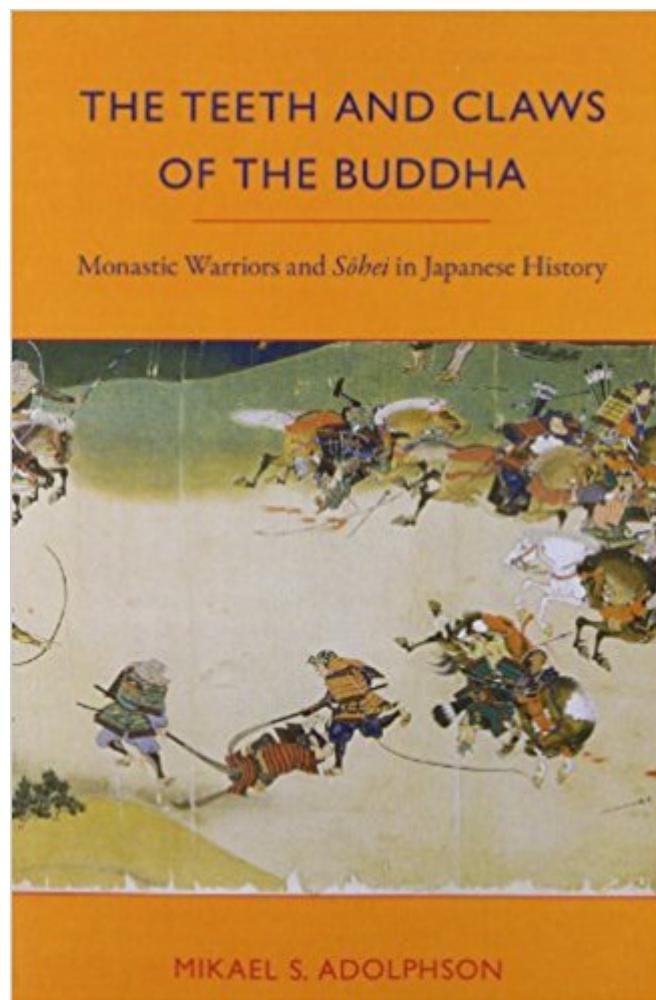


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The Teeth And Claws Of The Buddha: Monastic Warriors And *Sohei* In Japanese History



Synopsis

Japan's monastic warriors have fared poorly in comparison to the samurai, both in terms of historical reputation and representations in popular culture. Often maligned and criticized for their involvement in politics and other secular matters, they have been seen as figures separate from the larger military class. However, as Mikael Adolphson reveals in his comprehensive and authoritative examination of the social origins of the monastic forces, political conditions, and warfare practices of the Heian (794-1185) and Kamakura (1185-1333) eras, these monk-warriors(s hei) were in reality inseparable from the warrior class. Their negative image, Adolphson argues, is a construct that grew out of artistic sources critical of the established temples from the fourteenth century on. In deconstructing the s hei image and looking for clues as to the characteristics, role, and meaning of the monastic forces, *The Teeth and Claws of the Buddha* highlights the importance of historical circumstances; it also points to the fallacies of allowing later, especially modern, notions of religion to exert undue influence on interpretations of the past. It further suggests that, rather than constituting a separate category of violence, religious violence needs to be understood in its political, social, military, and ideological contexts.

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Customer Reviews

This book presents an excellent and well-balanced presentation of Japanese monastic warriors based completely on primary and secondary sources. To my knowledge, it's the first work to present a trustworthy picture of who the monastic warriors of medieval Japan were, what the social context was in which they lived, the factors that played a role in establishing the currently held inaccurate

image of them, how this image was able to survive in Japan and elsewhere until today and why it is still so powerful that until recently Japanese scholarship (despite the fact that according to the author the truth is there for everyone to see inside the primary documents) hasn't been able to dismantle it. Most interestingly, the author comes to his conclusions by systematically and thoroughly, although the author himself admits not comprehensively (which I believe, in this case, isn't adversely influencing the results of the research), analyzing the mistakes in the interpretation of primary sources by the Japanese academic world thusfar. A possible explanation for the fact that Japanese scholarship has sustained the inaccurate image of monastic warriors for so long is being given, and convincingly at that, as well as some recent attempts within Japanese academe at reconsideration of established views by a reinterpretation of primary sources. Besides all of this, the book contains a wonderful bibliography as well as excellent notes including Japanese characters that enable the interested reader to explore further. Well, to put it in a single frase, I strongly feel that this book is the product of excellent, first-rate scholarship and would therefore like to recommend it highly to anyone interested in the subject.

When one wishes to master the history of a country, it is often best to turn to scholars who reside outside the country in question. In-country historians are frequently captive to national myths, political pressure, and historical blindness. Examples would include Japanese scholar's treatment of the war in China, Texas school textbooks in which the word "coworkers" has replaced slaves, and the idea of any measured history of China taught or studied within that country is on the face of it impossible. Thus it is with this remarkable study of Japan's Monastic Warriors written by a "ogaijin" who has studied in Japan and returned to source materials rather than myths to produce an informative and somewhat revolutionary view of the Sohei period of Japan. Prior to the publication of this book, Japanese authors were overwhelmed by 16th & 17th century views of a development that began in the 10th Century. By returning to original source material the author separates predominant myths and popular legends, so widely accepted in Japan by both the public and scholars, from the intriguing and fundamental taxation and land ownership revolution which swept away the old Imperial System and eventually led to the era of warring states centuries later. As a student of Japanese I found this monograph wonderful, illuminating, and a great read.

great book leads directly into my research as well. i cant say enuff about this book but its a must have.,we need more like this that delve alittle deeper into certain subjects that are barley contained in this book but lo and behold they are there...theres another book or two on here that have some

good stuff in them as well...bottom line my teacher told me straight out...seek what the the old masters sought.sometimes the truth is right in front of you.....now if we could get ron roy to do a book that guy...man.

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