

Syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism in “Hokekyo genki”

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1. Introduction

This paper examines the syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism in “Dainihonkoku hokekyo genki” (henceforth “Hokekyo genki”). Previous research on the “Hokekyo genki” has covered several other aspects such as belief in the Lotus Sutra, Saṃsāra (endless rebirth), and comparisons with “Nihon Ryoiki.” Although many gods of heaven and earth appear in “Hokekyo genki,” little research has focused on them. In particular, there are few works that explore the syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism in “Hokekyo genki,” which is the argument of this paper.

2. “Hokekyo genki” and the syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism

“Hokekyo genki” is one of the ojodens, which are the biographies of people who attained rebirth in the Pure Land. Written by Chingen 鎮源 (year of birth and death unknown) from 1040 to 1044, it consists of 3 volumes and 129 episodes. “Hokekyo genki” focuses on the stories of the believers in the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, it might have different characteristics compared to other ojodens such as “Nihon ojo gokurakuki,” “Zoku honcho ojoden,” and “Shui Ojo-den,” which gather the stories of Nenbutsu practitioners and their rebirths in the Pure Land.

According to Masato Sato, the syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism is based on the dharmapala theory, the emancipation theory, as well as the manifestation theory (Honchi-suijaku theory).¹⁾ Firstly, the dharmapala theory and the emancipation theory appeared in the Nara period. The dharmapala theory states that the Shinto gods are good deities protecting dharma, while the emancipation theory explains that they eager to emancipate themselves from their godly bodies. In the Heian period, the manifestation theory arose and became mainstream. Interestingly, these three theories were not opposed to each other, but

were harmonized.

Gods appear in 14 stories in “Hokekyo genki.” The stories which are affected by the dharmapala theory are episodes 3, 21, 70, 80, and 93. Although we cannot find the direct effects of the dharmapala theory on episode 125, it is related to this theory as well. Conversely, the stories affected by the emancipation theory are episodes 67, 86, and 128. Episodes 81 and 116 are also related to the emancipation theory. There is no story which is affected by the manifestation theory. It seems that when the stories were gathered for “Hokekyo genki,” the manifestation theory had not become widespread. Specific descriptions about the gods are not seen in episodes 56, 98, and 129. Therefore, we will focus on the dharmapala theory and the emancipation theory in “Hokekyo genki.”

3. The dharmapala theory in “Hokekyo genki”

Firstly, we examine the stories affected by the dharmapala theory. The Lotus Sutra is imparted to the gods in episode 3 and 21. In episode 3, Saichou 最澄 (767–822) conveyed the Lotus Sutra at Usadaijingu 宇佐大神宮 and Kwarasha 香春社. He was given a purple Buddhist stole at Usadaijingu and the purple clouds appeared at Kwarasha. Meanwhile, in episode 21, Kounichi Houshi 光日法師 (year of birth and death unknown) conveyed the Lotus Sutra at Iwashimizu Hachimangu 石清水八幡宮. One of the participants in his Lotus Sutra chanting had a dream, where he heard a voice venerating Kounichi Houshi from the holy shrine. The gods protected the Lotus Sutra and responded to the monks, indicated by the auspicious omens in both episodes.

In addition, Kamo Myoujin 賀茂明神 relieved Renshuu Houshi 蓮秀法師 (year of birth and death unknown), who was a believer of Kannon Bosatsu (Kannon Bodhisattva) 觀音菩薩, from the world of the dead in episode 70. As a result, Renshuu Houshi was restored to life. Since Kamo Myoujin is portrayed as a dependent of Kannon Bosatsu in this episode, it connects to the dharmapala theory.

Finally in episodes 80 and 93, the gods inform believers in the Lotus Sutra of their previous lives through their dreams. In episode 80, Monk Myouren 明蓮 (year of birth and death unknown) could not remember the eighth volume of the Lotus Sutra. He turned to Inari 稻荷, Zaou Gongen 藏王権現, Kumano Gongen 熊野権現, Sumiyoshi Myoujin 住吉明神, and Daisen Daichimyou Gongen 大山智明菩薩, to ask for the reason. As a result, through his dream, Daisen Daichimyou Gongen informed Myouren that in his previous life,

he was a cow which had listened to the Lotus Sutra. The cow listened till the seventh volume, but left when the eighth volume started. Meanwhile, monk Tenjou 転乗 (year of birth and death unknown), who could not remember the seventh and eighth volumes of the Lotus Sutra, asked Zaou Gongen in episode 93 for the reason. Zaou Gongen informed Tenjou through his dream that he was a poisonous snake in his previous life. It heard the chanting of the Lotus Sutra by a monk, who left without chanting the seventh and eighth volumes. In both episodes, after these monks knew their previous lives and the reasons why they could not remember some volumes, their belief in the Lotus Sutra deepened. Both episodes emphasize the characteristics of the gods as deities protecting the Lotus Sutra.

Episode 125 is related to episode 80 and 93. In this episode, the god of Shinano 信濃 helped a snake and a rat which fought each other to learn about their previous lives. As a result, the power of the Lotus Sutra caused them to be reborn in one of the heavens. The god seems to be related to the dharmapala theory.

4. The emancipation theory in "Hokekyo genki"

There are some stories influenced by the emancipation theory. In episode 67, a dragon constantly heard the chanting of the Lotus Sutra by a monk. It turned over a new leaf and made friends with the monk. At that time, people were suffering from a drought. The dragon insisted that it wanted to emancipate itself from its distressing body, and then made it rain by sacrificing itself. Although it was dead, a temple was built over its dead body. Therefore, the dragon successfully emancipated itself from its distressing body and finally seemed to be saved. This dragon's story is illustrates the emancipation theory's influence.

Episode 128 is similar to episode 67. Monk Doukou 道公 (year of birth and death unknown) met Doso-shin, the traveler's guardian deity, in this episode. The god claimed that he wanted to emancipate himself from his distressing body and obtain a body of virtue. The god highlighted the agony of his body and asked Doukou for help. Finally, Doso-shin was able to emancipate himself from his distressing body and was reborn in Fudaraku, the Pure Land of Kannon Bosatsu, by the power of the Lotus Sutra. In addition, he became a dependent of Kannon Bosatsu and obtained the position of Bosatsu, illustrating how the emancipation theory is adapted to Doso-shin.

In episode 86, Zaou Gongen, Kumano Gongen, Sumiyoshi Myoujin and Matsuo Myoujin 松尾明神, came to Hourin Temple to listen to the chanting of the Lotus Sutra by

Doumyou Ajari 道命阿闍梨 (974–1020). Sumiyoshi Myoujin mentioned that he could leave the karmic suffering of his distressing body when he heard the chanting. Therefore, the emancipation theory is adapted to these gods. This episode contrasts to episodes 3 and 21. Since monks came to the shrines to convey the Lotus Sutra to the gods in episode 3 and 21, it relates to the dharmapala theory. Conversely, in episode 68, as the gods came to the temple to hear the chanting of the Lotus Sutra, it relates to the emancipation theory.

Monk Jinyu 神融 (year of birth and death unknown) reclaimed a thunder god using the Lotus Sutra in episode 81. Although the god did not claim to emancipate itself from his distressing body, it might be related to the emancipation theory. Moreover, in episode 116, Kashii Myoujin 香椎明神 requested offerings in the form of living things. It came into conflict with Buddhism, which prohibits killing and might have some relationship with the emancipation theory.

5. The relationship between the dharmapala theory and the emancipation theory

Based on episodes 3, 21, 70, 80, and 93, the dharmapala theory is adapted to Usadaijinguu, Kawarasha, Iwashimizu Hachimanguu, Kamo Myoujin, Inari, Zaou Gongen, Kumano Gongen, Sumiyoshi Myoujin, and Daisen Daichimyou Gongen. They are gods of high-ranking shrines. On the other hand, the dragon and Doso-shin are adapted to the emancipation theory. They are gods of low-ranking or ‘out of ranking’ shrines.

According to Enchou Tamura, the dharmapala theory is used for gods which are related to the ancient state, while the emancipation theory is used for local gods. The dharmapala theory is supported by the state, while the emancipation theory is supported by the general public.²⁾ Since these two theories were adapted to different gods, there is no conflict between them.

However, in “Hokekyo genki,” the situation is not simple. In episode 86, the emancipation theory is adapted to Zaou Gongen, Kumano Gongen, Sumiyoshi Myoujin, and Matsuo Myoujin, who are gods of high-ranking shrines. However, in other episodes, Zaou Gongen, Kumano Gongen and Sumiyoshi Myoujin are adapted to the dharmapala theory. Some gods have different characteristics and different theories are adapted to them. We can see the diversity of the gods and their characteristics in “Hokekyo genki.”

6. Conclusion

This paper tries to find the theories of the syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism in “Hokekyo genki.” In general, the dharmapala theory is adapted to high shrine ranking gods, while the emancipation theory is adapted to low or out of shrine ranking gods. However, some gods are adapted to both theories. They have the different characteristics in different episodes. It might show the diversity of the gods and their characteristics in “Hokekyo genki.”

Notes

- 1) Sato 1990.
- 2) Tamura 1954.

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