

Hōnen's Senchakushū: Passages on the Selection of the Nembutsu in the Original Vow (Senchaku hongan nembutsu shū). A Kuroda Institute Book. Translated and edited by Senchakushū English Translation Project. xiii + 280 pp. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. Cloth \$55.00. ISBN 0-8248-2025-8. Paper \$29.95. ISBN 0-8248-2110-6.

THE PUBLICATION of this book is an auspicious event since it makes widely available to the Western academic world the “magnum opus” of Hōnen Shōnin (1133–1212), the primary instigator of the new trends in Japanese Buddhism during the Kamakura period.

Besides the full translation of Hōnen's text, the book also offers a long Introduction on Hōnen in general and on the *Senchakushū* in particular (pp. 1–55 and 155–63), and an extended Glossary with detailed explanations of the Buddhist terms involved (pp. 167–216). It is the outcome of eight years of teamwork by scholars participating in the English Translation Project of the Center for the Comprehensive Study of Buddhism at Taishō University (Tokyo). In the spirit of teamwork, one presumes, the different parts of the book are unsigned, but the copyright page tells us that the Introduction was written by Hirokawa Takatoshi and the Glossary by Kobayashi Yoshinobu, who is probably also responsible for the Preface and Acknowledgments.

Of the Glossary I shall only say that it is “thorough.” It devotes, for example, nearly three pages to the idea of *senchaku* (selection) and two pages to the explanation of the thirteen visualization practices of the *Contemplation Sutra*. On page 168, however, the author seems to present a different opinion on the set of three Pure Land sutras from the one given by his colleague in the Introduction (p. 19).

The Introduction to Hōnen's life, background, and doctrine must be warmly welcomed, since so very little has been written on Hōnen in English after Harper Havelock Coates and Ishizuka Ryūgaku published, at a surprisingly early date (1925), their *Hōnen the Buddhist Saint*. All in all, we have here a balanced presentation of the figure of Hōnen, and we may call ourselves lucky to find here, side by side, English translations of Hōnen's *Shichūkaikō kishōmon* (“Seven-Article Pledge,” wherein he tells his followers sternly to abstain from provoking the established sects) and the *Kōfukuji sōjō* (“Kōfukuji Petition,” the list of deviations the Nara sects accused Hōnen of before the emperor in 1205). The author stresses the point that Hōnen rejected Ten-

dai's *hongaku* (innate enlightenment) doctrine (pp. 14–15), and presents the thesis that Hōnen's initial rejection of the traditional Buddhist practices leads finally to a re-appropriation of these practices on another level (as "practices encouraging the *nenbutsu*") (pp. 35–44).

Next, a word on the translation. As is acknowledged in the Preface, the translation presented here is based on an initial translation by the Pure Land nun Kondō Tesshō (who, by the way, appears as a "he" in the List of Contributors on p. 267, presumably as a preparation for her entrance into the Pure Land) together with Morris Augustine, professor at Kansai University, which they started in 1977 and published in six installments in *The Pure Land* (journal) between 1983 and 1987. From 1987 onwards, this translation was then patiently checked and revised by the aforesaid team of scholars. Still, as far as I can judge by a short comparative check, the revision mostly limits itself to some "plastic surgery." For example, the title of chapter one was restored to its original form and, on page 62, a reference, overlooked by the original translators, was inserted. The English was also improved in places: on page 64, for example, the two ways of interpretation are now called "analysis and summation" instead of the original "the 'divided' and the 'merged'."

The translation can be said to be sufficiently true to the original to serve as a work instrument for further study on the text, but the same check has revealed that it is not flawless and that the infelicities of the original translation have mostly been left in place. So, for example, on page 60 the nonsensical passage "*the good results stemming from deluded thinking, which corrupt...*" is preserved as a translation of *tendō no zenka* (顛到の善果). Nakamura Hajime's *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, p. 991, however, intimates that this phrase could be translated as "good results turned bad by attachment to them." Page 63 has "Hence the name right practice" (again unchanged from the original translation). This "hence" is not to be found in the original and, as a conclusion, the sentence is a non sequitur. A few lines further down the translation reads "rewards in that land." This is a correct literal translation, but as there has been no mention of a land in the preceding sentences, the insertion here of "[the Pure Land]" for the English reader would be appropriate.

The book further provides a practical list of Japanese and Chinese proper names, with Chinese characters, a bibliography, and an adequate index. The bibliography is rather extensive (pp. 217–30 and pp. 239–66), covering publications both in English and in Japanese. It is, of course, useful, but there is still room for improvement. Under the heading, "English Translations of Pure Land Sutras," Luis O. Gomez's translation of the two *Sukhāvativyūha* sutras (*Land of Bliss*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1996) is not mentioned, and Hisao Inagaki's *The Three Pure Land Sutras* is found under the next heading, "Western Language Sources," instead of under "English Translations of Pure Land Sūtras." "Western Language Sources," by the way, is a misnomer, since under it one finds exclusively works in English. The most thorough Western study of Hōnen (to the best of my knowledge)—Christoph Kleine's *Hōnen's Buddhismus des Reinen Landes* (Peter Lang, 1996)—is thereby omitted. I also missed Julian Pas's book on *Shan-tao: Visions of Sukhāvati* (SUNY Press, 1995). But, most surprising of all, the above-mentioned early work by Coates and

Ishizuka, though mentioned in the Preface, is absent from the list.

What this bibliography makes perfectly clear, however, is the dearth of Hōnen research in the English-speaking world. Among the book-length studies mentioned, only three carry the name of Hōnen in their titles (and they are all written by Japanese); among the dissertations listed, none is about Hōnen; and among the “Articles and Chapters” that treat Hōnen directly, we find contributions by only two Western authors: Allan Andrews and Paul Ingram.

But, all my grumblings notwithstanding, my main feeling is one of gratitude to the original translators and to the Taishō University team for making this “classic” of Japanese religion available to the English-reading public. It does not matter so much that this translation is still a little flawed; this work by Hōnen being a real classic, revised versions and even brand-new translations are bound to appear in the near future, now that the way has been opened. Let me end with the pious wish that this book may kindle Western interest in this courageous Japanese religious reformer, Hōnen Shōnin, who, indeed, has been living far too long in the shadow of his famous disciple Shinran.

Jan Van Bragt

Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture