

17th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EJS)

Panel Title: A tradition of reinvention: Shōtoku Taishi in modern Japanese religious history

Convenor: Orion Klautau (Tohoku University)

Discussant: Makoto Hayashi (Aichi Gakuin University)

Section: Intellectual History and Philosophy

Location: Ghent University (Blandijnberg 2), Lokaal 0.3

Session time: Saturday 19 August, 11:00-12:30

Panel Short Abstract:

By focusing on both political and doctrinal aspects, this panel discusses different ways that Shōtoku Taishi (574-622), a key character for a number of Buddhist, Shinto —and even Christian— traditions in Japan, was reinvented in the modernizing context that followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Panel Long Abstract:

There is no controversy about the fact that Shōtoku Taishi (a.k.a. Prince Shōtoku, 574-622) plays a crucial role in the context of Japanese religious history. Praised as a key character in many different religious traditions — besides his pivotal place in Buddhist traditions as different as Sōto Zen and Jōdo Shinshū, the Prince is also highly regarded in Shinto, Shugendo, and, after the twentieth-century, even Christian groups in Japan. However, despite a thousand-year long history of (re-)inventions, the Meiji era did bring new elements that contributed to transformations theretofore never witnessed. For instance, the introduction of modern historiographical methods led scholars to question some of the Prince's most famous enterprises, and modern printed media certainly helped make certain depictions more pervasive than ever before. This panel session will concentrate on three different dimensions of the reinvention of Shōtoku's image in the modern period. By focusing on an early Edo-period (1600-1868) apocryphal text titled Shōtoku Taishi's Five Constitutions, the first presenter will discuss issues of continuity and change. Attributed to the Prince from the time of its conception in the early seventeenth century, this text gained new life in the Meiji campaigns aimed at elevating certain Shinto(-inspired) ideas to the level of national doctrine. The second presenter focuses on the image of the Prince in the influential Nichirenist movement of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Although Shōtoku had been deeply respected in most Japanese Buddhist schools, the Nichiren sect remained as an exception, a reality that would, however, eventually change as the Imperial system became further established throughout the Meiji years. The last presentation focuses on modern connections between the Prince and his Seventeen-

17th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS)

article Constitution, especially how the constitution changed from being regarded as no more than a collection of "moral admonishments" in the late nineteenth-century, to being considered, in the 1930s, as one of the highest expressions of the kokutai itself. Together, these presentations will clarify heretofore unfamiliar aspects of the modernization of Japanese Buddhist—and to an extent, also Shinto—tradition.

Paper 1

Modern commentaries on the apocryphal “five constitutions” of prince Shōtoku
Ishii Kōsei (Komazawa University)

Paper short abstract:

This presentation focuses on the modern development of Shōtoku Taishi’s alleged “Five Constitutions” (*Gokenpō*), an apocryphal text originally produced during the early Edo Period (1600-1868), but attributed new meaning in the Emperor-centered context that followed the Meiji Restoration.

Paper long abstract:

The famous “Seventeen-article Constitution” (*Jūshichijō kenpō*) attributed to Shōtoku Taishi (574-622) only commanded that people revere Buddhism, making no mention whatsoever to the Japanese kami. Dissatisfied with this fact, a number of intellectuals in the early Edo-period (1600-1868) forged a new text, which they titled The Five Constitutions of Prince Shōtoku (*Shōtoku Taishi gokenpō*). Besides a slightly modified version of the original constitution, which in this context was renamed the “General Constitution” (*tsūmō kenpō*), this text also included four other Shinto-centered “constitutions,” aimed, respectively, at politicians (*seika kenpō*), Confucianists (*jushi kenpō*), Shinto priests (*shinshoku kenpō*), and Buddhists (*shakushi kenpō*). The text was soon deemed a forgery and those responsible for its publication were punished, but it still remained popular thereafter. In the early Meiji period (1868-1912), when Shinto became the main standard for the new nation-wide religious policy, The Five Constitutions was again welcomed, and many commentaries, including by Buddhist priests, were published. In this new context, it was considered especially useful since it defined Buddhism as originating from a type of Shinto that had spread to India, and Confucianism as coming from the Shinto which spread to China. Therefore, in the overall scheme of The Five Constitutions, both Buddhist priests and Confucian scholars were allowed to take their positions in the new nation and were able to make use of their respective learnings. In the modern period, when the dichotomy between “foreign” and “national” becomes more pronounced than ever before, the apocryphal Five Constitutions of Prince Shōtoku served as a way for local intellectuals to justify the adoption, by the insular nation of Japan, of overseas culture while maintaining the importance of their own. In this presentation I will examine a number of annotations of the

17th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS)

Five Constitutions published after the Meiji restoration, clarifying the characteristics of each and hoping to contribute to broader questions pertaining to religion and nationalism in modern Japan.

Paper 2

Projecting modern ideals on the past: Nichirenist perspectives on Shōtoku Taishi
Yulia Burenina (Osaka University)

Paper short abstract:

By focusing on Nichiren Buddhists, this paper attempts to reconsider the role of Shōtoku Taishi representations within the context of Japanese modernity, thus providing alternative voices to the Shinran-centered narratives of previous research on his significance in modern Japanese Buddhism.

Paper long abstract:

The fact that Nichiren (1222-1282) was a harsh critic of other Buddhist sects, claiming that only the Lotus Sutra could lead to salvation in the Final Dharma age of mappō, is well-known. Although Nichiren did regard Shōtoku Taishi as a pioneer in the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in Japan, he was rather critical of the *Hokke Gisho*, the prince's famous commentary on the text, and denied its doctrinal value. Moreover, Nichiren drew a clear line between Shōtoku Taishi and Saichō (767-822), the founder of the Tendai tradition in Japan, emphasizing that Taishi did not propagate the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra. In other words, in Nichiren's teachings Taishi was not an essential figure as he was, for instance, to Shinran (1173-1263). This is, perhaps, one of the main reasons why Shōtoku Taishi never became a central question in studies of Nichiren Buddhism. However, after the Meiji restoration, when Taishi gained a new significance for the entirety of the Japanese Buddhist world, this picture started to change. Especially during the Taisho and early Showa periods Taishi began to appear in the work of Nichiren devotees in a variety of guises, such as a "great patron of Buddhism," "skillful politician and diplomat," "great artist and craftsman," "great philosopher," "pioneer in Buddhist social welfare," etc. This paper examines this wide range of narratives, focusing on the works of significant figures in modern Nichiren Buddhism, such as Tanaka Chigaku (1861-1939), Honda Nisshō (1867-1931), Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949), and shows why and how they projected their own ideals on the image of Shōtoku Taishi. By focusing on these cases, this paper thus presents alternative voices to the Shinran-centered narratives of previous research on the significance of Shōtoku Taishi in modern Japanese Buddhism and attempts to reconsider the place and role of his representations within the broader context of Japanese modernity.

Paper 3

Harmonizing the Prince: Shōtoku Taishi's constitution between the Taishō and early Shōwa years
Orion Klautau (Tohoku University)

Paper short abstract:

This presentation focuses on how Shōtoku Taishi's Seventeen-Article Constitution was resignified after the death of Emperor Meiji (1852-1912), going from a collection of moral rules in the early Taishō days to being considered, in the 1930s, one of the highest expressions of the kokutai itself.

Paper long abstract:

More than the dispatching of missions to Sui China or the establishment of the Twelve Level Cap and Rank System, the Seventeen-article Constitution is perhaps the achievement for which Shōtoku Taishi (574-622) is best known today. While early Shōwa ideologues understood the Constitution's portrayal of "harmony" (*wa*) as an expression of the Japanese spirit, twenty-first century politicians see it as the origin of a type of Japanese sui generis democracy. In the long history of Shōtoku representations, these Constitution-centered narratives are, however, relatively new: it was not until the late Meiji period that people gained interest in Taishi's Constitution as such. When the death of Emperor Mutsuhito in 1912 brings about a new wave of interest in the Meiji Restoration, not only Shōtoku but also the Taika Reforms that followed his regency are positioned as predecessors of these mid-nineteenth-century events. This original interest in Taishi's achievements shifts even further when, after 1918, intellectuals begin reading his Constitution from the perspective of yet another keyword: kokutai. The weakening of a number of European monarchies around the end of World War I, along with the Russian Revolution in 1917, provided part of Imperial Japan's intelligentsia with a new sense of danger toward Western "materialistic" ideologies. By allowing ideas such as Socialism and Individualism to circulate freely, would Japan not be paving the way for its own demise, as did the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German Empires? As a victorious nation Japan was, however, now deeply involved in the international order so a sort of intellectual sakoku was out of question. In this context, Shōtoku's constitutional attitude of "harmonizing" different "foreign" ideas such as Buddhism and Confucianism without losing sight of the immutable character of the Japanese kokutai became a remedy for contemporary anxieties, an understanding which will continue into the 1940s. In this presentation, by focusing on religionists and secular intellectuals alike, I will describe this process through which the Seventeen-Article Constitution went from a set of moral rules in the early Taisho days to being considered, in the 1930s, one of the clearest expressions of the kokutai itself.