

Public Abstract

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Title:INEQUALITY IN THE RHETORIC OF BUDDHIST-KAMI RELATIONS

Buddhism has long been praised and viewed as religion that embraces other faiths without compromising itself or the other religion. In history, Buddhism has been thought to meld with the indigenous traditions it encountered harmoniously and with little tension. However, though Buddhist rhetoric seeks to give this impression, under the surface a colonialist attitude can be found. In Japan, this takes form in the lowering and subsequent elevation of indigenous gods (kami). As Buddhism gained power in Japan, Buddhist deities and methods came to be seen as ways to control and subjugate the unruly indigenous gods. From the Nara to the Kamakura period indigenous gods had to regain their status by working their way up the Buddhist eschatological ladder to eventually gain the title of *suijaku*, emanation of a Buddha. Even with this title however, kami were seen as inferior to their Buddhist counterparts, with few exception. This study analyzes ritual and literary texts from the Nara-Kamakura periods to show the tension between the status of kami and Buddhist deities during these periods. These texts show that kami remained subject to the rule of Buddhist deities despite the awarding of impressive sounding titles and the rhetoric of *hongaku* which expressed equality of essence. These findings suggest that throughout history Buddhism has not been as egalitarian as it seems, and its rhetoric should be reevaluated for its colonialistic tendencies.