Review
Author(s): Terrence Jackson
Review by: Terrence Jackson
Source: *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Feb., 2005), pp. 201-202
Published by: Association for Asian Studies
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25075710
Accessed: 10-05-2015 19:35 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

*Association for Asian Studies* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Asian Studies.*

http://www.jstor.org

This content downloaded from 198.108.80.5 on Sun, 10 May 2015 19:35:38 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

*Burning and Building: Schooling and State Formation in Japan, 1750–1890.* By BRIAN PLATT. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004. x, 325 pp. $45.00 (cloth).

Brian Platt's new book on the history of commoner education is a work that not only complicates our understanding of the "successes" of early modern education in Japan but will also inspire scholars to take another look at the dynamics of the Tokugawa-Meiji transition. Focusing on the significant expansion of education in Nagano Prefecture (Shinano Domain) during the period 1750 to 1890, Platt presents two main theses. The first part of the book argues that the exponential growth in the number of commoner schools between the 1750s and 1860s was driven by local elite who were interested in retaining their status while being faced with new economic, social, and political challenges. The second part asserts that the shape of mass education during the Meiji period was the result of negotiations among local communities, local elites, prefectural officials, and the central government. The latter thesis challenges post–World War II historiography that overemphasizes Meiji state coercion and underemphasizes the effectiveness of popular resistance.

Utilizing the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu, Platt argues that the initial significant increase in schools beginning in 1750 was largely at the hands of local elite, who established schools in villages for their own children as part of a strategy to retain social and economic status. While educational developments within villages during 1750 to 1830 were predominantly for the elite commoners, the following period of 1830 to the 1860s saw an incredible growth in schools attended by ordinary commoners. Platt claims that famines and other difficulties of the 1830s convinced commoners, whose household economies had become notably tied to commercial markets, that a rudimentary education could be valuable to their economic pursuits. Also feeling the effects of these crises, local leaders opened new schools, hoping that providing moral education (not high-level literacy) for commoners would benefit them by strengthening social hierarchy within the villages. But because of the local elite's role as teachers and village headmen, their families came to identify themselves with education and public activism. Platt's use of the memoir of a teacher and former headman named Ozawa Watoku to present a case study is particularly fascinating.

After the Meiji Restoration, there was no consensus on what a school system should look like, and the new central government was in no position to implement changes. Therefore, village elites across Japan carried out their own visions of reform by opening *gōkō*, or "local schools," under the endorsement of the domainal governments. However, the Meiji government's Fundamental Code of Education abolished these gōkō and instituted measures for standardization in 1872 as part of efforts to craft a nation-state. Ironically, lacking the infrastructure and funds to accomplish these reforms, the young government was forced to rely on those educators whose schools it had just abolished. Luckily, many of that group were "eager to contribute to a broader campaign of local public service" (p. 184).

Cooperation such as this was one aspect of negotiation. Resistance was another. Platt's research is at its most interesting when he addresses this issue. He demolishes the idea that the Japanese population was conditioned by the Tokugawa educational system to join the cause of centralization willingly and enthusiastically. Forced out of work, many former teachers defied the government's decree and continued to operate their schools or encouraged communities to resist government-directed

This content downloaded from 198.108.80.5 on Sun, 10 May 2015 19:35:38 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions

reforms. Objecting to the new schools and their fees, many regular families neglected to send their children to school or did not pay tuition. Platt successfully shows that the high rates of enrollment recorded by the Meiji government did not mean high rates of attendance. Some resistance even reached the extreme of burning school buildings. These displays of resentment encouraged the drafting of the Three New Laws of 1878 and the Educational Ordinance of 1879, which allowed more flexibility in districting, organization, attendance, and curriculum to fit local conditions. Although during the 1880s and 1890s the government was able to curtail political activism among teachers and stabilize its centralization, Platt states that debates regarding policy and identity continued and the issue of consolidation in education was not yet settled in many areas.

Platt has used an amazing array of sources, including petitions, government documents, novels, and memoirs, to provide a complex view that challenges long-established assumptions. Although flaws are few and minor, a fuller discussion of the damage that the Fundamental Code did to local elite prestige and more of a voice from those ordinary people resisting Meiji reforms would have been useful.

On the surface, *Burning and Building: Schooling and State Formation in Japan, 1750–1890* is about educational history, but beyond that Platt's work pushes our understanding of social unrest and state-building further. In addition, the book breaks new ground in its examination of the role that the local elite played in commoner education. Anyone interested in Japanese social and educational history or the Tokugawa-Meiji transition should read this book.

TERRENCE JACKSON
*Adrian College*

*Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan.* Edited by BARBARA RUCH. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002. lxxviii, 706 pp. $69.00 (cloth).

The studies heretofore of women in Japanese Buddhism have been heavily based on the notion that women are defiled and subject to obstructions that hinder them from attaining salvation. The history of Buddhism has been told mainly through the lives and teachings of male practitioners, and women as those whom they must liberate. *Engendering Faith: Women and Buddhism in Premodern Japan* confounds such a picture. The essays contained in this volume demonstrate that it is worthwhile to explore the history of Japanese Buddhism as it was practiced and shaped by women.

Women played a significant role in propagation of Buddhism ever since its introduction to Japan. According to Mikoshiba Daisuke and Hongō Masatsugu, the sutra-copying project, the construction of state-sponsored nunneries and monasteries, and the building of Tōdaiji and the image of the Great Buddha, all of which are commonly known as the achievements of Emperor Shōmu, would not have happened without the faith of his wife, Empress Kōmyō.

Women also practiced their faiths in earnest, although at times within their limited capacities. They could become "nuns" through various levels of ordination that were best fit to their lifestyle and needs (as variously discussed in pieces by Chikusa Masaaki, Paul Groner, Katsuura Noriko, Ushiyama Yoshiyuki, and Martin Collcutt). The thirteenth-century Zen master Mugai Nyodai, mentioned in Barbara Ruch's overview, is certainly an exceptional woman fully devoted to religious life.

This content downloaded from 198.108.80.5 on Sun, 10 May 2015 19:35:38 UTC
All use subject to JSTOR Terms and Conditions