

Modern Buddhism

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We understand that the purpose of this series is to make a careful examination of the history of modern Buddhism and a presentation of its problems in order to promote its modernization. If we were asked

to choose what we regard as the best of this series, from among the contributions of seventy-seven scholars, our choice would fall on the following: (1) "Modern Buddhism in Ferment" by Yusen Kashiwabara, (2) "The Formation of Modern Buddhism" by Kyūichi Yoshida, and (3) "The Development and Problems of Modern Buddhism" by Ryūkichi Mori in Volume I, and (4) "Modernization and Buddhism in Japan" by Saburo Ienaga in Volume II.

The first three articles are a critical study of the history of modern Buddhism in Japan with its focus on the question of modernization. Mr. Kashiwabara covers the period up to the Meiji Restoration, Mr. Yoshida, the Meiji era, and Mr. Mori, the Taishō and Shōwa eras. These essays take up two-thirds of Volume I, and we have no hesitation in saying that they constitute the core of the whole series of six volumes.

In examining the historical trends of anti-Buddhist ideas in the Edo period, Mr. Kashiwabara recognizes the fact that "there is found a common factor in all of them—a

protest based on such modern ideological trends as realism, rationalism, humanism, etc." Accordingly, he says, the response of Buddhism to this challenge has "not only a religious and ideological significance but also an historical one. That is, how can Buddhism respond to the needs of the modern mental climate."

The last-named essay is found at the beginning of Volume II. Dr. Ienaga also deals historically with the relation between modernization and Buddhism in Japan from the Edo period to the present, but the merit of his thesis lies in its lucid presentation of the problem.

The separation of Shinto from Buddhism and the subsequent anti-Buddhist movements, which started in the fourth year of Keio (also the first year of Meiji), that is, 1868, gave the greatest blow to Buddhism in its long history in Japan. Roughly speaking, two proposals were made as to how Buddhism could recover from that fatal blow: one was by a return to the original principles of Buddhism; the other was by the modernization of Buddhism in response to the need of

the new age. The modernization of Buddhism has remained ever since as the greatest problem for Buddhists.

The question may be asked as to why this problem has never been fully solved in spite of the strong consciousness of it on the part of Buddhists. Dr. Ienaga answers in this way: "Because in short the basic direction of Buddhist institutions striving for survival in the new age has tended toward a compromise with the power of the new regime and the ruling class, upholding their banner." It is true that he is not the only one to interpret these historical events in this way, but his argument is most persuasive.

Dr. Ienaga admits that there have been many attempts by Buddhists, from various standpoints, to modernize Buddhism. The first was the movement launched by the eminent priest and scholar of Nishi Honganji, Mokurai Shimaji, for the separation of church and state. Early in the Meiji era the authorities based their program on theocratic principles, in other words, on the principle of the "unity of rites and

government" (*saisei itchi*), and made a foolish attempt to force all religious leaders to teach the Three Doctrines, promulgated in the fifth year of Meiji. These were: 1. Respect for the gods and love for Japan, 2. Heavenly Reason and the Way of Humanity, 3. Reverence for the Emperor and obedience to the authorities. Mokurai Shimaji, learned the news on his way to Europe and sent a petition entitled "Critique of the Three Doctrines" from Europe, adding that the Three Doctrines were a great anachronism and made a plea for the separation of "church" and state as a common practice in modern countries. After a campaign of several years he finally saw its realization.

The second attempt was the spiritualism of Manshi Kiyozawa at the turn of the century. The Rev. Kiyozawa, a priest of Honganji, through his own bitter experiences could revive St. Shinran's belief in the salvation of the sinful, that is, belief in "the sinner as a guest of honor," in a pure form. His way of faith was totally individualistic and internal, and had a strong influence on the intellectuals in the Meiji era.

for, because of his wide knowledge of Western ideas, he could present the old traditional faith in a new form.

The third attempt was the movement of the Buddhist Puritan Association (Bukkyō Seito Dōshi Kai 仏教清徒同志会) organized in the thirty-second year of Meiji (1899) by Kōyō Sakaino, Beihō Takashima, Kaigyoku Watanabe, and others. In the following year they published a journal, *New Buddhism*, as an organ for the spread of their ideas. They aimed at complete academic independence from both church and state in Buddhist studies in order to find the essentials of Buddhism and bring about the renovation of society in general. To a certain extent we can recognize their success in parting from pre-modernity and coming closer to progressive ideas, but, as their activity fell short of their ideal, they soon dropped off from the frontier.

These attempts at the modernization of Buddhism failed—Mokurai Shimaji gradually became conservative, Manshi Kiyozawa unfortunately died young, and the Buddhist Puritan Association became inactive.

There was, however, one successful attempt, according to Dr. Ienaga. This was "the introduction of the modern scientific discipline into the area of Buddhist studies that has projected up to the present a new route for the inevitable modernization."

"The introduction of modern, scientific discipline in Buddhist studies," to use Dr. Ienaga's expression, perpetuates the uninterrupted tradition of new Buddhist studies from the days of such pioneers as Fumio Nanjō, Kenju Kasahara, and other scholars who have studied abroad since the ninth year of Meiji. On the one hand, the study of Indian Buddhism has been advanced greatly by new philological knowledge regarding Pali, Sanskrit, and other related languages; and, on the other hand, historicism born in modern thought has given impetus to the development of the historical study of Buddhism.

We wish to pay our respects to Dr. Ienaga's penetrating contention that there lies a great landmark which distinguishes modern Japanese Buddhism from that of the Meiji era, which was totally lacking

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in any scientific character.”

Fumio Masutani

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mission by Kyōko Motomochi from *The Asahi Journal* (Vol. 5, No. 18) May 5, 1963.