

REVIEWS



Gaétan Rappo, *Rhétoriques de l'hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne: Le moine Monkan (1278–1357) et sa réputation posthume*

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MONKAN 文観 (1278–1357), also known as Juon 殊音 or Kōshin 弘真, was a Shingon Ritsu monk who worshiped *ḍākinī* (T 2456, 77.850a14), demonic witches controlling human vital and sexual energy. In the popular imagination, these female spirits were thought to manifest as furry foxes or lascivious courtesans, causing the death of their king by draining his vitality, such as Bao Si 褒姒 in China or Tamamo no Mae 玉藻前 in Japan (MINOBE 1988, 185–205). According to secret Shingon instructions, however, *ḍākinī* can be powerful allies to ensure health and longevity, especially that of sovereigns, when properly worshiped. Indeed, *ḍākinī* are said to be in control of the *ninnō* 人黄 (“human yellow”), the condensed form of human life force (IYANAGA 2016), which was alternatively read *ninnō* 人王 (human king) (TZ 5: 252c) or *ninnō* 仁王 (benevolent king) (*Zasshō*). Therefore, the *ḍākinī* were more relevant for the well-being of kings than for any other person. Moreover, following instructions in various scriptures, it was held in those days that by worshiping foxes one could transform an ordinary man into a sovereign (T 2410, 76.633b25–29). It should therefore not be surprising to know that Monkan’s master, Dōjun 道順 (d. 1322), had integrated the worship of *ḍākinī* in the liturgy of the imperial enthronement unction ceremony (MATSUMOTO 2005, 64–67).

Monkan himself was especially skilled at manipulating these ambivalent sexual powers because he had inherited the Tachikawa 立川 lineage (*Zoku dentō kōroku*, 456), which specialized in a practice called the “skull ritual” (MORIYAMA 1965). This was a ritual in which a human skull was first empowered by the

magical effect of aphrodisiac frankincense fumes and one-hundred-and-twenty layers of a mix of semen and menstrual blood—implying that one had to do the “act” far more than one hundred and twenty times. Then, the skull was embellished to look almost exactly as the white-faced *onna* 女 (woman) mask of Noh theater, with silver-colored teeth, narrow deep-penetrating eyes, and thin red lips. After carefully keeping the female head warm and nourished for seven years, a practice said to be a type of *ḍākinī* ritual, it would eventually, in the eighth year, commence talking to the practitioner, instructing him into the secrets of the world while fulfilling all his desires. Monkan, empowered by this female spirit—who is, moreover, the manifestation of the celebrated dragon maiden of the *Lotus Sūtra*—did not falter in cursing the military government in Kamakura for four years while praying for the safe “pregnancy” of an imperial consort and felt no fear in donning armor to face hard-boiled samurai warriors when necessary (*Taiheiki*).

The emperor to whom Monkan dedicated his exceptional magical talents, Go Daigo 後醍醐 (1288–1339), likewise did not belong to the meek and faint-hearted. Supported by a mob (*akutō* 悪党) of low-life samurai and outcasts called *hinin* 非人 (nonhumans), this emperor plotted to overthrow the Kamakura Bakufu and eventually succeeded (albeit only temporarily). Monkan, relying on his position as the *primus inter pares* within the esoteric Buddhist establishment, created hundreds of sacred writings and manipulated Shingon doctrines to illustrate that Go Daigo is the reincarnation of the founder of Shingon, Kūkai 空海 (774–835), as well as the embodiment of Kongōsatta 金剛薩埵, the bodhisattva who rediscovered the secrets of esoteric Buddhism from the Iron Tower in India. Monkan and Go Daigo were not alone in believing these thoughts, since the former is said to have had more than two hundred disciples.

The “Monkan” in the above description, to clarify to the inadvertent reader, probably never existed. Yet, if one were to uncritically assemble data on his person and on the subjects he is said to have been acquainted with (such as *ḍākinī* and Tachikawa) from existing sources—such as the *Hōkyōshō*, *Kakuzenshō*, *Zoku dentō kōroku*, *Taiheiki*, and so on—and see this data through the lens of beliefs current in the religious culture of that time, one would easily conclude that this kind of sensational description were true. This constructed image, or “memory,” of Monkan appeals to the imagination and turns him into a “wicked monk” (*yōsō* 妖僧), the “Rasputin” of Japan, whose charismatic mastery of esoteric magic and sexual energy made him one of the most influential characters of his time. That time, the fourteenth century, was one of great and fundamental changes, sometimes defined in scholarship as the true transition from the classical age to the medieval period in Japan.

Until recently, the above description of Monkan would probably not have been considered that remarkable. In fact, a swathe of premodern and modern

works, from Yūkai's 宥快 (1345–1416) *Hōkyōshō* and Yūhō's 祐宝 (1656–1727) *Zoku dentō kōroku* to the books of MIZUHARA (1968), MORIYAMA (1965), and AMINO (1986), to name the most salient examples, have done nothing but perpetuate such an image of this monk. Rather than studying Monkan objectively, it seems these authors were more driven by their own personal agendas and predilections and, perhaps, also a fascination with that alluring concept that is the combination of sex, death, and power.

Recent critical studies on Monkan, the Tachikawa lineage, and fourteenth-century Japan have done much to demystify Monkan's image and place his life in a more objective historical context (IYANAGA 2004; ABE 2013; CONLAN 2011; QUINTER 2015). Special credit is due here to Iyanaga Nobumi, whose insights regarding distinctions between the skull ritual and the Tachikawa lineage have truly been groundbreaking in this area. And now Gaétan Rappo's critical study of Monkan's life, *Rhétoriques de l'hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne*, can be added to the list of new outstanding scholarly achievements that have been produced in the wake of Iyanaga's discoveries.

Besides providing a beacon through the swamp of hagiographical fantasies and unfounded judgments surrounding Monkan, Rappo's book also gives insight into the processes, running from premodern to modern times, which led to Monkan being characterized as a monk who espoused heretical views. The purpose of the study, as the author himself underscores, is not to reinstate Monkan's reputation but to analyze the trappings of historiography and of the study of "heresy," a notion that is always enmeshed with prejudices of given time and place. In doing so, Rappo has produced not only a polished image of Monkan, whose life and achievements still stand out as quite extraordinary even after the removal of all posterior unfounded accruments, but he also illustrates that the notion of "heresy" in a medieval Japanese context has to be clearly distinguished from that in the West, despite showing a number of apparent similarities.

Although focusing on this important Shingon Ritsu monk, the book is also a profound study of Shingon history and doctrine. The work is the first volume in a two-volume project—the second volume is currently being edited—which will highlight Monkan's extensive esoteric Buddhist doctrinal system. Traditionally, due to an uncritical reading of the sources smearing his name, scholars at best simply ignored Monkan, or at worst denigrated him as a wicked character involved in black magic and aberrant sexual practices. It hardly occurred to previous scholars that Monkan had, in fact, been one of the most important figures in the development of orthodox Shingon doctrine.

In some broad explanations of Shingon it is sometimes stated that its doctrine did not change significantly until the emergence of Kakuban 覚鑿 (1095–1144), the founder of the Shingi 新義 branch of the school, after which few doctrinal developments have ensued. This view is, of course, oversimplified, as multiple

important changes did occur in Shingon's intricate esoteric system. Owing to the work of Abe Yasurō, it has become clear that Monkan had been a prolific writer and a creative systematizer of Shingon thought. His texts, the full scope of which has just begun to be reconstituted and analyzed, may, in fact, be regarded as the crown of medieval Shingon esotericism. Indeed, after Monkan it is hard to pinpoint a Shingon monk who had an equal impact on doctrinal matters, except perhaps Yūkai, Monkan's fiercest critic. Rappo's study builds on these achievements and the result is a work that, together with the second volume, will serve as an important basis for any researcher interested in the history of medieval Shingon Buddhism.

Rappo's book, while sweeping away many uncertainties about Monkan's life and achievements, also gives rise to new questions, which is of course one of the book's merits. Indeed, having a clearer and more objective picture of Monkan now enables the future researcher to make better assessments of his place in the history of Shingon. Rappo's study unveils a Monkan who had been instrumental in furthering Go Daigo's project, initiated by his father, Go Uda 後宇多 (1267–1324), to bring a fragmented Shingon under tighter imperial control. In this process, Monkan, who had inherited the teachings of one of the Ono lineages based at Daigoji 醍醐寺, reworked various Shingon doctrines and beliefs to enhance the legitimacy of Go Daigo's Southern court. At the same time, Kenshun 賢俊 (1299–1357), head of a rival Ono lineage at Daigoji, served the Ashikaga-controlled Northern court with his own version of esoteric Buddhist secrets. This quite complex historical situation has recently been investigated by Thomas CONLAN (2011), who defined the fourteenth century as an "age of ritual determinism": that is, an era in which ritual knowledge, especially of Shingon, was the decisive element behind the legitimation of power.

An important question in need of investigation in this regard, as Brian RUPPERT (2013) has suggested in his review of Conlan's book, is to what extent the situation of Shingon ritualism in the fourteenth century had been "different" from previous ages. Indeed, already at the end of the eleventh century Shingon Buddhism had become deeply involved with the legitimation of imperial power. Emperor Shirakawa 白河 (1053–1129) did much to unify the school under the imperial banner by placing the figure of the *omuro* 御室 (abbot of imperial descent) of Ninnaji 仁和寺 at the head of Shingon (YOKOUCHI 2008, 19–61). After Shirakawa, the *omuro* would be further promoted to the position of *sōhōmu* 総法務, the head administrator of the office of monastic affairs, thus *de facto* becoming the head of the entire Buddhist establishment. Interestingly enough, while recognizing Ninnaji's superior position, Shirakawa had personally entrusted an Ono-branch monk trained at Daigoji named Hanjun 範俊 (1038–1112), an act that was replicated by Go Uda and Go Daigo two centuries later. A major difference is that there is no indication that before Go Uda an emperor had

been initiated into Shingon or performed esoteric rites. Nonetheless, there are many points in common between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in terms of Shingon's connections to imperial power. Therefore, it remains to be investigated how exactly the Shingon doctrines and rituals promoted by such monks as Monkan and Kenshun differed in terms of content and function from earlier ages. There is still much work to be done to clarify Shingon development from the late eleventh to the fourteenth century. Rappo's study of Monkan proves to be crucial in dealing with such pivotal historical issues.

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- TZ *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō zuzō* 大正新修大藏經圖像. 12 vols. Takakusu Junjirō and Ono Genmyō 小野玄妙, eds. Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1932–1934.

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