

Bio

Orion Klautau (PhD, Tohoku, 2010) is associate professor of Japanese Studies at Tohoku University. His work focuses on the development of Japanese Buddhism in the modern period, with special emphasis on historiographical issues. He is author of a number of works in both English and Japanese.

Title

A Nostradamus for Japan: Heisei Era Depictions of Shōtoku Taishi as a Doomsday Prophet

Abstract

As noted in previous studies, the work of Nostradamus was introduced to Japanese audiences mainly through the efforts of Gotō Ben 五島勉, pen name of Gōtō Tsutomu 後藤力 (1929-2020). Born in Hokkaidō to Orthodox Christian parents, he became a writer of popular fiction during his years as a Law student at Tohoku University, one of the most prestigious universities in Japan. In 1973, he was catapulted to fame with the publication of *Nosutoradamusu no daiyogen* (The Great Prophecies of Nostradamus), which spawned several works of the same kind and inspired an eponymous motion picture released in the following year. Although the ramifications of Gotō's work as a cultural phenomenon in 1970s Japan still need to be further explored, a number of scholars have pointed out the impact it had on several new religious movements such as *Kōfuku no Kagaku* and *Aum Shinrikyō*. What is less well-known, however, is that after a purported encounter with a Buddhist nun in Kyoto, Gotō began publishing, in 1991, several works that depicted the semi-mythical Prince Shōtoku (a.k.a. Shōtoku Taishi, 574-622) as author of a set of prophecies that could, ultimately, save the non-Christian nation of Japan. Centered around apocryphal writings attributed to the Prince including the *Miraiki* (Records of the Future), Gotō gave birth to yet another subgenre that continues to be popular today, as we can see through publications such as Nakayama Ichirō's 2017 *Shōtoku Taishi no 'Miraiki' to iruminati* (Shōtoku Taishi's *Miraiki* and the Illuminati), among others. In this presentation I intend to introduce the basic elements of this narrative, placing it as much as possible in the broader historical context of contemporary Japanese religion.