

Reviews

Delmer M. BROWN and ISHIDA Ichirō, *The future and the past: A translation and study of the Gukanshō, an interpretative history of Japan written in 1219*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979. 479 pp. \$25.00.

The appearance of the *Gukanshō* in English, enhanced by the translators' "introductory studies" as well as by a generous dose of foot-noted explanations and comments, is a long-awaited and important event. Brown and Ishida took on a task of staggering difficulty and have turned in a very creditable performance. Their research and translation make accessible to readers limited to English-language (and modern Japanese-language) sources a work of remarkable interest, Jien's religio-political interpretation of Japanese history.

Jien (1155-1225), four times appointed the abbot of Tendai Buddhism, was a member of the Kujō house of the Fujiwara clan. He was just thirty when the Minamoto defeated the Taira in the famous battle of Dan no Ura that marked the consolidation of military power under the Bakufu in Kamakura. This was the age of Hōnen, Shinran, and Eisai, an age when emperors abdicated in order to gain a degree of power, an age in which relationships between the imperial house, the regent-providing Fujiwara clan, and the shogun-providing Minamoto clan were often strained. Jien, looking back into myth and history and seeking to ward off an impending clash he viewed as disastrous, wrote the *Gukanshō* in order to influence the shape of things to come.

Jien's central argument is that the principles (*dōri*) by which emperor and officials should be guided change from period to period but can be discerned by a man of understanding. More concretely, Jien's clan, the aristocratic and learned Fujiwara, was originally charged by the sun goddess Amaterasu with responsibility for serving as guardian to the emperor. This meant that emperor and guardian had to see eye-to-eye, work hand-in-glove. The rise of the military age marked the emergence of a new principle: guarding the emperor and the state was temporarily the responsibility of the Bakufu. The assassination of the last Minamoto shogun, Sanetomo, in 1219 brings that age to a close. Now a new principle is at work: the guardian is to be one who will combine Fujiwara learning and Minamoto strength. The new

shogun, Yoritsune, a Kujō house member of the Fujiwara clan by birth and a person with ties to the Minamoto clan through his mother, is precisely the right one to serve simultaneously as regent and shogun. Though only two years old, his future service to the throne is the will of the kami and the buddhas. It would be worse than folly, therefore, for the retired but actually ruling emperor Gotoba to entertain for the new shogun the feelings of dislike that have been attributed to him. This would be to ignore what the sun goddess and the bodhisattva Hachiman desire. It would be to disregard the principle established as normative for this new period of history. Gotoba, therefore, should heed this word from a man of understanding and let the principle here enunciated, the principle ordained by the kami and the buddhas, govern his heart and behavior.

It would be too much to claim that the *Gukanshō* makes for pleasant reading. Many sections are downright tedious, and keeping names straight becomes an exercise in futility. But when Jien's purpose and line of argument are kept in mind, the work takes on life and in places even becomes fascinating.

One question that is bound to arise among students of Japanese culture and intellectual history has to do with the ideas and values to which Jien appealed in his argument on behalf of a "principled" polity. Such ideas and values can only be listed here, but even a list may indicate something of the importance of Jien's work. Though neither systematic nor exhaustive, such a list would doubtless include: the belief that the kami (especially Amaterasu) and buddhas (especially the bodhisattva Hachiman) establish normative arrangements that should guide the emperor and those appointed to serve him in official posts; the notion that the imperial line is unbroken and will remain so, and that this is what makes Japan unique; the startling suggestion that assassination of evil emperors was a righteous act in an early age; the idea that human history (which here means Japanese history) has now entered what Buddhism calls its Final Age (*mappō*), a deteriorating era marked by the crumbling of order and virtue but in which there is still room for significant (if temporary) improvements; the view that the end will come during the rule of Japan's hundredth emperor; the interpretation of political events by reference to celestial events such as comets, stars "invading" each other's territories, and the like; and the attribution of sociopolitical calamities to the work of vengeful

spirits and destructive kami, sometimes manifested through mediums and/or possessed persons. Anyone even casually familiar with contemporary Japanese culture will find in this list some features that still survive. The *Gukanshō* can be regarded as important, therefore, not only for understanding Kamakura-period religion and thought but also for tracing the background of values that play a continuing (if contextually different) role in present-day Japan.

One matter elicits a pang of editorial regret. The translators apparently decided to present modern Japanese names in Western order (surnames last), premodern names in Japanese order (surnames first). It brings one up short, though, to read in one sentence about "Moto-ori Norinaga" and in the next about "Isezō Umezawa" (p. 362). The bibliography, conversely, lists modern authors in Japanese order, thus reversing the form used in the text. To complicate things even more, some footnotes give the surname first, others last (cf. p. 355, n. 2 and p. 359, n. 10). This inconsistency is a bit disconcerting.

The book is marred by a smattering of typographical errors. I shall list them here for readers and, in anticipation of new printings, for University of California Press editors:

- p. 3, l. 12, for "Yoritsune" read "Yoritsune"
- p. 10, l. 23, for "His" read "He"
- p. 39, l. 8, for "death" read "death,"
- p. 59, l. 45, for "splended" read "splendid"
- p. 67, l. 19, for "*histosugime*" read "*hitotsugime*"
- p. 87, l. 2, for "Kyōgku" read "Kyōgoku"
- p. 118, l. 17, for "statutes" read "statues"
- p. 125, l. 32, for "principle" read "principal"
- p. 167, l. 2, for "Regent" read "Regent,"
- p. 175, l. 29, for "had" read "had been"
- p. 180, l. 16, for "Nobikyō's" read "Nobukiyo's"
- p. 360, l. 38, for "Express" read "Empress"
- p. 416, l. 38, for "umcle" read "uncle"
- p. 417, l. 18, for "has" read "have"
- p. 428, l. 25, for "teachings" read "teaching"
- p. 451, l. 14, for "*Higagoto* (ヒガト)" read "*Higagoto* (ヒガゴト)"
- p. 453, l. 5, for "*rangyabu*" read "*rangyaku*"

To the bibliography, under the heading "Studies of the Gukanshō and Jien," one reference should be added: Charles H. Hambrick, The

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Gukanshō: A religious view of Japanese history. *Japanese journal of religious studies* 5 (1978): 37-58.

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