

## Two Seemingly Contradictory Aspects of the Teaching of Innate Enlightenment (*hongaku*) in Medieval Japan

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*The Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki (The thirty-four item report) is one of the most representative works in the tradition of hongaku thought in the Japanese medieval Tendai school. Two seemingly contradictory aspects can be found when analyzing the theory found in this text. The first aspect is that of the absolute affirmation of this world on the basis of the principle of self-consistency, which seems to require no practice for realizing enlightenment. The second is the realization of enlightenment at the “degree of verbal identity,” that is, the second stage of the Tendai “six degrees of identity.” Although this is considered the easiest way of realizing enlightenment, it is not the same as the affirmation of the world that requires no practice at all. This contradiction saved hongaku teachings from being completely corrupt.*

THE CONCEPT OF *hongaku* 本覚 (innate enlightenment), first encountered in the *Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun* 大乘起信論 [*Awakening of Faith*], underwent centuries of profound development in China and Japan. The most radical expression of this doctrinal tradition is found in the medieval Japanese Tendai school. The term “*hongaku* thought” (*hongaku shisō* 本覚思想) can be applied either broadly to refer to all teachings on innate enlightenment, or narrowly to refer only to the development of the concept within the Tendai tradition; in this paper I will use the narrower meaning.

The academic study of *hongaku* in modern Japan was begun by Shimaji Daitō and subsequently carried on by Hazama Jikō and Tamura Yoshirō.<sup>1</sup> In 1973 Tamura and three other scholars published a critical, annotated edition of many *hongaku* texts (TADA et al.). This

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the studies of *Tendai hongaku shisō* (Tendai *hongaku* thought), see SUEKI 1993, pp. 284-311. HABITO 1991 is a good introduction to Tamura's ideas.

work opened the way for further research and helped to popularize studies into *hongaku* teachings in Japan.

Tamura identifies world-affirmation (*genjitsu kōtei* 現実肯定) as one of the main characteristics of *hongaku* thought, and praises the teachings as the “climax” of Buddhist philosophy.<sup>2</sup> He nevertheless points out a basic weakness in the *hongaku* teachings: their tendency to denigrate the importance of religious practice, a tendency often identified as one of the causes of moral corruption in the Buddhist order. As a result many of the new traditions of Kamakura Buddhism criticized *hongaku* teachings even as they were influenced by it.

After Tamura, two major trends emerged in the academic study of the *hongaku* teachings: Hakamaya Noriaki’s criticism of *hongaku* thought and the late Kuroda Toshio’s (1926–1993) theory of the Buddhist establishment as an exoteric-esoteric system (*kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制).

Hakamaya’s 1989 book *Hongaku shisō hihan* 本覚思想批判 [A critique of *hongaku* thought] caused a sensation, for it presented a radical challenge to views widely accepted by Buddhist scholars.<sup>3</sup> Hakamaya uses the term *hongaku* in a very broad sense to include any syncretistic tendency involving Buddhism and the indigenous traditions of India, China, and Japan.<sup>4</sup> Although his interpretation is too broad to be of any real use in the discussion of *hongaku* in Japanese Tendai, Hakamaya nevertheless views medieval Tendai positions as typical examples of *hongaku* thought. His criticisms focus on two concerns.

First, HAKAMAYA claims that *hongaku* thought can be employed to justify discrimination under the guise of equality (1989, pp. 134–58). Since, according to the *hongaku* teachings, everything in the world is a manifestation of enlightenment, social discrimination too can be rationalized away as an expression of truth. Second, Hakamaya criticizes *hongaku* teachings as “pseudo-Buddhism.” His position is closely related to that of his colleague, MATSUMOTO Shirō (1989), who links the concept of *tathāgatagarbha* (Buddha nature) with the non-Buddhist belief in a substantive substrate underlying the phenomenal world. *Hongaku* thought having developed from the *tathāgatagarbha* teachings, this criticism applies to the notion of innate enlightenment as well. Both Hakamaya and Matsumoto began their studies in the field

<sup>2</sup> See TAMURA 1973. It should be pointed out, however, that Shimaji Daitō had already used the expression “the ‘climax’ of Buddhist philosophical history” to describe *hongaku* thought (SHIMAJI 1931a, p. 138).

<sup>3</sup> SWANSON 1993 and HEINE 1994 introduce some of Hakamaya’s ideas to Western readers.

<sup>4</sup> This idea is clearly expressed in the preface of his book; see HAKAMAYA 1989, p. 9. See my criticisms of Hakamaya’s interpretation in SUEKI 1993, pp. 313–16.

of Tibetan Buddhism, and have applied Geluk school criticisms of *tathāgatagarbha* thought to the *hongaku* teachings.<sup>5</sup>

Hakamaya's criticisms have provided a valuable and necessary stimulus for Japanese Buddhist scholars, who tend to avoid discussions of essential issues and uncritically adhere to conventional interpretations. He has oversimplified the situation, however, as will become clear in the following consideration of *hongaku* thought and its position in the history of Buddhist philosophy.

The Marxist historian Kuroda Toshio considered *hongaku* thought from a slightly different perspective.<sup>6</sup> The academic consensus at the time Kuroda wrote saw Kamakura Buddhism as the new Buddhist mainstream of the Kamakura period, arising from the common people's efforts to overthrow the previous political structure.<sup>7</sup> Kuroda, however, asserted that during the Kamakura period the new Buddhist schools remained marginal, and that establishment Buddhism maintained its mainstream position by developing into what Kuroda calls *kenmitsu* Buddhism (because it combined the exoteric Kengyō and esoteric Mikkyō teachings). *Hongaku* thought was the ideology of this establishment and reflected the views of the ruling classes. Thus Kuroda portrayed *hongaku* thought in a negative manner, though he recognized its historical significance.

The concerns raised by Hakamaya and Kuroda are valid, and have made it difficult to share Tamura's view of *hongaku* thought as the climax of Buddhist philosophy. This negative evaluation, however, should not deter us from investigating the *hongaku* tradition—indeed, the position of *hongaku* thought as the ideology of the establishment and its profound influence upon Japanese culture make it, if anything, even more important as an object of study.

We must thus enter a new stage of *hongaku* research. The first step in this must be textual studies. The material already published represents but a small fraction of the extant manuscripts, and much of it has not been critically edited. In addition, many of the manuscripts are written in *sōsho* 草書, a cursive style of calligraphy that is difficult for the uninitiated to decipher, so that cooperation with specialists who can read such manuscripts is vital. Second, the contents of the

<sup>5</sup> Both Hakamaya and Matsumoto have been influenced by Yamaguchi Zuihō, a Japanese scholar on Tibetan Buddhism. For Yamaguchi's own criticism of Japanese Buddhism from the standpoint of Tibetan Buddhism, see YAMAGUCHI 1988, p. 180.

<sup>6</sup> Kuroda's ideas are presented in KURODA 1975. His analysis has had a great impact on younger historians. TAIRA 1992 is one work produced under Kuroda's influence. See also SUEKI 1994. MATSUO 1988 is a work that takes a critical approach to Kuroda's theory.

<sup>7</sup> This idea is well represented by INOUE 1956.

texts must be analyzed and situated within the context of Buddhist thought. Although Tamura's works serve as a starting point, the critiques of Hakamaya and Kuroda have made it clear that more detailed studies are necessary. Cooperation with foreign scholars may provide new perspectives.

The present paper addresses the second need by analyzing the contents of a basic *hongaku* text known as the *Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki* 三十四箇事書 [The thirty-four item report]. This text (hereafter abbreviated as *Kotogaki*) is also referred to as the *Makura no sōshi* 枕雙紙 [The pillow notebook], and is attributed to the famous Tendai scholar Genshin 源信 (942–1017). Recent textual studies have proven that it was not written by Genshin but have yet to demonstrate convincingly either who wrote it or when it was composed. It most probably dates from the late Heian or early Kamakura period (late twelfth or early thirteenth century).<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned above, one of the main characteristics of *hongaku* thought is its absolute affirmation of the phenomenal world. This position is, however, quite similar to the basic Mahāyāna doctrine that “defilements themselves are identical to enlightenment” (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提) or “saṃsāra is identical to nirvāṇa” (*shōji soku nehan* 生死即涅槃). What is the difference between the position of ordinary Mahāyāna Buddhists and that of the advocates of *hongaku* thought with regard to this issue? This question will be analyzed in the first section below.

Another issue concerns whether or not advocates of innate enlightenment thought actually advocated the abandonment of practice. We will demonstrate that *hongaku* thought does indeed include an element of praxis, and clarify how this aspect related to the world-affirmation of the *hongaku* advocates.

### *The Problem of Self-Consistency*

As noted above, statements such as “defilements themselves are identical to enlightenment” and “saṃsāra is identical to nirvāṇa” are common in Mahāyāna Buddhism. But what do they actually mean? If the defilements are enlightenment, is practice necessary in order to attain enlightenment? If saṃsāra is nirvāṇa, is practice necessary in order to realize nirvāṇa?

In Mahāyāna Buddhism the answer in both cases is that practice is necessary. The phrase *bonnō soku bodai* does not mean that the

<sup>8</sup> See SUEKI 1993, pp. 292–94. HANANO 1994 is critical of my idea, and I hope to address his points on another occasion.

defilements are, just as they are, enlightenment. Their identity is not at the phenomenal level but at the level of essence.<sup>9</sup> A clearer re-statement of the phrase would be, “The defilements are *in essence* identical to enlightenment.” When one realizes enlightenment, the identification of the defilements and enlightenment becomes a fact; from the perspective of a Buddha, all differences disappear and everything becomes equal. Such enlightenment can only be realized through practice. This argument can be summarized in the following way:

Ordinary person:

essential level: defilements = enlightenment

phenomenal level: defilements ≠ enlightenment

Buddha:

essential level: defilements = enlightenment

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phenomenal level: defilements = enlightenment

The statement *shōji soku nehan* can be explained in a similar fashion.

The *hongaku* tradition reversed this situation, insisting that the identity exists not only on the level of essence but also on that of phenomena. Defilements are themselves enlightenment, a fact that does not depend on whether a person has or has not practiced and attained enlightenment. This argument leads to the *hongaku* tradition’s position of no-practice.

A more sophisticated argument for no-practice is found in the *Kotogaki*. It is based on what I call the “principle of self-consistency” (*jiko-dōitsusei* 自己同一性; SUEKI 1993, p. 328). The nature of a being does not change—an ordinary person is an ordinary person, a denizen of hell is a denizen of hell. To express it as a formula: “A is A and nothing other than A.” This, according to the *Kotogaki*, is what is signified by enlightenment, Buddhahood, and so forth.

Consider, for example, the section entitled “The Realization of Buddhahood by Trees and Grasses” (*Sōmoku jōbutsu no koto* 草木成仏之事; TADA et al. 1973, pp. 166–67). The realization of Buddhahood by grasses and trees was a popular Tendai doctrine first discussed in Japan during the early Heian period (SUEKI 1995). The *Kotogaki* says, “Our school maintains that grasses and trees realize Buddhahood because of the nonduality of the subject and its environment (*eshō funi* 依正不二).” However, after presenting the standard view of the

<sup>9</sup> Tamura described the general Mahāyāna Buddhist interpretation as “intrinsic identity” (*naizaiteki sōsoku* 内在の相即) in contrast to “identity as manifestation” (*kengenteki sōsoku* 顯現の相即) in Tendai *hongaku* teaching (TAMURA 1973, p. 482).

Japanese Tendai school, the *Kotogaki* criticizes it as commonplace and argues, “Our opinion is that grasses and trees do not realize Buddhahood; this is a profound idea.”

Grasses and trees are the environment (*ehō* 依報), and sentient beings are the subjects (*shōbō* 正報). The environment remains the environment as it manifests the merits of the ten realms. Subjects remain subjects even as they manifest the merits of subjects (of the ten realms). If grasses and trees attain Buddhahood, the environment of the whole world would decrease, but in fact there is no decrease in the environment. Thus the opinion that grasses and trees realize Buddhahood is superficial, even though it appears to be an excellent teaching.

(TADA et al. 1973, p. 167)

Grasses and trees are nothing but grasses and trees; they do not *change* into Buddhas or anything else. They can manifest all the merits that they have just as grasses and trees. The situation is similar to that of subjects, that is, the beings of the ten realms. The discussion in the *Kotogaki* continues as follows:

The situation is similar in the case of realization of Buddhahood by the hell-dwellers, hungry ghosts, and so forth all the way up to the bodhisattvas.... The ten realms of this world are eternal without any change at all; grasses are eternal, sentient beings are eternal, and the five elements are eternal. Think about this carefully.

(TADA et al. 1973, p. 167)

Not only grasses, but sentient beings too do not change into Buddhas. They are self-consistent and eternal just as they are.

Similar ideas appear in many parts of the *Kotogaki*. In the section entitled “Saṃsāra is Nirvāṇa,” the common view that nirvāṇa is fixed and immutable is denied. According to the text, “Transient things are eternal and do not cease while they are transient. Distinct beings are eternal and do not cease while they are distinct” (TADA et al. 1973, p.157). According to the usual view of Buddhism, transience and distinctness cease in the eternal state of enlightenment. The *Kotogaki*, however, states that the state of transience and difference is itself eternal and without change. Even the cycle of birth and death—saṃsāra—is eternal just as it is.

In this way, what Tamura called “the absolute affirmation of the world” is discussed in the *Kotogaki* on the basis of the principle of self-consistency. As a result, change in the nature of things is denied. Such a position is so different from standard Buddhist teachings that it is

quite understandable why Hakamaya would criticize it as “pseudo-Buddhism.”

This doctrine is certainly quite radical, but can similar ideas be found in other Buddhist texts? What occurs to us immediately is the emphasis on the everyday world found in Ch’an and Zen Buddhism. For example, the author of the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* criticizes the “gradual” practice of Shen-hsiu 神秀 and praises the famous verse of Hui-neng 慧能:

The mind is the Bodhi-tree,  
The body is the mirror-stand.  
The mirror is originally clean and pure,  
Where can it be obscured by dust?

(YAMPOLSKY 1967, p. 132)

Although this verse is said to present the standpoint of “sudden” enlightenment, it actually seems to present a standpoint of no-practice and no-enlightenment similar to that found in *hongaku* thought. However, the verse expresses no principle corresponding to the self-consistency discussed above. Moreover, this verse is paired with another verse:

*Bodhi* originally has no tree,  
The mirror also has no stand.  
Buddha-nature is always clean and pure,  
Where is there any room for dust?

(YAMPOLSKY 1967, p. 132)

This verse concerns the same truth as the first. But, whereas the first verse expresses the aspects of affirmation and difference, the second emphasizes the aspects of negation and equality. It is in terms of both these aspects that sudden enlightenment is explained in Ch’an/Zen Buddhism. In *hongaku* thought, negation and equality are lost and only affirmation and difference are affirmed (Tamura’s “absolute affirmation of this world” and my “principle of self-consistency”).

Are there ideas similar to self-consistency in non-Buddhist literature? In my opinion, some of the ideas of Kuo-hsiang 郭象 (c. 252–312)—a philosopher of the Chin Dynasty who presented his unique philosophy in a commentary on the *Chuang-tzu*—are similar to those in the *Kotogaki*. Kuo-hsiang argued that each being has its own inborn nature that cannot be changed. No one knows why his nature is the way it is; each must live in accordance with it.

To make his case, he interpreted certain passages in the *Chuang-tzu* in ways that differed from their original meaning. An example is the parable of the swallow and the P’eng bird (an extremely large leg-

endary bird) in the first chapter of the *Chuang-tzu*, “Free and Easy Wandering.” The P’eng bird could fly from the northern sea to the southern sea, but small birds and insects only laughed in disbelief when they heard of its feats since they themselves could only fly several hundred miles at most. This suggests that small-minded people cannot understand the great person who transcends the everyday world and enjoys vast freedom. According to Kuo-hsiang:

Great birds and small birds have their own natures and live following their own natures. Whether great or small, they are equal in that they live following their own natures. In the case of human beings, the situation is exactly the same. Some are great in nature and some are small in nature. However, they are equal in that they enjoy their lives following their own natures.

(KUO 1973, p. 7 [Not a literal translation])

Kuo-hsiang’s philosophy resembled in some respects the ideology of the contemporary aristocracy, which believed that one’s social position was determined when one was born and could not be changed even through strenuous effort. Kuo-hsiang’s philosophy thus supported the establishment of his time.

If the philosophy of the *Kotogaki* is compared with that of Kuo-hsiang, a number of similarities become evident. Both insist that one’s nature is self-consistent and immutable. Kuo-hsiang distorts the ideas of the *Chuang-tzu* in a way similar to that in which the *Kotogaki* twists Mahāyāna ideas; Kuo-hsiang expresses the ideology of the Six-Dynasties aristocracy, while (at least according to Kuroda) *hongaku* thought reflects the thought of the medieval establishment.

Needless to say, differences exist between the two philosophies. For example, much of Kuo-hsiang’s thought focuses on social and political theory, while *hongaku* thought is religious. Kuo-hsiang uses philosophical terms such as nature (*hsing* 性) and lot (*fēn* 分), while the *Kotogaki* uses Buddhist terms. Such contrasts might help clarify the true character of *hongaku* thought, although it is beyond the scope of the present paper to develop them any further.

#### *Problems of Practice*

As argued above, the principles of self-consistency and absolute world-affirmation suggest that neither practice nor enlightenment is necessary. In the section “The Attainment of Wondrous Enlightenment” (*Myōgaku jōdō no koto* 妙覺成道之事), the *Kotogaki* states that “wondrous



enlightenment is realized in the single instant of mind of the degree of identity in principle” (*ri soku ichinen no kokoro* 理即一念之心; TADA et al. 1973, p. 158). “Identity in principle” is the first stage of the “six degrees of identity” of the perfect teaching in Tendai thought:

- 1 Identity in principle (*ri soku* 理即): the stage in which one does not yet know of the Buddhist teachings;
- 2 Verbal identity (*myōji soku* 名字即): the stage in which one hears and understands Buddhist teachings;
- 3 Identity of meditation and practice (*kangyō soku* 觀行即): the stage in which one practices meditation and other religious acts to attain enlightenment;
- 4 Identity of similarity (*sōji soku* 相似即): the stage in which one attains a state similar to true enlightenment;
- 5 Identity of partial enlightenment (*bunshō soku* 分証即 or *bunshin soku* 分真即): the stage at which one attains partial enlightenment;
- 6 Ultimate identity (*kukyō soku* 究竟即): the stage at which one realizes ultimate enlightenment.

The passage quoted from the *Kotogaki* thus indicates that a person can realize ultimate enlightenment at the stage of identity in principle, a stage at which a person would know nothing of Buddhism, let alone practice it. Every moment of consciousness of an ordinary person would thus constitute the realization of ultimate enlightenment. This conclusion is the inevitable result of the principles of self-consistency and absolute world-affirmation.

A new problem thus emerges: If we follow this train of thought, then Buddhism is no longer necessary for realizing enlightenment and the importance of Buddhism is in effect negated. In my opinion, one of the reasons why mainstream Japanese thought shifted so smoothly from an emphasis on Buddhism to a stress on Shinto and Confucianism in the Muromachi and Tokugawa periods was because Buddhism negated its own importance.

The *Kotogaki* is not consistent on this point, however. In the section “The Attainment of Wondrous Enlightenment,” which presents the concept of returning to and becoming one with innate enlightenment (*gendō hongaku* 還同本覺), it is stated that the return to innate enlightenment occurs partially at the stage of verbal identity. From this perspective, enlightenment at the stage of identity of principle is not actual enlightenment but only enlightenment in principle. Actual enlightenment is nothing other than returning to innate enlightenment, and it begins when one hears and understands the teaching of Buddhism.

In addition, the section “The Attainment of Enlightenment with Four Phrases” (*Shiku jōdō no koto* 四句成道之事) criticizes the idea of attaining wondrous enlightenment at the stage of identity in principle as a teaching that is reasonable but not profound. A deeper interpretation, the author claims, is one in which enlightenment is realized through the following four phrases (TADA et al. 1973, pp. 154–55):

	Origins ( <i>hon</i> 本)	Traces ( <i>shaku</i> 迹)
1.	high	low
2.	low	high
3.	high	high
4.	low	low

Similarly, the section “The Realization of Buddhahood in a Single Instant” (*Ichinen jōbutsu no koto* 一念成佛之事) states that a person can attain Buddhahood when he meets a teacher at the stage of verbal identity, hears the sudden and ultimate teaching, and in an instant understands that he is a Buddha (TADA et al. 1973, pp. 179–81).

Thus from the perspective of religious practice it is usually at the stage of verbal identity that the *Kotogaki* affirms the realization of enlightenment. In contrast, orthodox T’ien-t’ai teachings hold that enlightenment occurs at the stage of partial enlightenment, as the name of the stage implies. This is the fifth of the six stages and is not easy for the ordinary person to attain. The degree of verbal identity is the lowest stage that one can, as a Buddhist, be considered “enlightened.”

According to the *Kotogaki*, enlightenment is realized in a single instant of thought (*ichinen* 一念), at the instant when the truth is first heard and understood. It is realized, in other words, at the moment one enters the stage of verbal identity. This is similar to sudden enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. However, while sudden enlightenment in Zen occurs after a long period of practice, the *hongaku* position has it taking place the instant one enters Buddhism.

Is “gradual” practice necessary to attain the ultimate stage of enlightenment once the practitioner has realized the initial stage? Although certain passages in the *Kotogaki* seem to allow for the gradual realization of enlightenment, the section entitled “The Attainment of Buddhahood in a Single Instant” clearly rejects it: “One need not advance from one stage to another. When one encounters the teaching, one realizes enlightenment” (TADA et al. 1973, p. 180). Is practice thus meaningless? According to the text, “All practice and good deeds are expedient means after the realization of enlightenment” (p. 180).

This interpretation is similar to the Jōdo Shinshū teaching of the nenbutsu said in gratitude to Amida Buddha after rebirth in the Pure Land has been determined.

Thus the attainment of Buddhahood is considered to be quite easy for ordinary people. This is, nevertheless, much different from the position that practice is unnecessary, as found in other parts of the *Kotogaki*. Although the stage of verbal identity may seem quite close to the stage of identity in principle, there is in fact a discontinuity between the two levels. In order to be in agreement with Buddhist and religious concepts, the realization of Buddhahood cannot occur at any level earlier than the stage of verbal identity. There is a tension, in other words, between the naturalism of no-practice and the requirement that a practitioner at least hear and understand the teaching. This contradiction in the *Kotogaki* is one of the major issues in *hongaku* thought.

The following figure shows the relation between the *hongaku* notions of naturalism and enlightenment-in-a-single-instant and the Ch'an notions of sudden and gradual enlightenment:

Ch'an: gradual enlightenment: sudden enlightenment

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*Hongaku*: enlightenment in a single instant: naturalism

Another term that must be discussed in connection with the *hongaku* concept of *ichinen jōbutsu* (realization of Buddhahood in a single instant) is the Pure Land term *ichinen nenbutsu*. The term *ichinen* 一念 has at least three meanings relating to these terms: 1) an instant, or the shortest period of time (Skt. *eka-kṣaṇa*); 2) a single instant of mental activity (Skt. *cittopāda*), or the slightest activity of the mind; and 3) a single recitation of the nenbutsu (SUEKI 1978). The *hongaku* teachings employ the second meaning, while Pure Land Buddhism uses both the second and the third. Hōnen and several of his disciples maintained that even a single recitation would enable one to be reborn in the Pure Land (*ichinen-gi* 一念義). Because this teaching seemed so radical, it was used by establishment Buddhism as a reason for persecuting the Pure Land followers, leading Hōnen to expel Gyōkū 行空, the most adamant exponent of this interpretation. However, Kōsai 幸西, another advocate of *ichinen-gi*, remained one of Hōnen's chief disciples. Shinran too was strongly influenced by the teaching.

Hōnen stressed the third meaning of *ichinen* (a single recitation of the nenbutsu), while Kōsai employed it in the second sense (a single

instant of mental activity). Shinran suggested two meanings: an instant of practice (*gyō* 行 *no ichinen*) and an instant of faith (*shin* 信 *no ichinen*). An instant of practice refers to a single recitation of the nenbutsu, the practice selected by Amida as easiest for ordinary people. An instant of faith refers to the shortest length of time in which faith can arise. According to Shinran, as soon as faith arises in a person, his rebirth in the Pure Land is assured, even if he has never recited the nenbutsu at all (this concept of *ichinen* is included in the second meaning of *ichinen*, because faith is a mental activity).

An instant of faith would seem to be the easiest way to realize salvation, since not even a single recitation of the nenbutsu is required. However, this is not necessarily the case since the point when one has attained the instant of faith is not easily determined. Even Shinran required a long period of time before he was confident of his faith in Amida. In fact, the *ichinen* of faith resembles Ch'an sudden enlightenment because of the long period often required before a person realizes his or her goal.

#### Summary

In this paper I have tried to clarify the characteristics of *hongaku* thought. Two contradictory aspects were identified in the analysis of the *Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki*. The first is the absolute affirmation of this world based on the principle of self-consistency. The second is the realization of enlightenment at the stage of verbal identity. Although this is identified as the easiest way to realize enlightenment, it is not the same as the no-practice position that arises from absolute world-affirmation. In my opinion, this contradiction saved *hongaku* teachings from becoming completely corrupted.

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