

Provincial Society and Religion in Ancient Japan

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This treatise endeavors to reconstruct the actual state of provincial Buddhist temples as they existed in Japan from the mid-7th century to the mid-8th century. To clarify the true nature of religion in ancient provincial areas, the author also examines the respective relationships between: votive rituals and Buddhist temples; temples and the ideology of public administrators; society and religion; and politics and religion. In addition to literary and historical records, the author utilizes inscriptions on metal and stone, archeological surveys, and other historical source materials to trace various aspects of provincial temples from their inception until the founding, by the Nara period's central government, of *kokubunji* [国分寺] provincial temples, which were established in every province of the country.

In Part 1, "Provincial Control and Religion," background factors affecting the emergence of provincial temples are examined from the perspectives of both the central state and local powers with the aim of clarifying the actual state of provincial temples. Two background factors are identified as having contributed to the rapid growth of provincial temples from the second half of the 7th century: that the powerful provincial clans who built the local temples had the opportunity to come into contact with Buddhism; and the policies adopted by the central government to propagate Buddhism in the second half of the 7th century. Judging from the distribution of temples, the author concludes that both transportation networks and the ties the local power had with central authorities played a role in the development of temple construction. The word *tera* ("temple") is then analyzed as used in the *Nihon ryōiki* (a set of three books of Buddhist stories) written in the early 9th century. References to *tera* are compared with the remains of temples have been ascertained through archeological excavation, indicating that a temple was defined by the presence of three elements: a Buddha hall, a pagoda, and a monk. Of these, the pagoda was given primary importance. Finally, consideration is given to the relationship between the various functions of 7th and 8th century provincial temples and rituals offered to the indigenous gods of Japan. It is confirmed that the interior of the temple functioned as a space ultimately founded on Buddhist thought distinct from the outside world. A spiritual world existed outside temples which constituted an amalgamation of ancient Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism, and folk beliefs. However, people of the time venerated temple interiors as spaces for the embodiment of Buddhism, which represented a new and attractive spiritual world.

Buddhism was at first introduced to the ruling class, who protected it and used it as a means of enacting policy. For this reason, Buddhism is inseparable from politics. During the second half of the 7th century, when Buddhism was being rapidly disseminated in the provinces, the regulatory state (*ritsuryō kokka*) was in the process of bringing all the provinces under centralized control. As an example of examining the relationship between provincial politics and religion, Part 1 concludes with an examination of provincial parishes (*shingun* [神郡]) which were centered on powerful shrines and the hereditary clans that controlled them.

Part 2 examines the relationship between Emperor Shōmu and Buddhism. Buddhism was disseminated nationwide during the reign of Emperor Tenmu in the second half of the 7th century, which is considered to be a period of national Buddhism when

Buddhism was actively used to provide spiritual protection for the nation. During the Nara period, however, the reign of Emperor Shōmu represented the second wave of that movement. The author therefore focuses on Emperor Shōmu's Transcription "*Zassyū* [雑集]" a collection of Chinese poems and articles related to Buddhism, which reflects influences on his Buddhist thought, and his policies related to Buddhism after he completed "*Zassyū*". Particular emphasis is placed on policies related to *kokubunji*, the state-maintained provincial temples.

The author begins by elucidating five dots found in the margins of the work that relate to formatting rules, from which one can perceive the emperor's attitude toward the work. Next, an explanation is given concerning the "four phrases each comprising of three words" appearing at the end of the work, which among all the poetic texts included constitute the only passage without a title and identified author. The "four phrases" are a Zen inscription attributed to the Chinese monk Nanyue Huisi [南嶽慧思], the second patriarch of the Tiantai school of Buddhism. Words from the "*Anrakugyō-hon* [安樂行品] (Chapter 14)" in the *Lotus Sutra* [法華經] are included in the phrases. Emperor Shōmu included this passage at the end of *Zassyū* because he sought, both as a seeker of the dharma and as a statesman, to use "soothing conduct" to both discipline himself and achieve salvation. Indeed, his transcribing the long *Zassyū* in his own hand was in itself a kind of *Anrakugyō* [安樂行]. Emperor Shōmu's intentions in directing the construction of *kokubunji* can be deduced from the official names he gave them: "*Konkōmyō Shitennō Gokoku no Tera* [金光明四天王護国之寺];" and "*Hokke Metzai no Tera* [法華滅罪之寺]". The sources of these names are *Konkōmyō-Saishō Sutra* [金光明最勝王經] and the *Lotus Sutra* [法華經], indicating that Emperor Shōmu sought protection from calamity and protection of the state from *Konkōmyō-Saishō Sutra*, and liberation from the world of delusion through *hokke-zanmai* [法華三昧] of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Emperor Shōmu truly empathized with *Musō-gyō* [無相行] of *hokke-zanmai*, which is why he included it at the end of *Zassyū*. Huisi [慧思] preached this practice in the midst of social disorder and personal travails. Similarly, Emperor Shōmu confronted epidemics, famines, civil unrest, and other difficult conditions when he established *kokubunji*. It was only natural in such troubled circumstances for him to assign the state-sponsored temples the task of *hokke-zanmai* based on the *Lotus Sutra*. Also, *Konkōmyō-Saishō Sutra* and the *Lotus Sutra* had both become required scripture for monks in Tempyō 6 (734), before *kokubunji* was built. *Konkōmyō-Saishō Sutra* is also known as the sutra for repentance. The repentance is deeply connected with religious precepts. *hokke-zanmai* based on the *Lotus Sutra*, on the other hand, is a way to achieve enlightenment through the practice of *zazen* (sitting meditation). Zen practice and religious precepts were deemed inseparable. Precepts are rules that monks and nuns must follow, and in order to be fully ordained they were required to practice *Gusokukai* [具足戒], an even stricter set of precepts. Founded on two sutras with a deep connection to precepts, *kokubunji* was institutions that educated monks and nuns who provided the foundation for the transmission of Buddhism and provided a standard for monks and nuns in temples throughout Japan. As such, they served as nurturing institutions for monks and nuns that paired monasteries and nunneries.