

REVIEW ARTICLE

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Politics and Scholarship in the Modern Reinvention of Japanese Buddhism

Ōtani Eiichi 大谷栄一, *Kindai Bukkyō to iu shiza: Sensō, Ajia, Shakaishugi* 近代仏教といふ視座—戦争・アジア・社会主義 (The perspective called “Modern Buddhism”: War, Asia, socialism). Tokyo: Perikansha, 2012.

Orion Klautau オリオン・クラウタウ, *Kindai Nihon shisō to shite no Bukkyō shigaku* 近代日本思想としての仏教史学 (The study of Buddhist history as modern Japanese thought). Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2012.

THESE TWO provocative recent monographs today stand at the forefront of the study of modern Buddhism in Japan—roughly, the period from 1868 through 1945, though Klautau’s study extends into the postwar years. Their value resides not only in their meticulous use of copious sources from this period, but also in the methodological self-awareness and willingness to critically scrutinize previous scholarship. This review article takes up each in turn, offering a substantial summary of the contents of each before offering concluding remarks.

Ōtani Eiichi’s study of modern Buddhism in Japan is framed by a strong interest in issues of disciplinary lineage. At its beginning and ending, the study directly addresses the past of its own discipline—in the preface, the “big three” (in Hayashi Makoto’s words) pioneers—Yoshida Kyūichi (1915–2005), Kashiwahara Yūsen (1916–2002), and Ikeda Eishun (1925–2004); and in its conclusion, a number of living researchers who have advanced the field, particularly since the passing of the generation of the “big three.” While the prose modestly avoids overemphasizing its author’s own standing, Ōtani has himself inherited

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the banner bequeathed by this earlier generation. This book shows how various Japanese Buddhist individuals and groups, with various political commitments, fashioned and inherited “modern” identities, and how they coped with the inescapable problems of war abroad and social oppression at home.

Broken into an introduction, three major divisions, and a conclusion, Ōtani’s book focuses principally on events from the late 1880s to the mid 1930s. Its three major divisions (1) “open up the question of modern Buddhism” in general before treating (2) “the nation-state and modern Buddhism” with its presumed antithesis, (3) “modern Buddhism crossing [national] borders.” The main structure of the book is as follows:

Preface: What to Question in the Study of Modern Buddhism?

I. Opening the Question of Modern Buddhism

A. A Narrative Called “Becoming Modern Buddhism”: A New Perspective on The History of Research into Japanese Modern Buddhism

B. The Formation and Development of “New Buddhism” in the Meiji Years: The Youth Culture of Buddhist Young Men

C. The Dynamic State Surrounding “New Buddhism” in the Early Shōwa Years: Communication and Conflict among Traditional Buddhism, Buddhism Revitalized, and the Anti-Religious Movement

II. The Nation-State and Modern Buddhism

A. Buddhists Active in Politics: Concerning the Public Role of Buddhism

B. Nationalism and the Co-Composition of Buddhism: The Social Suation Activities of the Pillar-of-the-Nation Society in the 1920s

C. Is War Evil? Buddhist Opponents of War in the Early Twentieth Century

III. Modern Buddhism Crossing Borders

A. The Fate of Buddhist Asianism: The Missionary Work of a Cleric of The Nichiren-shū, Takanabe Nittō, in Inner Mongolia

B. Ultra-Nationalism and Buddhism, Combined: The Blood Pledge Corps as Religious Sect

C. Buddhist Social Movements Against War and Against Fascism: Senoō Girō and the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism

Postscript/List of First Appearances of Chapters/Index

The first chapter of Part I offers a methodological overview for the book, starting by identifying some dispositions lurking in much postwar research about modern Japanese Buddhism: modernist tendencies to valorize rationality, reform, participation in civil society, and an emphasis on inner faith; a common lack of reflection concerning the constructedness of the categories of “Buddhism” and “religion”; and a hierarchy of forms ranking doctrinally endorsed belief (what Ōtani calls “modern Buddhism in the narrow sense”) over ancestor veneration,

which in turn outranks prayer for benefits in this world (which Ōtani calls “modern Buddhism in the broad sense”). Previous histories have tended to equate the “narrow sense” definition with the proper object of the study of modern Buddhism as a whole. In his own scheme for future research, Ōtani proposes (1) an expansion of the field of research and of research methodologies, and (2) a comparative study of various kinds of modernizations and Buddhism across Asia.

The second chapter considers the Association of Buddhist Puritans (Bukkyō Seito Dōshikai), founded in 1899—and in 1903, rebranded as the Association of New Buddhists (Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai)—by examining its journal, *New Buddhism* (*Shin Bukkyō*, published from 1899 to 1915). The association emphasized faith, social reform, and a spirit of free inquiry, while accusing establishment Buddhism of breeding superstition, empty ritualism, and political entanglement. Inheriting ideas about free inquiry and critical practice ultimately from American Unitarianism via its Japanese students, the association was accused of big talk and little concrete action. Yet the author identifies the major contribution of the group precisely in its discursive work—in particular, its work of publishing for the urban bourgeoisie and provincial intellectuals, in exchange for their financial support. Ōtani reads the discontinuation of *New Buddhism* in 1915 not as testament to its failure, but rather as evidence that its claims had acquired such broad social support that they were, in effect, no longer so “new.”

The third chapter of Part I focuses upon the inheritance of the association’s goals by the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism (Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei), a group that survived for less than seven years (1931–1936) in an increasingly volatile decade. Founded by the lay Buddhist socialist and Nichiren sympathizer Senō Girō (1889–1961), this movement differed from its Meiji predecessor: no longer a movement principally for the reform of Buddhism, it instead attempted to use Buddhism to reform society. It borrowed its style of activism and even the formatting of its newsletter not from existing religious groups, but from the leftist movements of its day. Its three-point founding charter advocated (1) a return to the Buddha Śākyamuni, here defined as the “highest character” (*saiikō jinkaku*) of humanity, along with the realization of a Buddha-land in this world; (2) the denunciation (*haigeki*) of all the established Buddhist groups as the “skeletal remains” (*zangaiteki sonzai*) of true religion, which had “blasphemed the spirit of Buddhism”; and (3) a call for the reform of the present capitalist economic structure, which they castigated as “opposing the spirit of Buddhism.”

As might be inferred from these fighting words, the league passed its short existence embroiled in a state of perpetual conflict. To establishment Buddhist groups, the league was “red” Buddhism, while to the anti-religious socialists, it was “reactionary” (262). But the present study also implies that the bitterest rivals to the league were, in fact, other new Buddhist organizations. Also founded in 1931, the All-Japan Buddhist Youth Alliance (*Zen Nihon Bukkyō Seinen Ren-*

mei) represented an attempt to find common ground among these dozens of groups. At successive general meetings, Seno'ō and his colleagues unsuccessfully pressed the alliance to incorporate the unification of Buddhist movements and social reform into its official principles, and finally withdrew in protest. The league also denounced a far larger rival, the pan-sectarian lay Movement for Truth (Shinri Undō), launched in 1934 by Tomomatsu Entai (1895–1973). Excoriating Tomomatsu as a hypocrite and a reactionary, Seno'ō railed against the Movement, writing in the League's newsletter in 1935 that “no matter what new disguise you cook up, it is nothing but warmed-over, idealistic, Establishment Buddhism” (quoted on page 87). The skillful use of such evidence nicely reveals the wide range of opposition to Seno'ō and his comrades.

Part II takes up modern Buddhism and the nation-state. Its first chapter on modern Buddhism and political participation introduces several modes in which Buddhist groups engaged with the public sphere as it took shape along with the modern nation-state. Until the mid-Meiji period, established Buddhist groups lobbied to recover a public role by securing official government recognition (*kōnin*). From the late Meiji period through the Taishō years (1912–1925), the call for the union of Buddhism with the state passed to the Pillar-of-the-Nation Society (Kokuchūkai), which was founded by a Nichiren cleric who had laicized, Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939). Seeing the national essence (*kokutai*) as one core of his Nichirenist movement, Chigaku even launched a political party (a manner of predecessor to Sōka Gakkai's Kōmeitō), and in 1924, he made an unsuccessful bid for election in the Diet. (Ordained clerics were forbidden to participate in Japanese politics—either to vote or to stand for elected office—until the reforms of 1925.) Before a brief consideration of Buddhist cooperation during the period of total war, the chapter foregrounds the public engagement of the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism: its commitments to “a communal society that practices mutual aid” (Kropotkin) and “a communal society of the equality of character, with no exploitation and no domination,” as well as its support for the labor movement of the 1930s. Ōtani evaluates these efforts, maintained despite increasingly hostile circumstances, as, “in a word, one apex (*hitotsu no kyokuten*) of modern Buddhism” (112).

The societal outreach activities of the Pillar-of-the-Nation Society in the second half of the 1920s occupy the spotlight of the second chapter of Part II. Employing categories articulated by Benedict Anderson, Ōtani asks, “What happens when a religious movement aiming to build a universal ‘sacred community’ acts within the modern, national community?” (119). To answer this question, he traces the religious contribution to the public sphere in the society's campaigns to secure the designation of the birthday of the Meiji emperor (3 November) as a public holiday. Riding a wave of popular nostalgia for the Meiji emperor's reign and the idealization of his figure, the society exerted massive efforts to build its own lobbying organization throughout the empire; it ultimately attracted some thirty thousand

members in seventy branches (136). Its lobbying succeeded, and in 1927, the Anniversary of the Birth of the Emperor Meiji (Meiji *setsu*) was first celebrated. The number of people mobilized by the society's lobbying for this event in fact dwarfed the size of the Pillar-of-the-Nation Society proper, in terms of sheer membership, but that lobbying success did not translate into substantial growth for Tanaka Chigaku's movement itself (140). Although Ōtani does not make this point explicitly, it seems that the society may have succeeded in building a social movement but was still, in the end, merely a vector for one version of nationalism.

The third and final chapter of Part II examines early twentieth-century antiwar activism by Buddhists through the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Laudably, this chapter carefully contextualizes that activism by first discussing the antiwar stances adopted by Japanese Protestants (particularly Uchimura Kanzō, 1861–1930) and the early socialists associated with the Society of Commoners (Heiminsha). Ōtani also devotes attention to the overwhelming expressions of active support for the war by Japanese Buddhist organizations, and the generally cool reception to Leo Tolstoy's (1828–1910) antiwar stance in Japan. Efforts at expressing opposition in a Buddhist mode all faltered: prominent writers for *New Buddhism* demonstrated a passive acceptance of the war; the antiwar socialist True Pure Land cleric Takagi Kenmyō (1868–1914) suffered arrest and excommunication before finally killing himself in prison; and the Zen cleric Inoue Shūten (1880–1945), who did object to the war in the pages of *New Buddhism*, was harassed by the police and ultimately left the clergy. Ōtani concludes that the challenge faced by Buddhist opponents of war lay in the “difficulty of proposing a new social order to replace the present state order” (168). But we might recall that even other religious groups in modern Japan, which did offer clear alternatives to the existing order, also suffered from state suppression.

Part III returns to the topic of Nichirenism to show that not all figures inspired by Chigaku circumscribed their activities within his group. The first two chapters of this part take up two modes of Nichirenism that did not emerge from what Ōtani, following the British historian Norman Cohn (1915–2007) via Hashikawa Bunsō (1922–1983), calls its “church” form, which is to say, the publically circulating form of Nichirenism. Rather, as the first chapter of Part III shows, participation in Nichirenism could impel individuals to cooperate with elements in the wartime Japanese government as it sought to control ever-larger swaths of territory in Asia. This chapter tells the story of Takanabe Nittō (1897–1953), an ordained cleric in the Nichiren tradition who hoped to unify the world under the banner of both the *Lotus Sutra* and the Japanese emperor. Takanabe spent some years in Mongolia in the late 1920s, and returned there as a missionary-cum-political operative. He hoped to model himself upon one of Nichiren's original disciples, Nichiji (1250–?), who posthumously acquired a reputation for indefatigably spreading Nichiren's teachings even as far as the Asian

continent, where he died. Dispatched to Mongolia to further relations with Buddhist clergy and political elites, Takanabe became an agent of Japanese governmental efforts to secure allegiance from its ruling parties. In addition to forging high-level political contacts, Takanabe also founded a temple—the “Temple for the Establishment of the Nation” (Kenkokuji). He also helped to arrange for the dispatch of some of the two hundred or so young Mongolian lamas who studied in Japanese Buddhist institutions into the 1940s. This chapter supplements the existing research on Japanese religions in occupied Manchuria (see KIBA and CHENG 2007).

The second chapter of Part III relates the tale of what Ōtani deems a full-blown Nichirenist “sect,” the so-called “Blood Pledge Corps” (Ketsumeidan), and their abortive coup of 1932. Its leader, Inoue Nisshō (1886–1967), also drew inspiration from Nichirenism. He attracted a group of disaffected young men in the area of Mito, ultimately setting them on a course to topple the existing political and economic power structure in order to return government directly to the hands of the emperor. Nisshō promoted a theory by which an individual life ultimately equated to the life force of the universe, which in turn equated with the national essence and the emperor himself. At a meeting of his group in 1930, Nisshō was reading a key passage from Nichiren’s *The Opening of the Eyes* (*Kaimoku-shō*)—“I will be the Pillar of Japan. I will be the Eyes of Japan. I will be the Great Ship of Japan. This is my vow, and I will never forsake it!”—when an earthquake shook the room. His students interpreted this as an omen demonstrating that they were, in fact, the “bodhisattvas welling up out of the earth” (*jiyū no bosatsu*) who testify to the claims of the Buddha in the *Lotus Sutra*. Ōtani reads this incident as critical to the formation of the self-identity of the corps, whose members thus found divine sanction for their abortive coup. On this reading, the Corps found in Nichiren-*shugi* “values that transcended the existing state” (242).

Chapter three of Part III returns to a group at the opposite end of the political spectrum: the antiwar and anti-Fascist activism of Senōō and some members of the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism, in cooperation with a coalition of “popular front” groups. Although the study does not dwell on the contrast, Senōō differed starkly from some of the other Buddhist antiwar or peace activists of a previous generation. Like the martyred Kenmyō, who fused absolute faith in the Buddha Amitābha with a call against war, or Inoue Shūten, who ultimately abandoned the Sōtō sect to embrace absolute pacifism (162–65), Senōō, too, faced persecution with his arrest in late 1936, and subsequent ideological conversion (*tenkō*). However, he parted ways with them in his willingness to turn to violence. As this chapter informs us, Senōō wrote the entry for “Buddhism and the Peace Movement” in the monumental collection *Buddhist Scriptures for the Citizenry* (*Kokumin Bukkyō seiten*, Shūbunkaku Shobō, 1934; 109). Though not quoted here, Senōō’s entry articulates a striking call for struggle: “Basically, struggle and war

are not things that can be so easily eradicated. Nor are they things that should be seen as absolute evils. No, in life there are sometimes cases necessitating solution by the sword, but those are actually expedients to be confined to unavoidable cases for [eliminating] obstructions to peace” (SENO’O 1934). Further exploration of the contrast between Seno’o and his successors develop the research of this chapter.

In sum, this welcome collection of essays treats some of the core issues at the interface of modern Japanese Buddhist history and state/society with a great deal of care and methodological self-awareness. Rather than treat “progressive” and “reactionary” groups separately, this collection shows how they were frequently connected, and how groups at all points along the political spectrum were involved in responding to basically the same new pressures. Future scholarship narrating modern Japanese history outside a reductive, binary frame of villains and heroes will build upon such work as this.

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Orion Klautau’s *The Study of Buddhist History as Modern Japanese Thought* exhibits a sustained concern with historiography, counting among its influences the intellectual historian Hayden White (37–38). In a mode clearly influenced by White, this study weaves a meta-narrative of how Japanese Buddhist intellectuals have recounted their own history from the nineteenth century onward. It tells that story using two plots, which crisscross and inform one another despite their basic independence. As the introduction to the book states, “This book is an attempt to describe what structures were created, and what ‘grand narratives’ were born, in the depiction of the ‘facts of the past’ concerning the Buddhism of [the Japanese] archipelago, as motivated by the two discourses of the ‘nation-state’ and ‘clerical reformation’” (14). More precisely, this study shows how these processes resulted in a now-pervasive concept of the progression of Japanese Buddhism from Kamakura revolution to Edo stagnation to Meiji reformulation—a concept which, we find, results from surprisingly recent discourses guided by a few influential intellectuals. The overall plan of the book is as follows, leaving out the headings for the sub-chapters.¹

Conventions/Foreword

Introduction: Buddhism and Modernity

1. Historical Narration Concerning the Nation-State and “Buddhism”

1. Versions of these chapters have been published not only in Japanese, but also in English. Chapter 1-B has appeared as “(Re)inventing ‘Japanese Buddhism’: Sectarian reconfiguration and historical writing in Meiji Japan,” in *The Eastern Buddhist* 42: 75–99 (2011). Chapter 1-D has appeared as “Between essence and manifestation: Shōtoku Taishi and Shinran during the Fifteen-year War (1931–1945),” in the *Working Papers Series* of the Ryūkyō University Research Center for Buddhist Cultures in Asia, 12.05 (2013). Finally, Chapter 1-C has appeared as “Against the Ghosts of Recent Past: Meiji Scholarship and the Discourse on Edo Period Buddhist Decadence,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35: 263–303 (2008).

Introduction

- A. Before “Japanese Buddhism”: Hara Tanzan and the Universalization of Buddhism
- B. The Birth of “Japanese Buddhism”: An Analysis Focused Upon Murakami Senshō and His Intellectual Activities
- C. The Development of Discourses about Japanese Buddhism in the Taishō Period: An Analysis Focused Upon Takakusu Junjirō’s Theories of a Buddhist Citizenry
- D. About Japanese Buddhism During the Period of the Fifteen-Year War and its Structure: An Analysis Focused Upon Hanayama Shinshō and Ienaga Saburō

Conclusion

II. Historical Narration Concerning Clerical Reform and “Buddhism”

Introduction

- A. Clerical Self-Criticism in Traditional Discourse: With Special Reference to the Buddhist Discourses of the Buddhist Ethical League
- B. The Establishment of Modern Buddhist Histor(iography) and the “Decadence” of Early Modern Clerics
- C. Criticism of Clerics and “Empiricist Historiography”: Concerning Tsuji Zennosuke
- D. Criticism and Continuation of the Discourse of Decadence in Early Modern Buddhism: With Special Reference to the Academic World in Postwar Japan

Conclusion

General Conclusion: The Modernity of “Japanese Buddhism”

Postscript/List of Works Cited and List of First Appearances of Chapters/
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Part I of the book analyzes the rise of the category “Japanese Buddhism” (*Nihon Bukkyō*). The introduction to Part I quotes a True Pure Land cleric-scholar whose academic work has now nearly been forgotten. This man, Hanayama Shinshō (1898–1995), wrote in 1944: “At least for us Japanese, it is factually impossible to conceive of a general ‘Buddhism’ apart from ‘Japanese Buddhism’...” (quoted on page 50). As Klautau goes on to show, this notion of an irreducibly *Japanese* Buddhism was not a mere aberration of the wartime years, for it actually had developed decades before. This study argues that “Japanese Buddhism” was, in fact, initially framed in the language of universalism in the 1880s, an era which recast it into a transcendent entity under the sign of such newly imported European categories as “religion,” “science,” and “philosophy.” As the first chapter of this part of the book explains, Hara Tanzan (1819–1892)—who was, among other things, a physician, a scholar of Chinese learning, a Zen monk, a fortuneteller, and the first lecturer in Buddhist texts at Tokyo Imperial

University—re-described Buddhism in the language of individual, inner experience. Even as his contemporary, Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), played a decisive role in fixing the classification of Buddhism as a “religion” (*shūkyō*), Tanzan refused that term, which he equated with devotional Buddhism and with Christianity. He instead insisted upon identifying real Buddhism as “moral philosophy” (71).

The major shift in historical discourse about Buddhism came, argues the second chapter of Part I, with Murakami Senshō (1851–1929)—Tanzan’s successor, and the intellectual who “established historical research in ‘Japanese Buddhism’” (84). Senshō founded the first academic journal to treat Japanese Buddhist history; his initial interest in unearthing the universal core of Japanese Buddhism later gave way to an active appreciation for its sectarian divisions. From around 1905, Senshō came to stress not a universal “Buddhism” but instead a very particular “Japan.” Beginning in 1906, Senshō gave a succession of lectures and published accompanying pieces under the general title “The Characteristics of Japanese Buddhism,” in which he adduced a “development of religious faith” as the key feature of Japanese Buddhism, and located its moment of key flourishing in the Kamakura period (99). Further, he argued that, unlike its continental counterparts, Japanese Buddhism was uniquely “national” from the start of its existence (102). Still, this chapter points out, Senshō refrained from asserting, at least explicitly, that these distinctively *Japanese* features necessarily implied any kind of distinct superiority (107).

Such a contention awaited articulation by Takakusu Junjirō (1866–1945), holder of the first chair of Sanskrit Studies at Tokyo Imperial University, and leader in the creation of the monumental Taishō edition of the Chinese *Tripitaka* (1922–1934). The third chapter of Part I focuses on *The Ideals of a Buddhist Citizenry* (*Bukkyō kokumin no risō*, Heigo Shuppansha, 1916). This was the first among a cascade of writings in which “the very discourse of ‘Japanese Buddhism’ transformed into a locus for expressing nationalism” (138). Concerned in his own day about the indiscriminate appropriation of Western culture in Japan, Takakusu articulated a vision of Japanese Buddhism in which it had consistently functioned as an agent of domestication and “Japanization,” a process at whose pinnacle he placed Shinran. (Like Murakami Senshō, Takakusu also had an individual background in True Pure Land Buddhism.) For Takakusu, Shinran’s Buddhism marked the full assimilation into Buddhism of Japan’s indigenous “familism” (*kazokushugi*), which Takakusu imagined as a bulwark against Western materialism and individualism, even as he espoused a clear sense of Japanese Buddhist-cum-national chosenness. “We must,” the conclusion of the chapter quotes *The Ideals of a Buddhist Citizenry*, “be conscious that we [Japanese] are the chosen people (*senmin*) of Buddhism, the human beings most suitable for it. Buddhism is not suitable for other countries...” (quoted on page 139). The coverage of Takakusu here is particularly welcome, since little research has

discussed him in English, and the discussions of him available in Japanese are, as Klautau says, more or less hagiographic in nature (125).

The positioning of Japanese Buddhism at the apex of all Buddhism—deliberately counterpoised against the “originary Buddhism” then in vogue among Euro-american scholars—emerged fully into the mainstream of the Japanese academy during the Fifteen-Year War, which began with the invasion of the Republican China in 1931 (168). The final chapter of Part I shows how two very different scholars of this period both came to valorize Japanese Buddhism along these lines during the war. In 1942, the aforementioned Hanayama Shinshō, disciple of and successor to Takakusu Junjirō, contributed one of a series of officially produced commentaries to the *Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan* (*Kokutai no hongji*, Monbushō Naikaku Insatsukyoku, 1937). In it, he contended that the development of Buddhism, though stunted in China, had reached its full flowering only in Japan. Hanayama pointed to the “single vehicle Mahāyāna” thought of Prince Shōtoku as later developed by Shinran. At roughly the same time, the historian Ienaga Saburō (1913–2002), though himself an immensely influential liberal humanist and anti-fascist, proposed a very similar structure, also linking Shōtoku with Shinran, in his study of the *Development of the Logic of Negation in the History of Japanese Thought* (*Nihon shisōshi ni okeru hitei no ronri no hattatsu*, Kōbundō, 1940). After the end of the war, Hanayama’s influence was forgotten as Ienaga’s grew, insuring the historiographic dominance of the Kamakura era, regarded as the locus of the special nature of Japanese Buddhism.

Part II of the book explores the obverse of the valorization of the Kamakura period: the use of historical writing to deprecate the Buddhism of the Edo period. This study presents that process as having started as a means of motivating clerical reformation during the Meiji years. Accordingly, the introduction to Part II promises a meta-historical account of the development of the discourse of decline concerning Edo-era Buddhism. The first chapter of Part II explores the continuity of pre-Meiji conceptions of Buddhist “apologetics” (*gohōron*) in the early Meiji years. It reminds us that such clerical reformers of the Edo period as Jiun Onkō (1718–1804) turned their apologetics first not upon outsiders, but rather upon fellow Buddhist clerics who disregarded the precepts. With the eruption of the government-sanctioned persecution of Buddhism in the early Meiji years, the clerical reformer Shaku Unshō (1827–1909) and the short-lived Buddhist Ethical League responded to the government with similar rhetoric and did not object to the persecution itself. Instead, they repeatedly pledged their loyalty and utility to the new state, and they vowed to eliminate the “evil customs” practiced by Buddhist clerics—by which, they averred, they themselves had brought on the persecution. Apologetics and reform were thus articulated together, as two faces of the same coin—a conclusion that recalls Ōtani’s discussion of later Buddhist groups that sought to use nationalism as a mode of growth.

The second chapter of Part II suggests how this older discourse was reworked within the modern discipline of Buddhist studies at Tokyo Imperial University. Hara Tanzan, the first instructor in Buddhism there, criticized clerical “decadence,” but did not fault the Tokugawa regime for it. His student Inoue Enryō, however, did blame the generous treatment of clerics by that regime for producing “three hundred years of accumulated poisons” (223). But here too, it was Murakami Senshō who produced a definitive template followed by others, accusing the clerics of the Edo period of falling prey to internal disputes over power and position and of sinking into indulgence with the guarantee of their social position. Senshō’s student, the Buddhistologist Washio Junkyō (1868–1941), wrote an essay in 1911 that positioned the Edo era as the “dark ages” (*ankoku jidai*) of Japan’s Buddhist history, and the medieval period as the period of its efflorescence. Within a few years of his pronouncement, the Buddhism of the Kamakura period (typically symbolized by Shinran) had become a buzzing locus of critical activity for swarms of historians, social activists, and popular authors. Writing in the 1930s, the Tokyo Imperial University historian Tsuji Zennosuke (1877–1955) inherited these attitudes, blaming Edo clerics for the anti-Buddhist persecution, which he understood as a wake-up call urging them to become self-reliant—a call which, he insisted, had gone unanswered. As the chapter’s conclusion states, the cumulative result of these operations was that, while the “decadence of Edo Buddhist clerics” became an “objective fact,” Buddhist intellectuals could also claim that Edo-era Buddhism and its modern successor were “not its true form” (236).

Positioned at the heart of Part II, the third chapter takes on Tsuji Zennosuke, the prolific historian whose “empiricist” and “objective” scholarship about the “decadence” of Edo-era Buddhism retains its dominance in the Japanese academy. Tsuji’s claim to empiricist, objective research gained in prestige from his position: He studied under Ludwig Riess (1861–1928)—himself a student of the great Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), father of empiricist history in Prussia—and he trained and worked not in Indian or Buddhist Studies, but in the highly prestigious discipline of National History (*kokushigaku*). Tsuji accused Edo-era Buddhism not only of decadence, but also of an overemphasis on empty form and ceremony. But, as this chapter shows, Tsuji invoked examples of “empty form” that were anything but objective. For instance, he uncritically accepted a report of Nichiren priests killing villagers in the name of their salvation from that notorious opponent of Buddhism, Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843)—a report that later scholarship has found patently implausible (253–54). As another example of such empty formalism, Tsuji invoked a long-standing debate in True Pure Land doctrinal studies that persisted from the seventeenth century onward, concerning whether infants who died without understanding the meaning of the *nenbutsu* could still be saved, dismissing it as “nothing more than games with debate” (quoted on page

255). As this chapter reveals, later scholarship has interpreted this debate as a real consequence of the efforts of True Pure Land intellectuals to address the needs of their new parishioner base, many of whose children died at an early age. Thus, this particular debate might well represent not an exercise in casuistry, but a genuine mode of engagement with the demands of commoners. Nor did Tsuji inhabit a citadel of disinterest; son of a deeply learned but obstreperous True Pure Land layman, Tsuji was himself critical of the clerical practice of Buddhism in his day for, in his eyes, failing to catch up to the modern world.

Since Tsuji's work, research in Edo-era Buddhism has been driven by critical efforts to go beyond his theory of decline. As the fourth chapter of Part II attempts to show, however, such efforts have all too often resulted in endorsing the overall thrust of his case, however much they may challenge it in pieces. In his well-known study *Funerary Buddhism (Sōshiki Bukkyō)*, Dai Horin Kaku, 1963) Tamamuro Taijō (1902–1966) showed that mortuary rites remained the only way in which Buddhist clerics of the Edo period responded to the needs of the people—conceding, along with Tsuji, that other services of Buddhist establishments were no longer needed. Takeda Chōshū (1916–1980), the scholar of folklore who spearheaded the periodical series *Early Modern Buddhism: Sources and Studies (Kinsei Bukkyō: Shiryō to kenkyū)*, Kinsei Būkkū Kenkyūkai, 1960–1965), attempted to find the vitality of Edo-era Buddhism in such festivities as temple fairs, which attracted the laity without compulsion. By doing so, however, he implicitly accepted Tsuji's dismissal of day-to-day temple life. Such historians as Nakamura Hajime (1912–1999) and Kashiwahara Yūsen (1916–2002) tried to find “precursors of modernity” in the intellectual or ethical development of Edo Buddhism, but only by accepting Tsuji's dismissal of compulsory patronage of temples. Tamamuro Fumio tried to show how the object of peasant faith shifted from temples that performed funerals to temples granting benefits in this world, later substituting low-ranking clerics for the latter group of temples—but, again, by accepting Tsuji's dismissal of compulsory patronage. Some historians of regional society, hailing from the True Pure Land establishment, have looked to geographical regions in which that group flourished during the Edo period, appealing to a kind of “True Pure Land exceptionalism” that once again cedes the main ground to Tsuji by accepting the decline of other Buddhist groups. Other scholars have sought to broaden the definition of state power in the Edo period, charting the difficulty and length of the process by which authorities brought marginal religious practitioners to heel. In the end, concludes this chapter, all of these efforts have foundered because, “more than anything else, they have grasped decadence not as a ‘theory’ (*ron*)—which is to say, as a discourse made by Tsuji—but as a fact” (290). The conclusion to Part II warns against accepting Tsuji's position as “scientific” or “empirical” while neglecting its political nature (298).

The brief conclusion to this study cautions readers that some of the distinctions implied in its structure are only provisional, on both biographical and intellectual levels. In biographical terms, the figures covered in Part I were not merely exponents of academic positions, but all men deeply linked to traditional sectarian units, many to True Pure Land Buddhism. Intellectually, the concepts treated in Part II developed in a space in which state-sponsored academism and sectarian scholarship were not always clearly distinguished, and in which they in fact sought harmony, a development that helps to explain how discourses originating among Edo Buddhist intellectuals could take root and flourish in the putatively secular academy.

Spanning developments of well over a century, this study is solidly researched and copiously documented. In a manner too rarely seen these days, it engages deeply and constructively with contemporary scholarship, but also delves into difficult sources that have not yet received extensive scrutiny in either Japanese or English-language scholarship. In conjuring and sustaining its two lines of intertwined argument, it accomplishes a tour de force.

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The two volumes under review here merit attention beyond the narrow community of scholars who study religions in modern or contemporary Japan. With the exception of a handful of studies, Anglophone historians of social movements in modern Japan—whether statist or progressive—have typically shown little interest in religious issues. Ōtani's fine study reveals that Nichiren Buddhist groups and individuals were not mere marginal afterthoughts in these historical processes, but rather key figures in both kinds of social movement—whether in the massive undertakings of the Pillar-of-the-Nation Society, or in the equally spirited work of Seno'ō Girō and his smaller Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism. Further scholarship about Tanaka Chigaku, whose “complete works” in the *Shishiō zenshū* (Shishiō Zenshū Kankōkai, 1931–1938) amount to over three dozen volumes, is a special desideratum for the Anglophone world. Klautau's volume, for its part, deserves examination by all serious students of the history of Japanese Buddhism. Living legacies of the histories traced in this study include the conception of “Japanese Buddhism,” in whatever form, to the exclusion of “Buddhism in Japan”; the privileging of the Buddhist reform movements of the Kamakura era; the concomitant denigration of “establishment Buddhism” in the Edo period; and the stubborn hold of insufficiently reflective empiricist historiography. Anglophone scholars, too, have developed increasing awareness of these problematic legacies, but have had only a piecemeal understanding of their relationships to one another. Now that Klautau has gracefully exposed their mutual entanglement, scholars should find it easier to go about unpicking the web.

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