

BOOK REVIEWS

Ryōgen and Mt. Hiei: Japanese Tendai in the Tenth Century. Paul Groner. Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 15. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. Pp. xvi + 525.

ROBERT F. RHODES

The Tendai school, with its headquarters at Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei located just a few miles northeast of the ancient capital of Kyoto, is historically one of the most important schools of Japanese Buddhism. Not only was Enryakuji a major center of Buddhist learning, it also produced most of the monks who established the various schools of the so-called “new Kamakura Buddhism,” such as Hōnen, Shinran, Eisai, Dōgen and Nichiren. During its earliest years, Enryakuji was a small and struggling institution, beset by factionalism and, at times, finding it difficult to even feed the few monks in residence. However, despite its humble beginnings, the Tendai school came to occupy the pre-eminent place in the Japanese religious scene by the mid-Heian period. The key to its success is to be found in the close connections it created with the imperial family and nobility. In return for serving as the spiritual protectors of the various competing families at court, Tendai monks gained the backing (including financial support) of these nobles, and this lucrative symbiotic relationship led to the growing influence of both the individual monks who exploited this system as well as the Tendai school as a whole. Ryōgen (912-985), the eighteenth abbot of Enryakuji and the subject of this major study by Paul Groner, was an important figure in the development of this system of patronage.

Groner, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, is eminently qualified as Ryōgen's biographer. He is the author of *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School* (Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1984. Reprinted by the University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), which is simply the best scholarly study of this monk in any language. In that book, Groner traced in meticulous detail the career of Saichō, the founder of the Japanese Tendai school, focusing in particular on his attempt to break with the established tradition and create a new Buddhist monastic community based on the Mahāyāna bodhisattva precepts. Like his book on Saichō, Groner's new, hefty study is also thoroughly researched; indeed, upon finishing this book, the reader is left with the impression that there is no relevant primary or secondary material that he has not consulted in writing this biography.

By the time Ryōgen became a Tendai novice at the age of eleven, the Tendai

school had divided into two competing lineages, one deriving from Ennin, the third abbot of Enrakuji, and the other from Enchin, the fifth abbot. The temple was then dominated by monks of the latter lineage, virtually closing off Ryōgen's path to future advancement. Despite such an inauspicious beginning, the ambitious Ryōgen steadily ascended the Tendai hierarchy and reached the position of abbot in 966 at the comparatively young age of 54. To achieve such a goal, Ryōgen established close ties with powerful members of the court, exploited their influence to create his own group of disciples within Enryakuji, and used it to spread his authority throughout the entire monastery.

Ryōgen's skill at debate and mastery of esoteric ritual provided him with the means to reach his goal. He first attracted the attention of the nobles during an informal debate on Buddhist philosophy, held before an imperial emissary on the occasion of the Yuima-e ceremony at Kōfukuji in 937. His skill in this debate was reported to Fujiwara-no-Tadahira, who subsequently employed the promising monk to perform esoteric Buddhist rituals for him. Groner notes that during this time, leading nobles were constantly engaged in ruthless power struggles at court and regularly employed monks to pray for their political success. (This was before Tadahira's branch of the Fujiwara clan established itself as the dominant family at court. Fujiwara-no-Michinaga, who finally succeeded in establishing this branch as the foremost power at court, was Tadahira's grandson).

When Tadahira died in 949, his son, Morosuke, requested Ryōgen to perform a 300-day goma fire ritual for his father's repose. However, this ceremony was apparently not conducted solely, or even primarily, for Tadahira's benefit. Its main purpose was to pray for the birth of a son by Anshi, Morosuke's daughter and the consort of Emperor Murakami. Earlier that year, a male child had been born between Emperor Murakami and Sukehime, the daughter of Fujiwara-no-Motokata, an ambitious member of a less prestigious branch of the Fujiwaras. Thus, Morosuke's entire political future depended on Anshi's giving birth to a baby boy. In this time of crisis, Morosuke turned to Ryōgen for help. In order to comply with Morosuke's request, Ryōgen embarked on the unusually long and difficult goma ceremony.

Following Ryōgen's ritual intercession, Anshi safely delivered a baby boy, who was quickly installed as crown prince, ensuring Morosuke's pre-eminence at court. As a reward for Ryōgen's spiritual assistance, Morosuke helped finance the construction of several halls in Yokawa, Ryōgen's power base on Mt. Hiei. His ties with Morosuke were further cemented when Morosuke's tenth son, Jinzen, was dispatched to Yokawa to become Ryōgen's disciple. This was an important event not only for Ryōgen, but also for the Tendai school as a whole, because this paved the way for the growing aristocratization of Mt. Hiei. In later years, the highest positions came to be dominated by monks from the nobility, while those from ordinary families were excluded, as a matter of course, from the top levels of the Tendai estab-

ishment. Although Morosuke's death in 960 deprived Ryōgen of his most powerful patron, he contrived to stage the famous Owa Debate in 963, where he dazzled his audience with his forensic skills. As a result, just three years later, Ryōgen was appointed Abbot of Enryakuji, the highest position in the Tendai school.

The major portion of *Ryōgen and Mt. Hiei*, which is divided into thirteen chapters and eight appendices, consists of a chronological narrative of Ryōgen's fascinating life, briefly outlined above. However, some of the chapters are actually self-contained essays on ancillary topics, important for understanding Ryōgen and the religious situation of his time. Chief among them are Chapter Eight, "The Significance of Ryōgen's Revival of the Examination System," which provides a thorough discussion of the system of monastic debates that was so important in furthering Ryōgen's career, and Chapter Twelve, "Ryōgen and the Role of Nuns in Ninth- and Tenth-century Japan," an important contribution to this little studied topic. Also noteworthy, in this regard, is Chapter Nine, "Rebuilding the Tendai Establishment on Mt. Hiei," which discusses how Ryōgen rebuilt Mt. Hiei after a disastrous fire in 966. Besides explaining how he went about his project, this chapter gives a useful sketch of the history of many of the halls found on Mt. Hiei. Among the eight appendices, it should be noted that the translations of the *Owa shūronki*, the major source for the Owa Debate (appendix 5), Ryōgen's will (appendix 3), and his twenty-six rules for the monastic community on Mt. Hiei (appendix 8), were done by Eishō Nasu of the Institute of Buddhist Studies at Berkeley. As Groner relates in the preface, while in the process of preparing this book for publication, he discovered that Nasu had just completed a doctoral dissertation on Ryōgen, and with his consent, it was decided that these three translations, which had been a part of Nasu's dissertation, would be included here.

Groner's scholarship is superb, and there are surprisingly few things to quibble with in a volume of this length. One thing I noted is that the abbreviation "NS," which occasionally appears in the notes, is not found in the list of abbreviations at the beginning of the book. I should also mention that I found only one typographical error in the 500-plus pages of this volume. On p. 203, the word "cite" should have read "site."

In conclusion, it must be said that Groner's *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei* is a major addition to the literature on Japanese Buddhism. Not only is it an impressive biographical study of this important monk, but it also breaks new ground in that it focuses on the political and institutional aspects of Tendai history. Studies on Japanese Buddhist figures have generally tended to concentrate on their religious thought and/or practice, while their political, social, economic and institutional contexts have often been neglected. Groner's book provides an important corrective to this tendency because it highlights the close symbiotic relationship which came to be forged between the nobility and the monastic community, and shows how certain monks manipulated their ties with temporal powers to further their own interests.

The approach taken by Groner in this book will certainly inspire future scholars to examine other aspects of Japanese Buddhism using a similar methodology.

Constituting Communities: Theravāda Buddhism and the Religious Cultures of South and Southeast Asia. Edited by John Clifford Holt, Jacob N. Kinnard, and Jonathan S. Walters. Albany: State University of New York Press (SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies), 2003. ISBN 0-7914-5692-7, paperback, pp. viii + 224.

PETER SKILLING

Constituting Communities contains ten essays, “inspired by and dedicated to Frank E. Reynolds.” The essays examine Theravāda Buddhism from several perspectives, with an emphasis on communal experience, as stated in the introduction: “the personal and social natures of religion and religious experience are inextricably intertwined” (p. 1). The category “Theravāda Buddhism” is not defined, and the degree to which it is a valid marker for the subjects studied is not explored.

An introduction sets out the premises of the volume—communities are imagined and in a constant state of flux—and gives summaries of the essays. The first chapter, by Jonathan Walters, is entitled “Communal Karma and Karmic Community in Theravāda Buddhist History.” It deals with “sociokarma” (an unfortunate term coined by the author: see p. 11) in contemporary Sri Lanka and “in Theravāda studies and in Theravāda history.” The statement that according to the historical record “at least publicly none but a tiny handful of Theravādins has considered himself or herself a Bodhisatta, or has been so considered by others” (p. 27) is inaccurate. The public historical record, in the form of a large number of inscriptions and colophons of Southeast Asia, shows aspirations to become a Buddha in the future, expressed by monastics, kings, men, and women. Inscriptions, chronicles, and royal orders demonstrate amply that kings and princes of Ayutthaya and early Bangkok were considered to be bodhisattvas. The bodhisatta practice was a socially active ideology in the region throughout much of the second millennium of the Christian Era. (My examples are for Siam: for Sri Lanka see e.g., Walpola Rahula, *Zen and the Taming of the Bull: Towards the Definition of Buddhist Thought*, London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 76.)

The remark that “from the beginning Theravādins have vehemently rejected the Mahāyāna claim that all Buddhists should and in fact do aspire to the Buddha-vehi-