

24 Ji'en: Notes on Foolish Views (ca. 1220)

Introduced and translated by Christoph Kleine

Introduction

The author of the text reproduced in translated excerpts below, Ji'en 慈圓 (1155–1225), was a famous poet and priest of the Tendai school of Buddhism, who was given the posthumous name Jichen. His father was the regent Fujiwara Tadamichi, and his older brother was the powerful Kujō no Kanezane 藤原兼實 (1149–1207), who had been appointed *sesshō* (regent for a minor sovereign) in 1186, and five years later became *kanpaku* ("chancellor" who executes political power on behalf of the emperor). At the age of eleven, Ji'en entered Enryakuji, the main temple of the Tendai school on Mt Hiei, located north-east of the capital Kyōto. He was ordained at the age of fourteen, and received the Buddhist name Dōkai, which he changed to Ji'en in 1181. In 1192, at the age of 37, he became head (*zasu* 座主) of the Tendai school, and the emperor Go-Toba's 後鳥羽 (1180–1239; r. 1183–98) personal chaplain. Although deeply devoted to Go-Toba, who had in 1198 abdicated in favour of his son, Emperor Tsuchimikado, Ji'en opposed his ambitions to overthrow the military government of Kamakura and reinstall imperial power. Consequently, Ji'en turned his back on the imperial court in 1219. From then until his death, he held the position of head administrator (*bettō* 別當) of Shiten'ōji Temple. On 15 September 1225, he died of illness at Sakamoto, at the foot of Mt Hiei.

Ji'en wrote several books on doctrinal matters, as well as poems; around 1220, having a keen interest in politics, he also wrote the seven-volume historiography *Gukanshō*, in which he critically reflects upon the political history of Japan from the reign of the first emperor Jinmu (third century BC?) to 1219. Ji'en adopted the prevailing pessimistic Buddhist outlook on history, according to which he was living in the latter days of the Dharma (*mappō* 末法), generally believed to be a period that had started in 1052 CE, and which would last 10,000 years. During these 10,000 years, Buddhism would gradually decline, and finally disappear. Moreover, his perspective on history was based on the idea that historical processes are governed by ordering principles (*dōri* 道理), and that, conversely, these principles have manifested themselves in historical events. One of these principles, which are of utmost importance in the history of Japan, is "the *dōri* by which Buddhism protects the state."¹ This is none other than the paradigm of the

¹ Charles H. Hambrick, "The Gukanshō: A Religious View of Japanese History," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 1 (1978): 37–58.

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interdependence of the Buddha's Law or Dharma and the ruler's law, which we encountered in Jōkei's *Kōfukuji Petition*, a text written only fifteen years earlier.

Bibliographical Information

The translation given here is based on the edition in:

Ji'en 慈圓. "Gukanshō 愚管抄" [Notes on Foolish Views]. In *Kokushi Taikei* 国史大系. Edited by Keizai Zasshisha 経済雑誌社. Vol. 14, *Hyakurenshō, Gukanshō, Genkō Shakusho* 百鍊抄 愚管抄 元亨釈書. Tokyo: Keizai Zasshisha 経済雑誌社, 1901; 417–23, 428, 579.

Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition.

An edition consulted here can be found in:

Maruyama Jirō 丸山二郎. *Gukanshō* 愚管抄. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1949, which was digitalised by Satō Hiroya (http://www.st.rim.or.jp/~success/gukansyo_index.html)

A translation consulted here can be found in:

Delmer M. Brown and Ishida Ichiro. *The Future and the Past: A Translation and Study of the Gukanshō, an Interpretative History of Japan Written 1219*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979.

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During the reign of Emperor Kinmei [r. 539–571], the Buddha's Law (*buppō* 佛法) was first introduced to this country. Prince Shōtoku [574–622], a grandson of Kinmei, was born towards the end [of Kinmei's rule]. It is evident that this country has been protected and preserved by the Buddha's Law ever since. [. . . p. 417/418 . . .]

From the very beginning of the age of man, and through to Emperor Seimu's reign [r. 131? – 190?; i.e. the first 13 reigns], emperors were invariably succeeded by their sons – a form of succession known as the True Law (*shōbō* 正法). Chūai [r. 192? – 200?; the 14th ruler] was the first to ascend the throne as an imperial grandson, while Empress Jingū [r. 201? – 269] – the great great-granddaughter of Emperor Kaika [r. 158? – 98? BCE] – became the first reigning empress. When Ōjin [r. 270? – 310?] ascended the throne, he thought that "as our country is now lacking the spirit of the age of Kami (*shindai no kibun* 神代ノ氣分), the situation is bound to deteriorate swiftly, with people harbouring only negative thoughts and feelings. Therefore, I will safeguard the country until the introduction of the Buddha's Law."

The reigns of all his successors proved to be brief. The line of descent from Ingyō and Yūryaku [r. 456? – 479?] was not continued, necessitating the search for descendants of an earlier emperor. Subsequently, the Buddha's Law was introduced, along with other [cultural elements from the continent]. During that period, it was difficult for the country's ruler to reign on their own. While Shōtoku [574–622] was Crown

Prince of the Eastern Palace [and, as such, executed real political power], Suiko [554–628] reigned as empress for thirty-six years. Despite the assassination of Emperor Sushun [r. 587–592] in 592, the land was well governed [under Suiko]. [Sixteen-year-old]^I Prince Shōtoku and Great Imperial Chieftain Soga [no Umako; ?–626] reached an agreement to attack and kill [Mononobe no] Moriya [? – 587], who opposed the introduction of the Buddha's Law. Subsequently, Prince Shōtoku and Soga [no Umako] commenced the promotion of the Buddha's Law, which has flourished ever since. [. . . p. 418/419 . . .]

Upon careful contemplation of these examples, I think the essential point is that the ruler's law (*ōbō* 王法 / *kōhō* 皇法)^{II} was hereafter to be protected by the Buddha's Law. Those events unfolded to manifest the principle (*ri* 理) that, following the introduction of the Buddha's Law to Japan, the preservation of the ruler's law could no longer be sustained without the support of the Buddha's Law. And yet another principle is that some principles (*dōri* 道理 = 道理) are more important and others less important, and that an important principle shall be well considered and a less important one discarded. Who was tasked with unveiling these principles for that era? Evidently, it was Prince Shōtoku, a bodily manifestation (*keshin* 化身) of the bodhisattva Kannon [Skt. Avalokiteśvara]. These occurrences were a direct result of his conscious awareness [of his role as a saviour figure]. [p. 419/420] What leads me to draw such a conclusion? Because, after the prince's passing, people gradually realised that he was actually a provisional manifestation (*gonja* 權者) of Kannon. While he was alive, they perceived him merely as an ordinary human being, but, after his demise, they came to realise that he had in fact been very extraordinary. When he was still a child, he sure enough acted like a child, but at the young age of sixteen, he was able to vanquish Moriya, who was about to destroy the Buddha's Law. This achievement was mainly due to his close alliance with Great Imperial Chieftain (*daijin* 大臣) Soga no Umako, an adult with mundane power and prestige. This Umako was undoubtedly a model minister, who had taken his refuge in the Buddha's Law. When it appeared that the chief of the Soga clan, Emperor Sushun – who lacked any virtue and had ascended to the throne merely because he was Kinmei's son – was about to attempt to kill Umako, the latter, empowered by his faith in the Buddha's Law, pre-emptively eliminated the emperor before he himself could be killed. This act served as his sole objective.

We cannot assert that this ruler [Sushun] was assassinated solely because he was destroying the Buddha's Law, as in Moriya's case. To claim that the Buddha's Law and the ruler's law were locked in bitter conflict [here], with the Buddha's Law emerging victorious, would be defamatory to the Buddha's Law. [Likewise,] the act of killing Moriya was not carried out by the Buddha's Law; rather, it was the ruler's law dealing

I CK: Shōtoku's age is only given in the Iwanami edition.

II CK: "*Kōhō* 皇法" is given in the *Kokushi Taikei* edition (p. 419), whereas the Iwanami edition has the more common "*ōbō* 王法."

with a harmful minister, because he posed a threat to the ruler's law's treasure.^{III} As I strive to illuminate the principles underlying these events, I reach the conclusion that the above-mentioned principle [of the Buddha's Law safeguarding the ruler's law] stands as a true Principle (*makoto no dōri* 誠ノ道リ).^{IV}

Let us now turn our attention to the relative importance of the [second] principle of the world (*seken no dōri* 世間ノ道リ),^V and consider [the aforementioned] Empress Suiko, who held the dual position of being both the empress and the younger sister of Emperor Bidatsu [r. 572–585], as they shared the same father, Emperor Kinmei. The question arises as to why Bidatsu married his sister [Suiko]. [p. 420/421] Probably, such marriages were not frowned upon during that time. The custom of prohibiting a brother from marrying his sister came later, after the introduction of the Buddha's Law and [other Chinese ideas and practices that were adopted in Japan]. Following the example set by Empress Jingū [r. 201–269], Suiko ought to have ascended the throne immediately after the death of Bidatsu [in 585]. However, Yōmei [r. 585–587] was enthroned instead, as he, the father of Prince Shōtoku, was considered the most suitable candidate. But Yōmei did not reign for long, because he died only two years later. Prince Shōtoku might have had a premonition about this. Subsequently, Sushun, another son of Emperor Kinmei, ascended the throne, as there was no way Prince Shōtoku could prevent it. When the prince observed Sushun's features, however, he made a prediction: "Something in your eyes indicates that you will not live long, and that you will face military disaster." Not heeding the prince's prophecy, Sushun had a boar killed, and uttered a curse: "I want the person I hate to be killed just like this boar has been killed."

However, the significance of the principle that the Buddha's Law and the ruler's law should be protected by Suiko's assumption of the throne after the ruler [Sushun] was killed [by Umako, as outlined above], with Prince Shōtoku administering state affairs, was so immense that its power could not be resisted at that time. Thus, the people may have regarded Sushun's assassination as "a commendable act by the Great Imperial Chieftain of the Soga clan." Although I do not know with certainty, it may have been a requirement of principle, too, that Empress Suiko be involved. Since the Buddha's Law and the ruler's law were now firmly intertwined, the Crown Prince simply observed the events, not voicing any opposition – thereby tacitly approving what his minister had done. Considering that the principle of the Buddha's Law safeguarding the ruler's law was of utmost importance at that time, Prince Shōtoku likely concluded that the assassination of Emperor Sushun was justified.

III CK: This might refer to the Buddha's Law or *dharma* (Jap. *hō*), which is regarded as one of three treasures that constitute Buddhism as a whole, namely: (1) the Buddha (i.e. the founder), (2) the *dharma* (i.e. his teachings), and (3) the *saṅgha* (i.e. the community). On the other hand, using the neutral phrase *takara*, the *Kokushi taishi* edition rather suggests the simple meaning of "the treasure of the ruler's law."

IV CK: マコトノ道理 in the Iwanami edition.

V CK: 世間ノ道理 in the Iwanami edition.

From that point on, events followed a singular course of history, with no conflict between the Buddha's Law and the ruler's law. As such an offence [had already been committed in the past], it never occurred to anyone [thereafter] to assault the ruler of the country (*kokuō* 國王) [again]. Moreover, people have refrained from even discussing such [an attack], as it is abhorrent. Anyone contemplating such an act would come to a clear realisation of the principle that it is indeed abominable. [421/422] In summary, if Prince Shōtoku had punished Umako [for assassinating Emperor Sushun] as if it were a mere human affair, he would have responded ordinarily, failing to align with the fundamental intent (*hon'i* 本意) of the most significant principle of that time. [. . .]

Subsequently, there came a moment in time when the ministerial house [of the Fujiwara] was destined to rise and take charge of state affairs. The Great Deity of Heavenly Illumination^{VI} had made a divine agreement with the Great Illuminating Deity of Kasuga,^{VII} that these two ancestral deities would jointly protect the imperial palace. [p. 422/423] As per this agreement, the time had come for the emperor to receive assistance from the ministerial house [of the Fujiwara], and for Fujiwara Kamatari (614–669), known as the Great Woven Cap (*taishokkan* 大織冠),^{VIII} to be born and succeed Prince Shōtoku as an administrator of state affairs, in support of the Buddha's Law.

This period coincided with Empress Kōgyoku's reign [i.e., 642–645], during which [Naka no Ōe, the later] Emperor Tenchi [r. 661–672] became the Crown Prince, and worked alongside the empress to bring about improvements. After [Soga] Iruka's head had been severed by Kamatari in the garden where the imperial banquet [of 645] was being held, it became abundantly clear that the nation of Japan could no longer be sustained solely by the ruler's prestige and power. This would have only added disorder to disorder. Instead, the time had come for the power of the Buddha's Law to merge with the good governance of the ministers [of the Fujiwara clan]. [. . . p. 423–428 . . .]

Subsequently, Japan experienced various disturbances, yet the ruler's law and the Buddha's Law continued to safeguard each other. The ministerial house [of the

VI CK: Tenshō Daijin 天照大神, also read as Amaterasu Ōmikami, the sun goddess who is regarded as the progenitor of the imperial clan.

VII CK: Kasuga no Daimyōjin 春日ノ大明神, the ancestral god of the Fujiwara clan, worshiped at the Kasuga Shrine near Nara.

VIII CK: The "Great Woven Cap" or *taishokkan* 大織冠 is the highest rank, established in the Taika Reforms in 647. The term is used here as another name of Fujiwara no Kamatari, who, in 669, was the first retainer to be promoted to this rank. Originally, Kamatari was a member of the powerful Nakatomi clan, and was called Nakatomi no Kamako. Ironically, in the sixth century, the Nakatomi clan, together with the Mononobe clan, had firmly opposed the establishment of Buddhism. Kamako eventually changed his name to Kamatari, and, on his deathbed, he was granted the family name of Fujiwara, along with the court rank of the Great Woven Cap. This Kamatari is regarded as the founder of the Fujiwara clan, which dominated Japanese politics from the late ninth to the late twelfth centuries. The author of this historiography, the abbot Ji'en, was, like so many high-ranking clerics of the Heian period (794–1185), himself an offspring of this powerful clan.

Fujiwara] faithfully upheld the custom^{IX} of harmonious relations like that between fish and water, bringing blessings to the country. However, with the passage of time, deterioration gradually set in, and now it appears as though the ruler's law and the Buddha's Law have nearly vanished. [. . . p. 428–579 . . .]

As I delve into the accounts of past conditions, the process of change in the lives of rulers, ministers, and warriors of Japan gradually becomes apparent to me. Reflecting upon this process and its associated conditions, while considering the ordering principles for different periods of time, I have also come to understand and pay attention to those reigns where principle and reality do not align.

For the generations to come, it is crucial to govern the state wisely, by clearly discerning between what is wrong (*ja* 邪) and what is right (*shō* 正), what is good (*zen* 善) and what is bad (*aku* 惡), and to act in harmony with the principles for this final age [of the Dharma] (*matsudai* 末代). By becoming vessels for the blessings bestowed upon living [beings] by Buddhas and gods, they must continue to safeguard the Buddha's Law and the ruler's law, throughout the remaining sixteen reigns of the [allotted] one hundred dynastic rulers.^X Because this is the primary intent (*hon'i* 本意) of the boundless blessings for living beings, and the mysterious responses (*myōō* 冥應) of Buddhas and gods, I have emphasised it as the central point of this writing.

IX CK: *Rei* 禮; the Iwanami edition has *kokorozashi* 志 (intention, will, etc.).

X CK: As Ji'en states in the third book of his *Gukanshō*, he believed that, after the reign of Emperor Jinmu 神武 – the mythical founder of the Japanese Empire and first emperor, who is said to have lived between 711 and 585 BC, and ascended the throne in 660 BC – a hundred more emperors were to follow. By Ji'en's time, eighty-four generations of emperors had already passed, so another sixteen would surely follow. He writes: "I do not know how it was in the age of Kami, but I hear that after the beginning of the age of man and the enthronement of Emperor Jimmu, Japan is to have only one hundred reigns. Now that we are in the 84th reign not many more are left. Meanwhile, no one has written Succession Tales for the period after the outbreak of the Hogen Rebellion (*hogen no ran* 保元ノ亂) [of 1156]. I hear that there may be some, but I have not seen any. Why? I am convinced that because people prefer to write only about that which is good and everything has been disturbed since the outbreak of the Hogen Rebellion, they have shied away from events that are all bad and not written Succession Tales for this modern period." Jien 慈門, Delmer M. Brown und Ichiro Ishida, *The Future and the Past: A Translation and Study of the Gukanshō, an Interpretative History of Japan Written 1219* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), 20. Cf. Keizai Zasshisha 經濟雜誌社, ed., *Kokushi Taikei* 国史大系, vol. 14, *Hyakurenshō, Gukanshō, Genkō shakusho* 百鍊抄 愚管抄 元亨釋書 (Tokyo: Keizai Zasshisha, 1901), 412.