

Mark J. TEEUWEN and Hendrik VAN DER VEERE, *Nakatomi Harae Kunge: Purification and Enlightenment in Late-Heian Japan*. Buddhismus-Studien 1/1998, 118 pp. München: iudicium verlag, 1998. DM 29. ISBN 3-89129-690-8.

MARK TEEUWEN, now of the University of Oslo, has already made a name for himself in the field of Japanese religions with a major study of Watarai Shintō; here he teams up with van der Veere from the University of Leiden to produce a short but ground-breaking pamphlet on a text of considerable interest: a Buddhist commentary on the Nakatomi Purification Formula. This formula was a *norito* that was recited on the last days of the sixth and twelfth months of the year and which is recorded in Book 8 of the *Engishiki*. The authors start by reviewing questions of dating and by sketching the movements we now know as Ryōbu Shintō and Watarai Shintō, remembering all the while that these designations are both recent coinages; they follow this with a fully annotated translation based largely on the notes for the Nihon Shisō Taikei edition; and they end with a careful discussion of the layers evident in the text and the pattern of its argument. They conclude that it was probably compiled in the late twelfth century by Buddhists and that Watarai priests from the Outer Shrine at Ise then added to it sometime during the thirteenth century.

The vocabulary of the main commentary is that of esoteric Buddhism, for the simple reason that it was into this form of Buddhism that the native formula was adopted, although it is difficult to decide whether we are dealing with Shingon or Tendai esotericism here because there are conflicting signals. The vocabulary leads us in the direction of Shingon, but there are signs that the Tendai Onjō-ji may be linked to the text. The argument of this section is geared to explaining why the purification formula is to be seen as equally Buddhist, the equivalent of a *dhāraṇī* in fact, and to showing how performance of the ritual can not only ward off all calamities but can even lead the practitioner to ultimate enlightenment. Ritual objects such as the *ōmusa* and the *shaku* are interpreted as *samaya* or representations of pure, upright weapons of defense against the onslaught of illness and misfortune. One finds here too the familiar habit of word-play: the phrase Dainihonkoku 大日本国, for example, being read Dainichi-Honkoku, so “proving” an indissoluble link between Japan and the cosmic Buddha.

The last part of the commentary is clearly an anomaly. It switches tack, tying the formula firmly to rituals at the Ise Shrines and appropriating the esoteric Buddhist interpretation back into Shinto. The oddity here is that the formula had in fact no traditional connection to practices at Ise at all, but was rather part of rituals in the capital, at Kamo. As central control weakened during the late Heian period and the Ise Shrines found themselves driven to look for patronage elsewhere (while always using the special imperial relationship to their own advantage), they began to feel the need to appeal to a wider audience and to offer services to individuals. The first known use of this formula in such a context at Ise is surprisingly late, 1180, and it was only in the late twelfth century that it became used for private purposes, becoming part of the rituals at the Outer Shrine run by the Watarai. We know that this section was written by Watarai priests because it gives equal status to both Amaterasu and the deity Toyouke, something that only the Watarai would ever dare to claim. This borrowing of the esoteric interpretation shows us how during the thirteenth century Ise Shintō built a new and eclectic ritual foundation for itself that became necessary for its very survival. The *Kunge* was to be the first of many such adaptations.

The *Kunge* is, therefore, an extremely informative text, which began as an attempt to appropriate a ritual from the native tradition, absorbing it into Buddhism along the familiar lines of *honji suijaku*, but which ended with priests from Ise reversing the perspective and adopting it back into their own rituals with the Buddhist interpretation intact. One could hardly ask for a better illustration of the process by which (shall we call it?) “*jingi* worship” matured into (can we call it?) “Shinto.” It is exciting to think that we are now beginning to see academic work of this quality being produced on this vital subject.

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