made “self-conscious attempts to forge good Christian practice within the realm of polite sociability” (167).

Since the majority of essays deal with individual women and their public writings, the usefulness of the book lies in the authors’ success in presenting and interpreting these well-known individuals and their writings in new ways. On these grounds, the book succeeds admirably. Viewed separately, the essays are certainly useful and occasionally surprising. Taken together, they clearly succeed in challenging the theory of public and private spheres as it applies to both women and religion.

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In The Princess Nun, Gina Cogan explores the life of the nun Bunchi (1619–97), the eldest daughter of Emperor Go-Mizunoo (1596–1680), who ended her marriage at the age of twenty-one, took the tonsure, and founded a Rinzai Zen convent known as Enshōji. In 1620 Bunchi’s mother, Oyotsu, had her relationship with Go-Mizunoo suddenly terminated when, under pressure from the shogunate, he took Shogun Hidetada’s daughter, Masako (later named Tofukumon’in), as his consort. From the beginning, Bunchi’s life was fated to encounter rough waters.

Challenging “the dominant ideology that pushed nuns to the margins of institutional practice in the first place” (13), Cogan provides a full narrative of Bunchi’s life, focusing on how she “worked to create and perform her identity as a nun as ascetic, reclusive, and centered in the observance of precepts” (16), noting that she was able to instill into early modern Buddhists, who were steeped in secularism, a spirit of reform. Indeed, Cogan characterizes Bunchi as a Buddhist reformist.

At the same time, Cogan portrays Bunchi as someone who took full advantage of her class and gender “as a means of generating cultural and religious capital” (17)—something that not only helped her establish a new convent and run it independently of the imperial palace, but that also provided her with financial
stability. According to Cogan, Bunchi changed not only how courtly Buddhism was practiced but also how Zen was practiced, thus “serv[ing] as a model of a different way of being an imperial nun” (114) in early modern Japan. Bunchi was economically savvy, too. Cogan details how she was able to secure a stable source of income for her Buddhist institution by obtaining a grant for two hundred koku of land from the shogunate (through Tōfukumon’in) in 1667 as well as a bequest of one hundred koku of land from her younger half-sister Myōshōgon’in in 1678. The annual yield of three hundred koku of rice from these lands ensured Enshōji’s financial security.

What did Bunchi do to make Enshōji religiously distinctive? According to Cogan, Bunchi located Enshōji in a quiet area away from Kyoto; ensured that the Enshōji community was ascetic and disciplined; and established a precept platform. Cogan offers an articulate and erudite analysis of Enshōji’s distinctive features, but it should be noted that her discussion suffers, to some extent, from a lack of specific evidence and even from some misunderstanding.

Cogan notes that, as with elite Kyoto Buddhist institutions, Bunchi’s Enshōji was “subject neither to public recognition nor to official regulation by shogunate” (98) because it did not participate in “the parishioner system that made Buddhist monasteries throughout the realm into bureaucratic outposts of the shogunate” (96). Enshōji’s detachment from the parishioner system, Cogan continues, gave Bunchi “the freedom to practice without fear of external constraints but it also limited the audience for her reforms” (98). As far as Cogan is concerned, this is the institutional context that separated Enshōji from most of the Buddhist monasteries in Tokugawa society.

Here we see how Cogan understands Buddhist institutions and the state in early modern Japan. She notes that the shogunal government instituted the parishioner (danka) system along with the temple registration (terauke) system and that, thereby, it “remade Buddhist monasteries into state offices” (17). However, the fact is that the shogunate neither instituted the danka system nor transformed Buddhist institutions into state offices. Furthermore, the danka system had nothing to do with what the terms “parish” or “parishioner” tend to imply. It is true that the shogunate instituted the terauke system, but its operation was not as simple as Cogan indicates.

When it was formed, the danka system was not really a legal “system” or “institution” per se — something that the shogunate imposed from above. Rather, it was a custom enforced by Buddhist temples upon the populace in order to
capitalize on the Tokugawa bakufu’s anti-Christian policy. Despite its lack of legal status, it was, as a public custom, applied to the entire populace, and it exerted a lasting influence on Japanese society. Buddhist temples that maintained the danka system were not state offices. Although the “danka system” is often translated into English as the “parishioner system,” it must be stressed that it had little to do with the idea of a “parish.” A parish indicates a specific geographical zone set aside for patron families and their funerary temples; the danka system simply indicates the affiliation between patron households and funerary Buddhist temples (an affiliation that was formed when the former, with free will and no restrictions on location, chose the latter). Too often, patterns of affiliation between households and temples were so arbitrary and disorderly that it was almost impossible to group them into temple-centered parishes that could be adequately demarcated by geographical boundaries.

By the 1660s, the shogunate streamlined the terauke system, under which all residents were annually required to prove their non-Christian identity by allowing the Buddhist temple with which they were affiliated to inspect them. The temple would then issue them a “certificate,” stating that they were affiliated with it and, therefore, had nothing to do with the Christian religion. Based on the submitted non-Christian certificates of their residents, village officials were required to draw up an anti-Christian register, known as a “register of sectarian inspection” (shūmon aratamechō), for all residents under their jurisdiction and to submit it to the government. In other words, those who maintained a registration of non-Christian residents were village officials, not Buddhist monasteries. This being the case, it is more accurate to translate “the terauke system” as the “temple (tera) certification (uke) system,” not “the temple registration system.”

It is true that Buddhist monasteries were subject to shogunal authority; however, this was not because, in Cogan’s words, they were forced into “the parishioner system” but, rather, because the shogunate exercised paramount authority over everything in Tokugawa Japan, including the imperial institutions. It is estimated that there were more than 200,000 Buddhist institutions in early modern Japan, but not all of them were involved in the danka system. Many temples could survive without becoming involved in the policy of anti-Christianity; however, this did not mean that they were not under shogunal authority.

Thus, the assumption that Enshōji was free from shogunal regulations because it was not involved in the danka system is incorrect. Not only monzeki temples but also many prayer temples with no funerary danka patrons were sub-
subject to shogunal supervision. Enshōji’s distinction had to do with its special relationship with the emperor and the imperial court—a relationship upon which Bunchi skillfully capitalized by securing income sources and keeping in touch with the institutional/ritual tradition of courtly Buddhism (even though Cogan associates Bunchi more strongly with Zen).

Throughout the book Cogan stresses that Bunchi developed Enshōji as an ideal site for Buddhist monasticism by strictly implementing secular legal codes as well as “rules of purity, a genre of regulation distinctive to Zen” (23). In illustrating how Bunchi endeavored to enact and embody the Buddhist dharma through rule-based discipline, Cogan pays close attention to the Kanbun Four Regulations. The Enshōji community was composed of nuns of various statuses as well as male administrators and laborers, as were many other nunneries; and it contained secular functionaries, as did many other Buddhist monasteries. The task of running Buddhist temples whose membership was heterogeneous always involved the imposition of a strict set of regulations. In this respect, Enshōji was no different from any other convent or monastery.

Given this, it is not surprising that Bunchi’s Kanbun Four Regulations “describe the duties of the male administrators and the kitchen nuns and outline procedures for airing grievances and mediating disputes within the community” (197). According to Cogan, “there is no indication that this particular version of the rules was actually followed once it was issued” (194). Promulgating rules and practicing them are two separate issues, and The Princess Nun offers not a single example of how Enshōji members actually practiced the Kanbun Four Regulations. Yet Cogan suggests that Bunchi’s attention to monastic regulation “set Bunchi’s Buddhism apart from the kind of Buddhism practiced by her Kyoto peers” and that “Bunchi used rules and reclusion to enhance her ability to perform effective rituals” (191). One might wonder what Cogan means by “effective rituals.”

Cogan concludes that “the construction of the bodhisattva precept platform at Enshōji was the culmination of Bunchi’s reform” (23). “Precept platform” refers to an institutionalized ritual space within which monks and nuns were ordained through the conferring of precepts. It is indeed remarkable that Bunchi was able to establish an independent precept platform at Enshōji so that nun candidates did not have to go to a monastery in order to be officially ordained. As Cogan notes, this platform was “the first one known to have been built in almost 400 years” (1). She continues: “For Bunchi, the independent administration of the bodhisattva
precepts was indispensable to the salvation of the nuns at Enshōji” — something that was “central to Bunchi’s vision of what Enshōji ought to be” (227). But Cogan does not provide readers with a single example to indicate who was ordained or when and how the ordination was conducted.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Princess Nun* represents the most detailed and informative analysis of Bunchi and Enshōji to date, thereby helping to expand our understanding of monasticism in the Edo period — an understanding that has hitherto been constrained by the dominant narratives of male monasticism. In sum, Gina Cogan makes a valuable contribution to the field of Japanese Buddhist studies and social history.

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