

## ARTICLES

### FEATURE: DEVELOPMENTS OF NARA BUDDHISM IN KAMAKURA JAPAN (I)

#### Introduction

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OVER the past twenty years or so, there has been a virtual explosion of scholarly interest in the development of the Nara Buddhist schools during the medieval period. During the Nara period (710–794), which takes its name from the city that was established as the first permanent capital of Japan in 710, Buddhism became a dominant presence in the religious landscape of Japan. Splendid Buddhist temples housing numerous monks and nuns were built, providing the setting for elaborate rituals performed to pray for the peace and prosperity of the country as well as for the health of the imperial family and nobility. At that time, several Buddhist schools were transmitted from China and became established in the major temples of Nara. These so-called “Six Schools of the Southern Capital” (*Nanto rokushū* 南都六宗) included the Kusha 俱舍, Jōjitsu 成実, Sanron 三論, Hossō 法相, Kegon 華嚴 and Ritsu 律 schools and played an extremely important role in introducing Buddhist thought to Japan. A cursory look at historical documents reveals that, even after the capital was moved from Nara to Kyoto and the Nara period came to an end, these schools of Nara Buddhism, especially the Hossō and Kegon schools based in the large and wealthy temples of Kōfukuji 興福寺 and Tōdaiji 東大寺 respectively, retained great power and influence. Inexplicably, however, their places in the post-Nara period religious history of Japan have generally been ignored. Surveys of Japanese Buddhism rarely devote more than a few pages to them, giving the impression that these schools all but died out with the move of the capital to Kyoto.

Beginning in the 1980s, this widespread image of the Nara schools came under increasing criticism due to the impact of Kuroda Toshio's influential *kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制 (esoteric-exoteric system) theory.<sup>1</sup> Kuroda holds that, along with the court nobility and warriors, the Buddhist establishment was a major player in the Japanese political scene. Furthermore, and more importantly for our purpose, he also maintains that, along with the Tendai 天台 and Shingon 真言 schools that had been founded in the early Heian period, the temples of Nara (especially Kōfukuji and Tōdaiji) remained important players in the Japanese religious world throughout the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and well into the following Muromachi period (1336–1573). This new perspective challenged the earlier entrenched view that the so-called new schools of Kamakura Buddhism, such as the Pure Land school of Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), the Shin school of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), the Ji 時 school of Ippen 一遍 (1239–1289), the Zen schools of Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215) and Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) and the Nichiren 日蓮 school founded by Nichiren (1222–1282), were the dominant Buddhist schools during the Kamakura period, and that the Tendai, Shingon and Nara schools had lost all influence during this age.

With the growing acceptance of Kuroda's theory, a new generation of scholars, including Hosokawa Ryōichi, Matsuo Kenji, Minowa Kenryō, Ōishi Masaaki and Oishio Chihiro, began to study the medieval developments of the Nara schools anew, concluding that they remained a vibrant and significant presence even after the Nara period had come to a close.<sup>2</sup> Their research has focused mainly on the monks associated with the "revival" of these schools during the Kamakura period, such as Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) of the Hossō school, as well as Eison 叡尊 (also pronounced Eizon; 1201–1290) and Ninshō 忍性 (1217–1303) of the Ritsu school. The number of studies published by these and other like-minded scholars has been enormous. According to Oishio, almost ninety percent of the approximately 640 books and articles that have appeared on Eison, Ninshō and their Saidaiji 西大寺 order of precepts as of September 2001, have been published since 1970.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, during the past five or six years, a number of scholars working in America and Europe have also begun to turn their attention to this topic. To give just a few examples, Paul Groner (2001, 2005), Abe Ryūichi (2002–3) and David Quinter (2007) have written on Eison; Lori Meeks (2007) has taken up the subject of the nuns

<sup>1</sup> For concise summaries of Kuroda's theory, see Dobbins 1996 and Adolphson 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Their studies include Hosokawa 1987, Matsuo 1988, Matsuo 1995, Matsuo 1996, Matsuo 2007, Minowa 1999, Ōishi 2004, Oishio 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Oishio 2002, p. 69.

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of Hokkeji 法華寺; Mark Blum (2002) has published a volume on Gyōnen 凝然 of the Kegon school; while James Ford (2006) has recently completed an important book on Jōkei.

In their treatment of monks like Jōkei, Eison and Ninshō, these new scholars were following the lead of earlier studies. Pre-war scholars such as Shimaji Daitō and Tsuji Zennosuke, as well as Akamatsu Toshihide, the editor of the second volume of Hōzōkan's three-volume *Nihon bukkyōshi* 日本仏教史 (the standard post-war survey of Japanese Buddhism), devoted substantial sections of their books to the Kamakura resurgence of Nara Buddhism.<sup>4</sup> Another important precursor deserving mention here is the influential collection of writings by Kamakura-period monks of the Nara schools entitled *Kamakura kyū bukkyō* 鎌倉旧仏教 (Kamakura Old Buddhism), edited by Kamata Shigeo and Tanaka Hisao (1971).

However, although they built upon these earlier studies, the new research calls into question the basic paradigm underlying them. The earlier studies had consistently contrasted the “old schools” of Nara Buddhism with the “new schools” of Kamakura Buddhism, led by Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen, Nichiren, etc, portraying the latter as progressive, reformist and in close touch with popular aspirations, while characterizing the former as conservative and elitist. However, the Nara schools of the Kamakura period, as exemplified by Jōkei, Eison and others, share much in common with the new schools, including a strong reformist impulse and concern for the salvation of the common people. Thus the earlier dualistic paradigm is clearly in need of revision.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the leading advocate of this view in Japan is Matsuo who, speaking in reference to Eison, declares that this monk should be included among the leaders of the “new” schools of Kamakura Buddhism. Matsuo's point is that the Kamakura resurgence of the Nara schools should not be seen merely as a revival of the old schools but as a genuine revolutionary movement, on par with the new schools of Kamakura Buddhism. Or, in more general terms, the revived Nara schools of the Kamakura period were not simply some updated versions of “old” Buddhism, but something very new indeed.<sup>6</sup>

The following feature, “Developments of Nara Buddhism in Kamakura Japan,” is comprised of four articles, two of which are to be found in this

<sup>4</sup> See Shimaji 1933, pp. 216–436, Tsuji 1944, vol. 2, pp. 149–278, Ienaga et al. 1967, vol. 2, pp. 292–326.

<sup>5</sup> For a perceptive discussion on how the Nara schools have been treated in Japanese scholarship, see Ford 2006, pp. 185–92.

<sup>6</sup> Matsuo 1996, pp. 138–47.

issue, and two to be published in the next issue, vol. 39, no. 2. The first article, “Jōkei and Kannon: Defending Buddhist Pluralism in Medieval Japan” by James Ford, takes up Jōkei of the Hossō school, a seminal figure in the Kamakura resurgence of Nara Buddhism. Jōkei was a multi-faceted personality whose impact on the Nara schools was felt in many ways. First, he was an enormously erudite monk who played a key role in revitalizing Hossō scholarship through his numerous works on the school’s doctrine, including the *Hokke kaijishō* 法華開示抄, a massive twenty-eight-fascicle commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as the *Yuishikiron jinshishō* 唯識論尋思鈔 in fifteen fascicles, a major compendium of the Hossō teachings. Since the time of Zōshun 藏俊 (1104–1180), the teacher of Jōkei’s own teacher Kakuken 覺憲 (1131–1212), the Hossō school had been undergoing a period of scholastic revival, and Jōkei is generally viewed as the most important figure of this development. Jōkei, moreover, was a strong advocate of the need to revive strict observance of the precepts. His position, expressed most forcefully in the *Gedatsu shōnin kairitsu kōgyō gansho* 解脫上人戒律興行願書, proved to be quite influential. Several of his disciples played important roles in the precepts revival movement, including Kakushin 覺真 (1170–1243), who established Jōkiin 常喜院 within Kōfukuji as a center for the study of the precepts, and Kainyo 戒如 (n.d.), who became the teacher of both Eison and Kakujō 覺盛 (1194–1249). Finally, Jōkei is also known for his numerous devotional works addressed to various Buddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhist deities.

In his article, Ford focuses on Jōkei’s devotion to Kannon and proposes that it “served as the perfect symbolic foil for Jōkei to counter the popular *senju nenbutsu* 專修念仏 (exclusive practice of the nenbutsu) teachings expounded by Hōnen and the threat it represented to established Buddhism in Japan” including Jōkei’s own Hossō school. As Ford notes, from about 1201 on, Jōkei increasingly turned to the Kannon faith (although he was in no way exclusively attached to it). Kannon is known as the bodhisattva of compassion who vows to appear in various guises to save beings; moreover it is said that devotees can attain birth on Mt. Potalaka, this bodhisattva’s Pure Land, at the time of death. In 1205, Jōkei wrote the well-known *Kōfukuji sōjō* 興福寺奏狀, petitioning the court to ban Hōnen’s *senju nenbutsu* movement. This movement was based on the notion that one can gain birth in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land at the time of death through the exclusive reliance on this Buddha’s promise, as set forth in the eighteenth of forty-eight vows, to save all beings who would recite the nenbutsu. In this petition, Jōkei argued that Hōnen was fundamentally mistaken in claiming that all beings could be

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saved by the nenbutsu. From Jōkei's perspective, since human beings are of different spiritual capacities and inclinations, it is necessary to recognize a variety of different practices if all beings are to attain enlightenment. Hence, in contrast to Hōnen, who emphasized the universal applicability of a single exclusive practice to the salvation of all humankind, Jōkei was pluralistic in his view of Buddhist practice, arguing that there are many different spiritual disciplines through which one can attain enlightenment. In his paper, Ford maintains that it was Jōkei's emphasis on the need for a pluralistic approach to practice which eventually led him to champion devotion to Kannon. This is because Kannon not only, like Amida, possesses a Pure Land into which one can gain birth after death (and one which is, according to Jōkei, much easier to gain birth into) but, more importantly, because, since this bodhisattva manifests himself in a variety of different forms and guises to save sentient beings, he is the paragon of the inclusivistic and pluralistic tendency which Jōkei found so important in his understanding of Buddhist practice.

In the second article, "Emulation and Erasure: Eison, Ninshō, and the Gyōki Cult," David Quinter contrasts Eison and his disciple Ninshō, the two major figures of the Saidaiji order of Ritsu monks (later institutionalized as the Shingon Ritsu school), focusing in particular on the degree of their commitment to social welfare activities, which in turn reflects the degree to which they sought to model themselves on the Nara-period monk Gyōki 行基 (668–749). Both Eison and Ninshō are generally understood as emulating Gyōki, the prototypical *hijiri* 聖, but Quinter, following Oishio, argues that Ninshō shows more affinity with the socially activist stance of Gyōki than Eison, who was more of a scholar-monk.

Earlier studies on Eison and Ninshō have identified their social welfare activities, most notably their well-known charitable relief efforts for outcasts or *hinin* 非人, as one of the characteristic features of their movement. Their work for the outcasts was closely associated with the Mañjuśrī cult, since it was believed (on the basis of a passage in the *Wen-shu-shih-li pan-nieh-p'an ching* 文殊師利般涅槃經) that outcasts were apparitions of Mañjuśrī. The most well known of their Mañjuśrī-related activities was a Buddhist ceremony held in 1269 by Eison to dedicate a statue of this bodhisattva at Hannyaji 般若寺 just north of the city of Nara. As part of the ceremony, food and gifts were offered to the outcasts that had gathered. However, as Quinter states, Eison's interest in charitable works for outcasts arose out of his contacts with Ninshō. Before he met Eison, Ninshō had vowed to compose and enshrine paintings

of Mañjuśrī in the seven outcast communities of Yamato province (present-day Nara prefecture) to pray for the salvation of his deceased mother. It was only after his meeting with Ninshō that Eison, in company with the former monk, began to hold ceremonies dedicating images of Mañjuśrī in outcast communities. As this clearly shows, Eison's impulse to engage in relief work for outcasts has its source in Ninshō.

Ninshō was likewise far more active than Eison in undertaking public work projects. Gyōki was (and still is) also famous as the sponsor of such projects, being credited with building many bridges, wells, irrigation canals and reservoirs during his lifetime. Towards the end of his life, Eison, too, embarked on a project to repair a bridge at Uji 宇治 but this is the only such project that he undertook. In contrast, Ninshō constructed many bridges and roads, as well as numerous bath-houses, which functioned as treatment facilities and dwellings for the outcast communities. Thus, although both Eison and Ninshō can be understood as emulating Gyōki, it must be emphasized that the degree to which they modeled themselves on the earlier monk differed considerably.

The next two papers, to be carried in the following issue of this journal, focus more narrowly on Eison's life and his understanding of the precepts. Both papers were originally written in Japanese for a volume of essays entitled *Jikai no seija: Eison, Ninshō*, edited by Matsuo Kenji (2004). Matsuo's article, "The Life of Eison," presents a useful summary of his life, touching upon many of the issues that have been raised in recent studies of this monk. (Throughout his paper, Matsuo refers to him as "Eison," following an alternate way of pronouncing the characters of this monk's name.) Earlier studies on Eison have focused on his role in the precept revival movement, and this is indeed an issue of primary importance for him; his fame, after all, rests in the fact that he is the founder of the Saidaiji order of Ritsu monks. However, as Matsuo points out, Eison was much more than a monk vowed to keeping the precepts. He was concurrently a practitioner of esoteric Buddhism, a devotee of the cults of Śākyamuni Buddha, Prince Shōtoku, Gyōki and Mañjuśrī (the last of which is closely related to his relief work for the outcasts) and a worshipper of the Buddha's relics. How are we to understand his wide-ranging spiritual interests? Although a number of different interpretations have been proposed, Matsuo suggests that the unifying core is to be found in Eison's devotion to Śākyamuni.

The final paper, "The Movement for the Revival of the Precepts" by Minowa Kenryō, presents a detailed analysis of the interpretation of the precepts in medieval Nara. Since the precepts were a matter of utmost importance

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for Eison and other monks associated with the precept revival movement, it is necessary to have an understanding of this topic in order to fully comprehend their thought. In his paper, Minowa argues that this revival was accompanied by important innovations in the theory and practice of the precepts, symbolized by the incorporation of the “comprehensive ordination” (*tsūju* 通受) into the ordination ceremony.

The person responsible for this development was Kakujō, a monk of the Jōkiin cloister who was one of three monks that took self-ordination with Eison before the statue of Kannon in the Hokkedō 法華堂 of Tōdaiji. In the traditional ordination ceremony conducted in Nara, the novice is granted the full precepts (*gusokukai* 具足戒), consisting of 250 injunctions (348 in the case of nuns), in order to become a full-fledged monk. However, in Kakujō’s comprehensive ordination, the novice is instead granted the Mahayana threefold pure precepts (*sanjujōkai* 三聚淨戒) described in the *Yogācarabhūmi*: (a) precepts encompassing *vinaya* rules (*shōritsugikai* 撰律儀戒), referring to the bodhisattva’s duty to uphold the precepts laid down by the Buddha, (b) precepts encompassing meritorious dharmas (*shōzenpōkai* 撰善法戒), referring to the bodhisattva’s duty to undertake all good acts, and (c) precepts for benefiting sentient beings (*nyōyaku ujō kai* 饒益有情戒), referring to the bodhisattva’s duty to teach sentient beings and lead them to enlightenment. These threefold pure precepts were traditionally known as the bodhisattva precepts, and were conferred on both monastics and lay people who wished to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of the bodhisattva ideal. Hence, in the Nara Buddhist schools, the act of taking the bodhisattva precepts was not considered to confer monastic status on the recipient, since, as stated above, in order to become a monk, one had to take the full precepts. If any Nara monk wished to take the bodhisattva precepts, he took them only after receiving the full precepts. However, Kakujō argued that, since the first of the threefold pure precepts, those encompassing *vinaya* rules, included the injunction to keep all of the precepts, the taking of the bodhisattva precepts (more specifically, the threefold pure precepts) automatically resulted in the taking of the complete precepts. Thus Kakujō’s incorporation of the threefold pure precepts into the ordination ceremony was a radical innovation.

Minowa further makes the interesting point that Kakujō’s ordination is fundamentally identical in format to the one performed in the Tendai school. In the early Heian period, Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of the Japanese Tendai school, petitioned the court to allow the monks of his community to be ordained by receiving the bodhisattva precepts of the *Fan-wang ching* 梵網經,

and not the traditional full precepts. Although his proposal met with intense opposition from the monks of the Nara schools, it was eventually approved. Yet, monks in Nara still continued to ordain others using the full precepts. However, Kakujō's ordination followed the Tendai model in that, during the stage of the ordination ceremony known as the *konma* 羯磨, the novices are granted the threefold pure precepts instead of the full precepts. Kakujō also introduced another significant innovation into a later stage of the ordination ceremony called the *sessō* 説相 (explanation of the characteristics). During the *sessō* of the traditional Nara ordination ceremony, the novice vows not to commit the four transgressions that lead to expulsion from the monkhood (engaging in sexual relations, stealing, killing and lying) and promises to keep the four reliances (to live under trees [i.e., not in fixed dwellings], to live by begging, to use only urine as medicine and wear cast-off clothing as robes). However, in Kakujō's revised ordination, the novice promises to keep the ten major and forty-eight minor precepts of the *Fan-wang ching*. As Minowa points out, this format, the granting of the threefold pure precepts followed by the promise to keep the precepts of the *Fan-wang ching*, is identical to that found in the Tendai ordination manuals like the *Jubosatsukaigi* 授菩薩戒儀. Hence, it may be surmised that Kakujō was influenced by the Tendai system of ordination, with its strong emphasis on bodhisattva practice, in revising the format of his ordination ceremony.

In closing, I would like to mention that these four papers, as fascinating as they are, only scratch the surface of medieval Nara Buddhism. A number of other important topics still remain to be studied in more detail, such as the role of Buddhist rituals (including ritual debates or *rongi* 論義) in the Nara schools and the place of esoteric and Pure Land Buddhism in them.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, even though the articles in this feature are limited to the Hossō and Ritsu schools, the doctrinal and institutional innovations in the Kegon school at Tōdaiji during this period deserves to be investigated in greater detail.<sup>8</sup> Although much remains to be done, it is hoped that these papers will prompt more scholars to embark on the study of this fascinating area of Japanese Buddhism.

<sup>7</sup> The role of the debate rituals in the Hossō school has been studied at depth in a series of articles by Kusunoki Junshō. See, for example, Kusunoki 2000 and Kusunoki 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Nagamura Makoto has contributed substantially to our understanding of the administrative and institutional structures of Tōdaiji during the medieval period. See Nagamura 1989.

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