

*Rhétoriques de l'hérésie dans le Japon médiéval et moderne: Le moine Monkan (1278–1357) et sa réputation posthume.* By Gaétan Rappo. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017. 490 pages. Paperback: ISBN 978-2-343-08825-9.

MICHAEL PYE

The accusation of heresy is a form of abuse that usually seems intended to justify the might of a more powerful orthodoxy. Self-definition as a heretic does not occur. It is always others who are heretics! Yet without supposed heresy there would be no orthodoxy, and without deviation there would be no norm. Of course, the idea that wrong views should be downgraded or excluded is often sincerely held, for truth and good teaching are held in high esteem. In this sense, differences in doctrine or practice may seem to be most “regrettable,” as suggested in the title of one of Japan’s most famous Buddhist writings, the *Tannishō* 歎異抄 (Notes Lamenting Differences). But sometimes the pot boils over altogether and the resultant culture is one of smears and even violence. The retrospective disentanglement of disputes marked by such “rhetorics of heresy,” to use Gaétan Rappo’s fine phrase, is therefore a complex undertaking indeed.

Rappo explores a classic case of this syndrome, namely the image of the monk Monkan 文觀 (1278–1357), who was presented as an adherent of the much-criticized Tachikawa lineage (Tachikawa-ryū 立川流) of Shingon Buddhism. With surgical precision Rappo unpicks an almost unmanageable mass of data to show that this perception of Monkan was invented in the context of the political power plays of his time and thereafter. Indeed, it transpires that the very idea of the Tachikawa lineage, noted among other things for its use of ritual sex acts, was in part a convenient repository for the ascription of deviance in order to bolster other, supposedly more normative positions of power. In other words, we have here no straightforward tussle between competing orthodoxies, each claiming the other to be herodox. Rather, as we discover in the long run, the ascription of heretical allegiance to Monkan is a function of the power struggle that followed the decay of the Kamakura shogunate.

This subject is shot through with delicate terminological problems of various kinds, and no summary can do justice to Rappo’s judicious treatment in this regard. Although recognizing that all the relevant terms are constructed, as everybody does these days, he does not go down the fashionable track of refusing to use them at all. Indeed, as he recognizes, the presentation of any history requires a modicum of conceptualization and terminology that cannot

be drawn entirely from the period in question. Yet care must be taken. It may seem elementary to demarcate the traditional Western use of the term “heresy” from Buddhist contexts, if only because there is no single predominant doctrinal authority in the Buddhist tradition. The question of the transposition of terminology from West to East is also considered in an appreciative preface by Philippe Borgeaud. However, both Borgeaud and Rappo realize that this is not a black and white affair. Rappo goes into considerable detail over the relevant East Asian terminology. Saliently, he points out that while the usual Japanese equivalent, *itan* 異端, is a modern or at best early modern term, the older expression *jakyō* 邪教 (literally “perverse teachings”) has a substantial pedigree in Buddhist writings (p. 76), so that there is in fact a general justification for the careful use of the term “heresy” in the East as much as in the West. The real question is, who is contesting what, and why?

By way of introduction, Rappo escorts us through the various ways in which Monkan has been considered in modern times, especially by historian Amino Yoshihiko 網野善彦. However, the real story begins in chapter 2, for here we are introduced to Yūkai 宥快 (1345–1416), the monk who for his own reasons had decided to assign Monkan to the allegedly heretical Tachikawa lineage. While Yūkai’s main mission was to clean up the Shingon school, which had in his view become unduly diverse, his perception of Monkan was lodged in the politics surrounding the appearance of the rival Northern and Southern courts. Monkan was identified with the Southern court of Emperor Godaigo 後醍醐 (1228–1339), and therefore had to be attacked by those who supported the interests of the Northern court espoused by the self-declared Ashikaga shogunate. What could be more effective than to decry someone as a heretic associated with the Tachikawa lineage? A further very negative perception of Monkan, considered in chapter 3, is found in the *Taiheiki* 太平記, the famous chronicle of the civil war which is considered to date from some time before the middle of the fourteenth century. Although Monkan only appears a few times in this text, he is presented as a worthless monk who only sought wealth and other advantages while distorting the teachings of Buddhism. Rappo draws an interesting comparison between the traits ascribed here to Monkan and those of the *tengu* 天狗, demonic figures in the popular imagination of the time who, though occasionally inclined towards benevolence, were known for espousing heterodoxy (*gehō* 外法, literally “extraneous teachings”). It appears that little real information about Monkan is to be found in the *Taiheiki*, while a tendency to slander is evident.

So, will the real Monkan please step forward? After clearing his path in the first 114 pages, and beginning with chapter four, Rappo now takes up the task of assembling a more objective biography of this much-maligned monk. He assembles the relevant sources and translates a detailed account of Monkan's life by his disciple Hōren 宝蓮 (n.d.). Three main stages now come into view. In the first, Monkan was schooled in the recently combined Ritsu and Hossō traditions at Saidaiji 西大寺, near Nara, and in the second stage he entered the Shingon tradition of Daigoji 醍醐寺 and served the ritual needs of the Southern court under Emperor Godaigo. Third, after the latter's death, Monkan continued in ritual service for Emperor Gomurakami 後村上 (1328–1368) until his own death at the age of eighty, when he left numerous disciples.

The upshot is that we see a monk of humble origins, sincerely trained in the current traditions of Japanese Buddhism, who then became upwardly mobile in social terms and served the court in the then strongly fashionable Shingon rituals. Among other things, Monkan collaborated with Godaigo in the production and ritualized inauguration of “wish-fulfilling jewels” (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠) in 1324. This was followed in 1327 by the Buddhist initiation of Godaigo himself, authorizing him to transmit the Shingon teachings. Here, too, Monkan's role was central. There followed esoteric-style rituals to bring about a pregnancy for the empress in order to ensure the continuity of the line.

Although in one sense Godaigo's religious progression was following the example of his father, Emperor Gouda 後宇多, whose initiation is discussed in chapter 7, it is clear that the steady flow of ritual activity was intended to bolster the claims of the Southern court to power, not only in its competition with the Northern court, but ultimately as a threat to the very existence of the shogunate in Kamakura. Relevant to this is a consideration of certain parallels to the thought of Kitabatake Chikafusa 北畠親房 (1293–1354) who, with his *Jinnō shōtōki* 神皇正統記, contributed substantially to the ideological claims of Godaigo's Kenmu 建武 era. Godaigo saw himself not only as a Buddhist adept but also as a descendant of none less than the goddess Amaterasu. Real history, however, continued with the defensive move of the Southern court to Yoshino, and ultimately the failure of Godaigo's grand imperial restoration project. Nevertheless, Monkan's own work found a new focus in the cult of Zaō Gongen 蔵王権現 at Yoshino and the practice of mountain asceticism, and in this connection he authored in 1337 his *Kinpusen himitsuden* 金峰山秘密伝 (Secret Transmission of Mt. Kinpu), a work which dovetailed with Godaigo's own recent interest in ascetic practices.

So we come to see the monk Monkan as a sincere and learned ritualist who loyally served his powerful political sponsor. Inevitably, he was drawn into the political vortex and became a target of Godaigo's adversaries. It was for this reason that Monkan was denigrated, not very much later, as being supposedly involved in the Tachikawa-ryū, and so tarred with the brush of "heresy."

The work under review covers almost five hundred pages and is not only a finely constructed mine of information, but also a convincing guide through the complex machinations and loyalties of the period. The interplay of politics and religion, here especially with respect to the powerful Shingon temples of western Japan, is treated with great delicacy. The positioning of the author's own research in contested modern perceptions of the past is also exemplary.