

REVIEW ARTICLE

Some Reflections on Critical Buddhism

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Jamie HUBBARD and Paul L. SWANSON, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*. Nanzan Library of Religion and Culture, no. 2. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997. xxviii + 515 pp. \$45.00 cloth, ISBN 0-8248-1908-X; \$22.95 paper, ISBN 0-8248-1949-7.

THE INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT known as "Critical Buddhism" (*hihan Bukkyō* 批判仏教) began around the mid-1980s in Sōtō Zen circles, led by Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō, both Buddhologists as well as ordained Sōtō priests. Since then it has indeed raised storm waves on the normally placid waters of Japanese academic Buddhist studies. "Criticism alone is Buddhism," declares Hakamaya, by which he means the critical discrimination of truth from error. Aggressively normative, Critical Buddhism does not hesitate to pronounce on what represents "true" Buddhism and what does not. By its definition, Buddhism is simply the teachings of non-self (*anātman*) and dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). Many of the most influential of Mahāyāna ideas, including notions of universal Buddha nature, *tathāgata-garbha*, original enlightenment, the nonduality of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, and the "absolute nothingness" of the Kyoto school, are all condemned as reverting to fundamentally non-Buddhist notions of *ātman*, that is, substantial essence or ground. Thus they are to be rejected as "not Buddhism"—the "pruning" of this volume's title. At stake is not merely a claim about doctrinal correctness but a reform of Buddhism's social role. For Critical Buddhists, the proposition that all things participate in an innate, original enlightenment, far from being egalitarian, has in fact engendered and perpetuated social injustice by sacralizing the status quo.

The present volume both examines the issues raised by Critical Buddhism and introduces to a Western readership the major points of

controversy surrounding it. It brings together more than twenty essays by fifteen scholars based at Japanese, Taiwanese, and American institutions; Hakamaya and Matsumoto are themselves liberally represented, as are the views of both their critics and sympathizers. *Pruning* is divided into three sections: "The What and Why of Critical Buddhism," "In Search of True Buddhism," and "Social Criticism." The collection is noteworthy in drawing together contributions from across disciplinary boundaries: textual and philological studies, history, and constructive philosophy all have a voice here. Hakamaya and Matsumoto are fortunate in their Western interpreters. The editors, Jamie Hubbard and Paul Swanson, have not only provided extensive and balanced treatment of the subject but also produced outstanding translations of the essays by Japanese contributors. Special congratulations are due to Hubbard for capturing in English Hakamaya's distinctive polemical style.

That style can be both blistering and censorious, and Critical Buddhism has provoked reactions that are anything but lukewarm. Rumor in the field has christened this volume with an alternative title: *Promise Them the Moon, but Give Them the Finger!* Readers will differ as to whether the finger of the Critical Buddhism points to the moon of enlightened wisdom or is extended to the greater part of the East Asian Buddhist tradition in what my former professor of Japanese Buddhist art used to call the "freeway mūdra." But whether or not one agrees with the Critical Buddhist argument, or is even concerned with the question of what constitutes "true Buddhism," this is a thought-provoking book. *Pruning* raises significant questions about the how and why of normative definitions of Buddhism, the social dimension of religious doctrine, and what it is we do when we engage in Buddhist scholarship. No single review could treat it thoroughly, nor is it possible to discuss each article in detail. I will divide this essay into two parts, dealing with some of the questions and lines of controversy that *Pruning* raises. The first will summarize and discuss Critical Buddhism's normative claims and the responses presented in this volume. The second will address Critical Buddhism in the context of my own field of specialization, Japanese Buddhism, with particular attention to the category of "original enlightenment thought" and the issue of doctrine and social practice.

An Overview of the Issues

Readers hitherto unfamiliar with Critical Buddhism can quickly find their bearings via Paul Swanson's excellent introductory essay, "Why

They Say Zen is Not Buddhism.” Swanson distinguishes three major dimensions of Critical Buddhist discourse: the Buddhological level, the sectarian level, and the level of social criticism. Buddhologically, Critical Buddhism makes three foundational claims.¹ First, true Buddhism is nothing other than *pratītya-samutpāda*, not in the spatialized, Hua-yen sense of all things simultaneously giving rise to one another, but a linear sequence of cause and effect without metaphysical substrate. To this Hakamaya opposes the category of “topical Buddhism” or “topical philosophy”—notions of a universal, ineffable, preconceptual ground or “topos” from which all things are produced and to which they return at death. Hakamaya’s opposition of “the critical” and “the topical” is derived from *critica* and *topica* in the thought of René Descartes (1596–1650) and Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), respectively.² Matsumoto has coined the neo-Sanskritism *dhātu-vāda*: literally, a teaching about locus, to express the same kind of thinking. Both scholars regard concepts of universal Buddha nature, *tathāgata-garbha*, original enlightenment, and the like as the reimportation into Buddhism of non-Buddhist notions of *ātman* or substantial ground, contradicting the foundational standpoint of dependent origination. Notions of “topos,” they claim, are particularly characteristic of “indigenous thought,” such as the idea of Brahman in Indian philosophy or the *tao* in Chinese thought. Shamanism, animism, and spirit worship, being grounded in such indigenous, topical thinking, are also dismissed as “not Buddhism.” Against those who assimilate Buddhism to notions of a distinctive Japanese spirituality, Hakamaya argues that true Buddhism should be encountered as a foreign, critical voice that challenges comfortable, essentialized notions of tribal or ethnic identity.

Second, Buddhism is selfless action to benefit others. Claims about grasses and trees all possessing innate Buddha nature may sound

¹ These are based on the introduction to HAKAMAYA’S *Hongaku shisō hihan* (Critiques of the doctrine of original enlightenment, 1989, pp. 9–10) and are also summarized by Swanson, pp. 13–14 (unless otherwise indicated, page numbers in this review refer to *Pruning*). Hakamaya and Matsumoto differ in their approach; while Matsumoto has focused closely on matters of Buddhist doctrine, Hakamaya is more broadly concerned with issues of contemporary social and cultural criticism and adopts a more journalistic and confrontational style. Nonetheless, the two have deeply influenced one another’s thinking, and the above three points broadly reflect their shared understanding.

² Those who have wondered what these early modern European thinkers have to do with normative definitions of Buddhism will find their questions answered in Jamie Hubbard’s essay, “Topophobia.” Hubbard clarifies both the meaning of these categories in Vico and Descartes, as well as their appropriation by Hakamaya. Paul Griffiths (pp. 145–60) further clarifies Critical Buddhist notions of “topical” and “critical” in light of the distinction between internalist and externalist epistemologies.

inclusive, but, by affirming all phenomena as expressions of ultimate truth, they in effect legitimate existing social hierarchy and bolster the authority of those in power. In Japan, Critical Buddhists say, "topical Buddhism," or "original enlightenment thought," has fostered ethnic nationalism, militarism, and discrimination against outcaste groups, as well as the Japanese cultural essentialism found in the writings of Umehara Takeshi, Kawabata Yasunari, and others. It has also supported an ethos of "harmony" that, far from representing true consensus or tolerance, simply silences its opposition by subsuming it.

Third, Buddhism is not a matter of transcendent mystical experience but entails a commitment of faith, as well as reason and the use of language to discriminate truth from falsehood. Two intriguing dimensions emerge from this claim. The first is a revalorization of language. Both Hakamaya and Matsumoto severely criticize those stereotypes of East Asian religion, enshrined in the Ch'an/Zen dictum of "nonreliance on words," that idealize preverbal or ineffable experience. Those approaches to Buddhist practice that promote nonconceptual insight as a goal in itself are, they say, not legitimately Buddhist. To lose language would be to lose the sense of time and thus to lose what makes us human, becoming instead like a person in irreversible coma (pp. 68-69). Second, this claim leads to a reassessment of the exclusivistic stance taken by the new Kamakura period Buddhist founders, such as Hōnen (1133-1212) and Nichiren (1222-1282). The single practice (*senju* 専修) mode espoused by these teachers, in which one form is selected and all others rejected, has sometimes been criticized as intolerant, in contrast to the "all-encompassing" position of the older Buddhist schools such as Tendai, in which any form of practice may be seen as an expression of the one vehicle. From the Critical Buddhist perspective, the single practice approach is viewed rather as a proper critical discrimination of truth, and the "tolerant" or all-encompassing position, as uncritically swallowing the opposition without confronting it (see also the discussion of Hōnen in HAKAMAYA 1998). When it comes to interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, Matsumoto stands firmly in the "three cart" camp; the one vehicle is not the formless truth encompassing all other teachings within itself but the bodhisattva vehicle that is to be selected, over and against the two vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and the *pratyekabuddha* that are to be rejected.

Clearly such claims call into question much of East Asian Buddhism, and Hakamaya and Matsumoto are quick to acknowledge that "Buddhism" by their definition bears little resemblance to what many, perhaps most, people self-identified as Buddhist have historically thought and practiced. Stripped down to what Critical Buddhism will acknowledge as legitimate, the tradition indeed begins to resemble

the stricken tree with its two pathetic remaining leaves that adorns the present volume in Frederick Franck's eloquent cover art. Can anything be salvaged from the Buddhism of East Asia? Hakamaya does exempt certain figures from his criticism. These include Chih-i (538–597), patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school, who was explicitly critical of Taoism, and also Dōgen (1200–1253), founder of Japanese Sōtō Zen. It is in Hakamaya's reading of Dōgen that the apologetic or sectarian dimension of Critical Buddhism comes into play. For Hakamaya, the "definitive standpoint for understanding Dōgen" is neither the "oneness of practice and enlightenment" (*shushō ittō* 修証一等) nor "original realization and wondrous practice" (*honshō myōshu* 本証妙修); rather, Dōgen was throughout his life a staunch critic of original enlightenment thought. Dōgen's critique of the "Senika (Skt. Śrenika) heresy"—belief in a "spiritual intelligence" (*reichi*) that survives the body's death—is identified by Hakamaya with the influential Tendai original enlightenment (*hongaku*) discourse that prevailed in Dōgen's time.³ Also related to the sectarian dimension of Critical Buddhism is Hakamaya's revisionist reading of Dōgen's twelve-fascicle *Shōbō genzō* 正法眼藏. In contrast to the better known 75-fascicle version, which includes such famous essays as "Uji" 有時 (Being-time) or "Genjō kōan" 現成公案 (The kōan realized in reality), the 12-fascicle version, written late in Dōgen's life, contains instructions for novice monks as well as basic teachings on karmic causality. Where traditional Sōtō scholarship has generally regarded the 12-fascicle text as an introductory work for beginning practitioners, Hakamaya revalorizes it as signaling a profound shift in Dōgen's thought, repudiating the views of his earlier, more philosophical essays that were still influenced by original enlightenment thought and reasserting the normative Buddhist position of causality. This issue, its textual and historical evidence, and responses from other Sōtō scholars are insightfully analyzed in Steven Heine's contribution to *Pruning*. It is unfortunate that some version of William BODIFORD's "Zen and the Art of Religious Prejudice" (1996) could not have been included here, though it is cited several times.⁴ Bodiford also sheds light on the sectarian dimension of Critical Buddhism by locating it in the context of Sōtō responses to charges leveled by *burakumin* organizations, to the effect that Buddhist institutions have historically fostered discrimination, for example, by the use of

³ As HAKAMAYA notes (1989, p. 320), the first to interpret Dōgen as a critic of *hongaku* thought was the Tendai scholar Hazama Jikō, in a 1942 essay (reprinted in HAZAMA 1948, pp. 298–318). Hazama's reading has since been widely cited by Sōtō scholars.

⁴ The editors in fact wished to include it but were limited by space constraints. The same is true in the case of my wish (expressed below) to have had a contribution from Tsuda Shin'ichi.

discriminative *kaimyō* 戒名, or posthumous names, that signal outcaste status, or by opening temple registers to detective agencies investigating prospective spouses or employees for possible outcaste origins. Of the new Kamakura Buddhist founders, Nichiren, who called himself the son of a *caṇḍala* (Jpn. *sendara* 旃陀羅, outcaste) family, or Hōnen and Shinran, who preached to ordinary lay people, are not difficult to characterize as egalitarian teachers. Dōgen with his aristocratic origins and monastic bent is harder to reconstruct in this way. Representing *hongaku* thought as the source of social discrimination, and Dōgen, as a lifelong foe of *hongaku* thought, serves an apologetic agenda (BODIFORD 1996, pp. 18–22).

The *Pruning* essays identify other contexts of Critical Buddhism as well. As several contributors point out, Critical Buddhism has appeared at a time when many Japanese Buddhists have been led to reflect on the inadequacy of Buddhist ethical responses to modern social problems, including not only discrimination against the *burakumin*, institutionalized misogyny, lack of social welfare initiatives and the like, but also the complicity of Buddhist institutions in militant imperialism earlier in this century. The conviction that Buddhism should work to help to eliminate structural injustice distinguishes Critical Buddhism from other, more traditional forms of normative Buddhist hermeneutics and links it to contemporary movements of socially engaged Buddhism. Other contexts include advances on the part of Japanese scholars in the study of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Hakamaya and Matsumoto are specialists in Yogācāra and Madhyamaka thought, respectively, and are well versed in both the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of these traditions). Such advances have called into question assumptions, long regnant in Japan, about East Asian “Buddha-nature” theories as representing the culmination of Mahāyāna philosophical thought. Lin Chen-kuo’s essay additionally suggests that Critical Buddhism be understood as part of a broader Asian Buddhist encounter with modernity in the post-colonial world.

A Question of Substance

One large set of responses in *Pruning* addresses Critical Buddhism’s foundational claim that notions of Buddha nature, *tathāgata-garbha*, and original enlightenment represent substantialist heterodoxies that violate the normative principle of *anātman*. These responses in turn fall into two groups. One, represented by the contribution of Dan Lusthaus, is in basic sympathy with and elaborates on the Critical Buddhist claim. Lusthaus argues that between the seventh and eighth cen-

turies, Chinese Buddhists consciously opted for the *dhātu-vāda* model, reverting in their interpretive stance to notions of underlying metaphysical substrate, such as those found in Taoism, that had long predated Buddhism's introduction. Far from being a "return to the source" in the Mahāyāna sutras, as it was often represented, the move to assert concepts of one mind or inherent nature was the result of a "sustained misreading" of ambiguous materials and a deliberate rejection of the Indian Buddhist tradition of critical thinking based on logic and syllogistic reasoning as exemplified by Dignāga and the translations of Hsüan-tsang. After the eighth century, Lusthaus says, all important religious debates in China were debates among *dhātu-vāda* schools (p. 39). This evaluation of the sinification of Buddhism differs markedly from others put forth to date, which have positively characterized Sui- and T'ang-period doctrinal developments as, for example, refining the insights of Indian Madhyamaka through the use of kataphatic language; bringing the remote goal of Buddhahood within human reach through the teaching of innate Buddha nature; and revalorizing the world as the locus of salvation, rather than as the realm of suffering to be escaped (see for example YÜKI 1961; GIMELLO 1976a and 1976b; and GREGORY 1991). Lusthaus's alternative reading should make for stimulating debate. He also performs a valuable service in calling attention to the views of those Chinese Buddhists, such as Hsüan-tsang 玄奘 (602–664) and K'uei-chi 窺基 (632–682), that did not prevail historically, and in challenging the assumption, especially widespread in Japan, that East Asian Buddha-nature doctrine represents the pinnacle of Mahāyāna thought. However, it is one thing to challenge a dominant scholarly model and quite another to draw distinctions between "true Buddhists" and "deluded Buddhists," as it were, along geocultural lines. Lusthaus skirts perilously close to this when he writes, "We should not be surprised that East Asian Buddhists, not being enlightened despite the belief that all possess 'original enlightenment,' should tenaciously cling to this [*ātma-*] *dr̥ṣṭi*" (p. 55). Are the Buddhists of South, Southeast, or Central Asia then enlightened? How would we know? Similarly, Yamaguchi Zuihō—along with providing an admirably lucid exposition of Śāntaraksita's thought—seems to suggest that Tibetan Buddhists, unlike their Japanese counterparts, got matters right from the outset by introducing the "core elements of Indian Buddhism," beginning with the defeat of the Ch'an monk Mo-ho-yen by Kamalaśīla at the court of Khri srong lde btsan in the late eighth century.

A different group of *Pruning* responses to the substantialist charge suggests alternative readings of Buddha nature or *tathāgata-garbha* texts that do not involve assumptions of ontological essence. Sallie

King, for example, makes such an argument based on the *Fo-hsing lun* 仏性論 (Buddha nature treatise), attributed to Vasubandhu but most likely a sinic apocryphon. In this text, she argues, language about “Buddha nature” or “thusness” is used out of concern for the novice bodhisattva likely to misunderstand emptiness in nihilistic terms. The text affirms the Buddha nature, not as a substantive essence, but as an *upāya* to encourage practice by attempting to convey in positive language what is realized in meditation. King points to places where the text explicitly denies that it is speaking in essentialist terms. “Thusness language,” she concludes, is not an ontological theory but a soteriological device. King’s nuanced argument might be applied to many other texts as well. Takasaki Jikidō similarly argues that the oneness of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa represents an existential, not an ontological, ground (p. 315), and Paul Swanson points out that some Buddha-nature formulations, such as Chih-i’s three causes of Buddha nature, are non-substantialistic (p. 26).

Also relevant to the substantialist charge is a fascinating exchange between Matsumoto Shirō and Yamabe Nobuyoshi. Matsumoto contends that *tathāgata-garbha* and certain Yogācāra ideas represent *dhātu-vāda*—that is, they postulate a “generative monism,” in which all phenomena are seen as the “super-loci” produced from *dharma-dhātu* or *tathāgata-garbha* as underlying ground. This model, Matsumoto holds, is inherently discriminatory, because the hierarchy obtaining among the super-loci (e.g., among the five *gotra* or classes of beings) is legitimized in that the distinctions among those who can become buddhas, those who can become śrāvakas, and those without the nature of enlightenment, etc., are all affirmed as being equally the expressions of *dharma-dhātu*. Against this, Yamabe suggests that pluralistic *gotra* theory and notions of universal, monistic *dharma-dhātu* are not necessarily connected but may represent two originally unrelated elements incorporated into the Yogācāra tradition at different times that are incompletely reconciled. In contrast to Matsumoto’s static model of *dhātu-vāda* thought, Yamabe’s argument takes into account the historical development of the Yogācāra tradition. While the non-Yogācāra specialist may not be fully able to evaluate the evidence cited on either side, this exchange is exemplary for its courtesy and wealth of supporting philological and textual detail.

Lastly, the “alternative readings” category includes a clever, “post-modern” reading of Nishitani Keiji suggested by Lin Chen-kuo. While Critical Buddhism tends to be anti-postmodern (Hakamaya deems post-modernism a reactionary outbreak of irrational mysticism), Lin sees both postmodernism and Critical Buddhism as engaged in the same

“unfinished project of modernity”—the overcoming of a subject-centered “metaphysics of identity.” Lin proposes that Nishitani’s “topos” of absolute emptiness can be understood, not as an ontological substrate, but as the “daily lifeworld”—a field of “playful samādhi” that is its own end and that comes into view only when self-centered frames of reference have been emptied (p. 309).

All the foregoing responses, whether sympathetic or critical, deal with Critical Buddhism more or less on its own terms, in engaging and accepting its premise that the *anātman* doctrine is normative for Buddhist thought. The reader remains curious to learn the views of someone like Mikkyō specialist Tsuda Shin’ichi 津田真一, one of the first Japanese scholars to respond to Critical Buddhism and cited a few times in *Pruning* as someone who holds that there is room in Buddhism for something like notions of substantive ground (pp. 138, 166, 327). Hakamaya and Matsumoto are of course not the first Buddhists to assert *pratitya-samutpāda* as a normative standpoint. Some of the *Pruning* contributors in fact view the Critical Buddhist argument as a continuation of the ancient Buddhist debate over whether or not Buddha-nature ideas represent a violation of the *anātman* position. In Lusthaus’s words, “The debate is not over; it has only been on hold for twelve hundred years” (p. 55; see also Swanson, pp. 3–4). However, I suspect the situation may be more complex. Certainly Critical Buddhism exhibits strong continuities with this earlier debate, but the terms seem to have shifted. Concepts of “topos” or *dhātu-vāda* somewhat overlap but are not quite the same as those of *ātman*, self-nature, or permanent substance denied by earlier Buddhist critiques of essentialism. A thoroughgoing *anātman* position would surely reject, for example, any notion of an eternal, supreme being. Yet Critical Buddhism affirms monotheism as an instance of the “critical” stance of choosing truth and rejecting error. What is being affirmed here, of course, is not the doctrinal content of monotheism *per se* but its commitment to a single object of faith. For Hakamaya, Christianity emerged as the foreign voice critical of the “indigenous Western tradition”—that is, the Latin culture of the Roman empire (pp. 66, 79), while Matsumoto opines that “monotheism is not a form of monism (*dhātu-vāda*) but is closer to the structure of ‘one-vehicle’ thought in requiring a specific choice” (p. 489, n. 46).⁵ Nor does Critical Buddhism hesitate to put forth its own form of essentialism. Peter Gregory notes that, just as *tathāgata-garbha* thought postulates an original pure mind that becomes veiled and hidden by adventitious defilements, so

⁵ Historically speaking, of course, we might ask how many people in any culture have embraced their religion by choice.

Critical Buddhism postulates a foundational “true Buddhism” that has become obscured by “indigenous thought”; thus it replicates the very same sort of discourse that it decries as essentialistic (pp. 292–93). It would seem that what Critical Buddhism attacks is not so much the classic targets of *anātman* critique— notions of unchanging self, metaphysical essence, or the reification of views into objects of attachment by which false notions of “self” are constructed—as it is concepts of a universal ground in which all participate, whether that ground is said to have ontological substance or not.⁶ This, I will suggest further on, is because Critical Buddhism is not only reviving a traditional Buddhist debate but responding to the ideological problems of a very specific, modern historical context.

A Question of Method

Another strand of discussion in this volume steps back from the debate itself and attempts to position Critical Buddhism methodologically. As Gregory notes, the controversy this movement has engendered calls for reflection on important differences in the “sociology of knowledge” between Japan and the West. “Awareness of such differences should help make both sides more aware of their limitations, what they stand to gain from one another, and the nature of the premises on which their different perspectives are based” (pp. 286–87). A major contribution of the present volume lies in stimulating just such reflection. However, the essays included here collectively suggest that the gaps between different “sociologies of knowledge” and cultures of scholarship lie, not just between Japan and the West, but also between those Buddhologists, whatever their nationality, doing historical scholarship and those engaged in normative philosophy. For Hakamaya and Matsumoto, who are committed Buddhists as well as scholars associated with Buddhist sectarian universities, the very distinction is problematic. One senses from Hakamaya in particular a deep frustration with “professors in charge of courses on ‘Japanese Buddhism’ at national universities who, in attempting to be objective researchers, not only disregard the direction proper to Buddhist practitioners but entertain a corresponding contempt for those researchers affiliated with some specific sect” (HAKAMAYA 1989, pp.

⁶ This helps explain why a text like the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra*, despite its relentless denial of metaphysical essences, nonetheless falls under the Hakamaya/Matsumoto critique. While emptiness in this sūtra is definitely not a substantial ground, it does suggest spatialized notions of all phenomena as universally nondual and interpenetrating. That is, while not an *ātman* or ontological essence, emptiness in this sense would correspond to “*topos*” in Critical Buddhist usage.

22–23). It may well be true that, in secular universities, distaste for methods informed by obvious personal religious commitment may represent what Griffiths calls a “fideism of the academy” (p. 160)—although one should note that it also represents a reaction against the often stultifying effects of sectarian orthodoxy on the historical study of Japanese Buddhism. In any event, Hakamaya is loud in denouncing what he calls “objective scholarship.” He uses this term in at least three senses that, although conflated in his rhetoric, are not necessarily connected. They are: 1) value-free scholarship following the model proposed by Max Weber, which would make of religious studies something resembling a “science”; 2) scholarship that hides an ideological agenda behind a neutral descriptive pose; and 3) scholarship, such as descriptive historiography, whose major purpose is not normative in the sense that it is not concerned with what Buddhism “should be.”

Although he has radically challenged longstanding interpretations of Sōtō Zen orthodoxy, Hakamaya’s critique of “objective scholarship” is rooted in the same hermeneutical assumptions that have long shaped Japanese Buddhist sectarian scholarship, namely, that the “truth” of the religion under study is real and knowable, and this therefore recognizes no need to distinguish fundamentally between normative and historical approaches. As Steven Heine perceptively notes, Critical Buddhism comes much closer to classical Buddhist scholasticism, with its project of establishing hierarchical classifications of teachings (*kyōhan* 教判), than it does to either historical scholarship or speculative philosophy (pp. 283–84). For some of Critical Buddhism’s Western respondents, however, Hakamaya’s criticism of “objective scholarship” resonates with recent developments in the Western academy that have originated from a very different hermeneutical perspective—namely, the recognition that true “objectivity” in the humanities is, ultimately, an epistemological impossibility. We are inexorably embedded in the specifics of our particular culture, life history, and historical moment; there is no ground where we can stand outside ourselves and observe from a value-free perspective. For some, this recognition has led to the rejection of positivist historiography as well as conventions of scholarly “distance,” and the emergence of “engaged” scholarship. Some of the *Pruning* essays also link this development to Critical Buddhism. Griffiths, for example, writes, “Historiography is always driven by ideology, by a set of critically—or, in a bad case, uncritically—normative decisions about what it is for and how it should be done, decisions that are not themselves given or justified historically. The advantage and virtue of Hakamaya’s position and method is that it makes broadly ideological commitments explic-

it" (p. 159). Hubbard draws parallels between Critical Buddhism and the self-consciously "activist" direction taken in such fields as cultural criticism, women's studies, and postcolonial studies. "Once one accedes to the notion that scholars in-scribe even as they de-scribe," he writes, "the move to normative valuation seems the next natural step, perhaps even a morally obligatory step" (xii).

Perhaps. However, from another perspective, the next "natural" step would be to recognize that, if the notion of "objective" historiography is undercut by the epistemological impossibility of value-free observation, then so, equally, is the certainty of normative truth claims. As Gregory notes:

Awareness of this epistemological predicament [i.e., our inability to see independently of our particular cultural and historical context]... can have the salutary effect of freeing us from the self-righteousness that comes from the belief that we are in the privileged possession of the "truth." Indeed, the spectre of "truth" as an absolute standard by which to discriminate right from wrong (and consequently the question of "true Buddhism") carries within itself an authoritarian ideological potential that is apt to send shivers down the spine of anyone familiar with the history of religion in the West. (p. 291)

Neither the epistemological difficulties entailed in normative truth claims, nor the authoritarian dangers of self-righteousness, seem particularly to trouble Critical Buddhism. Sueki Fumihiko, too, notes the inconsistency of Critical Buddhists in denouncing "objective scholarship" even while insisting on the objectivity of their own standards for truth (p. 334).

As Hubbard notes, many Buddhist scholars have begun to insist that "there should indeed be a place within academic discourse for the committed Buddhist to argue his or her ideas about Buddhist truth" (p. xiii), and they have every right to do so. But there should also be a place for those whose overriding scholarly question is, not what constitutes Buddhist truth, but how Buddhists in various times and places have defined Buddhist truth, under what circumstances, and with what consequences.⁷ This is by no means an "objective" enterprise in the sense of being value-free. In our choice of subject and focus, in our approach, and in our arguments and conclusions, historians make value judgments all the time, and it is incumbent upon us to be as self-critical as possible about how our own cultural

⁷ This is of course a matter of scholarly approach and not necessarily connected to whether one is or is not a Buddhist practitioner.

embeddedness and ideological commitments affect our reading of history. The old positivist ideal of a perfectly objective approach, modeled on the physical sciences, represented an initial stage in the long, painful struggle by which scholars in the Western academy sought to break free from the authority of theology and pursue the study of religion as a humanistic discipline. That this early “objective” model has proven to be flawed, perhaps even oppressive in its own right, does not mean that the struggle itself was misguided. If more recent awareness of the “epistemological predicament” has taught us anything, it is surely the value of methodological plurality and the need to be wary of excessive attachment to the “rightness” of our own chosen approach. This is not a denial of the importance of methodological commitment, but, as Gregory observes, a corrective to self-righteousness. Frankly, I do not see such awareness in Critical Buddhism, and I find it hard to understand how its method represents anything other than a return to an authoritarian theological approach, if one may speak of theology in connection with a religion that has no *theos*. Be that as it may, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree* will surely make a contribution in stimulating both healthy reflection on the hermeneutical issues that we as scholars of Buddhism must engage, as well as further discussion across methodological divisions in the field.

Another methodological issue raised repeatedly in *Pruning* is the need for Critical Buddhism to more fully articulate the constructive part of its agenda. Critical Buddhism is, after all, not merely an argument about what constitutes correct doctrine but is allied to concern for Buddhist institutional reform and social responsibility. This concern is one of its more attractive features. But what, for example, would the practice of an “embodied” Critical Buddhism look like? Matsumoto says flatly: “The enlightenment that Buddhism proffers is nothing other than thinking correctly about the teaching of dependent arising” (p. 249). There is something attractive in this position, in that it seems so practical and, with effort, achievable; certainly it would free one from the tyranny of expectations concerning transformative moments of nonconceptual insight, which probably very few people actually experience. But what form would Buddhist institutions take? Sueki points out that temples of the Sōtō sect and indeed of all Japanese Buddhist denominations depend for their income largely on funeral and mortuary rituals incorporating many “indigenous” elements; were these elements to be eliminated, how would the Sōtō sect survive? (pp. 333–34). Posed historically, one also could ask if Buddhism of any form would have survived without the incorporation of “indigenous elements.” Hubbard, though sympathetic in many ways

to Critical Buddhist aims, expresses dismay at the thought of religion shorn of intuitive, aesthetic, or emotional dimensions (pp. 109–10). Even with regard to the intellectual element, which is paramount for Critical Buddhists, one must ask, along with Heine, “How exactly does Dōgen’s view of karma, or the Critical Buddhist view of Dōgen’s view, promote social change?” (p. 285). The claim that correct thinking about dependent origination can lead to greater social responsibility and egalitarianism needs to be more logically developed for the constructive side of the Critical Buddhist vision to become clear.

Locating “Original Enlightenment Thought”

In his essay in the present volume, Dan Lusthaus outlines a program for critics of Critical Buddhism that, rather crudely summarized, admonishes us not to reject it *in toto* because individual elements may prove unconvincing—a valid caveat for critics of any project. Let me say then that the following criticisms are not intended to dismiss the entire theory, nor merely to “set the record straight” (an undertaking meaningful to a historian but presumably not to a Critical Buddhist). Rather, my aim is to help clarify where certain arguments of Critical Buddhism hold true and where they tend to break down. In particular, since Critical Buddhism entails claims for the social consequences of particular doctrinal positions, it is worth briefly examining these claims in the light of Japanese religious history.

Let us begin with the notion of original enlightenment or *hongaku* 本覚 (Chn. *pen-chüeh*, Kor. *pongak*). It is ironic that Critical Buddhism, being self-avowedly committed to the discriminating use of language to arrive at truth, should be so vague and ahistorical in its use of this central term. Original enlightenment, in Hakamaya’s view, is the “topical philosophy... [that] has afflicted Japan for more than a millennium” (p. 65). For him, “original enlightenment thought” seems to refer to any immanentist way of thinking, and the majority of this volume’s contributors follow suit, referring to “*hongaku* ethos,” “*hongaku* ideology,” or “*hongaku* orthodoxy” as though these were transparent categories. (An exception is Gregory, who in his discussion of the Chinese Hua-yen and Ch’an thinker Tsung-mi 宗密 [780–841] notes that “*hongaku* had a different meaning in Chinese Buddhism than Hakamaya and Matsumoto claim it had in Japan” [p. 289]. Sueki also argues for a more nuanced usage.)

In fairness, inflation of the term “original enlightenment thought” did not begin with Hakamaya. Shimaji Daitō (1875–1927), who first popularized the term in the early decades of this century, employed it

in a broad sense to indicate those immanentist forms of Buddhist thought predominant in East Asia. But he made clear that this was a general and heuristic usage, contrasted with its specific meaning as a discourse in medieval Japanese Tendai. Since Shimaji, however, the term has increasingly been used in an expanded, unqualified sense to indicate any sort of innate Buddha-nature doctrine, often by proponents of cultural essentialism who claim to find in it the expression of a timeless Japanese spirituality. With Hakamaya, the debasement of the term is complete, as it need not even refer to Buddhism but is equated with “topical philosophy.”

At least three possible meanings of “original enlightenment thought” can be distinguished. They are (1) thought deriving from the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun* 大乘起信論, T. #1666), a sixth-century sinic apocryphon attributed to Āśvaghoṣa that was enormously influential in the development of East Asian *tathāgata-garbha* thought; (2) the intellectual mainstream of medieval Japanese Tendai; and (3) by usage, all immanentist strands of Buddhist thought. In my view, only (2) should properly be termed “original enlightenment thought.” *Hongaku* is not the dominant category in the *Awakening of Faith* and, as Sueki rightly notes (p. 330), has a different meaning in that treatise and its commentarial tradition than in medieval Japanese Tendai. In the *Awakening of Faith*, “original enlightenment” denotes the potential for enlightenment in the deluded mind; in medieval Tendai, it is the true status of all phenomena just as they are (see also SHIMAJI 1931 pp. 109–17; TAMURA 1990b). As for the expanded usage of the term in (3), it is far too broad to be useful. I will restrict my own use of the term to the second meaning—although even in this narrowed sense, it is hardly a unified or internally consistent category. This is not a mere quibble about terminology but part of a concern over how Critical Buddhism, like some of the very people it criticizes, misleadingly oversimplifies the history of Japanese Buddhism and the social role of doctrine.

There is considerable question about how far “original enlightenment thought,” in the medieval Tendai sense, fits the model of either “topical philosophy” or *dhātu-vāda*. First of all, ideas of original enlightenment are not necessarily substantialistic (if substantialism is indeed the target of critique here). *Hongaku* thought in the medieval Tendai context is by no means a simple extension of the *tathāgata-garbha* ideas of the *Awakening of Faith*. Some of its strands do indeed draw on Hua-yen style models of an originally pure mind to which one must “awaken” or “return”; an example would be the twelfth-century work *Shinnyo kan* 真如觀 (Contemplation of suchness). Many others, however, do not. In texts recording the orally transmitted teachings (*kuden*

hōmon 口伝法門) of the Eshin and Danna schools of medieval Tendai, the central category is the threefold truth and threefold contemplation. From this perspective, original enlightenment is not an underlying substrate, nor is it prior to the phenomenal world, nor is it a “generative monism” giving rise to all things; it is simply all phenomena being simultaneously devoid of independent self-existence (emptiness), yet, at the same time, arising through dependent origination (conventional existence), and both empty and conventionally existent simultaneously (the middle). Ontologically there is nothing apart from the moment-to-moment rise and fall of the phenomenal world. It is also possible to argue, as King does for the *Fo-hsing lun*, that what appears to be substantialist language in some Tendai *hongaku* texts is not an ontological argument but a pedagogical device aimed at encouraging a transformative insight achieved through meditative practice. Such an argument has in fact been recently advanced by Ruben Habito. Read carefully, HABITO argues, such texts are found to contain “deconstructive disclaimers” that obviate the possibility of substantialist interpretations (1995).

Second, not all original enlightenment texts can be dismissed as a mystical denial of language. The *Kankō ruijū* 漢光類聚 contains a transmission on the subject of “words and letters are liberation” (*moji soku gedatsu* 文字即解脱) (TADA et al. 1973, pp. 207–8). The *Zōda shō* 藏田抄, a Muromachi-period *kuden hōmon* collection, explicitly rejects the Zen dictum of “nonreliance on words” (TENDAI SHŪTEN KANKŌKAI 1935, p. 75). In fact, this seems to have been an issue hotly debated within the medieval Tendai tradition, some lineages claiming that *shikan* 止観 (calming-and-insight) represents that which is prior to words and conceptions, and others insisting that the insight of *shikan* is inseparable from the words of the *Lotus Sūtra* (see for example HAYASHI 1940 and ONO 1991). Third, *hongaku* thought does not uncritically subsume its opposition but is quite clear about distinctions and choices to be made: Linear views of enlightenment as the culmination of a long process of cultivation are deemed provisional, inferior, and ultimately delusive, and are to be rejected in favor of the understanding that all things are enlightened just as they are. The value judgment inherent in this perspective underlays the “fourfold rise and fall” (*shijū kōhai* 四重興廢), the new *kyōhan* or hierarchical classification of teachings that emerged within the influential Eshin school of medieval Tendai (see GRONER 1995, pp. 69–71).

On the other hand, one must concede that medieval Japanese Tendai thought does tend to be spatial, mandalic, and atemporal, and in this sense is characteristic of what Hakamaya terms “topical philosophy.” One does not change and “become” a buddha; hell dwellers,

hungry ghosts, all things just as they are, manifest original enlightenment (see for example *Sanjū shika no kotogaki* 三十四箇事書, TADA et al. 1973, p. 176). One can easily see, as Hakamaya argues, how such a teaching could be deployed to legitimize social hierarchy and oppressive rule. There may well be a difference, however, between what logically *could* have happened, and what historically *did* happen. More concrete evidence, including specific examples, is necessary before one can justifiably conclude, as Hakamaya claims, that this doctrine from the medieval period on was deployed in overarching fashion as an authoritarian ideology.⁸ (Similarly, one would like to see some historical support for Matsumoto's suggestion that Yogācāra *gotra* thought is an argument for social discrimination.)

A move in this direction is assayed in the *Pruning* collection by Ruben Habito, who suggests a connection between *hongaku* thought and the Japanese ethnocentrism found in a range of late thirteenth-century documents following the failure of the Mongol invasion attempts. Habito contrasts the place of Japan in Jien's *Gukanshō* 愚管抄 (c. 1219), where it is characterized as a "peripheral land" (*hendo* 辺土) on the edge of the Buddhist cosmos in the degenerate, last age of the Buddha-Dharma (*mappō* 末法), and more than a century later in Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Jinnō shōtōki* 神皇正統記 (1339–1343), where Japan appears at the center of the cosmos as a land destined to enjoy eternal prosperity under the rule of Amaterasu's descendants. This cosmological shift, from periphery to center, finds its theoretical basis, Habito suggests, in a "logic of reversal" found in medieval *hongaku* thought.

Original enlightenment thought does indeed employ a "logic of reversal" (Habito's "Copernican shift" metaphor was first used in this context by KAWAI Takaakira in 1943). Practice is not the cause of enlightenment but its expression; concrete actualities (*ji* 事) are valued over abstract principles (*ri* 理); and the focus is not the transcendent Buddha but the ordinary worldling. Beginning in the late thirteenth century, this logic was appropriated to the so-called reverse *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹 thought, which views the kami, who are close at hand, as prior, and the more abstract buddhas and bodhisattvas as their secondary manifestations. Habito is, I believe, quite right in positing a link between this "logic of reversal" and the interpretive shifting of Japan from margin to center of the cosmos during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Unfortunately for a closer evaluation

⁸ The late historian Kuroda Toshio (1926–1993) also argued that *hongaku* thought was archetypal of the ideology of the dominant *kenmitsu* (exoteric-esoteric) religious system 権密体制 that supported the ruling elites (see, for example, KURODA 1975, pp. 443–45, 487–88). This remains an inadequately substantiated part of his otherwise compelling theory.

of Critical Buddhism's claims, he stops short of analyzing exactly what this connection was. I would suggest that it was one of legitimation: The "logic of reversal" found in the influential discourse of original enlightenment was one factor assimilated to theoretize an emerging ethnocentrism. This is very different from saying that original enlightenment thought *produced* ethnocentrism—a distinction to be discussed in further detail below. It should also be noted that the latter thirteenth century is rather late in the development of *hongaku* thought, which was already flourishing when Jien wrote his *Gukanshō* but had yet to be linked to ethnocentric discourse.⁹ We can also find instances of Japanocentric discourse both prior to, and independent of, original enlightenment thought.¹⁰ A more immediate predisposing factor for Habito's "ethnocentric turn"—one that he notes—can be found in the typhoons that scattered the attacking Mongol fleets in 1274 and 1281, which were widely seen as divine protection and which stimulated increased theorizing in elite circles about Japan as a "land of the kami" (KURODA 1975, pp. 274–75). Also important was a growing interest among Buddhist clerics in traditions surrounding the kami and their shrines, to whose theoretical schematization *hongaku* elements were applied (TAMURA 1990a).

In evaluating the claim that original enlightenment thought represented an authoritarian discourse in medieval Japanese society, it is worth noting that many modern scholars, also with little supporting evidence, have asserted that its influence was antinomian, undermining both the authority of the Buddhist precepts and commitment to religious discipline. Bracketing the historical question of just how the *hongaku* doctrine was understood in medieval Japan, the fact that its modern interpreters have been able to read it as both an antinomian *and* an authoritarian discourse should at least suggest to us that the same doctrine can be open to widely differing interpretations.

Locating *hongaku* thought in its medieval Japanese context is no easy task. A great number of the relevant texts were not signed by their authors or compilers but retrospectively attributed to Saichō,

⁹ TAMURA Yoshirō's tentative chronology divides the development of *hongaku* thought into six fifty-year periods between 1100 and 1400 (1965, p. 403).

¹⁰ For example, the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 and other early "official histories" use terms such as *chūgoku* 中国 ("middle kingdom") to refer, not to T'ang China, but to Japan, based on *ritsurō* notions of a realm united under the emperor's virtuous rule (HAYAKAWA 1988, pp. 67ff; I am indebted to Wayne Farris for this reference). In the mid-thirteenth century, closer to the period under discussion, Nichiren saw Japan as the birthplace of a new Buddhism for the Final Dharma age, a theme he develops without reference to *hongaku* concepts (see, for example, his *Kenbutsu mirai ki* 顕仏未來記 and *Kangyō Hachiman shō* 諫曉八幡抄 RISSHŌ 1988, vol. 1, p. 742, and vol. 2, p. 1850.)

Genshin, or other great Tendai masters of the past; thus the author of a given text, sometimes even the century when it was written, cannot be clearly established. Lacking such information, it is hard to understand the role this discourse played in the lives and practice of the scholar-monks who produced it. Thus it has been correspondingly easy for modern scholars to appropriate it in the service of their own, contemporary concerns. Chief among these has been to assert the moral superiority of the Kamakura “new Buddhism,” over and against the “old Buddhism,” repeatedly depicted in one-dimensional terms as corrupt and alienated from the religious needs of the common people. Within this model, *hongaku* thought is identified with the elitist religious establishment, and its rejection or transformation, with religious reform. This construction of original enlightenment thought began in prewar Nichiren sectarian circles and was adopted after the war by Sōtō Zen. It was at this point that Dōgen’s “great doubt”—why the buddhas and patriarchs have launched the aspiration for enlightenment if the Dharma nature is innate from the outset—as well as his critique of the “Senika heresy,” began to be widely interpreted as criticisms of original enlightenment thought, interpretations not found before the twentieth century. I have called this the “radical break” theory of the new Kamakura Buddhism, because it sees the rejection of *hongaku* thought as the defining characteristic of the founders of new Kamakura Buddhism (STONE 1995 and forthcoming). Hakamaya’s claim that a critique of original enlightenment thought is the “definitive standpoint for understanding Dōgen” stands squarely within this scholarly context.

However, as Sueki points out (pp. 329–30), there is good evidence that Dōgen’s criticism of the “Senika heresy” may not have been directed at Tendai *hongaku* thought at all, but at other, rival interpretations of Zen (see also TAMURA 1965, pp. 556–64; FAURE 1987). The late Tamura Yoshirō additionally noted many points of structural similarity between some of Dōgen’s ideas and those found in medieval Tendai—including the “absolute now,” “total exertion of a single thing,” “original realization and wondrous practice,” etc. (TAMURA 1965, pp. 548–52). Hakamaya’s characterization of Dōgen can be made to stand, perhaps, if one also accepts his argument for the primacy of the twelve-fascicle *Shōbō genzō*. However, as Sueki says, one does so at the cost of “a fair appreciation of the work Dōgen did in the prime of life” (p. 331). Matsumoto rightly distances himself from Hakamaya’s view of Dōgen as a thoroughgoing critic of original enlightenment thought (p. 161). As I have argued elsewhere, the teachings of the new Kamakura founders, including Dōgen and Nichi-

ren, as well as the various strands of *hongaku* thought found in medieval Tendai, all participate in the emergence of new thinking concerning the relationship of practice and enlightenment that was particularly distinctive of the medieval period and cut across the divide between old and new Buddhist institutions. Acceptance or rejection of original enlightenment thought was not the fault line along which the new Buddhism is to be distinguished from the old (STONE forthcoming).

Despite the gaps in our knowledge, it is clear that *hongaku* thought in Japan's medieval period was not a totalizing discourse. It emerged as an attempt to rethink the scholarly categories of Tendai-*Lotus* studies in the light of a Mikkyō-influenced sensibility, developing first within monastic lineages of the imperial capital and later within the Tendai *dangisho* 談義所 or seminars of the Kantō. It was appropriated to emergent doctrines about shrines and kami, and to medieval aesthetics, especially poetic theory. But it did not, in the medieval period, constitute an overarching ideological framework encompassing governance, politics, ethics, and social practice. In fact, it coexisted with very different kinds of discourses, such as that of "rejecting this world and aspiring to the pure land" found, for example, in early medieval *ōjōden*.¹¹

Sometimes this "coexistence" can be found within the very same Buddhist tradition. One instance is the Muromachi-period Nichiren Hokkeshū. Late medieval Hokkeshū doctrine drew heavily on the categories of "topical" Tendai *hongaku* thought to interpret Nichiren's teaching. Yet the same scholar-clerics who produced these interpretations also often engaged in activities in the "critical" mode, asserting the exclusive truth of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the need to discard all other teachings in its favor. These activities including public preaching, religious debate, and the memorializing of high officials, sometimes at no small personal risk. One can point, for example, to the Kyoto-based Hokkeshū cleric Shinnyo-in Nichijū 真如院日住 (1406–1486), who, like many of his contemporaries, read the *Lotus Sūtra* as teaching that enlightenment is inherent from the outset in all living beings (SHIGYŌ 1952, pp. 79–81). But in terms of practice, Nichijū firmly upheld Nichiren's mandate to declare exclusive faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* and repeatedly delivered admonitions to the shogun to this effect (RISSHŌ 1984, pp. 271–73).

¹¹ The lack of mention of Pure Land thought generally in the *Pruning* essays is striking. Arguably the form of Buddhism most widespread throughout East Asia, Pure Land Buddhism represents neither a straightforward teaching of dependent origination nor a "topical" doctrine like *tathāgata-garbha*. Thus it would seem to challenge the Critical Buddhist model of Buddhist history as a struggle between "critical" and "topical" thinking.

Hakamaya is absolutely right in asserting that *hongaku* thought does not represent a timeless, innate Japanese spirituality. But in characterizing it as an ideology that has consistently dominated Japan since pre-modern times, he simply replicates the ahistorical views of those whom he criticizes, such as Umehara Takeshi. Japan's medieval period was by no means so thoroughly under the sway of immanentist or "topical" thinking as Hakamaya would suggest. The early modern and modern periods are a different story, and it is here, in my view, that Critical Buddhism offers its most important insights.

Doctrine and Social Practice

At the beginning of seventeenth century, Japan was unified under Tokugawa rule. Before long, a totalizing ideology had emerged to legitimize that rule, a process analyzed in detail by Herman OOMS (1985). The new ideology, well described by the Critical Buddhist notion of "topical thought," cut across traditions, incorporating neo-Confucian, Buddhist, and Shinto elements, and explicitly addressed social relations. Simply summarized, it held that the sociopolitical order was not the arbitrary result of power relations but reflected cosmic harmony. To discharge one's duties conscientiously, whether as a samurai, farmer, merchant, or artisan, was to fulfill the Way of Heaven (or to manifest the Buddha nature). The new ethos stressed loyalty to superiors, benevolence toward subordinates, and above all, gratitude and cheerful exertion in one's given circumstances, not as externally imposed moral precepts but as the practice of a universally innate cosmic principle. By no means merely an ideology of elites, it was intimately connected to what Yasumaru Yoshio has described as the profoundly influential groundswell of "conventional morality" (*tsūzoku dōtoku* 通俗道徳), which gathered momentum from the late seventeenth century on and which stressed self-cultivation through the practice of diligence, frugality, and harmony. Self-cultivation was rooted in a distinctly "topical" notion that Yasumaru terms "philosophy of 'mind'" ("kokoro" *no tetsugaku* 「心」の哲学), "mind" being the universally immanent ground in which self, society, and nature are identified. Because the limitless potentials of "mind" were said to be accessed through self-cultivation, this ethos encouraged the subjective formation of self and positive engagement with the tasks of daily life, investing such activities as agriculture and trade with moral significance and generating a powerful spiritual impetus toward Japan's modernization. Nonetheless, as YASUMARU acknowledges, it lacked the power to recognize and transform objective social conditions but rather empha-

sized “a pious attitude toward society and nature, which accepted them just as they are” (1974, pp. 45–46).

The ideological and moral dimensions of this emerging Tokugawa ethos can be seen throughout Buddhist writings of the day. Robert Bellah, in his study of Tokugawa religion, quotes this anonymous Shinshū tract:

The will of the Buddha is manifest everywhere and in everything, it is present in the person of our teacher, parents, brother, wife, children, friends and also in the state or community... Let us not forget how much we are owing to our present surroundings, and to regard them with reverence and love. We must endeavor as much as we can to execute our duties faithfully, to work for the growth of Buddhism, for the good of family, state, and society, and thus to requite a thousandth part of what we owe to Amida. (BELLAH 1985, p. 78)

A greater contrast to the spirit of medieval accounts of Pure Land devotees, often depicted as flouting worldly conventions in their aspiration for the Pure Land, can scarcely be imagined. Similarly, the Rinzai Zen master Hakuin (1685–1768) taught that enlightenment is realized in one’s given place. If people possess true meditation, then

the lords in their attendance at court and their conduct of governmental affairs, the warriors in their study of the works on archery and charioteering, the farmers in their cultivation, hoeing and ploughing, the artisans in their measuring and cutting, women in their spinning and weaving, this then would at once accord with the great Zen meditation of the various Patriarchs.

(*Orategama* 遠羅天釜, trans. in YAMPOLSKY 1971, p. 54)

This notion of meditation confers a soteriological equality, in that it is accessible to people in any circumstances. But at the same time, it undercuts any rationale for why those circumstances should ever be changed. In the sermons of the Zen teacher Bankei (1622–1693) as well, one senses that “living in the unborn Buddha-mind” implies becoming a good citizen: samurai officials become efficient and conscientious; young wives become diligent in their housework. Examples from other teachers, as well as from non-Buddhist writings, could be multiplied indefinitely.

There is no reason why this kind of discourse should be termed “*hongaku* ideology.” Medieval *hongaku* thought does not generally deal with social relations. Moreover, there is little evidence that Tendai doctrine contributed any more to the new ethos than did other

sources; indeed, early modern Tendai, especially the influential Anraku 安樂 school, consciously rejected many of its *hongaku*-related medieval antecedents, striving to revive observance of the *vinaya* and embracing the Sung T'ien-t'ai of Ssu-ming Chih-li 四明智礼 (960–1028) as a new orthodoxy. But that aside, we can see that in the Tokugawa context, immanentist thought did indeed function as an instrument of social control, much in the way Critical Buddhism argues that it does. Ideas of universal topos did not create the social hierarchy of early modern Japan but were nonetheless relentlessly enlisted in the cause of legitimating it. On the contrary, those religious movements embracing a more “critical” approach, such as Christianity and the Nichiren *fuju fuse* 不受不施 movement, were targets of official suppression. It is no accident that both these persecuted groups explicitly valorized loyalty to a truth transcending the state—whether God or the *Lotus Sūtra*—and thus provided religious grounds for defiance of the existing order.

The ideological uses of immanentist or “topical” religious ideas did not cease with the fall of the Tokugawa *bakufu* but were assimilated to the Meiji-period rhetoric of individual self-sacrifice in the cause of building a strong nation, and, during the Fifteen Years' War, to militant nationalism. Rinzai Zen priest and scholar Ichikawa Hakugen 市川白絃 (1902–1986), in his extensive critique of Buddhist wartime responsibility, was among the first to point out how doctrines such as nonduality, emptiness, and the inherence of universal principle in concrete particulars were deployed in the sociopolitical sphere to legitimate the submission of the individual to the state, to affirm emperor worship, and to activate commitment to the armed expansion of the empire (IVES 1995; VICTORIA 1997, pp. 166–74). And—though neither on the same hegemonic scale nor with same ruthless totalitarianism as during the war years—notions of universal principle are still invoked in postwar Japan in ways that support the status quo. One sees this, for example, in the “worldview” of many of Japan's New Religions as analyzed by Helen Hardacre. Here, too, all things are seen as participating in the same universal life force; by individual self-cultivation and by striving without complaint in one's given circumstances, it is said, this fundamental life-principle can be manifested, bringing inner happiness and outward improvement of one's situation. From such a perspective, unhappy circumstances reflect one's own lack of harmony with the universal principle and should call forth self-reflection and renewed spiritual effort. For example, when seen in this way, an abusive employer or philandering husband is really providing opportunities for the practitioner's personal growth and is thus deserving of gratitude. HARDACRE notes how this outlook works to

short-circuit political action for social change by obviating even the idea of structural injustice, reducing everything to a matter of individual self-transformation (1986, p. 23).

This subject is too vast for detailed discussion here. A more nuanced treatment would explore the complexities of how modern Japanese "topical" notions of cosmic "lifeforce," "mind," or "Buddha nature" both confer a sense of soteriological equality, empowering individuals, and yet at the same time play into conservative political agendas. Suffice it here to say that a recurring thread in authoritarian and conservative ideologies over the last nearly four hundred years lies in an appeal to an all-encompassing or immanent ground, said to be manifested in the state, in social relations, or in one's given circumstances. Critical Buddhist claims about the authoritarian nature of immanentist thought make considerable sense in this context. This no doubt helps account for why the object of negation in Critical Buddhism, given its concern for social reform, should be "topos," rather than more classic Buddhist formulations such as *ātman* or ontological essence.

Too often those who study Buddhist doctrine have treated it purely as philosophy or soteriology, without attention to its ideological dimensions, while those concerned with Buddhism's ideological side have tended to focus on institutional or economic factors, dismissing the importance of doctrine. A key aspect of Critical Buddhism, in my view, is that it draws attention to the relation between doctrine and social practice, or more specifically, between doctrine and social oppression, showing how the former can be used to legitimate the latter. Not only does it cast light on a specific tendency evident throughout Japan's modern period, but also makes us aware of the negative ideological potential of immanentist doctrines more generally. It exposes, for example, how apparently tolerant arguments for the "fundamental oneness" of varying positions can conceal a "subsume and conquer" strategy; how an ethos of "harmony" can be wielded as a tool for social control; or how the valorizing of ineffable experience can be used to silence dissent. Nonetheless, I believe Critical Buddhism makes two errors in this regard. The first lies in the assumption that, because immanentist or "topical" thought has been deployed as an authoritarian ideology in modern Japan, it must have been similarly deployed in the premodern period, and in other cultures as well. This assumption leads Hakamaya in particular to paint a picture of the whole of human religious and intellectual history as a tension between "topicalists" and "criticalists," inflating a specific historical situation into a universal principle. The corollary, of course, is that

because an oppressive modern ideology may draw on elements traceable to a medieval Buddhist discourse (such as original enlightenment), then that discourse must be defiled at its source and incapable ever of being assimilated to worthy ends. This betrays an essentialistic thinking quite at odds with the teaching of dependent origination, which Critical Buddhism holds as normative. This reifying of a specific historical situation in turn leads to a second error, namely, the naive claim that “topical” or immanentist thought *causes* social oppression. Given Critical Buddhism’s either/or categories of “topical” and “critical” thought and its universal claims for their social consequences, one should expect to find, historically, a far superior level of social justice in those societies where “topical” thinking has not prevailed. However, racial and ethnic prejudice, subordination of women, discrimination against the handicapped, and other oppressive practices have flourished, not only in cultures dominated by immanentist thought, but also in those whose political ideology has been informed by very different sorts of doctrine, such as, for example, transcendent monotheism. This is something rather difficult to explain in Critical Buddhist terms.

How convenient it would be, if establishing social justice were simply a matter of getting our doctrine right! Alas, the situation is far more complex. As Gregory notes: “Doctrines have no meaning outside of the interpretive contexts in which they are embedded” (p. 291). Religious doctrine is ideologically underdetermined; there is nothing intrinsic to it that determines, *a priori*, how it will be appropriated in specific contexts. King rightly notes that this will depend on “contingent factors,” such as the socioeconomic level of its interpreters. Those influential enough to have a vested interest in the status quo will deploy doctrine in a manner that legitimates it, while those on the margins of power structures are likely to wield it in a more critical fashion. Thus the very same doctrine can be, and historically has been, used for opposing agendas. Against the Critical Buddhist claim that innate Buddha-nature doctrine functions as an instrument of social oppression, King cites the example of Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk and antiwar activist who coined the term “engaged Buddhism,” and who has used notions of universal Buddha nature as the basis for a peace movement. One could also point to the example of the Sōtō Zen monk Uchiyama Gudō 内山愚童 (1874–1911), executed by the Meiji government on fabricated charges of treason, who found in the notion of universal Buddhahood a religious justification for his socialist convictions (ISHIKAWA 1998, p. 100).

Probably no doctrine is immune to appropriation for bad ideologi-

cal ends. Even what Critical Buddhism sees as “true” Buddhism—a temporal sequence of causally linked events without underlying substrate—can and has been used to reinforce social hierarchy, in the form of the doctrine of karma. Hakamaya seems to believe that the doctrine of moral causality has pernicious potential only when linked to the notion that karmic differences express the same fundamental ground, so that social distinctions become rationalized as expressions of true reality—the “oneness of difference and equality” (*sabetsu soku byōdō* 差別即平等) argument. But the doctrine of karmic causality has been enlisted in legitimating some very nasty forms of oppression and discrimination even without this refinement. Were not rulers said to be born as such deservedly, because they had kept the ten good precepts in prior lives? Were not the social conventions subordinating women to men seen as due to the women’s own “karmic hindrances”? Were not lepers and the deformed said to be suffering their condition as the result of evil committed in prior lives? As an encouragement to oneself to do good and refrain from evil, the teaching of karmic causality can be a morally edifying doctrine. But when used in an explanatory mode to account for why the world is as it is, it acquires a frightening power to legitimate injustice as somehow really deserved. The problem is not the doctrine *per se* but how it is deployed.

What is needed, then, is not so much the clarification of “true doctrine,” but greater awareness, as Gregory notes, of the complex process by which doctrines are appropriated as social ideologies (p. 291). This further requires, as he says, a constant vigilance about one’s own stance as an interpreter and the source of one’s assumptions, if one is to avoid the authoritarian tendencies lurking in the conviction that one’s own hermeneutical stance represents the “true” one. Critical Buddhism, however, seems blind to its own authoritarian potential in this regard and is particularly disturbing in its attitude that those who do not embrace its stance are indifferent to social problems. Although this cannot be laid entirely at Hakamaya and Matsumoto’s door, in some circles, willingness to jump on the anti-*hongaku* bandwagon even seems to have become a sort of litmus test of political correctness.¹² Perhaps this is what prompted one scholar to refer to Critical Buddhism as “intellectual terrorism” (FAURE 1995, p. 269). However, as King perceptively notes, “These antiauthoritarian ideas [of marginal religious movements] often pertain to the authority

¹² Monma Sachio, for example, has recently implied that scholars adopting a textual or historical approach to the study of medieval Tendai *hongaku* doctrine are complicit in the perpetuation of social injustice because their work does not address the putative “discriminatory” dimension of original enlightenment thought (MONMA 1998).

of others and do not extend to one's own authority over others. A critical view of one's own authority is an exceedingly rare development... even among the persecuted" (p. 441, n. 17). The critical force of Critical Buddhism may derive less from its method than from the fact that it is a movement on the margins, directed against the establishment. Were it to gain greater influence, would it tolerate the study and discussion of divergent views, or simply impose its "true Buddhism" as one more form of authoritarianism? Addressing this question will perhaps be the most critical issue that Critical Buddhism has to face.

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