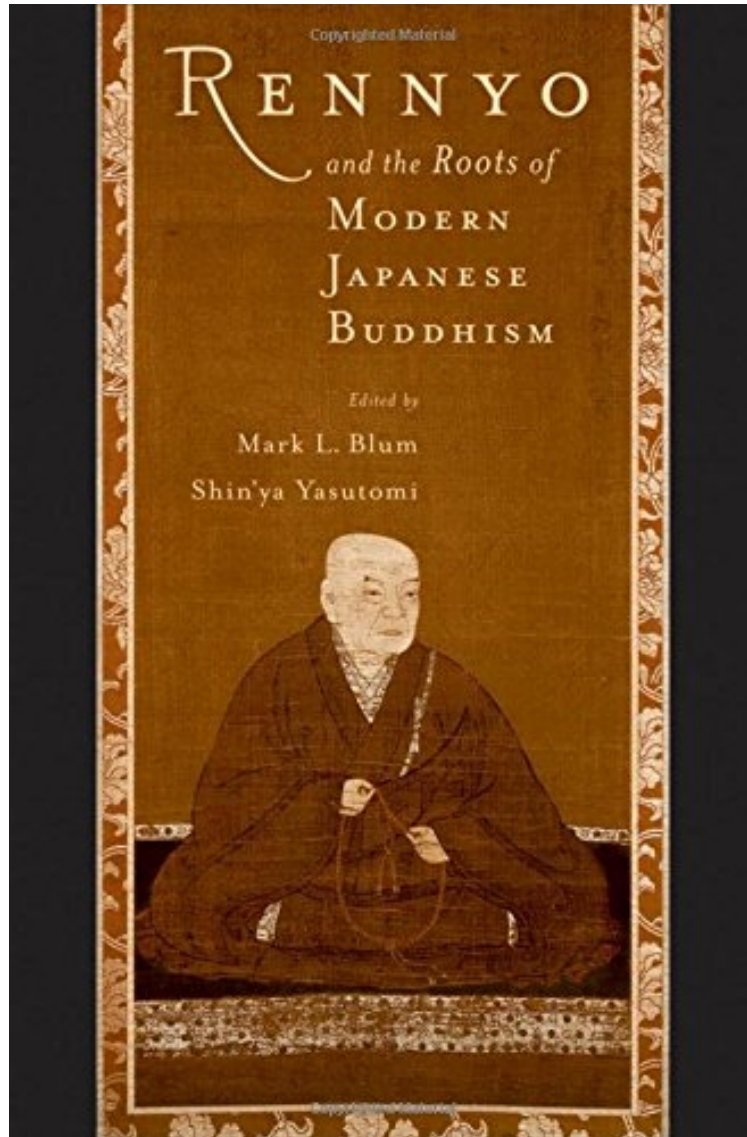


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Rennyō and the Roots of Modern Japanese Buddhism

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of the death of Rennyo Shonin (1415-1499), the Japanese Association for the Study of Buddhism and Indian Religion held a special section in its annual meeting at Otani University. This resulted in a collection of papers by distinguished Japanese and American scholars, 16 of which are now published in this volume, on Rennyo in the History of Religious Thought and The Faith of Rennyo and the Modern World. Rennyo was the second founder of Shin Buddhism a century and a half after the death of its founder Shinran. Rennyo's leadership saw the Honganji branch grow in size and power to become a national body of great wealth and influence. Rennyo was a successful communicator of Buddhism to the laity, an astute politician and an able administrator. For some, he is nothing less than the saviour of the Honganji branch, rescuing it from possible oblivion. For others, this husband of five wives and father of 27 children was a pursuer of worldly influence at the expense of spirituality. The papers in *Rennyo and the Roots of Modern Japanese Buddhism* explore through the disciplines of historical studies, Shinshu studies, and comparative religion the different facets of Rennyo's contribution to Buddhist thought and Honganji religious organization. One aspect of Rennyo's teaching, which is of great interest, is his attitude towards women, whom he taught could reach buddhahood at the moment of birth in the Pure Land through the intervention of the Amida Buddha. This is explored in Matsumura Naoko's paper on Rennyo and the Salvation of Women, which describes Rennyo's administrative solution to help women the encouragement of the formation of women's groups for religious discussion and devotion. This is an excellent addition to scholarship on Japanese Buddhism.

Rennyo Shonin (1415-1499) is considered the "second founder" of Shin Buddhism. Under his leadership, the Honganji branch grew in size and power, becoming a national organization with great wealth and influence. Rennyo's success lay in conveying an attractive spiritual message while exerting effective administrative control. A savvy politician as well as religious leader, Rennyo played a significant role in political, economic, and institutional developments. Though he is undeniably one of the most influential persons in the history of Japanese religion, his legacy remains enigmatic and largely overlooked by the West. This volume offers an assessment of Rennyo's contribution to Buddhist thought and the Honganji religious organization. A collection of 16 previously unpublished essays by both Japanese and non-Japanese scholars in the areas of historical studies, Shinshu studies, and comparative religion, it is the first book to confront many of the major questions surrounding the phenomenal growth of Honganji under Rennyo's leadership. The authors examine such topics as the source of Rennyo's charisma, the soteriological implications of his thought against the background of other movements in Pure Land Buddhism, and the relationship between his ideas and the growth of his church. This collection is an important first step in bringing this important figure to an audience outside Japan. It will be of significant interest to scholars in the fields of Japanese religion, Japanese social history, comparative religion, and the sociology of religion.

"In Japan's turbulent fifteenth century, the gifted proselytizer Rennyo rebuilt his relatively small following, the Shin Buddhist Honganji lineage, into a formidable nationwide organization. Drawing together new research from both Japanese and Western scholars and representing a range of methodological perspectives, this collection of essays sheds valuable light on Rennyo's place in the social, political, and religious transformations of his day and the meaning of his legacy for contemporary Japanese Buddhism. This volume will benefit scholars and students of Japanese religion as well as others interested in Shin Buddhist history and thought or in issues in the formation and legitimation of religious traditions." --Jacqueline I. Stone, Princeton University, author of *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*"The history of Shin Buddhism, Japan's massive Buddhist school, can be divided into two halves: first, when it was a peripheral and inconsequential Buddhist movement, and second, when it emerged as a religious institution of unparalleled success and influence. The dividing point between the two was Rennyo, the leader of its head temple, Honganji, in the late fifteenth century. This volume is a selection of recent and top-tier scholarship on Rennyo. It elucidates his many achievements and the lasting effects he has had on Shin Buddhism and Japanese religion as a whole. Many aspects of Rennyo's life, activities, and religious thought are explored in a depth previously unavailable in English. In the end, Rennyo emerges as a kaleidoscopic figure through which we can see better the character of Shin Buddhism and the development of Japan's religious traditions."--James C. Dobbins, author of *Jodo Shinshu: Shin Buddhism in Medieval Japan*About the AuthorMark L. Blum is at State University of New York, Albany. Shin'ya Yasutomi is at Otani University.