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NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions
Karasuma Shimodachiuri, Kamigyō-ku
Kyoto 602-8011 JAPAN
email: studycen@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp

NCC宗教研究所
602-8011 京都市上京区烏丸下立売上ル
Tel. & Fax: (075) 432-1945
website: http://www.japanese-religions.jp

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Special Issue: The Politics of Buddhist Studies in Early Twentieth-Century Japan

Guest Editor: Orion Klautau

CONTENTS

Articles

Review Essay

Book Reviews

Jason Ānanda Josephson*

"The Politics of Buddhist Studies in Early Twentieth-Century Japan": An Introduction

> Mr. Bunyiu Nanjio [Nanjō Bun'yū 南条文雄], among other useful works which he did during his stay at Oxford, compiled a complete catalogue of the gigantic Canon, called the Tripiṭaka or the Three Baskets. It contains 1662 separate works, some small, some immense. In each case the original Sanskrit title has been restored, the date of the translations, and indirectly the minimum dates of the originals also, have been fixed. This has led to a discovery which... has revolutionised nearly the whole of the history of Sanskrit literature.
>
> – F. Max Müller, *Biographical Essays*, 1884

It will not surprise anyone that the study of Buddhism had a recognizable politics in early twentieth-century Japan. Scholars looking at the history of other disciplinary formations have been quick to show how, for example, the study of Islam and Judaism have been formulated alongside various political projects and concerns (see Kersten 2011, Hughes 2012, Hughes 2013). Already in 1997, Russell McCutcheon had gone some distance to articulate the political contours of Religious Studies as a whole, arguing that a particular discourse around religion as a "sui generous" category had been formulated in the context of a nostalgic, or we might say traditionalist, politics (McCutcheon 1997). Similarly, Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一, in *Kindai Nihon no shūkyō gensetsu to sono keifu* 近代日本の宗教言説とその系譜 (Modern Japanese Discourse on Religion and its Genealogy, 2003) followed McCutcheon in placing a politics designed to safeguard "sui generis" religion at the center of his pioneering reconstruction of the history of Religious Studies (*shūkyōgaku* 宗教学) in Japan. Taken together, what all these studies demonstrate is that to understand a (sub)discipline's habit of thought, its submerged normative commitments, and even the basic formation of what it takes to be its special object of study – one has to flush its politics to the surface. Indeed, one could argue that a discipline cannot make real progress unless it comes to grips with its own inherent political tensions.

* Associate Professor, Williams College, USA.

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James Mark Shields
Bucknell University

Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士, Hayashi Makoto 林淳, Yoshinaga Shin'ichi 吉永進一, and Ōtani Eiichi 大谷栄一, eds.
Budda no henbō: Kōsaku suru kindai bukkyō ブッダの変貌—交錯する近代仏教 (Transformations of the Buddha: Crisscrossing Streams of Modern Buddhism).
Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2014. iv+415 pp.

In recent years, the study of modern Japanese Buddhism has burgeoned. Publications in this area since the turn of the twenty-first century outnumber those of several decades preceding, and the number of researchers, younger ones especially, has increased. Methodologically self-aware, this new wave of scholarship has moved beyond the modernist commitments of postwar models to acknowledge the constructed nature of its own categories ("Buddhism," "modernity," etc.), embracing and refining the insights of colonial and post-colonial studies and other relevant disciplines and theoretical frameworks. Modern Japanese Buddhism is no longer considered solely from a perspective confined to Japan but in global context.

One impetus behind these gains has been a collaborative research association based at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) and headed by Sueki Fumihiko. Outcomes of the group's activities include *Kindai to bukkyō*, or *Modernity and Buddhism* (Sueki 2011); an English version published as a special issue of *The Eastern Buddhist* (vol. 43, nos. 1-2 [2012]); and the present volume, which raises the field to a new standard.

Budda no henbō makes several contributions. First, it establishes a transnational perspective, attentive to multilateral flows of people, practices, and ideas across national boundaries (the "crisscrossing streams" of the book's subtitle). The volume brings scholarship on Buddhism in Japan's modern period (roughly 1868-1945), including interactions with Chinese and Korean Buddhism, into dialogue with work on Buddhist modernism from a chiefly Western perspective, such as that of

Donald Lopez, Thomas Tweed, and David McMahan. It demonstrates the value of Buddhist Studies to the study of modernity and illuminates from that perspective recent work on the formation in Japan of Religious Studies and the modern categories of "religion" and "the secular" (e.g., Isomae 2003, Josephson 2012). The essays showcase newly tapped sources, such as early Buddhist periodicals, and also introduce the reader to the historiography of modern Buddhism and the approaches that have informed it.

Budda no henbō contains fifteen chapters: nine written expressly for this volume and another six excerpted from seminal works originally published in English and here ably translated for a Japanese readership. The chapters are grouped into four parts, for each of which one of the co-editors has written a substantial overview. These four *sōron* elevate the book above the general run of essay collections, in that they not only introduce the work of the individual contributors but also situate it with respect to prior scholarship and supply detailed historical context. Also included are a foreword by Sueki, an afterword by Hayashi, and a brief biographical dictionary of figures discussed in the chapters.

Part I, "Ways of Speaking about Buddhism," deals with the formation of Buddhist Studies as a modern academic discipline in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century. Hayashi Makoto's introductory article relates how European Buddhologists grounded in Enlightenment values sought to construct the "historical Buddha" as a rationalist human teacher; valorizing the Pāli canon as normative, they dismissed the Mahāyāna as a later, debased form that was "not the Buddha's teaching" (*daijō hibussetsu*). Hayashi details how Japanese Buddhist scholars struggled to overcome this threat to the legitimacy of their own, Mahāyāna tradition. One powerful mode of counter-argument, often associated with Murakami Senshō (1851-1929), entailed a two-tiered response: viewed historically, the Mahāyāna must indeed be acknowledged as a later form, but from the perspective of doctrine or principle, it represented a higher development of the Buddha's truth that had culminated in Japan. This move not only inverted the European privileging of Buddhist origins but positioned the nascent field of "Japanese Buddhism" as uniquely able to mediate between the universalistic, "rational" Buddhism of the Western academy and traditional Buddhist sectarian studies.

The next chapter, by Donald Lopez – originally, his entry on "Buddha" in his *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (2005) – underscores the incommensurable gap between Western humanistic images of the Buddha and traditional Asian representations, using the *uṣnīṣa*, the fleshy protuberance atop the Buddha's head, as a metonym. This mark of a superior man, which in Asia had set the Buddha apart as a transcendent being, proved embarrassing to European Buddhologists and art historians, and had to be explained away as a turban or topknot.

Orion Klautau's chapter examines how "Buddhism" (*bukkyō*) took shape as an academic field in Meiji Japan and how differences over its proper method and social role – was it to be science, philosophy, or religion? – were negotiated. Klautau is the author of *Kindai Nihon shisō toshite no bukkyō shigaku* (The study of Buddhist history as modern Japanese thought, 2012), a masterful analysis of how the grand narratives of Japanese Buddhist history (Kamakura-period flowering, Edo-period decline, and modern reformation) were first produced. His essay in this volume expands on an early part of that story, focusing on the role of Yoshitani Kakuju (1843-1914) and Murakami Senshō, both Shinshū priests who each taught for a time at Tokyo Imperial University. In contrast to Yoshitani's colleague Hara Tanzan (1819-1892), who embraced a scientific approach to Buddhism and rejected its classification as "religion" (which he identified with Christianity), Yoshitani and Murakami valued the aspect of faith and argued for Buddhism as "religion," albeit with a strong philosophical component, shaping an approach that soon prevailed within the academic world. Deeply invested in sectarian reform, they also framed the task of academic Buddhist scholarship as the delineation of a unified Buddhism in which the doctrines and practices of the various sects were equally encompassed as differing approaches to a single truth.

As James Ketelaar noted early on, efforts to define a unified "bukkyō" led Meiji Buddhist intellectuals to assert that Japan's "thirteen sects" together represented, not factionalism, but the completeness of Japanese Buddhism (Ketelaar 1990, 177-91). Eric Schicketanz examines how Chinese Buddhists appropriated this discourse, even calling, at least at a rhetorical level, for the restoration of sects that had been "lost" in China. Some late Qing and early republican figures, beginning with the historian Liang Qichao (1873-1929), inverted the discourse: China was where the plurality of sects had arisen; Korea and Japan had merely imported them. In Schicketanz's analysis, even while the discourse of "sects" thus served to exalt Chinese Buddhism and relativize that of Japan, given the power differential between the two countries, it also subsumed Chinese Buddhists within a discursive space defined by their Japanese counterparts.

Part II, "The Transnational History of Modern Buddhism," shows that modern Buddhism did not spread unidirectionally but emerged as a global phenomenon shaped by both Asian and Western actors. In his rich overview, Yoshinaga Shin'ichi introduces the trans-Pacific networks, avenues, and "contact zones" through which modern Buddhism took form. He highlights the surprisingly influential role of the Theosophical Society; the activities of so-called "blue-eyed monks," young men from Europe and America who received ordination in Asia and established international monastic networks; the work of sectarian missionaries sent abroad from Japan; and the role of Buddhist English-language journals published in Japan and the United States and distributed worldwide, providing platforms for such influential advocates as D.T. Suzuki, Paul Carus, Henry Steel Olcott, T. W. Rhys Davids, and others.

Two other chapters in this section examine the contributions to modern Buddhism of actors on either side of the Pacific. Judith Snodgrass's essay, a key chapter from her *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West* (2003), considers the 1892 Chicago World Parliament of Religions against the backdrop of Japan's struggle for revision of unequal treaties imposed by Western powers. She examines how Japanese delegates, notably the lay Buddhist Hirai Kinza (1859-1916), drew strategically on Western and specifically Christian concepts such as God as ineffable truth and the ideal of human brotherhood to argue that these were exemplified by Mahāyāna Buddhism and to critique Western aggression and racial prejudice. Yoshinaga locates Snodgrass's work within a genealogy of scholars who, refining the insights of Edward Said, have argued that, far from being passive objects of an Orientalizing Western gaze, Asian Buddhists were assertive agents in representing their tradition to the West. Thomas Tweed's essay, the third chapter of his *American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912* (2000) presents his famous heuristic typology of early Western Buddhist sympathizers: "esoterics," such Theosophists, who turned to Buddhism in their quest for occult mysteries; "rationalists," who saw Buddhist as a humanistic, ethical tradition compatible with science; and "romantics," who were drawn to the artistic and literary dimensions of Buddhist cultures.

In his introduction to Part III, "The Development of Modern Buddhism in Asia," Ōtani Eiichi argues that to date the onset of Asian modernity to the "Western impact" is neither to promote a form of neo-Orientalism nor to embrace Western models of the modern: Modern Buddhism was shaped in the crucible of colonialism and imperialism, and its study offers unique perspectives for their critique. (Ōtani has himself pioneered the idea of Buddhism as a perspective for studying modernity; see Ōtani 2012). He begins by tracing relevant scholarly antecedents, including Charles Taylor's call for the study of multiple modernities; Robert Bellah's notion of "reformism"; Gananath Obyesekere's "Protestant Buddhism"; and the groundbreaking work by Sallie King and Christopher Queen on Buddhist liberation movements seeking to redress specific social inequities and environmental ills. This part of his essay serves to introduce King's chapter, an expanded version of her conclusion to *Engaged Buddhism* (1996), which she co-edited with Queen. King finds that, while sharing a common stance that legitimates social activism as inseparable from the pursuit of enlightenment, engaged Buddhist movements nonetheless diverge markedly on such issues as their means of reform, their degree of political involvement, and particularistic versus universalizing understandings of Buddhist identity.

Ōtani also addresses conflicts in modern Asian Buddhism arising from the ambivalent position of Japan, which resisted Western hegemony but also became an imperial power in its own right. Here he urges a transnational approach as essential to illuminating the tangled threads of conflict, resistance, collaboration, appropriation, and assimilation that accompanied Buddhism as part of the "history

of empire." The remaining two essays in this section offer compelling illustrations. Liang Minxia relates how initial admiration on the part of reform-minded Chinese monks for modern Japanese Buddhist modes of scholarship and priestly education gave way to disillusionment in the late 1920s when Japan began armed incursions on the mainland. The reformer Taixu (1890-1947) called repeatedly on the mass of Japanese Buddhists to oppose their government's aggression, eventually denouncing them as traitors to the Dharma. During the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45), while honoring *vinaya* prohibitions against bearing arms, Chinese monks wholeheartedly supported the national defense, donating material resources and forming rescue squads at the front to assist the wounded and displaced (these efforts are detailed in Xue 2005, which also notes instances of compromise with *vinaya* restrictions). Monastic support for the war against Japan, Liang argues, represents a form of "socially engaged Buddhism" unprecedented in Chinese history.

Kim Tae Hoon's chapter complicates simplistic models of Korean Buddhism under Japanese colonization as neatly split between a complicit "pro-Japanese" faction and a "people's Buddhism" (*minjung Pulgyo*) movement informed by ethnic nationalism – a dichotomy also challenged in recent Anglophone scholarship (e.g., Park 2009; Kim 2013). Kim takes up the Korean Buddhist leader and reformer Heo Young-ho (1900-1952), who straddled this divide. Heo found in the thought of the scholar-monk Wonhyo (617-686) a Buddhism at once distinctively Korean and yet all-encompassing. However, under Japanese colonization, Heo spoke out in favor of the "Buddhism of empire." Kim argues that Heo employed such language, not to promote the Buddhism of Japanese colonizers as presently constructed, but to appropriate its claims to universality and to express, within the harsh constraints of colonial rule, his vision of a Korean Buddhism that could someday open outward to the world. Kim's essay illuminates some of the complex and troubled intersections of Buddhist and national identities under conditions of asymmetrical power relations.

Part IV, "Tradition and Modernity," addresses tensions between modern and premodern Buddhist forms. In a trenchant introduction, Sueki draws on Meiji-era examples to argue that tradition is not a pristine past untouched by modernizing processes but is perpetually being constructed together with the modern. The much maligned "funeral Buddhism" of Japan's modern period, he says, was not a premodern holdover but a modern reconstruction that supported the patriarchal family system underlying both Meiji social organization and imperial ideology. Similarly, the valorization of "Kamakura new Buddhism," along with calls for a "return" to the message of its founders, was not a revival of Buddhist tradition but a refiguring of it in ways according with both modern constructions of "religion" as a private, inner realm and the secularizing efforts of the Meiji state. Sueki forcefully reminds us that the modern and the traditional are mutually constitutive, and that interpretations of the past are shaped by the needs of the present.

Nishimura Ryō's essay in this section surveys shifts in Buddhist anti-Christian polemics over some three centuries. Chan and Zen monks in the late Ming and early Tokugawa periods mounted a straightforward ontological critique of the Christian God based on Buddhist notions of emptiness and *tathāgata-garbha* thought. Later in the Tokugawa era, and especially under the perceived threat of Western domination in its closing years, Buddhist critics stressed the dimension of social ethics and the dangers Christianity posed to Japan. The ontological argument resurfaced in Meiji, for example, with Inoue Enryō (1858-1919), but was now refracted through the modern categorical divisions of science, religion, and philosophy. Nishimura underscores the ongoing significance of Christianity as a foil against which modern Buddhism has defined itself.

Also included here is the last chapter of Richard Jaffe's *Neither Monk nor Layman* (2001), which analyzes the decriminalization of clerical marriage in the context of emergent notions of the secular and official policies isolating religion from public affairs. Jaffe argues that legal redefinitions of priests as ordinary citizens and the loss of celibacy as a marker of their access to the transcendent neither undermined the traditional hierarchy of priests and laity nor displaced renunciation as a normative ideal: to this day, Buddhist priests, and their families, live with the tensions between the monastic ideal and the realities of temple family life.

Last, David McMahan's chapter, from his edited university textbook *Buddhism in the Modern World* (2012), sketches the complex and locally varied phenomenon of "Buddhist modernism," whose formation he astutely analyzed in his *Making of Buddhist Modernism* (2008). McMahan sees Buddhist modernism as a "hybrid religious and cultural form" arising initially from resistance to Western imperial powers and Christian missionizing. Shared traits that he examines include demythologizing of traditional cosmology; de-emphasis on ritual and priesthood; ideals of social egalitarianism; a this-worldly orientation that may include social or political activism; and a linking of meditation, broadly reformulated for lay people, to modern psychology and neuroscience.

Budda no henbō is on the whole a most superior volume. One could raise a few quibbles: Given the contributors' research specializations, its essays tend to cluster around the two foci of East Asia, especially Japan, and global Buddhist modernism; an additional essay or two devoted to specific aspects of modern Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the Himalayan region, and/or Southeast Asia could have strengthened the volume's transnational perspective. Personally I would have liked to see a final chapter by one or more of the co-editors, drawing out and explicitly thematizing some of the many suggestive connections among the individual chapters. And, without denying in any way that modernity has entailed profound ruptures with the past, one might also ask for increased attention to continuities with earlier periods that may have informed particular Buddhist modernist responses. Of course, no

single volume can do everything, and *Budda no henbō* is already much more than the sum of its parts. Those wishing to orient themselves to the current state of research on modern Buddhism, especially with respect to Japan, could hardly do better than to peruse this volume.

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Jacqueline I. Stone
Princeton University