

Parameters of Reform and Unification in Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought: Murakami Senshō and Critical Buddhism

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REFORM is a word that, one might easily say, characterizes more than any other the history and development of Buddhism. One can see the impulse for reform as far back as the Second Council at Vaishali, held barely a century after the death of Siddhārtha Gautama, which led to the split between the Elders (Sthaviravādin) and the Great Order (Mahāsāṅghika), thus setting in motion the wheel of Buddhist sectarianism. It is certainly true that since Buddhism first “officially” arrived on the shores of Kyūshū in the 6th century CE via the Paekche Kingdom of Korea, the imperative to develop and restructure Buddhism to suit contemporary needs has been a defining motif within Japanese Buddhism. Gyōgi 行基 (668–749), Saichō 最澄 (767–822), Kūkai 空海, Hōnen 法然, Dōgen 道元, Shinran 親鸞, Nichiren 日蓮, and Ingen 隱元 may all be considered as part of this general wave. Although this paper, along with others in this volume, is concerned with specifically modern movements towards Buddhist reform in Japan, it is important to bear in mind that one could construct a long genealogy behind such movements. Yet, it must also be said that reform movements in East Asian Buddhism have often taken on another goal—*harmony* or *unification*; that is, a desire not only to reconstruct a more worthy form of Buddhism, but to simultaneously bring together all

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existing forms under a single banner, in theory if not in practice. Like the drive for reform, this urge to merge also has long precedents in Japan, dating back as far as *Jūshichijō kenpō* 十七条憲法 (Seventeen Article Constitution) by Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子,² in which the various emergent streams of Sino-Japanese culture are quite consciously fused together as one, amid the exhortation to “consider harmony as the most valuable.”³ This paper explores some of the tensions between the desire for reform and the quest for harmony in modern Japanese Buddhist thought, by comparing two developments: the late nineteenth-century movement towards “New Buddhism” (*shin bukkyō* 新仏教) as exemplified by Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929), and the late twentieth-century movement known as “Critical Buddhism” (*hihan bukkyō* 批判仏教), as found in the works of Matsumoto Shirō and Hakamaya Noriaki.

Critical Buddhism

In the mid to late 1980s, Matsumoto and Hakamaya, two Sōtō Zen school scholars at Komazawa University, launched a short-lived but controversial scholarly campaign in the name of something they called *hihan bukkyō*—Critical Buddhism. The ferment reached a peak in the early 1990s, with the publication of Hakamaya’s *Hongaku shisō hihan* 本覚思想批判 (Critiques of the Doctrine of Original Enlightenment, 1989), *Hihan bukkyō* (Critical Buddhism, 1990), *Dōgen to bukkyō* 道元と仏教 (Dōgen and Buddhism, 1992), and Matsumoto’s *Engi to kū: Nyoraizō shisō hihan* 縁起と空: 如来蔵思想批判 (*Pratītya-samutpāda* and Emptiness: Critiques of the Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha*, 1989) and *Zen shisō no hihanteki kenkyū* 禅思想の批判的研究 (Critical Studies on Zen Thought, 1994), followed by a session at the American Academy of Religion’s 1993 meeting in Washington, D.C., entitled “Critical Buddhism: Issues and Responses to a New Methodological Movement,” out of which emerged the English-language collection of essays, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Hubbard and Swanson 1994). As with all storms, this one, we might say, eventually passed the critical stage, to the extent that for many scholars Critical Buddhism is now something of a dead horse.⁴ Yet there are a number of important lessons to be learned from

² Proclaimed in 604 CE.

³ *Ichi ni iwaku, yawaragu o motte tōtoshi to shi, sakaurukoto naki o mune to seyo* 一に曰く、和ぐを以て貴しとし、忤ふること無きを宗とせよ.

⁴ It has recently been brought to my attention that the two instigators of Critical Buddhism

Critical Buddhism, not least with respect to the often competing drives towards Buddhist reform and unification.⁵

The main arguments of Critical Buddhism can be briefly summarized as follows: (1) for over 1500 years, the Mahāyāna streams in general, and modern Japanese offshoots in particular, have verged further and further off course from the true path of Buddhism, which is based on core doctrines like *pratītya-samutpāda* and has a decidedly critical, rational, and humanistic intent; (2) the causes of this degeneration, though many, can be located especially in the development of doctrines tending towards essentialism or what is called “topical Buddhism”—for example, *tathāgata-garbha* (Jp. *nyoraizō* 如来藏), Suchness (Jp. *shinnyo* 真如), Buddha-nature (Jp. *bussō* 仏性) and original enlightenment thought (Jp. *hongaku shisō* 本覚思想); (3) finally and most crucially, the broad acceptance of such quasi-essentialist doctrines have led inexorably to the emergence of forms of Buddhism that lack all critical, rational, discriminatory elements, and that, correspondingly, are bereft of a strong foundation for Buddhist ethics and social justice in the modern world. Thus, Matsumoto and Hakamaya were pushing above all for fundamental reform of Buddhist doctrine and practice. Unlike previous reformers, however, they were not interested in bringing *unity* or *harmony* to the various Buddhist schools, but rather in clearly distinguishing the core doctrines and values of True or Critical Buddhism from False or Topical Buddhism—even if such means, as they thought it would, pruning a great part of the Bodhi tree.

In all that has been written about Critical Buddhism, in both Japanese and English, very little attention has been paid to the place of the movement within

have since had a rather acrimonious, public falling-out. Matsumoto, in particular, has chosen to distance himself and his work from the tasks of his erstwhile collaborator.

⁵ I will not here go into the many-sided arguments of Critical Buddhism, but it should be noted that the “movement,” though largely based on the work of only two scholars, caused much debate and even backlash within the Japanese Buddhist community. One reason for this was the forthright, combative style employed by both scholars, though one might say Hakamaya in particular, a form which is particularly foreign to traditional Japanese scholarship. But another was the simple fact that Critical Buddhism challenged many of the shibboleths of East Asian Mahāyāna—the Zen schools in particular. Called everything from fundamentalist, neo-conservative, liberal, Westernized, and even “non-Buddhist,” Matsumoto and Hakamaya have generally stood their ground against counter-attacks. In this paper, while speaking about Critical Buddhism as a whole, I will concentrate in particular on the work of Matsumoto, who is both more consistent and concise in his argumentation than the broader-ranging Hakamaya (see Sueki 1997, p. 321).

the larger traditions of Japanese Buddhist reform.⁶ Thus, I would like in what follows to reconsider Critical Buddhism in relation to the concerns of the previous, much larger trends towards Buddhist reform that emerged almost exactly 100 years previous—the so-called *shin bukkyō* or New Buddhism of the late Meiji era. *Shin bukkyō* is a catch-all term that includes the various writings and activities of Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919),⁷ Shaku Sōen 釈宗演 (1859–1919),⁸ and Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903),⁹ as well as the so-called *Daijō hibussetsuron* 大乘非仏説論, a broad term used (often

⁶ Dan Lusthaus (1997) alludes to the historical “inevitability” as well as the “necessity” of Critical Buddhism. Lusthaus is one of the few scholars to engage Critical Buddhism from a historical rather than purely buddhological or philological perspective, raising the possibility that the arguments of Critical Buddhism may be the recurrence of “an intrinsic Buddhist debate.” Still, Lusthaus is concerned mainly with ancient Buddhist debates from India and China, not with more modern ones within Japan.

⁷ Inoue, perhaps the most influential of all these Buddhist reformers, published his *Bukkyō katsuron joron* 仏教活論序論 (Introduction to the Revitalization of Buddhism) in 1887. Like Shaku Sōen and the delegates to the 1893 Columbian Exposition, and against the so-called *Daijō hibussetsuron*, Inoue combined a strong sense of Japanese nationalism and a faith in the universal message of (Mahāyāna) Buddhism with a commitment to presenting Buddhism as the most modern and “scientific” of all the world’s religions (see Staggs 1979, Snodgrass 1998).

⁸ Shaku Sōen, Rinzai Zen master, abbot of Engakuji 円覚寺 in Kamakura and teacher of D. T. Suzuki, led the Japanese delegation at the first World’s Parliament of Religions held at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, 1893 (see Snodgrass 1998, Snodgrass 2003). Sōen, who advocated Buddhist *unity*—in his collaborative multivolume project, *Essentials of Buddhist Teachings*—as well as *hegemony*—he proclaimed Japanese Mahāyāna the “universal” religion of the modern world—is targeted by Brian Victoria (1997, pp. 25–29, 59–60, 98–99, 109–10) for his complicity in the early development of “Imperial Way Zen” in Japan.

⁹ Kiyozawa was a central figure in the Higashi Honganji (Shin) school reform movement (Higashi Honganji kaikaku undō 東本願寺改革運動) of the 1890s. More than the other figures mentioned here, but akin to thinkers of the later Kyoto School (Kyōto gaku-ha 京都学派), Kiyozawa was interested not simply in Buddhism but in coming to understand religion in a deeper and more general, existential sense. Like Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962), and Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990) after him, he would come to understand the core of Buddhism (and religion) in terms of a kind of transformative or ‘pure’ experience. His *Skeleton of a Philosophy of Religion*, distributed at the Columbian Exposition in 1893, explains the core of religion as being, “more than just the activity of the infinite power, it is the process by which the finite becomes the infinite. Of this side of the finite, we might say that it is the way that the finite reaches out towards the infinite. Moreover, among the innumerable forms of the finite, it is through our individual souls, or we might say the evolution of consciousness, that we attain to the infinite—this is the essence of religion” (Kiyozawa 2002 p. 141).

critically) to describe Buddhist writers who suggested that Mahāyāna Buddhism is not, in fact, the Buddhism taught by the “historical” Buddha Śākyamuni. Of these, I will make a few general remarks about *Daijō hibussetsuron*, before turning attention more specifically to the work of Murakami Senshō, in order to flesh out some of the similarities and differences between his attempt to construct a “unified Buddhism” and the work of his late twentieth-century avatars, the Critical Buddhists. Though a number of their aims and ideas overlap, I will argue that there remain fundamental differences with respect to the ultimate purposes of Buddhist reform. This issue hinges on the implications of key terms such as “unity” and “harmony” as well as the way doctrinal history is categorized and understood, but it also relates to issues of ideology and the use and abuse of Buddhist doctrines in twentieth-century politics.

Daijō Hibussetsuron

As Western culture and values, including models and methods of Western scholarship on religion, began to make themselves felt in the mid to late Meiji period, it was inevitable that such would lead some Buddhist scholars towards a demythologized,¹⁰ rational, ethical and historicist understanding of Buddhism. Though it can hardly be considered a school or movement in its own right, theories of scholars who adopted such tendencies came to be known, often derisively, as *Daijō hibussetsuron*, which may be literally translated as the “theory that the Mahāyāna teachings are not true Buddhism.” The term was applied to the writings of several Buddhist scholars beginning in the 1890s such as Murakami and Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), the latter of whom would eventually, and perhaps not incidentally, be appointed as first professor of Religious Studies at Tokyo Imperial University in 1905. Inspired by Western scholarly notions of empiricism and scientific method, *Daijō hibussetsuron* sought to clarify and demarcate the limits of what should be included under the rubric “Buddhism.” The conclusion was that the so-

¹⁰ This drive towards demythologization of a religious tradition finds a parallel in Western scholarship on religion of the same period, particularly the drive towards uncovering the “historical Jesus,” as well as the slightly later work of German theologian Rudolf Bultmann. As with such Western Christian scholars, the scholars of *Daijō hibussetsuron* were generally working to preserve some pure essence of their tradition by opening the gates to historical critical method, in the sincere belief that science could provide religious answers that mythology and even centuries of doctrinal development could not. It is important to note the fact that, in both cases, there was a distinct “theological” undercurrent at work.

called Great Vehicle was a repository for supernaturalism, mysticism, deformities or corruptions of the original, pure teachings, better preserved in the “Hīnayāna” and latter-day Theravāda streams of Southeast Asia. Controversy of course ensued, most of the criticism coming, unsurprisingly, from the Buddhist establishment, those still powerful institutions understandably reluctant to serve up their long-standing beliefs on the altar of “modern” (and Western-inspired) sensibilities.

It should also be recalled that this was only a few scant years after the brief but brutal state-sponsored persecution of Buddhism under the slogan *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈—lit. “Throw away Buddha and abolish Śākyamuni!” Though the program of disestablishment was soon reversed, it was to leave an important imprint on late nineteenth-century Buddhism. Inoue’s plea for “revitalization,” Murakami’s desire for “unity,” and the more general *Daijō hibussetsuron* quest for a rational, true Buddhism—in short, virtually all the permutations of *shin bukkō*—can be traced back to the after-effects of *haibutsu kishaku*.¹¹ It is also important to note that the reaction to *Daijō hibussetsuron* cannot be separated from the fact that the most well-known precedent for *Daijō hibussetsuron* within Japan does not come from one of the Meiji scholars influenced by Western thought but rather from the controversial writings of an Edo-period scholar by the name of Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基 (1715–46). Tominaga may well have been the first writer “systematically to question the assumption that the Mahāyāna sutras, or indeed others, were transmitted directly from the [historical] Buddha.”¹² Moreover, without, once again, the benefit of “Western learning,” Tominaga came to this conclusion by “the critical, historical method of juxtaposing innumerable variations in the various texts and illustrating how these arose in order for some point to be made over against another school.”¹³ Tominaga’s work raised a strong challenge to the claims to authority of the various Mahāyāna schools,

¹¹ “‘Shin Buddhism’ was shaped by the imperatives of the institutional, social, and political crises of the early Meiji period, and the need to produce an interpretation of Buddhism appropriate to the new society. By the early 1890s, this Buddhism was further determined by the links between Buddhist revival and emerging nationalism” (Snodgrass 1998, p. 325).

¹² Perhaps not incidentally, Tominaga may have also been the first scholar in Japan to employ the term *shūkyō* 宗教 in a sense that approximates its modern usage (Pye 1990, p. 122). As Ian Reader (2004, p. 9) has pointed out, this flies in the face of the assumptions of scholars such as Tim Fitzgerald, who insist that the concept of “religion” is a cultural borrowing (or imposition) from the West.

¹³ Pye 1990, p. 5.

a challenge hardly mitigated by the aggressive and sometimes derisive tone he took towards those who “vainly say that all the teachings came directly from the golden mouth of the Buddha.”¹⁴ The point in raising this earlier example of *Daijō hibussetsuron* is to show that there was an understandable assumption of those who were faced with these types of historical arguments to see them as a direct challenge to not only the truth of certain Mahāyāna teachings but to the institutional authority of the Mahāyāna schools. Even scholars today tend to read the work of Murakami in light of this more extreme version of historicism, despite the fact that he rarely, if ever, went to the extremes of Tominaga or his own *shin bukkyō* contemporary Takada Dōken 高田道見 (1858–1923).¹⁵ As I want to show in the following, this is a mistake. Although the very term *Daijō hibussetsuron* carries normative baggage—i.e., a sharp criticism of Mahāyāna traditions as being ‘deviations’ from the true Buddhism taught by Śākyamuni—this normative addendum does not apply to the mature work of Murakami.

On Bukkyō tōitsuron

In his magnum opus, *Bukkyō tōitsuron* 仏教統一論 (On the Unification of Buddhism), Murakami attempted to employ the tools of modern critical scholarship to discern a clear historical and doctrinal foundation for Buddhism. The result is at once an original, impressive, yet deeply flawed piece of Buddhist scholarship—a “gorgeous failure”¹⁶ whose grand aspiration to bring about a “scheme for the amalgamation of all Buddhist sects” was bound to end in disappointment.¹⁷ Written in fits and starts over a period of more

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵ Takada, though also an advocate of non-sectarian “unification,” developed a far stricter line against “superstition” (*meishin* 迷信) within the Mahāyāna. See LoBreglio’s article in this issue, in which he notes, quite rightly, that Takada may be considered an early twentieth-century prophet of Critical Buddhism.

¹⁶ Sueki (1993) clearly outlines the main failings of Murakami’s scholarship, not least of which are his complete lack of Sanskrit and dismissal of Western scholarly conclusions on Buddhism.

¹⁷ As Murakami himself, by the time of writing the final volume, *Jissenron* 実践論 (1927), came to acknowledge: “At the time of its first publication, theoretically and also practically, there was a possibility of Buddhist unity, as well as the thought that such was necessary.” However, after this time, he could not help but acknowledge that while, “the theoretical possibility remained, the practical possibility did not.” This seems to contradict or at least problematize his earlier admission that the unification he sought was not to be taken at the “formal” level. In any case, Sueki argues, correctly, I think, that the failure of *Bukkyō tōitsuron* has as

than twenty years,¹⁸ its argument is, on the face of it, deceptively simple: Buddhism can and should be unified, because, whether Buddhists themselves recognize it or not, underlying all the manifold teachings (*kyōsō* 教相) is a common, fundamental core or essence of doctrine (*kyōri* 教理), which provides not only the historical trunk but also the life-giving sap of the great Buddhist tree.¹⁹ Although he admits that unification at the “formal level” may not be possible, unification at the “ideal level” is not only possible and necessary but has historical precedent in the harmonizing work of Saichō, founder of the Tendai school in Japan.²⁰

In reading *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, one thing becomes immediately obvious: although Murakami was a self-consciously modern scholar ostensibly dedicated to rigorous historical scholarship, he was not so quick to follow the path of complete demythologization—he clearly states his commitment to uncovering not only the bare facts of Buddhist history, but also to the more elusive religious or doctrinal dimensions that bind Buddhists of all stripes together. In other words, Murakami employs what he refers to elsewhere as a “Buddhistic” (*bukkyō shugi* 仏教主義) approach to history, whereby the faith dimension retains a central place. This is a point where there appears to be a glaring difference between the methods of Murakami and Critical Buddhism, which is famous for Hakamaya’s pithy conclusion that “only criticism is Buddhism”—in other words, that the truth of Buddhism can be found *only* through

much if not more to do with inherent problems in Murakami’s approach as it does with changing social and religious circumstances (Sueki 2004, p. 101).

¹⁸ Successive volumes were published in 1901, 1903, 1905 and 1927 (see Sueki and Mohr in this issue).

¹⁹ Murakami 1997, p. 10. Murakami’s use of *kyōsō*, is of course related to the traditional, particularly Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of *upāya-kauśalya* (Jp. *hōben* 方便)—expedient means or “beneficent deception”—used especially by Chinese Buddhists “to help deal with the hermeneutical problem of reconciling the disparities among the different teachings attributed to the Buddha—to explain that the differences in the teachings of the Buddha delivered in his forty-nine-year ministry were the result of the different audiences he addressed” (Charles Muller, *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* [hereafter DDB], s.v. “*upāya-kauśalya*”).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 178–82. By contrast, Murakami has little to say of Saichō’s peer and rival, Kūkai, founder of the esoteric Shingon school. Perhaps this has to do with Kūkai’s more openly supercessionist approach to rival schools, including Saichō’s Tendai (see note 25). Kūkai appears to have found Saichō’s all-embracing pluralism insufficient for Buddhist “reform,” as did the various Kamakura-era founders (Hōnen, Eisai 榮西, Shinran, Dōgen, Ippen 一遍), all of whom emerged from Tendai to establish their own schools, each adhering to a pared down vision of the best means to awakening.

(and within) rational, critical, processes of analysis and empirical discrimination. Yet, looking beyond the CB rhetoric of rationalism and concomitant affection for the work of René Descartes, we see that in fact both Matsumoto and Hakamaya admit that there is a core of fundamental doctrines to which all Buddhists must adhere—a ground or bedrock that cannot be further reduced. To take the best example, and one I will return to later on, the twelve-link chain of equiprimordiality,²¹ the single most basic and important Buddhist doctrine according to Critical Buddhism, is one that, while it may be rationally understood to a certain degree, must ultimately be accepted on what amounts to unwavering faith. Murakami also places *pratītya-samutpāda* among the very core teachings of Buddhism in all its forms, and remarks, in a very similar fashion, that while faith should not be completely irrational, it does and must come into play: “As a rule,” he states,

there are two main forms to what is referred to as religious faith. One, which does not require an appeal to common sense, is belief beyond or outside anything rational, while the other is faith obtained through approval of an appeal to reason or common sense. In these two types of faith, the first cannot help but disappear through the advance of society and progress, while only the second can accompany social progress. If we foolish scholars are unable to throw away our common sense and develop a faith outside of reason, how could more lettered men possibly do so.²²

An Ideality of Origins?

Before taking these connections further, another important issue to ponder when considering Murakami’s work is the problem of what the philosopher Michel Foucault called the “ideality of origins” (itself a modernist version of

²¹ *Pratītya-samutpāda* is variously rendered in English as “co-dependent arising,” “dependent origination,” or other permutations of such, none of which sufficiently conveys the nuances of this important term (though “equiprimordiality” perhaps comes closer than those listed above). Given the continuing debates concerning a precise English translation of *pratītya-samutpāda*, I have chosen to leave it in the Sanskrit, which is the most familiar reading for buddhologists (though Hakamaya seems to prefer the Pāli *paṭicca-samuppāda*; see, e.g., Hakamaya 1990, p. 16). At any rate, the Japanese *engi* 縁起 similarly fails to convey the full Indian meaning, particularly as the word has come to mean, in ordinary Japanese, something like the English “omen.”

²² Murakami 1997, p. 464; also see Sucki 2004, p. 21.

the genetic fallacy)—understood here as the notion that True Buddhism can *only* be found in the words and teachings of the “historical Buddha” Śākyamuni. Such a belief characterizes much of Buddhist writing from ancient times up to and including the *shin bukkyō* scholars of the Meiji era; in fact, it is hard to find any Buddhist writer prior to the twentieth century who does not implicitly or explicitly make such a claim, and believe correspondingly that their own school’s teachings were the ones actually taught by Śākyamuni himself (or, in the case of more belated traditions like Chan/Zen, if not actually taught then at least “thought” by Śākyamuni). As Tominaga shrewdly noted, as far back as 250 years ago, the appeal to origins as a source for authority in Buddhism led to the wilful misattribution of Mahāyāna sutras to the time of the Buddha.²³ Does Murakami fall for this originalist temptation, which, by modern standards of scholarship, is virtually impossible to defend?²⁴ I must confess that I cannot say for certain either way; on this issue, as with so many others, Murakami’s position is ambiguous. While he clearly does believe that the core doctrines of Buddhism date back to the original teachings of Śākyamuni, he also allows that later doctrinal forms, of the Mahāyāna in particular, are “constructions.” At any rate, to give perhaps unwarranted credit, the very ambiguity of Murakami on this matter opens up the possibility that his work towards Buddhist reform and unification need not rely on what most would recognize today as a flawed and untenable premise.

Though an in-depth exploration of this matter would take us beyond the scope of the present paper, the point requires some further elaboration. Most of Murakami’s *shin bukkyō* peers, including Shaku Sōen and Inoue Enryō,

²³ Ironically, Tominaga himself, or at least the type of *Daijō hibussetsuron* that is implied by his writings, may also fall for the originalist trap, in the sense that the assertion that, based on historical evidence, the Mahāyāna sutras are belated texts with little connection to the historical Buddha, betrays a reliance upon origins as the source for what is or is not a truly “Buddhist” text or teaching.

²⁴ First, at least until someone comes up with a workable time machine, we simply cannot know, and will most likely never be able to know, what “Śākyamuni’s original teachings” really were. Even the texts that make up the Pāli Canon date from at least several centuries after the Buddha’s death. Second, even without the various “postmodern” criticisms of such an approach, it might be argued that the very idea that Buddhism has or must have what amounts to an ahistorical, non-contingent, non-cultural “essence” or foundation of any sort, betrays a number of key Buddhist doctrines regarding conditionality and impermanence. This point, which has been elegantly argued by Dale Wright (1997), might even be used against Critical Buddhism.

dealt with the problem of Mahāyāna's inescapable historical belatedness in a traditional way, by accepting the medieval Tendai teaching of the *goji* 五時 or "Five Periods" of the Buddha's teachings,²⁵ whereby "not only were the Mahāyāna sutras indisputably the Buddha's teachings, directly transmitted to the world by Śākyamuni, but they were his first teaching, his last teaching, and the only complete teaching of his Truth."²⁶ One way to understand this particular Mahāyāna "hermeneutic" is to contextualize the emergence of the Mahāyāna "schools" vis-à-vis the older, more traditional ones. Understanding the truth of Buddha's teachings as being beyond historical place and time fits well with Mahāyāna understandings of the power and abilities of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as the important trope of *upāya-kauśalya* or expedient means in teaching the Dharma.²⁷ We can see hints of this approach in the following passage:

Śākyamuni Buddha was a human being; in fact, the only Buddha to have existed historically. While the Mahāyāna teachings are not the original teachings of the Buddha, *they do reflect the intention*

²⁵ Though this particular Tendai version is thought to be based on a teaching from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (Lotus Sutra), one can find very similar ideas in the *Ta-ch'eng chi'i-hsin lun* 大乘起信論 (Awakening of Faith)—a text roundly criticized by Critical Buddhism as one of the founding documents of "topicalism"—as well as the work of Heian-period Shingon school founder Kūkai, who produced his own "Ten Stages" of the progression of religious consciousness (*jūjū shin* 十住心), including not simply the main Buddhist schools but even, on the very bottom, Confucianism and Taoism. Kūkai's own "esoteric" Shingon school, it goes without saying, finds itself at the pinnacle of this supercessionist schema.

²⁶ Snodgrass 1998, p. 328; see Inoue 1954, Ketelaar 1990. In 1895, Shaku Sōen would declare, with unconcealed satisfaction, that "the mistaken idea that Mahāyāna Buddhism was not actually the Buddha's teaching had been put to rest" (Snodgrass 1998, p. 329); and that, in fact, the specifically Japanese versions of Mahāyāna could be considered the core truth for the whole world, thus eclipsing the other great religions such as Christianity and Islam—doing, in effect, to the world religions what Mahayanists had long done to earlier Buddhist traditions—supercession in the name of both authenticity *and* "modernity."

²⁷ The *locus classicus* for this is, of course, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* itself. While the standard Mahāyāna apologetic asserts that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* was indeed taught by the historical Buddha, the very circumstances of that teaching on Vulture Peak are rife with mythological constructs and cosmic implications, such that the ordinary understanding of space and time is subverted (see Morgan 1998, pp. 226–7; Wang 2005, p. 350). In short, while the appeal to historical origins, in this case the Buddha's *vacana* or "word of Buddha," is still employed, at the same time it is subtly undercut by Mahāyāna understandings of time, space and the power of Buddhas to transcend these at will. As the Buddha himself (allegedly) put it, "I am always here" (T. 9: 43b).

of the Buddha. The conflation of these ideas should not be surprising. It is natural for scientific research to conclude that Śākyamuni Buddha was a historical figure. To regard him as a transcendent being is pure foolishness.²⁸

Almost hidden in this passage, couched within the more strident rejection of the notion of Śākyamuni as a supernatural being, one finds the significant addendum: the Mahāyāna still carries on the “intention of the Buddha” (*butsu-i* 仏意), regardless of the fact that its teachings do not come directly from his “golden mouth.”

Though some of Murakami’s remarks certainly indicate a *Daijō hibussetsuron* approach to denying the authenticity of the Mahāyāna, in general, *Bukkyō*

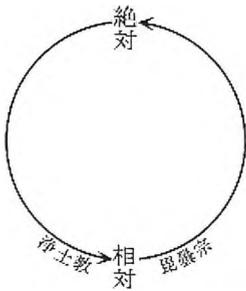


FIG. 15 Circulation of Relative & Absolute

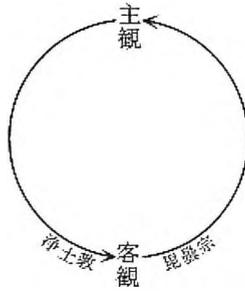


FIG. 16 Circulation of Objectivity & Subjectivity

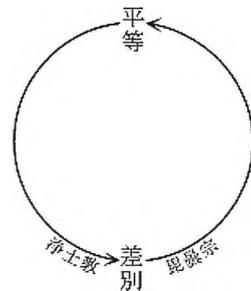


FIG. 17 Circulation of Discrimination & Non-discrimination (Equality)

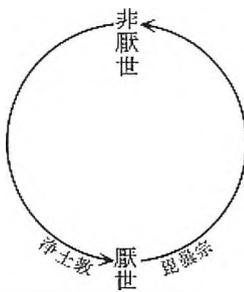


FIG. 18 Circulation of (World) Renunciation & Non-renunciation

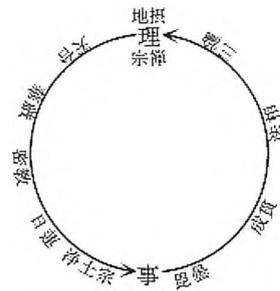


FIG. 19 Circulation of Real ('Thing') & Ideal ('Principle')

Diagram 1. The Circulation of Buddhism from Abhidharma to the Pure Land Schools²⁹

²⁸ Murakami 1997, p. 7.

²⁹ These figures are taken directly from Murakami 1997, pp. 392–99, with my translations.

tōitsuron employs a more nuanced approach, one that is at once surprising and problematic, though not without a certain systematic elegance. Instead of seeing the belated Mahāyāna forms as more authentic elaborations of the original thoughts of the Buddha (as per Inoue), or as examples of degeneration from an original, pure set of teachings (as implied by Tominaga and, at times, by the Critical Buddhists), Murakami proposes rather a dynamic “circulation” of Buddhist doctrine. He represents this process schematically by way of a number of revolving circles, each of which is meant to indicate the flow between the poles of the most important themes found in the Mahāyāna teachings (see Diagram 1).

Examining these figures, it is hard to miss their decidedly Hegelian flavor—thesis and antithesis working together to create a (higher?) *synthesis* or *sublation* (Gr. *aufgehoben*) of differences. In this way, does Murakami subsume the apparent contradictions and conflicts among sectarian visions of the Buddhism, from Abhidharma (Jp. [A]bidon [阿]毘曇) and Sattyasiddhi (Jp. Jōjitsu 成実)³⁰ through Yogācāra (Jp. Hossō 法相), Mādhyamika (Jp. Sanron 三論), Tendai, Kegon 華嚴, Mikkyō 密教 (i.e., Shingon), Nichiren and Jōdo 淨土 schools. Yet, for all the emphasis on sectarian harmony, it is important to note that if these figures are taken in a temporal sense, which is a plausible reading given the way that the various schools are located around the circle in Fig. 19, they “culminate” in the Jōdo or Pure Land schools to which Murakami himself belonged. In other words, the various schools become little more than preparatory experiments leading towards the ultimate end of Pure Land Buddhism. Moreover, given the Hegelian flavor of Murakami’s “circulation” figures, another question may be raised: Does Murakami’s vision of Buddhist unification require Hegel’s commitment to Absolute Reality “as the supersensible whole in which everything forms an integral and organic part?”³¹

In a way that suggests, once more, the stricter *Daijo hibussetsuron* of Tominaga, Murakami acknowledges that seminal Mahāyāna works such as

³⁰ An Indian school whose doctrines resemble in many ways those of the early Mahāyāna, e.g., *śūnya*, established primarily on the teachings of the *Sattyasiddhi-śāstra*. See DDB.

³¹ Blocker and Starling 2001, p. 134. Blocker and Starling, along with Piovesana, cite Inoue Enryō as being the modern Japanese thinker most strongly influenced and committed to a Hegelian vision of Buddhism, the author of *Bukkyō katsuron* going so far as to suggest that “[t]he position of Buddhism, as manifested in Kegon-Tendai, does not differ in the slightest from that of Hegel [because] matter and mind both become the one reason, the Tathagata” (Piovesana 1963, p. 230).

the *Saddharmapundarikasūtra* and *Hua-yen ching* 華嚴經 are, in fact, belated developments rather than pure replications of the original teachings. However, he does not let this take away from their power or their ability to convey key Buddhist truths—in particular, the truth of Suchness or Absolute Reality, which Murakami refers to as the “Fourth Seal of the Dharma.” In fact, though he does not take this nearly so far in the supercessionist³² direction as do his peers Inoue and Sōen, or Kūkai and the *Saddharmapundarikasūtra* did long before, Murakami does remark, almost in passing, that these belated works, based as they are on the standpoint of the Absolute (*hontai no chiritsu* 本体の地立), are able to convey their message on the problems of human life and the cosmos more clearly, and without the “roughness” that one finds in the earlier, “Hīnayāna” writings, which are based on the presumably inferior standpoint of the phenomenal world (*genshōkai no chiritsu* 現象界の地立).³³ Perhaps even more important is the shape that Murakami introduces in this discussion—the large, all-encompassing sphere, around which the various schools hover between two poles at opposite ends. Essentially, Murakami wants to show that, while each school takes a distinct and sometimes unique path, which is most evident in the external forms of its practice (including ritual, but also variations in doctrine), they ultimately share a common source, home and foundation in the core teachings of no-self and Nirvāṇa (which, as he argues elsewhere, themselves arise from the more basic teachings of the Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, and the doctrine of equiprimordiality). It is thus at the level of fundamental doctrine that the unity of Buddhism lies. As with the “developed” Mahāyāna teachings about Buddha-nature and original enlightenment, the unity of Buddhism according to Murakami is in fact already *real*, but only needs to be *realized* by Buddhists of his day—at the “ideal” if not the “formal” level.

³² Perhaps a note is required on my use of this term, which in religious scholarship is generally used in the context of explaining the hermeneutical strategies of a fledging Christianity as it emerged and sought to clarify its position vis-à-vis its parent religion, Judaism. The eventual consensus—(achieved after much debate and disputation, and in the case of Marcion (c. 110–160), even schism—was that the Christian “New Covenant,” though clearly historically belated with respect to the Jewish “Old Covenant,” effectively supersedes the latter, without (the theory goes) erasing or denying its validity (in a sense similar to the term “sublation”). Obviously, the subtleties in such an understanding were frequently lost on Christian leaders and layfolk alike, thus providing a main source for centuries of Christian anti-semitism. Though the parallel with the rise of the Mahāyāna is not perfect, I believe that there are enough similarities to justify its application here.

³³ Murakami 1997, p. 231.

Against this somewhat rosy scenario, Critical Buddhists, Matsumoto and Hakamaya, see the same history as one that is rife with stasis, conflict, and degeneration—the only bright spots being the rearguard efforts of heroes like Sōtō school founder Dōgen to stem the tide flowing away from True (i.e., “critical”) Buddhism. Critical Buddhism would point out that, while Murakami may be right about the importance of strict adherence to the basic doctrines underlying True Buddhism, he is far too tolerant in allowing for all the “84,000” schools to have a home within the all-enveloping Buddhist sphere, without discrimination on the basis of their specific teachings or practices. Yet, the issue is further complicated by the fact that, as we have seen above, Murakami’s Hegelian spheres are not quite so all-encompassing as they may at first appear, given the element of historical progression away from the pure source and back to what appears to be the highest development in the Pure Land teachings. Thus, from a Critical Buddhist perspective, Murakami ends up with the worst of both worlds, combing an ideology of harmony and non-discrimination with a covert supersessionism, based less on solid rational argument or historical scholarship than on a combination of sectarian affiliation and wishful thinking.³⁴

Variations of Historicism

Perhaps one way to understand these important differences in the work of Murakami and the Critical Buddhists is to see them as employing different types of historicism. Above, I applied this term to the work of Tominaga, who quite clearly pursued a path of scholarship based on the principle that the truth of Buddhism can be found only through historical investigation. Thus Tominaga (who, it should be recalled, wrote his works *before* Hegel) would have had little problem accepting the Hegelian dictum that “Philosophy is the history of philosophy.” Hegel also, however, argued that, as such, there can be no objective way to determine which of the many competing historical theories (or doctrines) are true—thus opening the door to what would eventually be called “relativism.” This version of historicism, embraced by many so-

³⁴ Moreover, though this falls outside the scope of Critical Buddhism, we might also add that Murakami is being paternalistic in effectively undercutting or stripping away the “external forms” of the Buddhist rainbow in favor of a denuded, underlying essence. When he says, of his own school, Jōdo Shinshū or True Pure Land Buddhism, that its beliefs in salvation via Amida’s Western paradise are simply a cover for the ancient teachings about Nirvāṇa, it is hard not to feel that perhaps more is lost than gained in such a conclusion.

called “postmodern” thinkers, is sometimes called today “New Historicism,” since it actually goes further than the earlier version of Hegel, who combined his historicist leanings with a conviction in the inexorable progressive workings of History through the Absolute Spirit.³⁵ Though the vocabulary is obviously quite different, Murakami’s dual commitment to historical research on the one hand and his conviction of the underlying (and eventual?) unification of Buddhist schools through a type of circulatory dialectic, on the other, belies a commitment to a historicism remarkably akin to that of Hegel. In contrast, Tominaga appears to embrace a version of historicism that flirts with originalism: the truths of Buddhism can be discovered not in the progressive unfolding of Buddhist doctrines through dialectical interplay but rather through the uncovering of the original teachings of the Buddha.

Along with the application of “discriminating wisdom” to all phenomena, history also plays an important role in Critical Buddhism, since a clear knowledge of the history of Buddhist doctrines in relation to Buddhist ethics and politics helps us to understand and take measures to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Here, Critical Buddhism would laud Murakami’s own commitment to history and historical research, but also his recognition, which one can find in the early work of the journal *Bukkyō shirin* 仏教史林, that the “facts” of history alone, shrunken of doctrine or faith, cannot take us much further along the path of reform and reconstruction. Moreover, despite superficial resemblances, both Murakami and the Critical Buddhists ultimately part company with common modernist assumptions regarding the pure origins of Buddhism before the Mahāyāna; even while retaining its strong criticism of the Mahāyāna streams, Matsumoto and Hakamaya do not argue that the only true Buddhism is original Buddhism, but rather that the only true Buddhism is *critical* Buddhism, which means something entirely different. It must be admitted, as Sueki Fumihiko has pointed out in his recent essay, that Murakami was rather inconsistent in his attitudes to the relative importance between history and doctrine, as well as the status of Mahāyāna within the larger Buddhist tradition (Sueki 2004). However, although Murakami’s commitment to history appears to have weakened over the decades, it never entirely disappears, and serves to keep him apart from the growing trend towards

³⁵ This more strictly Hegelian historicism—picked up and reworked on a materialist basis by Marx—is roundly criticized in the works of Karl Popper, notably his *Poverty of Historicism* (1944) and *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945). In a fashion similar to Critical Buddhism, Popper argued that this Hegelian view is the main theoretical presupposition underpinning many forms of political authoritarianism and tyranny.

the non-historical, existential brand of modernist Buddhism, developed in the early and mid-twentieth century by the likes of D. T. Suzuki, the Kyoto School, and sundry Western Buddhist popularizers.

“*Daijō bukkyō*”

Some of these same themes, as well as what might be seen as Murakami’s growing ambivalence towards *Daijō hibussetsuron*, emerge even more strongly in a late article entitled “*Daijō bukkyō*” 大乘仏教 (Mahāyāna Buddhism), where he says: “My contention is, the Buddha did not necessarily teach the Hīnayāna or the Mahāyāna, as these are designations invented later; what was really preached by the Buddha himself was primitive Buddhism in which there was yet no differentiation.”³⁶ Yet, Murakami follows this by allowing that some forms of early Buddhism do come close to the original teachings—particularly those reliant on the *Āgamas*, as well as the tradition known as Sarvāstivāda, an early Indian school well known for its insistence on the reality of *dharmas* past, present, and future, and thus of the phenomenal world—doctrines that would come to be heavily criticized by Nāgārjuna, Aśaṅga and the emerging Mahāyāna schools.³⁷

However, as Murakami puts it, the Sarvāstivādins “were satisfied with a logical, intellectual, and moral explanation of life, they took the world as it appears to the senses, they neglected to pay attention to the deepest yearnings of the soul, in fact they regarded these as not concerning our ethical and logical life. It was these assumptions . . . that Nāgārjuna fiercely attacked. . . .”³⁸ On the one hand, we might expect Murakami to praise the Sarvāstivādins, not only for their adherence to the early Buddhist teachings, but also for their attention to rational analysis and the ideal of “discriminating wisdom”—which aligns well with Murakami’s early commitment to rationalism and

³⁶ Murakami 1921, p. 95.

³⁷ Upon reflection, in many respects the Sarvāstivādins are the closest ancient sect or school to modern Critical Buddhism. First, they are a scholarly movement, one committed to a form of realism, but not to the extent of development what we might call a deep essentialism: the non-reality of the forms we interact with are no less significant or useful for being “non-real,” and even the fully-existent *dharmas* of which all things are composed do not appear to rest on an overarching foundation or Reality (see Williams 2000, pp. 112–5). Given this, it is ironic, from a CB perspective that it was the Mahāyāna tradition, with its development of *tathāgata-garbha*, Suchness, Buddha-nature, and original enlightenment, that seems to have relapsed into the very ways of thinking that they originally fought so hard against.

³⁸ Murakami 1921, pp. 97–98.

critical, historical studies. Yet, on the other hand, it is impossible to read the remark that the Sarvāstivādins dismissed the “deepest yearnings of the soul” without hearing a strong note of approbation. In fact, Murakami goes on in “Daijō bukkyō” to develop the thesis that Nāgārjuna helped establish a more authentic expression of Buddhist teaching by adding a fourth “Seal” to the Hīnayāna’s “Three Seals of the Dharma.” This “Fourth Seal” is Suchness or Absolute Reality (Jp. *shinnyo*). As in *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, but in much more succinct and cursory fashion, Murakami outlines a genealogy of the development of Mahāyāna after the rise of Sarvāstivāda: from Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and the *Ta-ch’eng chi’i-hsin lun*, through Aśvagoṣa, to the Chinese schools—divided, somewhat awkwardly, into four categories: “Perfect Doctrine” (i.e., T’ien-t’ai/Tendai, Kegon); “Extra-Scriptural” (i.e., Chan/Zen); “Esoteric” (i.e., Shingon); and finally the Pure Land schools. Though the tone of this short essay on “Daijō bukkyō” is largely descriptive (as, it might be argued, are most of Murakami’s writings), the brief conclusion betrays the fact that there is more at work here than a mere attempt to lay out the objective facts of history. Here is how Murakami concludes the piece:

The Idea of Amitabha Buddha taught by the Jōdo school seems at first sight to contradict all the dogmas of Buddhism, *but we know that it is the moral and religious culmination* of the Mahāyāna Buddhology which unfolded itself after the passing of the Buddha in conjunction with the development of Suchness (*shinnyo*) as the ultimate reality of existence.³⁹

We might spend many pages parsing these rather striking lines, but let us focus on just two points. First, Murakami here openly plays the Mahāyāna supercessionist card—the theory or perhaps ideology by which each successive school of Buddhist tradition replaces and in fact supersedes, in turn, each earlier one. Not only is the Mahāyāna thus lauded as a gradual but persistent “unfolding” of Buddhist truth (in contrast to *Daijō hibussetsuron*, *Critical Buddhism*, and even some of Murakami’s earlier statements), but now the very school that, by the author’s own admission, seems to diverge most widely from the early Buddhist path, is in fact the one that is lauded as the “culmination” of such a long and arduous development.

Second, and more pertinent to the concerns of *Critical Buddhism*, Murakami here connects the “obvious” superiority of the Pure Land Way with

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108. Emphasis added.

the development of the so-called Fourth Seal of the Dharma—Absolute Reality, Suchness or *dharmadhātu*—which came to be considered in the Mahāyāna as the essential ground or locus of equiprimordiality and thus of all phenomena.⁴⁰ Moreover, such a doctrine cannot, says Murakami, possibly be explained or understood on a logical, rational basis—“it is beyond our analytical understanding.”⁴¹ This line of thought, and the mode of expressing it, could hardly be more opposed to Critical Buddhism, which argues that it is in fact the very development of essentialist doctrines like Suchness—whether found in earlier Mahāyāna *tathāgatha-garbhā* and Buddha-nature or the later and more specifically Japanese notion of “original enlightenment”—that has most corrupted the true spirit of Buddhism, and that this has led to a “mystical” and problematic notion that Buddhist truth is somehow beyond language and reason. Furthermore, Murakami here makes the claim, though without providing anything in the way of supporting evidence or argument, that this gradual progress of the Mahāyāna, by way of the doctrine of Suchness to the Pure Land schools, is one that is not only religious but also *moral*. Here too, the contrast with Critical Buddhism could hardly be sharper, since both Hakamaya and Matsumoto insist that it is precisely within the realm of ethics (and politics) that Suchness wreaks havoc upon modern forms of Mahāyāna.

Below are two contrasting figures introduced by Matsumoto, showing the structure of what he derisively calls either *dhātu-vāda* (a Sanskrit neologism meaning something like “the way of essentialism”) or Topical Buddhism (Diagram 2), and the reverse image of what Matsumoto takes to be “True” Buddhism (Diagram 3):

⁴⁰ Cf. DDB entries on *hokkai engi* 法界緣起: “The *dharmadhātu* as the environmental cause of all phenomena, everything being dependent on everything else, therefore one is in all and all in one;” *nyoraizō engi* 如來藏緣起 and *shinnyo engi* 真如緣起: “Production from *tathatā* (*shinnyo*) through the action of causation.” Such doctrines have their locus classicus in the *Ta-ch’eng chi’i-hsin lun*, but find opposition in the writings of Faxiang and the *ālayavijñāna* doctrine of the Hossō school.

⁴¹ Murakami 1921, p. 99. Besides suggesting an even stronger move away from Kant to Hegel, we might also suggest that in focusing here on the foundation of *dharmadhātu*, Murakami has moved away from the late nineteenth-century “science of religion” or *Religionswissenschaft* and closer to the so-called “phenomenology of religion” found in the early twentieth-century works of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, a path that, in its insistence on a common, non-rational “ground” to religion, corresponds in many ways with the work of D. T. Suzuki, Hatano Seiichi, and the Kyoto School (see Tsuchiya 2000, p. 17). Yet, here again, in the case of Otto, Eliade, Suzuki, et al., the non-verbal ground was located in a kind of immediate experience—a line of argument suggested but not fully developed in Murakami.

SHIELDS: PARAMETERS OF REFORM AND UNIFICATION

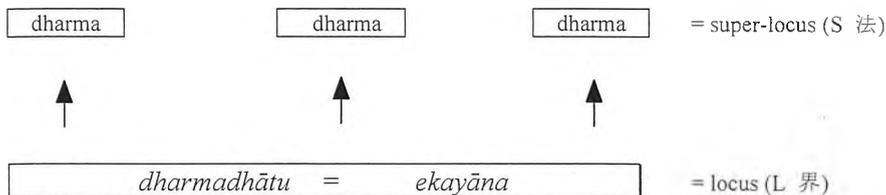


Diagram 2. Matsumoto's Map of the "Theory of Locus" or *Dhātuvāda* Buddhism⁴²

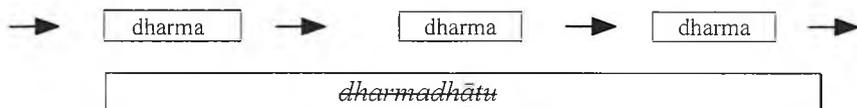


Diagram 3. Matsumoto's Map of *Pratītya-samutpāda* Buddhism⁴³

In Diagram 2, the components of phenomenal reality, or *dharmas*, arise from a fundamental locus or ground, signified by terms such as *dharmadhātu* and *ekayāna*. This, says Matsumoto, though common, is a “non-Buddhist” deviation from the proper understanding of Buddhism based on *pratītya-samutpāda*, as portrayed in Diagram 3. Although the fit is not immediately obvious, the so-called *dhātuvāda* structure for the arisal of phenomenal reality out of an underlying locus does in fact point to the heart of Murakami's own circulation thesis. In both cases, the individual elements—whether *dharmas* or the variety of sectarian teachings—become epiphenomena whose deeper reality must be sought in a singular, unified base. Though Murakami, as we have seen, adds a Hegelian dynamism to the picture, which lessens the sense of stasis, the framework remains, for all intents and purposes, a ‘topical’ one. As Matsumoto writes:

The structure of *dhātuvāda*, whose affirmation of identity and non-discrimination ironically ends up affirming and absolutizing actual differences, can also be seen in the Japanese notion of “original

⁴² Adapted from Matsumoto 1989, p. 5, as well as a slightly revised version in Matsumoto 1997, p. 170.

⁴³ Adapted from Matsumoto 1989, p. 67.

enlightenment,” itself based on the *tathāgata-garbha* tradition . . . The same phenomenon took place in India. The structure of *dhātu-vāda* . . . had itself been the target of Shākyamuni’s criticism—the *Brahman-ātman* of the Upanishads . . . The important point is that Shākyamuni’s doctrine of causality, *pratītya-samutpāda*, can only be understood when viewed as antithetical to the theory of a singular ground or cause of the manifold world—that is, to the idea of *dhātu-vāda* . . . This is also the grounds for my thesis that *tathāgata-garbha* thought is not Buddhist.⁴⁴

Now, it might be argued that neither side actually goes far towards proving its case in this debate—one of the weakest links in Critical Buddhism is precisely the assumption that quasi-essentialist doctrines have a direct and deleterious effect on the ethical behavior of Buddhists. Yet, Matsumoto and Hakamaya do have one thing on their side: the benefit of hindsight. Though it may be impossible to *prove* their point, the suggestion that Buddhist doctrines may have played a shaping, if not a determinative role in the otherwise-surprising complicity of virtually all mainstream Japanese Buddhist schools in the development of imperial ideology of early Shōwa until the end of World War II cannot be so easily dismissed. It remains a compelling hypothesis, one that I believe is bolstered by the recent work of scholars like Brian Victoria, Bernard Faure, Christopher Ives and Robert Sharf.⁴⁵ This is not to suggest that Murakami, or his peers, should be held culpable for the emergence of what would later be called by the seemingly paradoxical term, Imperial Way Buddhism (*Kōdōzen* 公道禪).⁴⁶ Yet, the case can and perhaps needs to be made that some of Murakami’s ideas, especially in his later writings, such as those proposing the development of “Suchness” as the basis for the “obvious” superiority of Mahāyāna or more specifically Pure Land buddhology and morality, and the criticism—if such it be—of Abhidharma and the Sarvāstivādins

⁴⁴ Matsumoto 1997, p. 172.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Victoria 1997, Victoria 2003, Faure 1991, Faure 2002, Ives 1999, Ives 2001, Ives 2005, Sharf 1993, Heisig and Maraldo 1994. A Japanese precedent can be found in the postwar writings of Ichikawa Hakugen, particularly Ichikawa 1970.

⁴⁶ There are certainly conservative and even nationalist currents in Murakami’s thought and writings (just as there are, more obviously, in the work of Inoue Enryō)—the best example being his 1912 essay entitled “Loyalty [to the Emperor] and Filial Piety in Buddhism,” published, along with pieces by both Inoues (Enryō and Tetsujirō) in a work entitled *Sonnō aikoku ron* 尊皇愛國論 (Essays on Reverence for the Emperor and Patriotism).

in particular for sacrificing “the soul’s deepest yearnings” on the altar of logic and intellection, appear to coalesce in a number of respects with the highly destructive Buddhist ideologies of the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s.

Moving straight to the heart of the matter, from a Critical Buddhist perspective the biggest stumbling-block to retrieving Murakami’s work today is the very thing that may at first seem to be its greatest appeal—the notion of Buddhist unification. This is a matter that goes beyond the simple accusation that Murakami or his writings—like those of most of his peers—supported or endorsed in some way the emerging nationalist ideology and loyalty of religious institutions to the imperial household. While the desire to bring together a fractured tradition seems laudable in its aspirations to “tolerance,” particularly within religious traditions that have fought sectarian battles (i.e., all of them), a strong counter-argument suggests that, in our present, “post-modern” age, such unification can only be built upon a shared appreciation for diversity, not upon the imposition of some deeper, underlying similarity. Of course, there are similarities and shared doctrinal grounds among the various streams of Buddhism, but to suggest that *only* what is shared is relevant or *truly* Buddhist seems to be drifting into dangerous ideological waters, not to mention the supersessionist tendencies in the specific version of historicism employed by Murakami. After all, the rhetoric of harmony—based on a romanticist organic model in which, despite “superficial” distinctions, a people or *Volk* share a deep, fundamental common accord—has been used in modern times as one of the foundations of modern fascism, in Japan as in Germany and Italy.⁴⁷

Consider the following provisional chart, presented here as a possible Critical Buddhist approach to the problems of unification and non-sectarian Buddhist scholarship.

Here, Buddhism remains “founded” on a core set of doctrines such as

⁴⁷ Besides the obvious example of the *kokutai* 国体 or “one body of the nation” led by the divine emperor, one might include the almost risibly euphemistic “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” (*Dai tōa kyōei ken* 大東亜共榮圏)—based on the notion that, in creating their empire, the Japanese armies were simply “reminding” other Asian nations of their unity vis-à-vis the encroaching Western nations. Here, real, important differences—including resistance to brutal Japanese occupation—disappear from view in favor of an (imposed) ideology of peace and brotherhood. The Buddhist element here can be found in the fact that some Japanese Buddhist leaders were in fact supporting imperial expansion in the name of “reminding” Asian Buddhists of their true, common heritage (which, alas, they had lost); see Victoria 1997, *passim*.

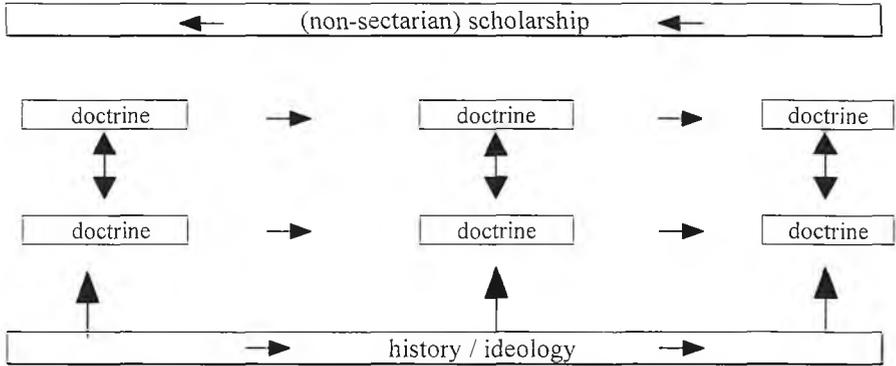


Diagram 4. Proposed Methodology for Non-sectarian Buddhist Scholarship

pratītya-samutpāda and *anātman*. Yet, these are not taken to be part of a larger, deeper or more fundamental ground in “Suchness” or “Absolute Reality.” Rather, the basic doctrines give rise to new doctrines, through the principle of causality: like all *dharma*s, doctrines arise historically in an interdependent fashion. This chart recognises that the principle of equiprimordiality is more than just a doctrine or point of faith, but a method that must be applied wholesale to reflection on Buddhist tradition and study of the emergence and development of sectarian differences. Here is a point which Murakami may have something to add to Critical Buddhism, since, for all his attempts at unification, he is clearly more willing to appreciate the contingency of sectarian teachings, without dismissing them out of hand if they fail to conform to certain standards of rationality. The movement of the various parts here indicates that the model for discussion and debate is more akin to Socratic than Hegelian dialectics. Yet, what Murakami’s vision lacks, due partly to his historical circumstances but also to his emphasis on unification, is a deep recognition of the political and ideological elements involved in the development of Buddhist doctrine. A truly critical, non-sectarian scholarship must come to terms with the complications introduced by ideology in doctrinal history.

Murakami’s Legacy: (Critical) Buddhist Theology?

After the above cautionary remarks regarding the pitfalls of placing too much value on unification, I would like to conclude with a more positive evaluation of Murakami’s work, framed by the question of whether Murakami—this

early if inconsistent champion of historical scholarship and non-sectarianism—might be considered a practitioner of something that has of late come to be known as “Buddhist theology.” According to Roger Jackson and John Makransky, whereas, by and large:

scholars trained in Religious Studies (including Buddhist Studies) critically analyze the data of a religion at a distance from tradition, to develop theories of interest to the Western academy. By contrast, contemporary theologians who have been trained by and stand within a religious tradition use the same tools for a different purpose: to draw critically upon the resources of tradition to help it communicate in a new and authentic voice to the contemporary world.⁴⁸

As I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁹ both Matsumoto and Hakamaya can fall within this category, based on the fact that, despite their affection for Descartes and sometimes positivist rhetoric, they make no secret of the fact that the aim of their work is less to discover the objective Truth of Buddhism (they deride the particularly Weberian method of objectivity that undergirds much modern scholarship),⁵⁰ than to promote a particular “Buddhistic” agenda, although one that, in their view, aligns very well with the values and aims of the European Enlightenment. In other words, Critical Buddhism has the explicit purpose of criticizing, reinterpreting, developing, and ultimately advocating a “superior” form of the Buddhist religion. The goal is not the uncovering of truth or to make a “contribution to knowledge” or to “the academy,” but to get Japanese Buddhists to realize the errors of their ways. Indeed, of late, Matsumoto has moved away from the term Critical Buddhism and begun to proclaim his recent work an exercise in “Critical Theology.”⁵¹

How does Murakami’s work relate to this emerging area of Buddhist theology? First, it should be recalled that the term *shūkyō* 宗教, usually translated

⁴⁸ Makransky 2000, p. ix; see also Makransky 2000, p. 19 for a similar but more extended explanation of “Buddhist theology.”

⁴⁹ See p. 108 of this issue.

⁵⁰ See Hakamaya 1997.

⁵¹ Matsumoto 2000, pp. 1–12. Steven Heine (2001) discusses the “transition” in a more recent work of Matsumoto, away from Critical Buddhism towards what Matsumoto himself refers to as “Critical Theology” (*hihan shūgaku* 批判宗学), but I am more inclined to see a development in a more specific “theological” direction, rather than a turn away from “criticism” towards “theology”—since I would lump Critical Buddhism itself within a broad theological framework.

today as “religion,” actually means something more like “sectarian teachings.” Until the Meiji period and the influx of Western scholarly methods, Buddhist “scholarship” in Japan (with the exception of rare thinkers like Tominaga) was largely sectarian studies. Murakami, along with others involved in the development of “academic Buddhism” (*kōdan bukkyōgaku* 講壇仏教学), introduced a scholarly approach quite distinct from the work of more traditional Buddhist sectarian writers. Yet, Murakami does not follow the path towards a pure “religious studies” or *Religionswissenschaft* approach. Like the Critical Buddhists, he is clearly interested in promoting a “Buddhistic” agenda.⁵² *Bukkyō tōitsuron* is not meant to be simply a comprehensive genealogy of the Mahāyāna, but, more importantly, a call to action in the name of greater Buddhist harmony. Though ponderous in style, it is a work that remains every bit as much a manifesto as Hakamaya’s *Hihan bukkyō* or Matsumoto’s *Engi to kū*. Moreover, for all its weakness when judged by contemporary standards of historical scholarship, it remains of interest as a work that strives to forge a difficult balance between objectivity and polemic, at a time when most Buddhist scholars were lining up firmly on either side of the divide.

The benefits of “Buddhist theology” are many, but in particular the frank admission of Buddhist affiliation, and the corollary belief that scholarly work may have a goal that goes beyond the search for empirical facts or some “objective” truth, combined with a commitment to intellectual honesty and a desire to test whatever is testable (without dismissing as unimportant that which is not), provides a potentially fertile “middle way” between the more strict terms of so-called “objective” scholarship (whose methodology has recently taken a number of hits from feminist, “postmodern” and “postcolonial” scholars) and simple sectarian apologetics.⁵³ A final problem that besets much modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship is the tendency to focus on ideas

⁵² As early as the foundation of *Bukkyō shirin*, his journal dedicated to historical Buddhist research, Murakami was attempting to trace a “middle path” between the so-called “scientific” historians on the one hand, and the “moralists” on the other, by following a Buddhist (*bukkyō shugi*) perspective (*Bukkyō shirin* 1, no. 2, p. 1). Sueki calls this “a particular characteristic of . . . Murakami’s historical perspective on Buddhism” (Sueki 2004, p. 94).

⁵³ David Tracy has defined theology in this sense as “intellectual reflection within a religious tradition”—but reflection that falls somewhere between the lines of apologetics and historical studies (Jackson and Makransky 2000, p. 2). Heine (2000, p. 133) notes that the Japanese term *shūgaku* 宗学—though literally translated as “sectarian studies”—actually contains Tracy’s sense.

over practice—a trend that, according to Nishijima Gudō, was actually reinforced by Western influence during the period of *shin bukkō*.⁵⁴ This is a problem that should draw our attention away from Buddhist theology and towards Engaged Buddhism, an applied form of Buddhist studies now flourishing in the West and in various, mostly Theravāda, Buddhist countries. Though Critical Buddhism also outlined a vision of Buddhism that is at once ethically and politically engaged, with perhaps one exception,⁵⁵ neither Hakamaya nor Matsumoto went very far towards introducing or implementing practical reforms themselves—their work remained largely enclosed within the ivory tower of ideas.⁵⁶ Yet, it is precisely the emphasis on the relevance of doctrine and fundamental beliefs to Buddhist ethics and socio-political engagement that remains the most important legacy of Critical Buddhism, and one that must be retained in any contemporary movement towards Buddhist reform, let alone Buddhist unification.

Conclusion

In his magnum opus, *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, Murakami attempts to employ the tools of modern scholarship to discern a clear historical and doctrinal foundation for Buddhism. In discussing more specifically these foundations of Buddhism, Murakami comes up with three general principles, all of which seem to coalesce well with the Critical Buddhism of Matsumoto Shirō and Hakamaya Noriaki: (1) the priority of reason over revelation; (2) the priority of subjectivity over objectivity; and (3) the ultimate goal of liberation from ignorance.⁵⁷ Yet, unlike the Critical Buddhists, Murakami also called for the emergence of a *universal, non-sectarian* Buddhism based on a set of unified and undisputed doctrines. In other words, Murakami's vision was more constructive than critical—or, at least, was intended to be both. As a result, he was not completely dismissive of the Mahāyāna teachings, coming to see

⁵⁴ Nishijima 1997, pp. 19–20.

⁵⁵ The one exception being their work towards ending social discrimination towards the *burakumin* or “outcastes” of Japan (see Bodiford 1996).

⁵⁶ Stone (1999, p. 183) provides the most concise argument against this weakness of Critical Buddhism, though she is not alone in making note of it. One may even get a sense of this in the fact of the “idealization” of the aristocratic philosopher Dōgen, whose ideas and life, as Heine (2001, p. 136) notes, appear to be much less “conducive to social reforms” than any of the other Kamakura Buddhist reformers, who tend to be ignored by Critical Buddhism. This also, of course, raises the question of their own sectarian biases.

⁵⁷ Murakami 1997, p. 53.

these as belated but nonetheless significant adaptations and permutations of the core Buddhist truths taught by Śākyamuni. A tension thus arises in his work between the call for a historical approach and the desire to bring about or “realize” an already existing doctrinal unity among Buddhist schools. While Murakami’s usage of what amounts to a Hegelian version of historicism can be criticized on a number of levels, his commitment to critical scholarship, engaged in a constructive “Buddhist theology,” makes his work, for all its flaws, worthy of reconsideration.

ABBREVIATION

DDB *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, edited by Charles Muller,
<<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/index.html>> (12 June 2006).

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