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Shaku Unshō to kairitsu no kindai 釈雲照と戒律の近代

[*Shaku Unshō and the Modernity of Buddhist Precepts*].

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Synopsis by the Author

THIS WORK sheds light on the relationship between religious modernity in Japan and Buddhist precept revival through the case of Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909), a so-called precept-upholding Shingon monk active during the Meiji period in Japan. Even today, the prevalence of clerical marriages in Japanese Buddhism remains contentious and taboo. While some scholars take Japanese monasticism’s liberal attitude toward the preceptual tradition as constant throughout its history, many others locate its watershed moment in the official decriminalization of “clerical marriage” by the Meiji government.

Previous scholarship has paid considerable attention to the emergence of radical lay-centric movements initiated by those in the Shin and Nichiren traditions, alongside pioneering scholars working to establish the academic study of Buddhism in Japan, as defining the epochal shift in understandings of Buddhism during Japan's modernization. As such, Unshō's fervent efforts to revive the precepts and thereby reconstruct monastic communities have been largely dismissed as anachronistic or incongruous with the overall movement toward laicization and the import of Western frameworks for understanding religion. Elsewhere, scholars have also described his revivalist movement as a kind of premature stage within the eventual full realization of modern Buddhism in East Asia.

This book is an effort to contextualize Unshō's nationwide revival movement in its full complexity, with a particular emphasis on his transnational connections. The book spans his establishment of a lay-centric body of teachings, his foundation of strict precept-focused monasteries central to the resurrection of idealized sangha communities, his ideological critiques of Christianity and Buddhist reformists, and his direct engagement with the increasing demand for moral suasion as part of a larger project of Japanese nation-building. In this sense, this work also aims to address several key contemporary discourses within the field of religious studies, including the relationship between Buddhism and Japanese imperialism, and the complex, interconnected genealogies of the concepts of "religion" and "Japanese Buddhism."

A key finding of this research is that a cornerstone of Unshō's efforts to articulate the ideal of the True Dharma (*shōbō* 正法) was a longstanding confrontation between a realizable, idealized past and the notion that Japan had long ago entered an age of decline, the age of the Final Dharma (*mappō* 末法). This tension, inherited from his premodern predecessors like Jiun Ōnko 慈雲飲光 (1718–1805), sat at the core of his movement to return to the untainted age of Śākyamuni through the revival of the precepts, and forms an essential continuity with premodern intellectual history. In addition, this work explores Unshō's transnational encounters with other Buddhisms, such as Theravāda and various Korean traditions, and their pivotal role in reshaping his thinking and institution building. Through these explorations into Unshō's broader context, and within Japanese history and across colonial Asian contexts, this book uncovers new contours in the narrative of Buddhism and modernity in East Asia by showing Unshō's complex response to the expansive agendas of his contemporaries.

Statement from the Awards Committee

Kameyama Mitsuhiro's *Shaku Unshō to kairitsu no kindai* is a masterful work focusing on the ideas and behavior of Shaku Unshō (1827–1909), a Shingon priest who played a prominent role as an advocate of the religious movement to revive the Buddhist precepts between the late Edo and Meiji periods. The book contributes to

elucidating Unshō's movement from a variety of perspectives, including the reformulation of the Ten Virtuous Precepts into "national morality" and his propagation efforts of moral suasion directed at the laity. Additionally, it explores the establishment, with the aim of educating monks dedicated to upholding the full set of precepts (*gusokukai* 具足戒), of the Precept School (*kairitsu gakkō* 戒律学校)—later known as Mejiro Monastery (Mejiro Sōen 目白僧園)—as well as Unshō's reconsideration of the ideal of True Dharma (*shōbō* 正法) as a means to counter the situation of the Latter Day of Dharma (*mappō* 末法). The book also delves into the confrontation between the concepts of karma and the scientific worldview, Unshō's reflections on contemporary Buddhism in other Asian countries, and the repositioning of Buddhism pertaining to the Imperial Way (*kōdō* 皇道). That is, the book captures Unshō's movements from a variety of perspectives.

Although Unshō was heir to the early modern religious movement to revive the precepts and return to Śākyamuni by preserving the full-set precepts, he also presented unique contributions by responding to expansive modern agendas. Even during his lifetime, Unshō's contemporaries offered conflicting evaluations of his enterprise, ranging from viewing him as a great monk engaged in restoring the "corrupted" monastic community to seeing him as a conservative adherent of "Old Buddhism." Postwar scholarship on modern Japanese Buddhism has also provided an equivocal assessment: scholars have, on one hand, evaluated Unshō's thought as the beginning of modern introspective awareness in the practice of the precepts, and on the other hand, pointed out that it remained a type of nationalistic and feudal Buddhism, positioning it as an incomplete form of the religion, especially in comparison to the thought of later characters such as Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) and Sakaino Kōyō 境野黄洋 (1871–1933). Or yet, Unshō would be pushed into the modern narrative of precept decline in Japanese Buddhism.

In response to these perspectives, the author does not comprehend Unshō's discourse on the precepts from such a monolithic modernist perspective, but rather, while taking into account the specific context of the cognitive framework and ideological situation of the time, relies on a wide range of recent domestic and international studies to provide a discussion that goes beyond the sociohistorical account of one single monk.

The first outstanding aspect of this book is that, by focusing on the post-Meiji development of Shingon precepts, it opens up the possibility, in contrast to Shinshū-centered narratives, of a new history of modern Japanese Buddhism. This investigation has the potential to contribute to further developments in the study of modern Japanese history of ideas and religion. Second, the book critically examines the stereotype of a "precept-less modernity," thereby paving the way for new research in the field of modern Japanese Buddhist history, an area that has hitherto not sufficiently discussed the role and position of precepts. It focuses on Unshō's attempts to transform the basic Ten Precepts (*jūzenkai* 十善戒) into national morality, a development which, signifying the detachment of these ideals from Buddhism and

therefore their universalization, took place in response to the growing demands for the moral suasion of the laity; the work also reveals the intellectual backdrop of how Unshō's ideas about the Buddhist precepts took shape through his encounters with Theravāda and Korean Buddhism. Third, it should be noted that this work pays considerable attention to the continuities and ruptures between the early modern and modern periods. In particular, this work successfully delineates the intricate connection between early modern Buddhism and that of the post-Meiji era. This is done by drawing parallels with the late Tokugawa precept-keeping monk Jiun Onkō (1718–180), who had a decisive influence on the formation of Unshō's thought and efforts. In this line, the work revisits Unshō's vision to revive the True Dharma during the era of *mappō*, when precept-keeping was considered an especially difficult path.

On the other hand, the work does have a few issues. One of them involves the question of the extent of Unshō's representativeness and the degree to which his ideas influenced the broader context of "precept modernity." While the book touches upon the commonalities and differences between Unshō's thought and those of other individuals who emphasized the Buddhist precepts, a more in-depth analysis of this point would have been beneficial. At the very least, the author should have addressed more specifically how Unshō's patrons and supporters practiced (or not) the precepts. Additionally, questions remain regarding the extent to which the Ten Virtuous Precepts, reinterpreted as "national morality," permeated society. Apart from Unshō's own influence, the social impact of his ideas is not apparent.

Another issue is related to the author's lack of engagement in the closer reading of Unshō's own texts. In other words, this work falls short of fully deciphering Unshō's texts or articulating his ideas in connection to his practice of the precepts. In this regard, several problems remain unaddressed: How did Unshō himself explain to other Buddhist monks each of the articles in the Four-Part Vinaya, and in which ways did he, in terms of setting an example, practice them? In other words, analyses that highlight a more specific background and physical aspects of the practice are almost entirely absent from the work. The book focuses mostly on describing Unshō's more abstract ideas, such as interpreting precepts as a broader type of morality and establishing the foundation for the precepts within Buddhist ontology and its cosmology based on the law of cause and effect and the karmic retribution of good and evil over three lifetimes. These hermeneutical issues related to Unshō's thought, rooted in his practice of the precepts, seem to mirror other challenges in the book. For instance, while the introduction of this book highlights the problem of "meat consumption and clerical marriage" (*nikujiki saitai* 肉食妻帯), deeply interconnected to gender relations, it ultimately leaves the subject for future research. Despite the author's wide-ranging perspective, the book seems to overlook the question of the sexuality of male priests—an integral dimension inseparable from the matter of precepts. In addition, although the author contends that the discursive analysis of precept practices could work as a critique of belief-centered

frameworks, he ultimately seems to accentuate the belief-oriented aspect of Unshō's precept discourse due to his failure to address more concrete discussions on individual corporeality, senses, and emotions.

The work does give us, however, the sense that these are challenges that the author should indeed be capable of overcoming. For these reasons, the Committee acknowledges this work as an achievement worthy of the 2023 Japanese Association for Religious Studies Award.