

FEATURE:
JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND
ITS MODERN RECONFIGURATION

Introduction

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DURING the sixty-eighth annual convention of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies in September 2009, the program session “The Reconfiguration of Japanese Buddhism: From the Early Modern to the Modern Era” took place. This session attracted a large audience, with presentations by Orion Klautau, Tanigawa Yutaka, Nishimura Ryō and Hikino Kyōsuke, all of whom are up-and-coming young scholars. Their stimulating presentations, based on new awareness of the issues at hand, gave us a sense that modern Buddhism should become a “hot” topic for the future. I was asked to act as moderator and discussant, but while listening to the four young speakers, I felt with certainty that they were opening a new page in the academic world. The articles gathered in this feature for *The Eastern Buddhist* are based on the presentations they gave on that occasion.

However, before introducing their papers, I would like to begin by sharing a few memories of something that took place around twenty years ago. Ikeda Eishun 池田英俊 (1929–2004), then a colleague at Aichi Gakuin University, asked me whether I would be able to help him with the creation of a modern Buddhism research association, to which I remember having responded: “Gladly. However, since there are no proper specialists in the field but yourself, I wonder if it will survive for more than five years.” The fact is that the research association created by Ikeda—Nihon Kindai Bukkyōshi Kenkyūkai 日本近代仏教史研究会 (Society for the Study of Modern Japanese Buddhist History)—continued far beyond my expectations: in 2010 it reached its eighteenth annual meeting, where scholars of the younger generation gathered and lively discussions took place. From what

I can observe, the situation in the period when Ikeda created the association and that of today are clearly different. For Yoshida Kyūichi 吉田久一 (1915–2005), Kashiwahara Yūsen 柏原祐泉 (1916–2002) and Ikeda Eishun, pioneers of the research in the field, the history of “modern Buddhism” signified the course of Buddhism’s “modernization,” and they all postulated the *Shinbukkyō* 新仏教 movement or the *Seishin-shugi* 精神主義 enterprise begun by Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) as the quintessence of this process. In their case, Buddhist intellectual reformers received the most attention, and priests who followed the Japanese state or collaborated with colonial control naturally fell outside of the scope of their concern. Seen from today’s perspective, the dimension of “modern Buddhism” as proposed by the likes of Ikeda is all too narrow. In addition to this, I would also like to note that the period usually dealt with by these three scholars is relatively brief: they focus on Meiji 明治 Japan, and do not cover the Taishō 大正 and Shōwa 昭和 periods to a satisfactory extent. One could say that the reason why research on modern Buddhism reached a new phase in the 2000s was that scholars expanded the boundaries of the area postulated by the three pioneers, and succeeded in bringing new topics into the field. That the area was augmented and Buddhism could now be discussed in relation with diverse topics such as State Shinto, overseas conquest, colonialism, memorial tablets, publication culture, school education, academic knowledge and nationalism, was perhaps a contributing factor for attracting even more scholars. I would like to further ascertain the meaning of studying modern Buddhism by looking back on the history of research into it. I will deal with research put forward on two fronts: modern religious history and Buddhist history.

First, let us focus on the research on modern religion. The first name to be given here is certainly that of Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良 (1928–1991). Needless to say, besides being a pioneer of research on State Shinto, Murakami was also one of the first to focus on popular religions and new religious movements. There should be no disagreement that his *Kokka Shintō* 国家神道 and *Kindai minshū shūkyōshi no kenkyū* 近代民衆宗教史の研究, published in 1970 and 1958 respectively, are both landmarks in their respective areas. After Murakami, studies on State Shinto during the 1970s and 1980s were produced mainly by historians, and many detailed studies of historical events were put forward as attempts to overcome Murakami’s theories on the subject. On the other hand, research on popular and new religions was developed by historians and sociologists of religion during the 1980s and 1990s. From the 1980s, research on new religions became

one of the central topics of the sociology of religion, having contributed much to the enlivenment of the field. However, after the Aum Shinrikyō オウム真理教 incident in 1995, research on the subject rapidly lost momentum. Instead, “spiritualism” and “cults” emerged as trend topics, but I will leave aside that discussion at this point.

But why did Murakami become a pioneer in both these areas? A hint for answering this question is in the fact that the Marxist historiography he learned during the period immediately following Japan’s defeat in World War II, was based on the dichotomy of state (*kokka* 国家) and people (*minshū* 民衆). Murakami applied this dichotomy to the historical study of modern religion, and using the opposition between “State Shinto” and “popular religion,” he depicted the drama of modern religious history. He depicts such a drama as one wherein leaders of popular religions autonomously became aware of the modern self and put forward ideas based on rationality (*gōrisei* 合理性) and civilization (*kaimeisei* 開明性), which gave rise to movements that the state in turn coerced and suppressed. This remains, to this day, as a relatively convincing structural outline of modern religious history in Japan. Nevertheless, it still ignores the role of Buddhist institutions in that process. Despite the theory that State Shinto was created by Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗—and here we will set aside the question of whether or not this is valid—we can estimate that the relationship between State Shinto and modern Buddhism is much deeper than Murakami had imagined. Also in the field of new religions, if we bring into view the social penetration of those with backgrounds in the thought of Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282), we may be able to reconsider this topic as a development from modern lay Buddhist associations.

The time when Murakami was most active as a scholar was also the time when Yoshida, Kashiwahara and Ikeda wrote their articles on modern Japanese Buddhism. As I have mentioned above, these three scholars regarded Kiyozawa Manshi’s *Seishin-shugi* movement—which is said to have emphasized the deepening of inner faith in a stronghold of the self beyond the control of state power—as the very quintessence of modern Buddhism. While Murakami developed the dichotomy “State Shinto/popular religions,” Yoshida and his colleagues also set the dualist outline “state power/internalized Buddhism.” From the latter perspective, it was difficult to reconsider the relationship between modern Buddhism and state power or State Shinto. Today, however, modern Buddhism is being studied from perspectives that see it as both a deeper and wider phenomenon. It is completely possible to understand modern Buddhism as the very social context

in which State Shinto and new religions were cultivated. If we interpret it that way, then we can expect research on modern Buddhism to absorb past studies on State Shinto and new religious movements, and hopefully it will reconsider the problems dealt with in such works from a new perspective.

I would also like to speak about this problem from the perspective of past research on Buddhist history. It is already common knowledge within Japanese historiography that from the 1980s, based on Kuroda Toshio's theory about the *kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制, historical research on medieval temples flourished. We can also perceive how much Kuroda's theory both improved and broadened the research on medieval religious history from the fact that research on temples is no longer an atypical field within medieval Japanese history. It is also a well-known fact that later, during the 1990s and 2000s, research on early modern religious history was invigorated, driven by Takano Toshihiko's theories on court/*bakufu* relations and studies on elements at the "margin" of the Tokugawa status system. In this context, the organization of associations of religious professionals such as Buddhist clerics, Shinto priests, *shugen* 修験 practitioners, *onmyōji* 陰陽師 and *miko* 巫女; the functions of temples and shrines in regional society; fund-soliciting and pilgrimages, all came to be addressed as topics. Before Takano, the history of early modern Buddhism was an isolated field of study, and had no influence on other areas of early modern history. However after the publication of his works, religious history came to be studied in relation to the structure of the early modern state, and to theories on regional society. *Kinsei no shūkyō to shakai* 近世の宗教と社会, published in 2008, is worthy of note. In this three-volume series, which presents the results of research by a group of scholars led by Takano, we can observe the broadening and the possibilities of the field. In the 2000s, with the publication of Ōtani Eiichi's *Kindai Nihon no nichiren shugi undō* 近代日本の日蓮主義運動 (2001), Sueki Fumihiko's *Kindai Nihon no shisō: Saikō* 近代日本の思想・再考 (2004), Tanigawa Yutaka's *Meiji zenki no kyōiku/kyōka/bukkyō* 明治前期の教育・教化・仏教 (2008), and the translation of James E. Ketelaar's *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan* into Japanese in 2006, modern Buddhism rapidly became an eagerly addressed topic. As we can observe from the fact that Ōtani is a sociologist, Sueki a Buddhist studies scholar, and Tanigawa a historian, modern Buddhism is not a field limited to historical studies, but has had from the outset the characteristics of a cross-disciplinary field.

Hikino Kyōsuke and I are scholars of early modern religious history, and despite having been influenced by Takano, we give thought to perspectives on the modern period, and are seeking dialogue with specialists in this

area. Tanigawa, on the other hand, goes back to the early modern period to attempt a reevaluation of the *terakoya* 寺子屋 tradition when considering the relationship between Buddhism and education in the modern period. Looking back on the 2009 panel session and on the background against which this feature for *The Eastern Buddhist* came to life, we could perhaps understand it as an initiative of specialists in the early modern (Hikino, Nishimura and myself) and modern (Tanigawa and Klautau) periods seeking a place to exchange opinions.

I have pointed out that the trends in the study of Buddhist history shifted from the medieval (Kuroda) to the early modern (Takano) and then to the modern period. However, while the modern is only one period among others, it is also fated to relate to all other periods. The images we now have of Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574–622) or Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), for instance, did not actually exist before the modern period. These images were created by historians and other scholars of the modern period based on their studies of documents and artifacts, and then disseminated. The creation of these historical images was constrained partly by the available documentation, and partly by the nature of previous studies on the subject. These scholars required facilities such as universities, libraries, academic associations and publishing companies in order to pursue their studies and release their works, and without such modern institutions and organizations, research on Shōtoku Taishi or Shinran would never have started. In this sense, it is justifiable to say that, with reservations, historical narratives about any period are a construct of modern academic knowledge. In other words, without modern historiography there would be no such thing as ancient, medieval, or early modern history. From this perspective, it is valid to understand the images of Shōtoku Taishi and Shinran as a historical construct of modern Buddhism.

Also, Buddhist history is not an exception to the reevaluation of fundamental concepts that has been taking place in several academic fields. The usage of such basic concepts as “religion” (*shūkyō* 宗教), “state Buddhism” (*kokka bukkyō* 国家仏教) and “Buddhist history” (*bukkyōshi* 仏教史) began at a specific point—the modern period. Modern Buddhism is parallel with ancient, medieval and early modern Buddhism, and is a historical accumulation of these periods while at the same time also the matrix which gave birth to the historical image of Buddhism in previous ages. Therefore in order to reflectively examine our image of ancient, medieval and early modern Buddhism, it is first necessary to deepen research on modern Buddhism.

Next, I would like to briefly introduce the essays included in this feature for *The Eastern Buddhist*.

In “The Intellectual Development of the Cult of Śākyamuni,” Nishimura Ryō criticizes the fact that the proposition that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana (*daijō hibussetsu* 大乘非仏説) has been so far regarded as a unilinear scheme of modern rationalism, and works on the premise that a historical investigation going back to the medieval period is necessary. While the cult of Śākyamuni as performed in medieval Nara by the likes of Jōkei and Myōe was based on the *Hikekyō* 悲華經 (Compassion Flower Sutra) and on the cult of relics (*shari shinkō* 舍利信仰), early modern monks such as Fujaku 普寂 (1707–1781) approached Śākyamuni following an appraisal of the “Lesser Vehicle” (*shōjō bukkyō* 小乘仏教), stimulated by their interest in Buddhist precepts. Meiji scholar Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929) inherited Fujaku’s proposition that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana, through which he succeeded, as Nishimura summarizes, “in circumventing the contradiction between history and belief that had become a problem at that time.”

In “‘Hōnen’ and ‘Shinran’ in Early Modern Jōdo Shinshū,” Hikino Kyōsuke puts modernity in perspective by tracing the formation of True Pure Land sectarian consciousness from the end of the medieval period to the early modern period. By exploring the right to issue “worship objects” (*honzon kafuken* 本尊下付権), Hikino points out that while medieval Buddhism had its fundamental basis in the *monryū* 門流, Rennyo’s Honganji was early to start on the path to becoming a sect. According to the author, with the formation of scholastic studies pertinent to each sect in early modern educational facilities such as the *danrin* 檀林 and the *gakurin* 学林, the separation of sects developed further and the basis for modern sectarian consciousness was laid down. Furthermore, he focuses on the “sect name polemics” (*shūmei ronsō* 宗名論争) between Jōdoshū and Jōdo Shinshū, and demonstrates that in both these sects a strong sense of orthodoxy regarding their own existence was formed. Looking over the medieval, early modern and modern periods from the perspective of sectarian consciousness, Hikino’s article reveals the possibilities of a *longue durée* history of religion.

In “No separation, No clashes: An Aspect of Buddhism and Education in the Meiji Period,” Tanigawa Yutaka describes the tenuous transitions through “waves of proximity and separation” between education and Buddhism in the Meiji period. The first part—“Friction (1872–1875)” —shows how education (*kyōiku* 教育) and proselytization (*kyōka* 教化), were at that time intermingled in terms of persons, place and content. This was, however, seen as a problem, and the two were gradually separated. The second part—“Separation (1875–1885)” —deals with the period when the govern-

ment and the Ministry of Education adopted a policy of leaving matters up to those responsible in the region concerned. In this period, separation advanced less in terms of persons and more in terms of place and content. The third part—"Sudden Proximity (1886–1890)"—deals with the period when monks serving concurrently as teaching staff were looked upon in a positive light, and we observe the formation of a scene where Buddhist clerics took an active role in school education. The fourth part—"Re-separation (1890–1899)"—deals with the period when, after the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education, the Ministry of Education expressed the opinion that the situation of monks doubling as school teachers should be avoided. In this manner Tanigawa focuses on "individuals who were linked with both education and Buddhism, acting amid the ebb and flow between proximity and separation of the two, and outside university academia"; thus striving to avoid the unilinear understanding of institutional history.

In "(Re)inventing 'Japanese Buddhism': Sectarian Reconfiguration and Historical Writing in Meiji Japan," Orion Klautau explores the contents of Meiji-period histories of Japanese Buddhism. The author elucidates the development of the framework of modern historical narratives of Buddhism, and how this framework also drew upon traditional knowledge such as the teachings of each sect and the "three lands" view of history (*sangoku shikan* 三国史観). According to Klautau, Murakami Senshō—at the same time a Jōdo Shinshū cleric and a Tokyo Imperial University professor—put forward a historical narrative of "Japanese Buddhism" through which "he could fulfill both his 'religious' and 'public' functions," playing "an important role in the unfolding of 'Japanese Buddhism' into modernity."

This was but a brief description of the four articles included in this feature. It is beyond question that each of them is original in its own way. However, even though this is not clear at first glance, we can also perceive differences among each author's problematizations and sympathies. For instance, Nishimura and Klautau both focus on Murakami Senshō, but their stances are clearly different in the sense that while Nishimura sees Murakami as an extension of the early modern monk Fujaku, Klautau understands him in terms of reconfiguration into modernity. Likewise, the problem of sectarian consciousness pointed out by Hikino is referenced in the articles of Tanigawa and Klautau, where we can confirm that such a question is also a valid perspective for considering school education and the concept of *tsūbukkyō* 通仏教. However, the common thread in all four articles is their interest in the mechanisms through which knowledge, education and expertise networks, such as the *gakurin/danrin*, school education and

university academism, were propagated and how these served to remake citizens and Buddhist clerics. This suggests that the reproduction of academic knowledge and the publishing culture that supports it are important keys to further research.

To build a bridge across the research on State Shinto and new religions and to continue a dialogue with post-Takano research on early modern religious history is a task one cannot accomplish alone. One of the differences between our own time and the time of Yoshida, Kashiwahara and Ikeda is that scholars no longer work as individual players, but are expected to cooperate on research as teams. Both the 2009 panel session and this special issue of *The Eastern Buddhist* are the results of this sort of team work. Neither the historical characters of modern Buddhism, nor the scholars who now make them an object for study, are just aggregations of isolated individuals.

(Translated by Orion Klautau)