

REVIEWS

Jacqueline I. STONE, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 12. xxi + 544 pp. Character glossary and index. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999. Cloth \$55.00. ISBN 0-8248-2026-6.

IT IS SAFE TO SAY that most studies on Japanese Buddhism (particularly of the Heian and Kamakura periods) have focused on sectarian founders and/or the development of their specific traditions. This book by Jacqueline Stone, however, by focusing on the *hongaku* 本覚 discourse of "original enlightenment," cuts a wide swath through the landscape of Japanese Buddhism, for *hongaku* thought—despite its partial identification with Tendai—is trans-sectarian. As this book demonstrates so ably, the concept of *hongaku* in a broad sense was (and continues to be) an essential element not only in Shin-gon and Tendai Buddhism, but also (in various ways) for all the so-called new Kamakura movements, as well as in religious discourses identified as "Shinto" or "folk" religion. Though not well known or dominant in the common parlance of religious studies or religious discourse in general, *hongaku* is just as important for Japanese Buddhism as many other better-known terms such as zen, *nenbutsu*, or buddha-nature (a term which, for the most part, could be substituted by *hongaku*).

Stone, however, is careful to define *hongaku* more precisely for her purposes here in examining the historical role of this discourse in Japanese Buddhism. She begins, in the opening section on "Perspectives and Problems," by giving an overview (in Chapter One) of "What is 'Original Enlightenment Thought'?", presenting various views of and approaches to *hongaku* thought, and tracing the historical development of the term. In Chapter Two she outlines the specific historical development of Tendai *hongaku* thought in Japan and how it fits within various theories of "new Kamakura Buddhism." Part Two on "The World of Medieval Tendai" begins with the development of "the culture of secret transmission" on Mt. Hiei (Chapter Three), part of the esoterization of Tendai Buddhism. This historical background leads to a discussion of "Hermeneutics, Doctrine, and 'Mind-Contemplation'" (Chapter Four) and shows how the *hongaku* discourse "worked" through the reinterpretation of traditional Tendai in a radically nondualistic and subjective/experiential fashion. Finally (in Chapter Five) Stone applies this information and analysis to reappraise Tendai *hongaku* thought and Kamakura Buddhism, showing how they reveal a "shared paradigm." A broader analysis of *hongaku* is provided in Part Three by examining the role of this discourse for Nichiren himself as well as for his successors. Stone discusses the controversy surrounding whether or not Nichiren was "influenced" by *hongaku* thought, and the significance of this debate for understanding Nichiren and his tradition, concluding that "one might legitimately speak of a medieval Nichiren *hongaku* discourse; by this time, Tendai clearly no longer held a monopoly on the ideas and interpretive techniques associated with this doctrine, if indeed it ever had" (p. 351). Finally, a hearty

conclusion summarizes the book's discussions and points out various issues for further investigation.

This book is so rich in information and suggestive analysis that it is difficult to summarize or choose examples to illustrate and discuss its content. Here are a few arbitrarily chosen points for further thought:

1. Why choose to analyze the role of *hongaku* discourse for Nichiren, rather than another of the many possible figures or topics in Japanese Buddhism? Actually I agree that Nichiren is an obvious and good choice, but it can be pointed out (and Stone no doubt agrees; see p. 239) that *hongaku* is just as important for Dōgen and the Sōtō tradition, Shinran and the Pure Land tradition, pan-sectarian “common”/folk Buddhism, Shugendō, and even “Shinto” or numerous other categories. One can only hope that others will take up the example and challenge offered by Stone's work to discuss these other areas in relation with *hongaku* discourse, as she has done so well with Nichiren.

2. It has long been suspected that the “Tendai *hongaku* tradition” was as much a “new Kamakura movement” as that of Hōnen, Shinran, Nichiren, Dōgen, and others. Stone's detailed analysis of the world of medieval Tendai confirms this suspicion. She concludes that “All this [the culture of secret transmission and so forth] distinguishes medieval Tendai from the Tendai of the early Heian period and makes it, in effect, a ‘new Buddhism.’ This new medieval Tendai began to emerge somewhat before, and then developed coevally with the so-called new Kamakura Buddhism” (p. 152). Later she adds, “Medieval Tendai hermeneutics and doctrine were nothing less than a reworking in its entirety of the received T'ien-t'ai/Tendai tradition from [the] perspective of original enlightenment” (p. 188). If we are to speak of “new Kamakura” movements, “Tendai *hongaku* discourse” must be added to the roster.

3. One question that remains in my mind: Was the confluence of *hongaku* discourse and the culture of secret transmission in medieval Tendai Buddhism a historical accident, or are the two naturally supportive? Stone points out that “virtually all forms of medieval Tendai secret transmissions were grounded in the assumption of original enlightenment” (p. 130), but was this because esoteric Buddhism and *hongaku* thought happened to come to fruition in the same historical period? The dominance of *hongaku*-type assumptions in contemporary Japan indicates that this confluence with a culture of secret transmission is not a necessary one.

4. In light of the development of *hongaku* discourse in the Heian period, many “innovations” of the “new Kamakura” movements are seen to be less radical, or at least not unique, when put in this context. For example, the logic of “reversal” in *hongaku* discourse—where one “proceeds not from cause (practice) to effect (realization) but from effect to cause.... Cultivation then becomes the expression of original enlightenment” (p. 164)—makes Shinran's teaching of the *nenbutsu* as an expression of gratitude for Amida's grace-already-realized, rather than as a practice for achieving salvation, seem less original and revolutionary. Rather, one can see (as Tamura Yoshirō concludes),

that the uniqueness of Shinran's teaching lies "not as an absolute emphasis on Other Power, but as a return from Hōnen's dualism to the nondual structure of Tendai *hongaku* thought" (p. 87).

5. Stone argues valiantly (see pp. 52–54) against considering *hongaku shisō* in terms of something intrinsically Japanese. Although I dislike *nihonjinron* (and the rhetoric of Japanese uniqueness) as much as anyone, still I believe that one can speak of a Japanese propensity for *hongaku*/buddha-nature/nondualistic ideas without resorting to spurious claims of Japanese uniqueness or "invoking [essentialistic] Japanese thought patterns." There is something about the prominence of *hongaku*-type discourse (including, but not limited to, an affinity for extreme nondualism and an affirmation of the everyday phenomenal world) among Japanese (both historically and currently) that is compelling. The least we can say is that it is a "comfortable ideology" for many Japanese. Shirato Waka aptly closes a recent article tracing the historical roots and textual appearances of the "buddhahood of grasses and trees" (*sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成仏) idea with the question, "Why is it that Japanese have expressed the idea of 'the buddhahood of grasses and trees' so concretely, and show such an affinity for this idea?" (SHIRATO 1998, p. 30). The question begs to be addressed, and Stone's book is a major contribution to understanding, if not the answer, at least the historical specifics of this infatuation.



In short, this is not just a book about medieval Japanese Buddhism; it concerns ideas that still dominate unconscious ways of thinking among many contemporary Japanese—a propensity for "salvation" within this life, a valorization of the phenomenal world, a preference for ambiguity with regard to dualistic opposites such as "good and evil"—whether or not these ideas are specifically identified as Buddhist, or even "religious." The book also clarifies important aspects of how Buddhism developed in the Japanese context. It is a brilliant presentation and analysis of an influential discourse in Japanese Buddhism, religion, and culture. Every time I return to the book I find gems of insight that leave me excited about otherwise arcane ideas and themes in Buddhism and Japanese culture. If a book's value is to be measured in the length of its reviews, then this book deserves many more pages of discussion, but my evaluation can be summed up in a simple phrase. Everybody must get Stone.

REFERENCE

SHIRATO Waka 白土わか

- 1998 *Sōmoku jōbutsu-setsu ni tsuite: Sono keisei to tenkai* 草木成仏説について—その形成と展開. *Bukkyōgaku semina* 68: 14–32.

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