

REVIEW



Sueki Fumihiko 末本文美士, *Kindai Nihon no shisō, saikō*
近代日本の思想・再考 [Rethinking modern Japanese
thought], 2 vols.

Meiji shisōka ron 明治思想家論 [Essays on Meiji intellectuals],
¥2,800 cloth, ISBN 4-901510-24-x. Tokyo: Transview, 2004.



Kindai Nihon to Bukkyō 近代日本と仏教 [Buddhism and modern
Japan], ¥3,200 cloth, ISBN 4-901510-25-8, Tokyo: Transview, 2004.

IN THIS two-volume collection, Sueki Fumihiko has provided an insightful introduction and provocative discussion of modern (Meiji to early Showa) intellectual figures and issues. It is a serious attempt to rethink modern Japanese thought at a crucial juncture for Japanese society—the end of the post-War era. With the collapsing influence of Marxist thought, the resurgence of calls for a return to pre-war values and traditions, and the dizzying plethora of post-modern alternatives, Sueki looks to Buddhism for an old-yet-new perspective from which to reconsider ongoing issues such as religion and the state, and the relation between the individual and the whole. Thus it is an appropriate work to review for this *JJRS* special issue on traditional Buddhism in contemporary Japan.

The essays in this collection are sprinkled with trenchant comments, and a wide range of figures and issues are discussed from the perspective of a non-sectarian interest in Buddhism. There is some repetition between volumes 1 and 2, such as in Sueki's comments on D. T. Suzuki, but in general there is a clear flow of argument and clarity of themes, especially considering the fact that this is a collection of essays written independently over a period of time. Sueki is particularly adept at clarifying the relevance of the intellectual issues and debates of the Meiji era for contemporary Japan.

I usually do not care for the style of book reviews which lists the table of contents, but in this case it is useful to show in detail what Sueki is discussing. I will thus give a list of the entire contents, with brief comments on the theme of that chapter or a particularly perceptive comment by Sueki.

Volume 1: A Reconsideration of Meiji Intellectuals

Introduction: Under the title “Re-evaluating modern thought: Buddhism and Meiji intellectuals,” Sueki introduces and outlines the rationale for his work, namely, an attempt to reconstruct the history of modern thought in Japan, with Buddhism as the axis, by reconsidering the contributions of twelve Meiji intellectuals. Sueki takes a very commendable approach: each chapter in the book takes up one figure and a major issue surrounding this figure. Instead of just providing biographical details and describing their publications and influence, however, Sueki uses each figure as a springboard to discuss a major topic, such as Shimaji Mokurai and the relation of Buddhism and Shinto in Chapter 1. Thus the chapters begin with a specific person, but end with a discussion and insightful comments on a broader issue, as follows:

1. Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 and the evolution from the traditional synthesis of kami and Buddhas (*shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合) to the mutual complementation of Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu hokan* 神仏補充) in modern and contemporary times, in which the social roles (“Shinto weddings/festivals, Buddhist funerals”; see 1, 38–44) are compartmentalized and mutually supportive.
2. Inoue Enryō 井上円了 and the attempt to interpret Buddhism in terms of “pure” philosophy (*junsei tetsugaku* 純正哲学); where modern Chinese intellectuals presented Buddhism as “neither philosophy nor religion,” Inoue presented Buddhism as “both philosophy and religion,” yet both (the Chinese and the Japanese) were concerned with presenting Buddhism as a path superior to that of Christianity and Western philosophy (1, 61).
3. Inoue Tetsujirō’s 井上哲次郎 ethical interpretation of religion, in particular his leadership in the debate over “the clash between morality and religion” in response to the incident of Uchimura Kanzō’s *lèse majesté*.
4. Murakami Senshō 村上專精 and the development of academic Buddhism (*kōdan bukkyōgaku* 講壇仏教学); the social and religious impact of the claim that Mahayana is not the teaching of the historical Buddha.
5. Kiyozawa Manshi’s 清沢満之 spiritualism (*seishinshugi* 精神主義): the turn inward, the importance of individual faith, and the “transcendence of morality”; is it “irresponsible” for Kiyozawa Manshi to claim that matters beyond the individual are the responsibility of the Tathagata?
6. Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 and the possible independence of the “self”; a Nichirenism that proclaims the individual against, or transcending, the state.
7. Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 on religious experience and society; was D. T. Suzuki guilty of supporting Japanese nationalism and the war effort? Sueki closes with this comment on the relationship between religion and the state: “These two should be in tension, and when the tension is lost and both become ambiguous, they fall into a mutual collusion. Was not Daisetsu too unaware of this danger? But this is not just Daisetsu’s problem. When we consider modern Buddhist thinkers, this is the issue that requires the greatest soul-searching” (1, 190).

8. Tsunashima Ryōsen 綱島梁川 and the individual experience of “seeing God” (*ken-shin* 見神); Buddhism from a Christian perspective.
9. Tanaka Chigaku 田中智学 and the role of Buddhism in political activism supporting the state; Nichirenism as supporting the Emperor; Buddhism and Japanese fascism.
10. Uchiyama Gudō 内山愚童, Takagi Kenmyō 高木顯明, and the role of Buddhism in resisting the state and reforming society; critics of identifying Buddhism and the Emperor.
11. Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 and the rhetorical claim that “Asia is one”; a cosmopolitan vision that turned into a justification for nationalistic expansion and the “Greater East Asian War” 大東亞戰爭.
12. Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 and the issue of “pure experience” (*junsui keiken* 純粹經驗); Nishida’s philosophy as an attempt to overcome the various dualistic tensions (for example, self and other) faced by Meiji intellectuals.

In his afterword to the first volume, Sueki states, “Meiji thought developed by dealing with the tension between poles such as the state and religion, ethics/morality and religion, the mundane world and the transcendent world, the individual and the whole, the limited self and the unlimited absolute, and so forth” (I, p. 319). Note that the problem of Buddhism and the state (and the related issue of the status of the individual or “self”) runs through this volume as an ever-present theme. It is striking to see the variety of responses to these issues that were debated from the Buddhist perspective. These themes are taken up again in thematic essays in volume II.

Volume II: Essays on various themes under the general rubric of “Buddhism and Modern Japan”

SECTION I: BUDDHISM AND MODERN THOUGHT

1. Why was Buddhism important for modern Japan? This chapter discusses how Buddhism played a key role for modern intellectuals in rethinking the impasse or tension between the role of the individual and that beyond the individual.
2. Is it possible to care for “the other” if one is focused deeply on one’s own inner spiritual life: problems presented by Buddhist thinking in the late Meiji period.
3. Buddhism and the Kyoto School: discusses how in the West the “big three” of Nishida Kitarō, Tanabe Hajime, and Nishitani Keiji are the focus of attention (referring mainly to the work of John Maraldo and James Heisig), while considering the Kyoto School in Japan involves including a broader, more variegated “movement”; closes with the interesting question: “In modern China, [the Buddhist philosophical tradition of] ‘consciousness-only’ had a major influence on intellectuals, similar to the role played by Zen in modern Japan. Why was this ‘consciousness-only’ [philosophy] important in China, and why was it Zen in Japan?” (II, p. 57).
4. Comments on the debate over the “Ajātasatru complex”: Japanese society and the “maternal complex” in contrast to the “Oedipus complex” in the West; the dangers of oversimplifying or stereotyping Japanese culture and society.

SECTION 2: THE HORIZON OF INTERPRETATION

1. Watsuji Tetsurō's theory of "original Buddhism."
2. The Buddhist thought of Maruyama Masao: the longest chapter in the two volumes.
3. Contemporary Readings of the *Tan'nishō*: Comments on Yamaori Tetsuo's *Aku to Ōjō* 悪と往生; a critique of Yamaori Tetsuo and his valoration of "Jōmon culture" as the heart of Japanese spirituality.

SECTION 3: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON BUDDHIST STUDIES

1. Transcending Buddhist history: what is the role of Buddhism in contemporary Japan? The need to go beyond "Japaneseness."
2. The challenges of "Critical Buddhism"; a summary of Critical Buddhism and its impact (or lack of it). Sueki gives a trenchant comment at the end of the essay, that Critical Buddhism has still not addressed the main problem of modern Buddhism (specifically of the Sōtō tradition), that it depends for its economic base on providing funerals and other *ie*-related "services" (II, 193).
3. The development and promise of Zen studies in Japan; originally written for a Chinese audience.
4. The development and problems of academic Buddhism in Japan, mainly at the University of Tokyo; a summary of how Buddhist Studies developed in Japan, in particular at the University of Tokyo under the aegis of "Indian Studies"

SECTION 4: FROM AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

1. Asia and modern Buddhism: recent trends in research.
2. Modern Buddhism from the perspective of comparing China and Japan.
3. Chinese Buddhism under the Japanese occupation.
4. Ōgawa Shūmei 大川周明 and fascist Asia-ism.

These four chapters are an attempt to look at Buddhism in Japan from the perspective of Asia as a whole.

In his Postscript at the end of volume II, Sueki summarizes his intent in writing the essays in this collection:

It is not that traditional [Buddhist] thought has not been studied. In fact there are considerable achievements in this area. Unfortunately, however, these studies [and the scholars who undertake them] have avoided commitment to the current situation and have no contact with cutting-edge intellectual movements. It is not just that intellectuals at the cutting edge have often been ignorant of traditional [Buddhist] thought; scholars of traditional thought have not been able to come out of the confines of their own field of expertise, and have been content to remain blissfully in their own "gardens," out of touch with the current world.... How, then, is it possible to bridge the "traditional" and the "contemporary"? The key is to reexamine modern thought. If we try to drag pre-modern thought directly into the present, we are left with abrupt and arbitrary interpretations. As

a link between the two, it is necessary to once more reevaluate modern [late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century] thought.

(II, p. 376)

Sueki has masterfully presented the issues and raised important questions concerning the development of ideas (particularly with regard to “state and religion”) in modern Japan. He is to be congratulated for taking on this task, and providing us with a challenging, readable, and informative study of Meiji thinkers and various current issues from the perspective of a non-sectarian interest in Buddhist thought.

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