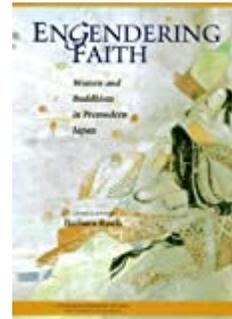




Barbara Ruch, ed. *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Illustrations, charts, maps. lxxviii + 706 pp. \$69.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-929280-15-5.



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Women and Japanese Buddhism

This book marks a clear departure from the male-oriented foci of traditional scholarship on Japanese Buddhism and ventures to reconstruct its history by incorporating women's voices.[1] All of the essays address, from diverse angles, women's roles in the history of Japanese Buddhism. The volume begins with a foreword and preface, followed by twenty-three weighty essays, interspersed with ninety-five illustrations, charts, and maps, many of which are in full color; a list of characters; a selected bibliography; an index; and information about the contributors. One of the distinctive features of this book is that it contains a substantial number of essays by a younger generation of Japanese scholars, all translated into English. These essays are the fruit of a scholarly movement that has been taking place in Japan for the last two decades.

The emergence of women's studies in Japanese academia began with the women's liberation movement of the early 1970s—trailing that of North America by a decade or so. The public's consciousness was awakened to gender issues in this process, and feminist scholarship,

too, made its contribution. That the recent volume of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (*JJRS*, 2003, edited by Noriko Kawahashi and Masako Kuroki) is dedicated to "Feminism and Religion in Contemporary Japan" speaks for the healthy unfolding of feminist studies in Japan, as this issue marks the twentieth anniversary of the 1983 special issue of *JJRS*, "Women and Religion in Japan," the guest editor of which was the late KyÅko Nakamura.

Indeed, Japanese society's acknowledgement of the importance of women's issues helped to create the academic discipline of women's studies as well as to promote the study of women in the history of Japanese religions. But it should not be forgotten that the scholarly interest in women's roles and female spirituality is by no means a recent phenomenon. A handful of Japanese scholars always engaged in these issues; for example, works by Origuchi Shinobu, Makita Shigeru, Takatori Masao, Ueda Masaaki, Miyata Noboru, Saeki Junko, Asai Torao, Iwamoto Yutaka, and Kasahara Kazuo readily come to mind. What is different today, however, is that the studies focusing on women have gained momentum and are

developing into a mainstream research field.

In this regard, Nishiguchi Junko may be singled out as one of the driving forces of studies on women and Buddhism in Japan, someone comparable in importance to the general editor of this book, Barbara Ruch in North America. Nishiguchi's pioneering work, *Onna no chikara: kodai no josei to bukkyō* (Woman's power: Women of ancient times and Buddhism), was published by Heibonsha in 1987. Three years prior to that in 1984, she, together with Asumi Kazuo, had organized a "Study Group on Japanese Women and Buddhism" (*Kenkyū kai, nihon no josei to bukkyō*), which did much to advance research in that area. Consisting of specialists of history, literature, religious studies, and ethnography, this group met every summer for the following ten years to hear seminar reports from its members. These seminar reports were compiled in four volumes, *Josei to bukkyō* (Women and Buddhism), and published by Heibonsha in 1989. The momentum, thus built up, is undoubtedly continuing in Japan. In 1997, *Hotoke to onna* (Buddha and women), edited by Nishiguchi, was published by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan; this book contains essays by younger scholars—mostly born after 1950. More recently in 1999, *Nihonshi no naka no josei to bukkyō* (Women and Buddhism within the context of the history of Japan) was published by Hōzōkan in Kyoto as the outcome of a lecture series organized by Nishiguchi. Most recently, the birth of the imperial princess Aiko on December 1, 2001, kindled the debate concerning the post-Meiji Restoration legislation that the imperial succession be limited to the male heir alone. *Rekisho no naka no kōjotachi* (Imperial women in Japanese history), published in December of 2002, came out of this public debate.

Scholarly breakthroughs in the humanities, just as discoveries in the field of natural sciences, sometimes depend on the factor of serendipity. One day in the 1980s Ruch came across a photo of a *chinzō*—this word *chinzō* usually refers to portraits of Zen masters, but also includes sculptures—of a female Zen master Mugai Nyodai. Ruch's encounter turned out to be decisive, because as she went on to find out more about Mugai Nyodai, a wholly new area of research began to unfold.

Mugai Nyodai 日蓮阿闍梨 (1223-98) was born a daughter of the Adachi family closely related to the Hōjō regency of the Kama-kura shogunate, but for reasons unknown she took up Zen practice under the Chinese Chan master Wuxue Zuyuan (Mugaku Sogen 寂菴; 1226-86), who came to Japan in 1279 at the invitation of regent Hōjō Tokimune. Sogen first resided at Kenchōji

in Kama-kura and then in 1282 became the *kaizan*, or the "founder," of Engaku-ji. Mugai Nyodai was one of his dharma heirs (*hassu*), along with the eminent monk Kōhō Kennichi, the son of Emperor Saga and the teacher of Musō Soseki. Mugai Nyodai's enlightenment was authenticated by Mugaku Sogen, who most likely gave her the dharma name of Mugai, by taking the Chinese character *wu* 無 (*mu* in Japanese, meaning "nothingness") from his own dharma name, Mugaku (or Wuxue), which in turn had been bestowed on him by his master, Wuzhuan Shifan 無著 施範 (or Bujun Shibān in Japanese, 1178-1249). This fact seems to indicate how pleased he was with the scope of his disciple's enlightenment. She became the first Japanese female Zen master and founded a Rinzai Zen nunnery in Kyoto. This temple, Keiaiji, became the head temple of the *amadera* (or *niji gozan*) *gozan*, or the Five Mountain Convent System that paralleled the Five Mountain Monastery System of Kyoto and Kamakura. (Regrettably, the existence of *amadera gozan* came to my attention too late for inclusion in my textbook, *Japanese Religious Traditions*, [2002]).

Back to our times: the year 1989 saw not only the publication of the four volumes of *Josei to bukkyō* (Women and Buddhism) in Japan, but also the hosting of the first international conference titled "Workshop on Women and Buddhism in Pre-modern Japan: Research Strategies for a Newly-developing Field" by the Institute for Medieval Japanese Studies at Columbia University. This conference gathered fifty-seven scholars from the fields of art history, religion, history, and literature, and included seven members of the aforementioned Nishiguchi-Asumi group. The present book initially grew out of this conference.

In 1994, Ruch and her group organized the Imperial Buddhist Convent Research and Conservation Project, which has thus far completed the survey of one of the twelve Japanese imperial convents (*monzeki amadera*), and individual scholars are now at work in six others. This project has uncovered innumerable artifacts and documents. At Daishōji, the highest-ranking imperial convent and a Rinzai Zen temple in Kyoto, Mugai Nyodai's letter and a poem describing her enlightenment experience, both in her own hand, were discovered. At Hōkyōji, originally a subtemple (*tacchō*) of Keiaiji, they found the biography of the abbess titled "Chiyono's story"—Chiyono most likely being the childhood name of Mugai Nyodai. These hitherto unrecognized materials offer unprecedented opportunities for researchers engaged in the study of monastic women in Japanese Buddhism. In April 2003, commemorating the tenth anniversary of

this project, the *ChÅsei Nihon KenkyÅjo* (Institute of Studies of Medieval Japan) was established at Daikankiji in Kyoto to facilitate the operation and research related to the project.

As mentioned above, this book contains a large number of essays by Japanese scholars, meticulously translated into English by leading American scholars. Åsumi Kazuo, cochair of the Study Group on Japanese Women and Buddhism, has contributed a foreword, “A New Age of Research on Women and Buddhism,” and a preface, “Historical Notes on Women and the Japanization of Buddhism.” He points out that scholars need to pay attention to the role of women as mothers and sisters of monks, since such stories abound in the medieval *setsuwa* literature. What is called for is the adoption of a more balanced perspective by breaking away from an exclusively male-oriented approach.

Chikusa Masaaki’s essay, “The Formation and Growth of Buddhist Nun Communities in China,” examines biographical accounts of Chinese nuns from Wei, Jin, to Northern and Southern dynasties (221-589) and shows the lively presence of Buddhist nuns, who enjoyed the confidence and patronage of ruling kings and queens. Mikoshiba Daisuke’s “Empress KÅmyÅ’s Buddhist Faith: Her Role in the Founding of the State Temple and Convent System” sheds light on the fact that the wealth Empress KÅmyÅ inherited from her father, Fujiwara no Fuhito, enabled her, the wife of Emperor ShÅmu, to promote Buddhism among women. It was at her initiative that nunneries were established along with monasteries in each province; we also learn that Empress KÅmyÅ looked up to Empress Wu as her model, and adopted the Tang temple system developed by the Chinese empress.

In “State Buddhism and Court Buddhism: The Role of Court Women in the Development of Buddhism from the Seventh to the Ninth Centuries,” HongÅ Masatsugu features the active role the court ladies assumed in shaping Buddhist practice from the Nara to the early Heian periods. Katsuura Noriko’s “Tonsure Forms for Nuns: Classification of Nuns according to Hairstyle” clarifies the various degrees of renunciation the aristocratic women of the Heian period embraced, based on the observation of different lengths of their hair. Moreover, most of the “nuns” lived at home, not in nunneries.

“Buddhist Convents in Medieval Japan” by Ushiyama Yoshiyuki is considered by many Japanese scholars to be the groundbreaking work on the study of medieval nunneries. His meticulous field research and theoretical conjectures have elevated the level of scholarship by a few

important notches. The long list of convents found at the end of his essay just shows how much work is left to be done.

Nagata Mizu’s “Transitions in Attitudes toward Women in the Buddhist Canon: The Three Obligations, the Five Obstructions, and the Eight Rules of Reverence” traces the doctrines of three obligations (that women were subordinate to their fathers in the natal home, to their husbands in marriage, and to their sons in old age), and five obstructions or states (that women could not attain the supreme ranks of BrahmÅ, Indra, MÅra, Cakravartin king, and Buddha). He then discusses in detail the set of eight rules of reverence nuns were expected to observe. He speculates on the anti-female traditions of ancient India and China, and asks why Japanese Buddhism unquestioningly embraced the doctrines of the three obligations and five obstructions.

In “The Enlightenment of the Dragon King’s Daughter in *The Lotus Sutra*,” Yoshida Kazuhiko examines the rhetoric of the salvation of the dragon king’s daughter in the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* in terms of the effectiveness of missionary activities. The tactic of the story was to belittle women first and then ennoble them; this tactic, he argues, was successful in popularizing the *Lotus Sutra* and Amida faith among women. Obara Hitoshi’s “The Rebirth of Women into Paradise: Women in Fujiwara no Minetada’s Diary *ChÅyÅki* (1087-1138)” reveals that aristocratic women of the latter half of the Heian period were key players in managing the family worship halls and temples, and as such exerted significant economic, political, and religious influence.

EndÅ Hajime’s “The Original BÅmori: Husband and Wife Congregations in Early Shin Buddhism” illustrates how women were an integral part of the lay congregations (congregations being defined as community-based, voluntary religious associations privately organized and self-governing) in the True Pure Land sect. Women who married Shin Buddhist priests assumed the role of *bÅmori*, “temple guardian,” and shared congregational leadership with their husbands; they transformed their home into a religious meeting place (*dÅjÅ*), where community members gathered. EndÅ examines the rise of the position of *bÅmori* to the legend of Shinran’s marriage to a noble princess, as well as to the reverence for Shinran shown by his wife, Eshin-ni, and his daughter, Kakushin-ni. Women for some time enjoyed high status as the “proprietor” of the *dÅjÅ* for the congregations.

All of these essays by Japanese scholars were originally published in the above-mentioned four-volume se-

ries, *Josei to bukkya* (1989). In contrast, Nishiguchi's "Where the Bones Go: Death and Burial of Women of the Heian High Aristocracy" is taken from her book, *Onna no chikara*. Her study shows that, once cremated, women's ashes and relics were rendered genderless, "clean," and no longer "polluting," and therefore could be buried at sacred mountain cemeteries, such as at Mt. Kaya.

Works by Western scholars add further rich content to this book. Ruch's introductory essay, "Obstructions and Obligations: An Overview of the Studies That Follow," contains invaluable information on Mugai Nyodai and the history of the last two decades of the study of Japanese Buddhism. In her other essay, "Burning Iron against the Cheek: A Female Cleric's Last Resort," Ruch introduces the biographies of nuns who gained their religious inspiration and devotion from the abbess Mugai Nyodai.

Paul Groner's "Vicissitudes in the Ordination of Japanese 'Nuns' during the Eighth through the Tenth Centuries" not only examines the ordination practice of the eighth and ninth centuries but also studies specific imperial women, such as Tachibana no Kachiko (786-850), Emperor Saga's wife, and their daughter Seishi, showing the sincere devotion of these imperial ladies to Buddhism. Martin Collcutt's "Nun Shogun: Politics and Religion in the Life of HÅjÅ Masako (1157-1225)" looks into the religious and spiritual side of Masako, the wife of Minamoto Yoritomo, and offers a sympathetic characterization of her as a devoted wife, a dedicated and caring mother of four children, and, after the death of her husband, a committed caretaker of the office of Shogunate and the HÅjÅ family.

The late Marian Ury's "Nuns and Other Female Devotees in *GenkÅ shakusho*" introduces Japan's first comprehensive history of Buddhism by the Zen monk, Kokan Shiren (1278-1346); fifteen biographical accounts of nuns and female devotees were included among the 416 biographies. This book was compiled at the behest of his Chinese master, Yishan Yining (Issan Ichinei in Japanese), who wanted to read such a biographical work. Ury's unfinished essay was edited and polished by her colleague, Robert Borgen.

Anne Dutton's "Temple Divorce in Tokugawa Japan: A Survey of Documentation on TÅkeiji and Mantokuji" traces in detail, how the convents of TÅkeiji and Mantokuji, havens for women seeking divorce, evolved, and how divorce brokerage became a lucrative temple business managed by male officials. Diana E. Wright's "Mantokuji: More than a 'Divorce Temple'" shows the intri-

cate relationship between the convent Mantokuji and the shogunal women residing in the women's quarters, the Åoku, as the abbesses of this convent were appointed from among them. Other women of the same quarters sought to strengthen their position by conceiving the shogun's offspring, and in that context sponsoring birth rituals performed at Mantokuji was considered particularly efficacious in obtaining this desired end.

Paul B. Watt, in "Body, Gender, and Society in Jiun Sonja's (1718-1802) Buddhism," examines celibacy in early Christianity and the similar view held by Jiun Sonja, and concludes that he considered nuns to be equal to monks within the celibate community. Nicole Fabricand-Person's "Demonic Female Guardians of the Faith: The *Fugen JÅrasetsunyo* Iconography in Japanese Buddhist Art" traces the development of this specific iconography of "ten female demons," or goddesses, possibly having its origin in the practice of *hokke hakkÅ* (the four-day recitation of the *Lotus Sutra*) and the practice of illustrating each chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* by taking a memorable scene.

"The Nude JizÅ at DenkÅji: Notes on Women's Salvation in Kamakura Buddhism," by Hank Glassman, illustrates the importance of JizÅ worship practiced among the women in the Kamakura period. He takes on this subject to illustrate how they drew their soteriological inspiration from the established traditions of Buddhist sects predating Kamakura Buddhism. Indeed, the assertion made by Kasahara Kazuo that the problem of women's salvation was a development of Kamakura "new Buddhism" and that the traditional sects of Buddhism remained aloof and unconcerned with it is generally refuted today by the findings of new scholarship.

Susan Matisoff's "Barred from Paradise? Mount KÅya and the Karukaya Legend" studies the complex myths and stories that grew out of the practice of "barring women out of the sacred mountains." Various versions of stories that evolved over the years were open to interpretation, not only as the stories of celebration of monastic commitment but also as the stories of a pious wife and mother, whose death inspired her husband and son to renew their religious devotion. Ruch's essay, "Woman to Woman: *Kumano Bikuni* Proselytizers in Medieval and Early Modern Japan," completes the book. In this essay, she shows how these "Kumano bikuni" should be treated more as a generic category than a specific one.

This volume is an eloquent witness to the emerging field of studies on women in Japanese Buddhism as a mainstream academic discipline. Its essays are far from

elementary, and Ruch expresses the hope that “this anthology of beginnings will inspire a new generation of young scholars from all manner of fields to take on the next stage of inquiry in the areas that have most attracted them” (p. lxi). As for the translation from Japanese into English, I found the level to be of high quality; accuracy was generally retained even if some details were omitted from the English version. In short, the English-reading audience will find the information contained in this volume indispensable for furthering their understanding of women in Japanese Buddhism. Ruch is to be heartily congratulated for her dedication and scholarly commit-

ment, which are effectively breaking down boundaries and opening up new horizons.

Note

[1]. This review was originally written for a volume on Dunhuang Tantric materials edited by Matthew Kapstein, to have been published as a special issue of *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions (SCEAR)*. After problems arose with that publication, Kapstein negotiated for it to be released on H-Net, and we are delighted to be able to publish this excellent review on such an important book.

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