

BOOK REVIEWS

Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. A Kuroda Institute Book. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

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The study of Japanese Buddhism has been receiving new impetus from several directions in the recent past. Among the elements worthy of mention in this regard include the reconfigurations of images of medieval Japanese society opened up by the work of Kuroda Toshio, the fresh insights derived from research into the institutional history of religious communities by scholars on both sides of the Pacific, and the questions raised by proponents of what is known as Critical Buddhism, which challenged some basic presuppositions of traditional scholars.

Jacqueline I. Stone's weighty volume not only does the service of updating the reader on key developments in the study of Japanese Buddhism over the last few decades, with its wide range of citations and near-comprehensive documentation, but more significantly, takes a major step forward in this field of research, setting forth a new framework of conceptualization. What it accomplishes is no less than a paradigmatic shift that will surely generate further studies into related themes along the lines it maps out.

The term "original enlightenment" (*hongaku* 本覚) garnered deserved scholarly attention in the mid-nineteen sixties, with the publication of the award-winning study by Tamura Yoshirō focusing on this theme.¹ Subsequent works, including the first published collection of *hongaku* texts co-edited by Tamura and others,² brought wider public attention to this notion not only as an aspect of Buddhist thought but as a key feature of Japanese ethos and culture as well.

From another angle, Kuroda Toshio's work opened a new framework of discourse, recasting moulds of conceptualizing the Buddhist movements of the

¹ Tamura Yoshirō 田村芳朗, *Kamakura Shin Bukkyō Shisō no Kenkyū* 鎌倉新仏教思想の研究 [Studies in the Thought of New Kamakura Buddhism], (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1965).

² Tamura Yoshirō, Tada Kōryū, Ōkubo Ryōjun, Asai Endō, eds., *Tendai Hongaku Ron* 天台本覚論, *Nihon Shisō Taikei* vol.9 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1973).

Kamakura period.³ It led the move away from stereotypical accounts that came out of sectarian-based sources (for example, drawing sharp lines between the “old” and the “new”), whose overriding though understandable concern was to glorify and enhance the image and significance of their own founder and religious community in history. Kuroda, taking cue from Tamura’s work, identified *hongaku shisō* as a factor that provided ideological support for the exoteric-esoteric socio-politico-economic power system (*kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制) that prevailed in medieval Japanese society.

With these and many other publications, academic as well as general-oriented, the thesis that “original enlightenment thought” exercised an all-pervasive influence not only on religious but also on cultural, socio-economic and political realities and structures in Japanese society throughout its history came to be an established one. This point in turn has occasioned a barrage of critiques from another direction, namely, from scholars who, under the aegis of “Critical Buddhism,” maintain, given the influence of *hongaku* thought on Japanese religion and culture, that therefore, (what is known as) Japanese Buddhism “is not (really) Buddhism.” The proponents of this type of critique (notably Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō), denounce “original enlightenment thought” and the “Japanese Buddhism” that came to be formed under its influence, as a deviation from the normative Buddhist teaching of Gotama Śākyamuni. This contention has raised a veritable hornet’s nest in Japanese Buddhist circles, and has elicited various responses from scholars and Buddhist adherents.⁴

The above is part of the setting in which Stone’s study can be situated and appreciated. The central question that propels it is simply thus: what is “original enlightenment thought,” and how has it figured, what role has it played, in the religious and cultural history of Japan? In the process of delivering an answer, the author opens for the reader a window into the world of medieval Japanese thought and culture, offering perspectives for understanding the present as well. And she does deliver, backed by a meticulous and careful reading of primary and secondary sources, helped in no little way by a systematic, thoughtful, and very readable treatment of the major issues involved.

Part One prepares the ground, with a genealogy of the key term and a survey of

³ Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄, *Nihon Chūsei no Kokka to Shūkyō* 日本中世の国家と宗教 [The State and Religion in Medieval Japan], (Iwanami Shoten, 1975); *Jisha Seiryoku: Mōhitotsu no Chūsei Shakai* 寺社勢力: もう一つの中世社会 [The Power of Temple-Shrine Complexes: Yet Another Medieval Society], (Iwanami Shoten, 1980); *Ōbō to Buppō: Chūseishi no Kōzu* 王法と仏法: 中世史の構図 [The Imperial Law and the Buddhist Law: The Structure of the Medieval History], (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1983); and others.

⁴ See Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

historical developments of its usage (in the first chapter), followed by an account of different scholarly theories of its relationship to Buddhist developments of the Kamakura era (in the second). Part Two ushers the reader into the spiritual and intellectual world of medieval Japan, with chapter Three describing the pivotal role of what is termed “the culture of secret transmission” in the maintenance of power structures in Japanese society, and chapter Four elucidating the hermeneutical strategies involved in the reading of religious texts within a context of ascetical (esoteric, or tantric) practice. Chapter Five then offers a reappraisal of the Tendai-based original enlightenment discourse, marking the significant features that enable us to situate it with greater clarity in the context of the formation, development, and transmission of what came to be called the “New Kamakura Buddhism.” Part Three examines Nichiren Buddhism against the backdrop of the central thesis of the volume developed in the fifth chapter, with a masterful account of the career and teaching of Nichiren himself (in the sixth chapter), and a description of subsequent developments in his teaching as carried on by his followers in later generations (in the seventh).

I will now retrace my steps and summarize the contents of each chapter, making evaluative and critical comments along the way.

The first chapter offers a handy historical introduction to the discourse surrounding the notion of original enlightenment, noting the initial appearance of this term in the problematic treatise *The Awakening of Faith*, outlining its development in Hua Yen and T'ien T'ai thought in China, and pursuing its ramifications after its transplantation on Japanese soil, with contributions of Saichō, Kūkai, and medieval Tendai thinkers. The influence of *hongaku* thought on broader currents, including Shintō theory, poetics, aesthetics, and other aspects of culture, is also mapped out, giving the reader a fairly clear picture of the importance of this notion in the formation of Japanese ethos and identity. In passing, Tamura Yoshirō had much earlier provided such a historical introduction, with an expository essay appended to the collection of *hongaku* texts he coedited (1973), cited above. Stone builds upon Tamura's essay, supplementing it with further textual and historical corroborative material from her own research, and adds an account of problematic issues in the study of Tendai *hongaku* thought that other scholars have raised in Tamura's wake.

To this reviewer, one area that could have warranted further treatment in the genealogical account concerns the developments in Buddhist thought in India and China that prepared for original enlightenment discourse. It may have been a strategic decision on the part of the author to take the first appearance of the term *hongaku* (Ch. *pen chueh*) in the *Awakening of Faith* as the starting point in her genealogical account, but an exploration of related notions that preceded this term, such as the *Ekayāna* doctrine of the *Lotus Sutra*, *tathāgatagarbha* thought, as well as the various attempts at positive expressions of the doctrine of Emptiness, including developments in thinking around the notion of Buddha-nature (仏性 Ch. *fo-*

hsing), would have provided a broader picture. In this regard, the work of Takasaki Jikidō (notably his *Nyoraizō shisō no Keisei* [The Formation of *Tathāgatagarbha* Thought], and subsequent publications on the theme) would be a valuable resource to consult.⁵

The second chapter prepares the stage for the main argument of the volume (found in the fifth chapter), describing three rival perspectives (“matrix,” “radical break,” and “dialectical emergence” theories) in current scholarship (that is, before Stone) regarding the relationship between *hongaku* thought and Buddhist developments during the Kamakura period. The author also includes a summary of the basic arguments raised by the proponents of Critical Buddhism vis-à-vis the notion of original enlightenment. This chapter is a very helpful guide for understanding key issues raised in Japanese Buddhist scholarship in the last few decades, which readers familiar with the Japanese sources would find insightful as well.

The third and fourth chapters portray the religious ethos of medieval Japan, focusing on the development and transmission of Esoteric ritual and doctrine in the Tendai tradition. Stone shows her mastery of the available literature and of the nuances of Tendai thought with her well-woven accounts, though the non-specialist may get lost in the intricate descriptions of the different lineages and personages with their emphases on particular points of ritual and/or doctrine. A comment by the author which this reviewer finds highly significant is one to the effect that the practice of secret transmission, which flowed over from religious circles to the wider arena of cultural, martial, and manufacturing arts, “became the normative mode of transmitting knowledge in premodern Japan” (p. 109). Indeed, anyone with some degree of familiarity with Japanese culture will be able to connect this with the still practiced master-disciple mode of educating students in traditions such as of flower arrangement, tea-ceremony, Noh and Kyōgen, martial arts, and other “ways” of human artistic endeavor. Involved in these ways is a framework of relationships that accord authority to the *iemoto* (head of the lineage) as the transmitter of knowledge received directly from the previous head, and passed on likewise directly to succeeding generations.

From a historical perspective, some comments of the author highlighting the mode of oral transmission as having flourished in Japan’s medieval period may tend to make one lose sight of the longer and broader traditions of oral transmission in religious circles that came from India (since pre-Buddhist times), to China and eastwards. For example: “. . . there is little evidence that secret oral transmissions played a significant role in Chinese T’ien-t’ai or early Japanese Tendai” (p. 119); “. . . the medieval Tendai *kuden* (口伝, oral transmission) cannot be traced back to Saichō . . .” (p. 123). At the risk of stating the obvious, one may venture to say that

⁵ Takasaki Jikidō 高崎直道, *Nyoraizō shisō no Keisei* 如来蔵思想の形成 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1974).

precisely because it is oral tradition, transmitted from master to disciple on a one-to-one basis, a significant portion of what actually transpired has not come down to us in written form. Hence other sources of evidence need to be consulted in the attempt to understand the history and development of this “culture of secret transmission,” not only in Japan, but in broader contexts, as a task in religious studies. In this regard, the work of Michael Saso, among others, based on a “hands-on” approach, that is, receiving direction from a living Tendai Tantric master, translating the texts and recording his experiences, may offer an inroad into this area.⁶ Also, a reflective look at one-on-one encounters (termed *sanzen* 参禅 or *dokusan* 独参) preserved in some Zen traditions that continue to the present in Japan and also transplanted into the Western hemisphere since the last few decades may offer some clues as to the dynamics of orality and textuality in the transmission of religious teaching, and could shed further light on the topic.

The fifth and central chapter of the book presents a new framework for understanding original enlightenment discourse, amply supported by what Stone has already demonstrated in the two preceding chapters. She succeeds in dispelling certain stereotypes repeated even in academic circles, namely, about *hongaku* discourse as denigrating or making light of practice, or as affirming or condoning evil actions. She then presents a paradigm of soteriology that original enlightenment discourse shares with those movements that came to be called New Kamakura Buddhism. In short, the non-linearity of attainment, a single condition required for access to ultimate realization, all-inclusiveness, and a denial of the obstructive power of evil karma, are features that situate original enlightenment discourse on the same plane as the new Buddhist movements that came to being in the Kamakura period but which attained a more stable institutional status in later ages.

Stone follows up this thesis with an examination of the Buddhism of Nichiren and his followers, consolidating her arguments and setting new avenues for future research tasks. To this reviewer, the treatment of Nichiren in the sixth chapter of this volume, backed by the author’s own long-time and in-depth study and reflection, incorporating state-of-the-art research developments on the subject, is the most lucid and well-rounded, albeit concise picture of this intriguing thirteenth century figure in English to date. Stone is reportedly currently in the process of writing a full book-length comprehensive account of Nichiren’s life in the context of his times, and this chapter offers an attractive preview of another major volume soon to see the light.

The seventh chapter dealing with the development of Nichiren’s Buddhist teaching by his followers in later generations is also extremely valuable for the clues it offers toward elucidating unresolved questions surrounding the apocryphal writings

⁶ See for example his *Tantric Art and Meditation* (Honolulu: Tendai Educational Foundation and University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

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attributed to Nichiren but apparently penned by his later followers. In short, original enlightenment discourse that came in vogue in the middle and later medieval period was a factor that loomed large in the milieu within which Nichiren's followers were challenged and called upon to expound their sect's doctrine and its soteriological import, in its practical and theoretical implications, as they responded to questions and concerns of their contemporaries. It was against this backdrop that writings produced by followers of Nichiren several generations later were attributed to their founder, lending them the weight of his authority. An ongoing task, sectarian and other scholars face, of sifting through these writings to determine "authentic" Nichiren writings from others, is given a fresh angle of approach with Stone's suggestions. In this regard, the publication of the revised version of her doctoral dissertation,⁷ which addresses this very issue, now in process, will undoubtedly provide another gem to the academic world.

To conclude, a would-be reader's expectations are heightened by the blurbs on the back cover, celebrating this volume as "one of the most important academic books ever published on Japanese Buddhism (Carl Bielefeldt)," "a major contribution to the field of Buddhist studies and to our understanding of Japanese culture in general (William Bodiford)," "one of the most important books on Japanese Buddhism ever written (Paul Groner)." A careful reading and re-reading by this reviewer has only served to confirm the aptness of the superlatives lavished by the above colleagues, themselves pace-setting scholars of Japanese Buddhism, on this monumental work of Professor Stone.

Charles Muller, trans. *The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation (with Commentary by the Sōn Monk Kihwa)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

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Reading Charles Muller's new book is an interesting experience of hearing an orchestration of triple voices of an American Buddhist scholar, a Korean commentator and a Chinese Buddhist text. Simply put, the book is Muller's translation of Kihwa's 己和 (1376–1433) commentary on the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* (Ch. *Yüan chüeh ching* 圓覺經 [SPE]). The end result, however, far exceeds a mere sum

⁷ Jacqueline I. Stone, *Some Disputed Texts in the Nichiren Corpus: Textual, Hermeneutical, and Historical Problems*. (Ann Arbor, 1990).