of ministry that won the attention of large numbers of lay people. He diffused the hostility of secular and religious authorities and attracted courtier and warrior followers. Thornton sees Ippen's constant pilgrimage as an extension of his mysticism, likening it to walking meditation. Pilgrimage, however, had social and economic ramifications as well. It glamorized Ippen, a homeless beggar, in the eyes of elite patrons, while the constant change of venue for his activities widened Ippen's base of support, limiting his dependence on any single patron.

The following chapter-by-chapter summary will serve to indicate how the argument is developed: Chapter 1 introduces methodological issues and key developments. Chapter 2, "The Yūgyō-ha and Jishū," traces the transformation of Ippen's itinerant confraternity into a monastic order with an ever more complex bureaucracy. It explains the Yūgyō-ha's system of dual leadership: A Yūgyō Shōnin based at Konkō-ji, Kyoto, engages in mass religious propagation by staging monumental processions throughout Japan, while a Fujisawa Shōnin presides over the order from Shōjōkō-ji in Fujisawa, near Kamakura. Chapter 3, "Charisma as a Career," presents the tradition of *hijiri*, or holy man, as the model for Ippen's career and argues that the *hijiri* model was preserved within the monastic Yūgyō-ha through the activities of the Yūgyō Shōnin. Chapter 4, "Charisma of the Leader," contrasts Ippen's confraternity with the assertion of absolute religious authority that enabled the Second Patriarch Shinkyō to establish an order that could be perpetuated.

Chapter 5, “The Charisma of the Religious Community,” discusses the imposition and distribution of religious authority within the monastic community. Authority bestowed by external sources—the elite classes—is the subject of Chapter 6, “The Charisma of the Lay Community.” Chapter 7, “The Yūgyō-ha and the Foundation Legends of the Tokugawa,” describes the Yūgyō-ha’s complicity in the construction of a Minamoto pedigree for Tokugawa Ieyasu and the reordering of life in Jishū monasteries in response to the rationalizing tendencies of Tokugawa culture. Chapter 8, the epilogue, examines the condition of the Jishū in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this way, the book consists, not of one chronological story, but of eight chronologically arranged analyses, which overlap each other in time to one degree or another.

This mode of organization must have been chosen in order to favor method over narrative. But it resulted as well in an organizational challenge that was met through massive repetition. Chapter after chapter, the same stories, events, and text passages are cited, being placed each time in the context of a different aspect of the Weberian analysis. Not only is the same information repeated, but the same wording may be used, with sequences of sentences recurring almost verbatim (e.g., 99 and 128; 104 and 149; 112–13 and 155).

These dizzying repetitions are symptomatic of a general problem, a deficiency of editorial attention that makes the book difficult to understand and frustrating to depend upon as a source of information. (It might be mentioned here that the publisher, the Cornell East Asia Program, reduces costs by providing no editorial services; writers are asked to submit edited, camera-ready copy.) The author presents evidence by means of a prolific, concentrated reporting of specificities. Prose already heavy with proper nouns and dates becomes torturous when burdened by prepositions with obscure modifiers or sudden shifts of topic (e.g., 102, 150), typos (37, 41, 45, 52), cryptic or mismatched footnotes (as in Chapter 3, notes 35–37), and inconsistent naming of people, places, and texts (e.g., the varying names and locations for Shōnen-ji, as on 103, 112, 123, 153, 220). The book is unaccommodating in other ways: References to the interesting translations in the appendix are buried in the copious footnotes and easily overlooked. No chronologies or lists are provided; a succession list for key Jishū positions would have been an especially useful adjunct to the dense text.

These problems are enumerated here because they will affect the book’s readership. The hostile prose is likely to deflect undergraduates, an important potential audience for whom the book’s content would otherwise prove stimulating. Others who lack the advantage of familiarity with Japanese language and history will also find it challenging to attempt a close reading of the book. For non-specialists, the most accessible sections may be the broad treatments in Chapter 1, the introduction, and in Chapter 8, the epilogue.

For those who persist, *Charisma and Community Formation* opens a window on a compelling world. It is wonderful to make the acquaintance of Jishū leaders. Among the early generations are the Second Patriarch Shinkyō (also known as Ta’amidabutsu), whose redefinition of the spiritual master is traced through short translations; Shinkan (Jōamidabutsu), who won credit for the

safe birth of future emperor Kōgon by giving the expectant mother three *nenbutsu* talismans to swallow; and Takuga, an accomplished scholar whose trenchant list of unacceptable monastic behavior includes, “rumpled clothing, fancy clothing, fancy fans, sloppy posture; ogling the nuns and other women, visiting the nuns alone...” (81). A respected contribution of the early Jishū was ministrations to warriors, living and dead, on the battlefield; Thornton analyzes reports of this chaplaincy in contemporary accounts such as the *Taiheiki*. Fascinating, too, is the Jishū’s long thread of connections and purported connections to the fallen imperial Southern Court of the fourteenth century; it culminated in a complex exchange of legitimizing gestures with the early Tokugawa rulers. Another side of Tokugawa governance emerges vividly from an account of ceremonial itinerancy in the eighteenth century, which is offered by Thornton as a counterpoint to the conventional view of the Tokugawa period as an era of Buddhist decline.

As these examples suggest, the case of the Jishū, while absorbing in itself, can also shed light on a range of issues in the study of Japanese religion, culture, and history. It is hoped that *Charisma and Community Formation* will spark the interest of Western scholars in this splendid material.

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