

Revitalization versus Unification: A Comparison of the Ideas of Inoue Enryō and Murakami Senshō

OKADA MASAHIKO

DURING the Meiji era, many Buddhist thinkers struggled to discover a pristine essence in Buddhism that could resolve sectarian divisions and lay the foundation for a modern form of Buddhist thought. Two men who are representative of this trend in Meiji-period Buddhist scholarship are Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919) and Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929). Both sought to promote Buddhism as a form of religious thought that went beyond the boundaries of sectarianism. In his *Bukkyō katsuron joron* 仏教活論序論 (An Introduction to the Vitalization of Buddhism), which was published in 1887, Inoue attempted to show the significance of Buddhist thought for Japanese culture and society, focusing on the rational and modern aspects of the Buddhist teachings. In 1901, Murakami published the first volume of his *Bukkyō tōitsuron* 仏教統一論 (On the Unification of Buddhism) in which he clarified the historical lineage of the Buddhist teachings and tried to find a common essence within the diversity of Buddhist thought.

Both authors similarly attempt to clarify the essential teachings of Buddhism and highlight their meaning for modern Japanese culture and society. However, with regard to on what form of Buddhism a modern Buddhism should be based, their arguments draw completely different conclusions. Although Inoue believed Mahāyāna to be the supreme form of Buddhist thought, Murakami claimed that Mahāyāna teachings had no intimate connection with the original teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha. In this paper, I will

investigate what caused these differences and how these two men sought to justify their cases.

*Inoue Enryō's Argument for Revitalization:
Working toward a Modern Buddhism*

Inoue, well known as the founder of Toyo University, was born as a son of a Shin Buddhist priest in 1858 and studied at Tokyo Imperial University. He published *Shinri konshin* 真理金針 (The Truth of the Golden Needle) in 1886, and it became a best-seller at that time. In the text, Inoue criticized the teachings of Christianity as being irrational and emphasized the modern and rational aspects of Buddhist thought. In the course of his life, he published a great number of books in which he attempted to systematize the Buddhist teachings as a contemporary form of religious thought.

As an educator, he established the Tetsugakkan 哲学館 (The Academy of Philosophy; present-day Toyo University) in 1887. In 1903, the Tetsugakkan was re-established as a private university and Inoue became its first president. He was a distinguished public speaker, giving numerous lectures at his university and around the country (and even outside Japan). When he passed away in 1919, he was on his way to lecture in China. Inoue also established a temple named Tetsugakudō 哲学堂 (The Hall of Philosophy) in 1904 to commemorate the establishment of the Tetsugakkan. There, he enshrined images of Socrates, Kant, Confucius, and Śākyamuni as the four sages. He later added other buildings and constructed a theme park where one could actually experience universal truth through visualizing these constructions. Inoue organized the Shūshin Kyōkai Undō 修身教会運動 (The Moral Church Movement) as a nationwide enlightenment movement with the Tetsugakudō as its headquarters. It is hard to categorize the movements he started during his life as being only religious ones, but Buddhist philosophy was always at the center of his unique activities.¹

In his *Bukkyō katsuron joron*, Inoue advocated the revision of Buddhism according to the principles of modern philosophy. In the foreword to this work, Inoue wrote that he began his quest for truth from a young age, studying the teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Western learning. However, finding no deep truths in any religious tradition, he started studying the theories of philosophy wholeheartedly:

¹ On Inoue's activities, see Okada 2004 and Okada 2005.

The truth that I have sought for over ten years was not found in the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism, nor in the teachings of Christianity, but only in the theories of philosophy lectured about in the West.²

Inoue examined the teachings of the various religious traditions through the modern “philosophical eye” (*tetsugen* 哲眼) and concluded that only Buddhist teachings could hold up to the “philosophical reason” (*tetsuri* 哲理) of modern philosophy:

I found the bright moonlight of truth only in the realm of philosophy. I then proceeded to examine the teachings of traditional religions. It was clear that the teachings of Christianity had no truth. I could also easily verify that the teachings of Confucianism had no truth—only the teachings of Buddhism were in accord with philosophical reason.³

Inoue emphasized the supremacy of Japanese Buddhist thought, regarding the comprehensive teachings of Japanese Buddhism as the most evolved form. Buddhism had already disappeared in India, its “mother country” (*hongoku* 本国), and had declined in China. Only the Buddhist tradition in Japan had reached “the deep truth of Mahāyāna teachings.” Only this most matured form of Buddhism could hold up to modern “philosophical reason”:

Buddhism in modern Japan is *Japanese* Buddhism. It is a unique product of the Japanese culture and society. We should further cultivate and spread it to foreign countries.⁴

Inoue classified religion into two categories: “intellectual” religion and “emotional” religion. He wrote that only Japanese Buddhism could satisfy both the demands of the intellect and the emotions. He believed that only Buddhist thought that opens the way to truth (Skt. *tathatā*; Jp. *shinnyo* 真如) by teaching the Middle Path could overcome the conflict between materialism and idealism in modern Western thought. He advocated the revitalization of Japanese Buddhism so that it could realize its potential:

² Inoue 1887, p. 18.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Oh! Proverbs reveal their eternal truth only in a later age—their deep meaning becomes clear only after a long time.⁵

Inoue believed that the latest interpretation of Buddhist thought was the most accurate expression of the true intention of the Buddha's teachings. The real significance of Buddhism lies in its diversity and comprehensiveness, which allows infinite possibilities for new interpretations.

Inoue's discourse on the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition never changed during his lifetime. He published a book in 1901 entitled *Daijō tetsugaku* 大乘哲学 (Mahāyāna Philosophy) as a record of his lectures at the Tetsugakkan. In this text, he wrote:

The deep and supreme Dharma of Mahāyāna Buddhism has disappeared in its home country of India . . . Now, we find a few traces of the Buddhist tradition in China. However, there remains only the name of Mahāyāna and no content. There is a school, but no study. It is like the empty shell of a cicada—there is only an empty shell of Mahāyāna. Therefore, the true Mahāyāna Buddhism remains only in the great empire of Japan.⁶

For Inoue, the future of Buddhism existed only within Japanese Buddhism. He emphasized the need to establish a modern form of Buddhism that was based on modern philosophy and contemporary Japanese Buddhist thought.

*Murakami Senshō's Argument for Unification:
Seeking the Historical Origins of Buddhism*

In his *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, Murakami severely criticized the sectarianism of traditional Buddhist scholarship and concluded that the Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings in Japan were not the original teachings of the Buddha. The impact of this book was so sensational that the publication of its second edition was planned within a few months after its first printing. Because of disagreements over the text, his branch, the Shinshū Ōtani-ha, forced him to withdraw his status as a practicing priest, though he was reinstated in October of 1911. Murakami published a paper entitled *Yo ga Shinshū Ōtani-ha no sōseki o dasuru no kokuhakusho* 予が真宗大谷派の僧籍を脱するの告白書 (My Confession

⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶ Inoue 1901, p. 2.

Concerning Leaving the Priesthood of Shinshū Ōtani-ha) on 30 October 1901. In this document, he explained as follows:

Buddhism first emerged in India, moved northeast, went across Central Asia, passed through China, and finally spread to our country. The depth of Buddhist philosophy that gradually developed over this time span is comparable to that of Western philosophy . . . The history of philosophy and doctrine cannot be studied if one is under the control of religious authorities or denominations. We have to stand aloof from sectarian influences to gain fruit from our studies.⁷

Murakami believed that an entirely new vision was required to realize his comprehensive approach to the study of Buddhist history and philosophy. In the explanatory notes added for the second edition of *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, Murakami explained his position as follows:

My intention is to study Buddhism temporarily from an outsider's point of view, with the same attitude as that of the general scholar or thinker. The ideas in this book might conflict with the basic teachings of some Buddhist denominations, but there is nothing that can be done about this.⁸

Murakami's method of study itself was nothing new—it was a simple application of the newly introduced Western methods of modern historical studies and comparative religious studies. The shock that his work imparted to the religious community in Japan was not what Murakami had expected—his argument for unification was just a result of scientific study:

I believe that my discourse on Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings in the main text and appendix will invite a great deal of criticism. Nevertheless, one cannot help but reach the same conclusions if one uses the same reasoning as science and historical studies. To my defense, I have never said that Mahāyāna did not reflect the true *intention* of the Buddha, but rather that it was not the teaching of the Buddha.⁹

⁷ Murakami 1901, pp. 10–11.

⁸ Murakami 1997, p. 8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Murakami stressed the importance of distinguishing the Buddha's direct teachings (*bussetsu* 仏説) from the Buddha's "intention" (*butsui* 仏意). According to him, the Buddha's intention as a matter of faith and his teachings as a matter of history are separate issues to be discussed.

For his method of study, Murakami insisted that five "eyes" would be required: the eye of doctrine, the eye of logic, the eye of history, the comparative eye, and the critical eye. Looking upon the Buddhist scriptures from these different perspectives, one could find a common essence in the philosophy and history of Buddhism, starting with Śākyamuni.¹⁰ What follows is a summary of Murakami's definition of these five.

The eye of doctrine is the ability to understand the religious aspects of Buddhist thought. The teachings of Buddhism are not a matter of science, but of religion. Therefore, their interpretation should be based not on theory, but on practice. Also, one cannot rely only on the interpretation of the terms used in scriptures, as many terms are combined in a complicated manner that make their precise meanings difficult to determine.

The eye of logic shows the fallacy of traditional methods of study that attached too much importance to quotations from former works. Because the study of religion is related to the realm beyond the intellect, one often needs tools rather than mere "explanations." Therefore, the tools of inductive and deductive reasoning are of particular value.

Of the five eyes, the eye of history and the comparative eye are given special importance by Murakami. To unify Buddhism, which "has existed for more than two thousand years and taken a journey of a million miles," the methods and perspectives of modern historical studies are indispensable. Even though the Buddhist tradition has been divided into numerous branches, all Buddhist teachings have the same founder at their root. How has Buddhism, which originated from Śākyamuni Buddha, developed into an incredibly expansive tradition? By tracing the historical process of this expansion, it becomes possible to study Buddhism as a unified body.

Buddhist thought has been affected by many cultures and times. Murakami believed that to restore the pristine unity of Buddhism, it was essential to see Mahāyāna Buddhism as a form that had diverged from the original teachings. Only when this was understood could the true identity of non-sectarian Buddhism be revealed:

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Śākyamuni Buddha is a historical figure. He is the only Buddha who existed historically. Mahāyāna Buddhism is not the original teachings of the Buddha; however, it reflects the “intention” of the Buddha. It is a natural conclusion of scientific study to view the Buddha as a historical figure—it is foolish to regard him as a supernatural being.¹¹

Even though Buddhism is a diverse religion, it still has a unified nature, as the teachings share a common historical origin. To discover a commonality in the diverse forms of Buddhist thought, one has to use an objective method of comparison. By introducing the methodology of comparative religious studies, a “joint consensus” (*gōdō teki itchi* 合同的一致) can be reached that transcends differences of particular “portions” (*bubun* 部分).

Finally, the critical eye was also essential for Murakami’s theory. Historical and comparative studies could be considered objective only when carried out with a critical eye.

For many Japanese Buddhist denominations, Murakami’s ideas were like thunderbolts from a clear sky. He denied a direct connection between Mahāyāna Buddhism and the original teachings of the Buddha. According to him, the Buddha was a historical figure, and Śākyamuni was the only Buddha who had historically existed. His ideas, although seemingly extreme, were simply the result of his adoption of modern scientific religious studies.

Differing Opinions on the Mahāyāna Teachings

In his *Daijō tetsugaku*, Inoue expressed his opinion that Mahāyāna Buddhist thought should be considered the direct teachings of the Buddha:

It is unmistakable that Śākyamuni taught both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna during his lifetime. However, the deep and mystical philosophy of Mahāyāna disappeared soon after he passed away, because it was not suited to the hot and humid climate of the central and southern regions of India . . . The character of the people and the climate in the northern region are better suited for Mahāyāna . . . At the time of Aśvaghōṣa and Nāgārjuna, the Mahāyāna teachings, which had been buried in the mountains to the north, were discovered and gradually gained popularity. Later,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 7.

these teachings were propagated in Central India and Mahāyāna was revitalized.¹²

Inoue called this theory of Mahāyāna Buddhism a “geographically-based theory of adaptability” (*chii sōō setsu* 地位相応説). The Mahāyāna teachings, which had failed to thrive in India due to the geographical surroundings, were discovered in a later period and spread into the northern region where the climate and people were more suited to its teachings.

Murakami criticized these ideas of Inoue in his *Daijō bussetsuron hihan* 大乘仏説論批判 (A Critique of the Argument That the Mahāyāna Teachings are by the Buddha) published in 1903. In the text, he introduced the theories of Anezaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 and Maeda Eun 前田慧雲, famous Buddhist scholars of this period, and concluded as follows:

From a doctrinal standpoint, it might be possible to reason that the Mahāyāna teachings are the direct teachings of the Buddha. However, this way of reasoning is not possible from a historical standpoint.¹³

Both Murakami and Inoue understood the importance of determining where to place Mahāyāna Buddhism within history. However, there is a clear difference in their opinions about whether the teachings of Mahāyāna are the Buddha’s direct teachings or not. What they had in common, however, was aiming at reconstructing Buddhist thought in light of modern consciousness. Murakami, himself, admitted that his unification theory of Buddhism was strongly influenced by Inoue:

There is no doubt that my *Bukkyō tōitsuron* should be discussed together with the late Mr. Inoue Enryō’s excellent work. However, I have to admit that both works are products of a time affected by the demands for contemporary thought.¹⁴

In spite of such a common clause, there are many different theses in their studies of Buddhist thought. While Murakami insisted that the Mahāyāna teachings had no direct relation with the original teachings of the Buddha, Inoue tried to discover the essence of Buddhist thought in Mahāyāna Buddhism and located the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition in Japan at the top of

¹² Inoue 1901, pp. 205–6.

¹³ Murakami 1903, p. 177.

¹⁴ See Murakami 1997, p. 4, for the editor’s commentary.

the evolution of Buddhism. However, they shared a basic attitude toward investigating the essence of Buddhist thought in the process of the historical development of “Buddhism” which started with “the only Buddha Śākya-muni.” Murakami directly connected the quest for the historical origin with the quest for the essence. Then he tried to establish the foundation to study the entire history of Buddhism and the diversions of the Buddhist traditions. Inoue found the possibility of future Buddhist thought within his contemporary Buddhist thought and tried to find the essence of Buddhism within this possibility itself. Murakami studied “Buddhism” (*bukkyō* 仏教) as a unified body that appeared through the comprehensive study of the long history and the cultural divergence of Buddhism, while Inoue conceptualized the “Buddha dharma” (*buppō* 仏法) as open infinitely to the future.

For Inoue, the comprehensiveness of the teachings that could keep producing an infinite interpretation was the true value of the Buddhist thought. Therefore, it was a critical subject for him to indicate the significance of “Buddha dharma” here in Japan now. For Murakami, who was aiming at the unification of “Buddhism,” tracing the long history of Buddhism and clarifying the essence of Buddhist thought became the main subject. These opposite directions of their studies were a result of differences in their methods of studying Buddhist thought: the modern “philosophical eye” and the “eye of history” or “comparative eye.”

After being expelled from his Buddhist denomination, Murakami frequently explained his basic perspective as follows:

Thinking of the excellent works of Saichō and Kūkai, I have to conclude that Mahāyāna Buddhism was not the direct teachings of the Buddha, but it reflected the intention of the Buddha. I admit it. However, the reckless critics in the world never know my true intention and always take my ideas in a totally different way.¹⁵

The aim of Murakami’s unification theory was not to criticize the teachings of the Mahāyāna. Moreover, Inoue Enryō, who basically criticized the traditional practice of Buddhism more than the teachings of Christianity, had never protected the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition unconditionally. The difference in their discourses was the difference in their visions in working on the same subject.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7.

Conclusion

In his renowned *Meiji shūkyō shichō no kenkyū* 明治宗教思潮の研究 (A Study of Meiji-Period Religious Thought), Suzuki Norihisa writes that the works of Inoue and Murakami belong to the former period of religious studies in Japan—Inoue’s works belonging to the tradition of “anti-pagan studies” (*haja gaku* 破邪学) and Murakami’s works belonging to objective “criticism of scripture” (*seiten hihyō* 聖典批評) in the tradition of Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基.¹⁶

Inoue criticized the teachings of Christianity from the standpoint of modern philosophy and Buddhist thought, while Murakami reviewed the entire history of Buddhism, seeking to find its essential teachings. It is fitting that their works be placed at the starting-point of modern religious studies in Japan—they both studied at traditional Buddhist schools in their youth and were familiar with the works of pre-Meiji Buddhist scholars. Yet, they also investigated modern Western learning and sought to reinterpret the meaning of Buddhist thought for the modern age. Suzuki is correct in pointing out the connection between their works and traditional Buddhist scholarship. However, their visions for studying Buddhism were not derived only from the traditional Buddhist learning. Although their motivation for studying the modern Western thought was based on the traditional critical concerns, they actually worked on those issues adopting the methods from the newly introduced scientific studies.

Inoue attempted to clarify the significance of Buddhist thought for the modern age by using the “philosophical eye,” while Murakami sought to discover the origins of Buddhism by studying with the scientific “eye of history” and the objective “comparative eye.” The difference in their opinions about the connection between the Mahāyāna teachings and the historical Buddha spurred much debate among Buddhist scholars in Japan.

While some have pointed out the unique qualities of Japanese Buddhism and promoted its significance for the modern age, others have criticized several Japanese Buddhist concepts (such as “original enlightenment” [*hongaku shisō* 本覚思想]) as being delusive and having no direct connection with the original teachings of the Buddha. Before discussing the plausibility of these arguments, we should go back to the origin of this debate. For this, the study of the works of Inoue and Murakami can be rewarding.

¹⁶ Suzuki 1979, pp. 6–12.

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