Book Reviews

Haruko Nawata Ward
Women Religious Leaders in Japan's Christian Century, 1549-1650
Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009, pp. 405

Despite some fragmentary previous scholarship, *kirishitan* women's roles have been underemphasized or ignored for the period known as the Christian Century in Japan. The aim of this most impressively researched new book is to rectify that imbalance. The method, as the author explains in her introduction, is to stick close to the documentary sources (especially, the reasonably open-minded records produced by the Jesuit missionary Luís Fróis [1532-1597]), evaluate all the bits of evidence about *kirishitan* women which can be obtained, and concentrate the information. The sources are somewhat piecemeal but nevertheless sufficiently extensive for the purpose, enabling the author to develop narratives about a number of individual *kirishitan* women whose lives manifested apostolic ministries of great spiritual depth.

After providing a lucid historical background for both Japan and Jesuit missions, the author (associate professor of church history at Columbia Theological Seminary) organizes her figures into four ad hoc categories: "nuns," comprising four individuals, plus a number of women in a group called *Miyako no bikuni* who became attracted to the life of Catholic female monasticism; "witches," particularly one character known to the missionaries as "Ōtomo-Nata 'Jezebel'" of Bungo province, who was involved with esoteric "Shintō-Buddhism" and quite consciously rejected Christian conversion; "catechists," including six women who actively engaged in Christian proselytization; and "sisters," who were four main figures who worked in local institutions of service to the poor in a relatively independent manner considering the contemporary Catholic practices in Europe.

Ward's research is fascinating because of the diverse local details of the various women's stories as they overcame obstacles to their commitments to Christian faith. The nun Hibiya Monica (c. 1549-c. 1577), from a merchant family in Sakai, became embroiled in a complex disagreement between her natal family and her Jesuit adviser over a marriage plan. Subsequently members of the Hibiya family, including other women *kirishitan* members, were involved in intense conflicts with Hideyoshi. Among other things, Monica opted out of her family's tradition of Shin Buddhism.

Naitō Julia (c. 1566-1627) was a female priest who shifted to Christianity from her earlier membership in Jōdo-shū Buddhism. She founded in Kyoto the only known "convent-like" organization of the Christian episode, called the *Miyako no bikuni*. Ward argues that such Japanese nuns were probably freer in movement
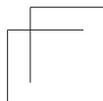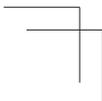
than their contemporary female Christian counterparts in Europe. Naitō was fully engaged in the discourse of *mondō* (systematized doctrinal debate) which evolved between Jesuits and Buddhist clerics during the period, indicating her intellectual participation on the same level as the men. However, like Hibiya Monica she was also caught up in the intense personal micro-politics of the era.

As *kirishitan* were later expelled from Japan in the seventeenth century, the *Miyako no bikuni* community was evacuated to the Spanish colonial territory in Manila in 1615, where after experiencing a new regime of strict cloistering and repeated episodes of religious visions, the last member among its *beatas* died in 1656.

"Jezebel" (d. 1587) was a priestess influential in Harima and Kumano shrine-temple networks who challenged the Jesuits in an amazingly complex ten-year contest (1577-1587) over Christian proselytizing in Bungo province, the application of Catholic marriage law (the local *daimyō* Ōtomo Sōrin became a Christian convert but divorced Jezebel who had been his wife, a fact which the padres found could be rationalized), and the validity of "Shintō-Buddhist" shamanic religiosity. As Ward analyzes, the epithet "Jezebel" for this woman was a grand example of how the hostile Jesuits could read the Japanese situation through their own religion. In this case the author maintains that the indigenous Kumano tradition actually fairly well represented women's interests (e.g. providing places of refuge from abusive family situations).

The catechist Hosokawa Tama Gracia (1563-1600), subject of modern film and fiction, is the most famous of the *kirishitan* women figures. Entangled in the politics of the Hosokawa family (her father was Akechi Mitsuhide, who assassinated Nobunaga) Tama Gracia became a highly intellectual scholar-teacher who, although kept under surveillance in Osaka by her husband, nevertheless made contact with Jesuit missionaries, was baptized, revealed a remarkably theologically-oriented mind (building on her earlier experiences with Zen Buddhist disputation, a tradition in which Zen nuns participated) and possibly learned Latin and Portuguese. She made a profound impression on Fróis and other missionaries. As Ward's treatment illustrates, the details of her life provide a stage for a feminist debate over women's autonomy.

Tama Gracia was supported by relationships with several other female *kirishitan* who also strikingly accomplished the catechist role and who formed part of what Ward calls a "network of women against abuse," i.e. against the family violence, disrespect towards women, coerced concubinage, forced political marriage, and wife-battering which originating from the men in the elite society which Tama Gracia inhabited. She herself was the object of an unwanted (despite her own troubled marriage) attempt by Hideyoshi to bring into his harem. (Jesuit advisers told her to submit to that troubled marriage).

Tama Gracia's death, which occurred in disputed circumstances in connection with fighting at Osaka in 1600 between Tokugawa Ieyasu and Ishida Mitsunari,

has been the subject of various documentary accounts and many often ideologized viewpoints among commentators. In this book Ward adopts a Christian apologetic with a feminist emphasis, arguing (by employing considerable psychological speculation) that Tama Gracia's death was an expression of her deep Christian faith.

In the last category of sisters, under the inspiration of Portuguese models, Justa of Nagasaki (died c. 1590) founded a significant social assistance organization, the Confraria de Misericórdia, in that southern city over which the Jesuits had been granted control by the regional *daimyō* Ōmura Sumitada in 1580. In this section Ward absorbingly explores similarities but also differences between social service in Japan and Europe of the time. Japanese women participants, who probably had more freedom than women in such institutions in Europe, focused on the teaching of children and hospital care, as well as ritual events involving death (funerals, burials, martyrdoms)—and self-flagellation. Evidence from southern Japan also survives about strong *kirishitan* women elders whose local leadership contributed to the *kakure kirishitan* tradition afterwards.

Such a skeletal summary of topics only hints at the splendid density of information in the work. The book is exhaustively detailed point by point as a result of thorough research in multiple languages and sources, including the original Jesuit documents and Japanese texts; it is supported by clean organization, a fine index, numerous relevant illustrations (e.g. from *nanban byōbu* screens) and a useful glossary of terms. The key overall message, that women's roles have been underemphasized or ignored for the period of Christian proselytizing in Japan in question, is richly justified, as is the claim that the energy and activities of the nuns, catechists and sisters repeatedly exceeded male Jesuit missionaries' intentions for women converts. (pp. 11-12, 121-122) Furthermore the narratives indicate that the diverse Jesuit-Japanese interactions were far more complex and specific than a formula like "Japanese vs. European cultural conflict" might suggest.

At the same time a couple of caveats might be proposed. The author sticks methodologically very close to primary and secondary historical texts, and thus although the history involves a cultural "hybridity" as the author notes in several places (e.g. pp. 1, 29) the reader is not offered significant elucidation of the idea nor references to the associated anthropological or theoretical literature, even from a theoretical standpoint about Christianity as globalizing hybrid phenomenon. (Of course, in some sections substantial references are provided to selected comparative topics such as witchcraft of nuns in European history).

The author's general knowledge of Japanese religions seems to be weak and imprecise, based on inadequate immersion even in the secondary literature, which accounts for her use of the vague term "Shintō-Buddhist" to summarize the totality of the complex religious world into which the Jesuits entered. In particular the author is not well informed about Buddhism and does not seem to have any doubts about the Jesuit comprehension of those alien doctrines. Regarding Shin Buddhism

(which was not entirely comparable to other lines of Buddhism), Fróis seems to have had a false understanding of deathbed *nenbutsu* in Shin. (p. 53) Similarly, along with Fróis, the author (perhaps through no fault of her own, but due to deficiencies in secondary literature) maintains that the Shin Buddhists practiced *Ketsubon-kyō* 血盆経 (Blood Bowl Sutra) ritual (embodying conceptions of female pollution), but this assertion is factually incorrect. (p. 51) Unfortunately that assumption leads to an unpersuasive tangential argument aiming to show that Christian doctrine has been more favorable to women than Pure Land Buddhist doctrine. (pp. 15, 52)

A more interesting framing approach would have been to try to explain why, as many historians have long been aware, it was the case that Christians and Buddhists (notably Shin Buddhists, but also other lines of Buddhism too) were competing with each other so overtly for membership and influence during the Christian Century. The author's focus on women or Christianity alone to understand this phenomenon is unduly narrow. It might be more appropriate to work from the premise that the core cultural transformations in sixteenth century Japan, as in Europe, were not based on proto-feminism or Christianity per se, but rather on even bigger common patterns of *longue durée* civilizational changes, in the direction of increasing personal interiority and autonomy, which had manifestations in all kinds of religions.

Finally, one of the author's kernel goals is to encourage revisions in the perceptions of the Christian Century in Japan by bringing forward the role of women. Situating herself on one side of a classic debate concerning the impact of Christianity on Japan during the era, Ward supports the position that Christianity was actually highly persuasive and successful down to the grass roots of the society (i.e. a position set against the George Elison school of thought which negated any such significant cultural influence). Christian success eventually made it seem fatally threatening to the interests represented by the Tokugawa regime in the seventeenth century. Ward's point is that women were central to the whole phenomenon:

> I suggest that the shift in politico-religious ideology in the first half of the seventeenth century and Japan's total rejection of Christianity was caused largely by the unprecedented apostolate of Kirishitan women. Women's apostolate became "so much part of" the Christian Century, and "so threatening to the Tokugawa" ideology that it had to suppress all women's activism for more than 200 years….
> This [neo-Confucian] ideological shift clashed with the Kirishitan women's apostolic movement. Tama Gracia and women catechists pursued greater learning, speaking, ministering, networking beyond their homes and families, and women's increased freedom of thought, religious belief and practices. Women catechists' "success" in converting thousands of women and men to Christianity was perceived as a threat in an increasingly neo-Confucian society. (p. 289)

Such a passage expresses the ideological tone of the study. A reader may feel that there is something a bit triumphalist about this Christian feminist argument. Furthermore some of its background assumptions about Japanese history are out

of date. In view of current research on the Edo *mibun* system, it is not clear that Japan's social hierarchy was becoming already sharply "distilled" into six classes during the period in question (p. 31), nor is it clear if "nationalism" was really part of Japanese consciousness during this period. (e.g. p. 191) The fact that (as Andrew Ross has argued in *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China 1542-1742*, 1994) the Jesuits were more enlightened about avoiding cultural imperialism and conquest than the Spanish imperial regime itself does not mean that Hideyoshi and the Tokugawas made an overall political misjudgement when they drove the Christians out of Japan. Further, as Herman Ooms has conspicuously argued (in *Tokugawa Ideology*, 1998), it is hardly clear to what extent Edo Japan was really a neo-Confucian society. Moreover, by totally ignoring later Buddhist developments, it is hazardous to posit simplistically a "free" sixteenth century society in contrast to an "oppressive" Edo period. In short, Ward's argument may reflect a certain (Eurocentric?) acceptance of conventional oversimplifications about Japanese culture and the many types of women in it historically.

Nevertheless, the author convincingly shows us that—whatever the exact weight and cultural input of Christianity in Japan between 1549-1650— women were absolutely core participants and contributors along with men. This book will stand as the primary reference for anyone investigating its subject.

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Helen J. Baroni
Iron Eyes: The Life and Teachings of Ōbaku Zen Master Tetsugen Dōkō
Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2006, 259 pp.

This study introduces an influential priest of the Ōbaku Zen school in 17th century Japan. Because Ōbaku combines *zazen* with the Pure Land *nenbutsu* practice it sometimes has been called pejoratively "impure Zen." Research on this school in a European language was pioneered by Dieter Schwaller (*Der japanische Ōbaku-Mönch Tetsugen Dōko: Leben, Denken, Schriften*, 1989; *Unreiner Zen?: Zwei Texte des Obaku Mönchs Choon Dokai [1628-1695]*, 1996). This research was followed by Helen Baroni in English, first in her publication *Obaku Zen: The Emergence of the Third Sect of Zen in Tokugawa Japan* in 2000, and now in her Tetsugen study here under review, which in contents and composition resembles much of Schwaller's first work. Since most research on Zen used to concentrate on Sōtō-shū and Rinzai-shū, the research by both authors helps to fill in a significant gap. Whereas Baroni's first book introduces the establishment of this Chinese Zen school in Japan, her second work focuses on the person of the Japanese priest Tetsugen Dōkō (1630-

1682), "perhaps the best known Ōbaku Zen monk in Japan and the West." (p. 1) Tetsugen ("iron eyes") collected funds in order to print the Chinese Buddhist canon in woodblock for the first time in Japan. Older Japanese school textbooks made him well known through conveying the legend that twice he used the funds collected for this project in order to help victims of natural disasters; only the third time did he succeed in printing the canon.

In her introduction, the author first outlines Buddhism during the Tokugawa Period (1600-1867), especially Zen Buddhism, and then situates the establishment of Ōbaku by Yinyuan Longqi (1592-1673) in this context. Reformers among Rinzai monks, who focused on strictly keeping the precepts, welcomed the Chinese Ōbaku monks since they stressed the importance of monastic rules as well. The study's first main part "Historical Biography and Analysis" consists of four chapters and is followed by translations of important texts of Tetsugen. The book is concluded by an appendix of translated Tetsugen biographies.

Chapter 1 of the main part treats the "Life of Tetsugen." Tetsugen was born in 1630 in Kyūshū. His father Jōshin was a priest of the Ikkō-shū (Jōdo Shin-shū or True Pure Land School). As a young man he moved to Kyoto and studied under Saigin (1605-1663), the headmaster of Nishi Hongan-ji's new academy for the training of priests. Saigin's broad doctrinal orientation beyond sectarianism influenced the young Tetsugen and aroused his interest in Zen. However, this breadth also caused a conflict within the Shin school in 1653/54 which ended in Saigin's resignation and the temporary closure of the academy. Disappointed probably by the doctrinal narrowness, the low level of learning and the hierarchical structure of Jōdo Shin-shū, Tetsugen returned to Kyūshū. Tetsugen visited the Ōbaku master Yinyuan in 1565 in Nagasaki, who had arrived from China one year earlier, and eventually became his disciple. Tetsugen practiced *zazen* primarily under two other Ōbaku Zen masters, Muan and Zhifei.

Tetsugen became concerned about the lack of complete sets of sutra collections in monastic libraries because at that time they contained mainly scriptures limited to the sect of each monastery. Thus he developed plans to collect money for printing the whole Buddhist canon because he considered it necessary for a comprehensive study of Buddhism. In 1667 Tetsugen and some students moved to Naniwa (Osaka) and built Jiun-san Zuiryū-ji (Cloud of Compassion Mountain Lucky Dragon Temple) which became the base for his enormous project. He also built the storehouse necessary for the woodblock prints in Mampuku-ji (Uji) as well as a printing house in Kyoto. In 1668, Tetsugen announced publicly his plan to produce a complete woodblock edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon. From 1669-1680 he mostly travelled through the country and gave sermons on the *Sūramgama sūtra* in order to collect financial support. This sutra teaches the importance of keeping the Buddhist precepts.

During these trips Tetsugen repeatedly faced public disputes with Jōdo Shin-shū priests, who knew his former religious affiliation and perceived his emphasis on keeping the monastic precepts as a direct attack against them. One incident occurred in the castle town Mori (Kyūshū) when Tetsugen gave lectures on the *Sūramgama sūtra*. Pure Land priests demanded permission to debate with him, claiming that he was slandering their sect, but the civil administration refused to give in. The protest escalated, and eventually the Shin-shū believers tried to seize Tetsugen by force. Then authorities cancelled the lecture series and apprehended some priests in order to punish them for causing civil unrest, but Tetsugen intervened and prevented them from receiving capital punishment. Against Pure Land believers Tetsugen instead maintained:

> Those who practice without keeping the precepts set out by the Buddha all represent the False Dharma. The reason for this [is as follows:] Although practices such as chanting the *nembutsu*, seated meditation, and reciting the sutras are each practiced differently depending on the abilities of the believer, the precepts against taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and the like are absolute, regardless of the sect. … Therefore these precepts are called "absolutes." (p. 25)

In 1680 Tetsugen completed the Ōbaku edition of Buddhist scriptures. He travelled to Edo to present a set to the Shogun and get permission to begin regular printing. While still waiting there, in 1681 a famine ravaged Osaka and Kyoto. He borrowed a large sum from a *daimyō*, returned to Osaka and began relief work among the starving people. Tetsugen died in 1682 when the famine had not yet ended. In his last hours he regretted not having practiced more intensely in order to attain ultimate liberation since the printing project had prevented him from doing so.

In Chapter 2 "Carving the Scriptures," the author emphasizes that Tetsugen's most significant contribution to the Buddhist world was the Ōbaku edition of sutras which he accomplished from 1667-1680. She situates this grand project in its historical context of 17th century Japan, with its characteristics such as peace in society, a flourishing economy, a more literate population, a growing publishing business (over 700 publishing companies operated in Kyoto at that time!), and last not least, Buddhist endeavors to return to the sources. In his "Brief Account of the History of Carving the Buddhist Scriptures" Tetsugen explained the reason for his project as follows: Japan "is not inferior to places such as India and China, except that from the beginning, there has never been a printed edition of the scripture published here, making texts quite scarce." (p. 44) Baroni elaborates the structure of this huge project as follows: Tetsugen's temple in Osaka, Zuiryū-ji, served as base for his solicitation campaign throughout the country; Hōzō-in at Ōbaku-shū's head monastery Mampuku-ji in Uji was the storehouse for the woodblocks; and the carving and printing was done in Kyoto, where the books were actually sold as well. During his travels Tetsugen collected funds both from wealthy and poor people.

Also the Ōbaku monastic community as well as lay confraternities (*kō*) supported his project. When the project was completed, altogether 6,956 bound volumes were produced which were printed from over 60,000 individual blocks (each block had 2 pages of text on its front and two on its back). During the next 200 years, over 2,000 complete or partial sets were sold. Only in the beginning of the 20th century was the Ōbaku edition replaced by the Taishō edition of the canon (*Taishō dai-zōkyō*).

In Chapter 3, the author introduces "The Teachings of Tetsugen" which are found in his sermons and vernacular Buddhist texts. In his sermons he fostered Buddhist faith among the lay community, and the scriptures were crucial for Tetsugen in that promotion. In his teaching procedure, he first gave the Chinese quotation of the text, then rendered it by a Japanese paraphrase, and finally concluded the discourse with his own explanation. The author comments on Tetsugen's focus on scriptures as primary source material in a broader context as follows: "Despite the popular assumption that the Zen school eschews the written word and devalues the Buddhist scriptures, Zen masters have traditionally held a wide spectrum of positions regarding the sutras." (p. 59) Meditation and teaching are one (*zenkyō itchi*), they relate to each other like water and waves.

As mentioned above, keeping the precepts was fundamental for Tetsugen. Thus he criticized his contemporaries for killing animals, which was confusing pain with pleasure. He also accused Zen masters for being blind men who lead blind people. His words were clear cut when stating, for example:

> Thieves don the robes of the Thus Come One (the Buddha), take on the appearance of a monk or nun, and so turn the Buddha into an object for sale and make him into the source of their livelihood. They create all sorts of (bad) karma, and say that it is all the teaching of the Buddha Dharma. (p. 62)

The second part of Baroni's book consists of translations of primary sources, such as Tetsugen's Dharma lessons, letters and poetry, and texts related to the Buddhist Scripture Project, as well as historical documents concerning the Dharma Debate in Mori and the famine in Osaka. An appendix also presents two hagiographies of Tetsugen. All these translations enable readers to get a fresh, first hand impression of this important Zen monk of the Tokugawa period. The book also contains a helpful index.

Altogether this book is an important contribution to the study of Japanese Buddhism in English language. It portrays a vivid picture of an influential monk, which demonstrates that Buddhism during the Tokugawa period was very dynamic and not stagnant as often had been claimed. There are a few points of criticism, though, which should be mentioned in the end as well. Even though the title of the book contains the English translation of Tetsugen's name, his peculiar name is not explained in the text. The author uses some misleading terms, such as in "The *myth* of Tetsugen" (pp. 79 ff) (instead of the more appropriate "legend"), or

"(religious) *biography*" (pp. 79 ff, 195 ff) (instead of "hagiography"). Religious studies requires the application of a precise terminology, otherwise properly understanding the subject under scrutiny is prevented. It also should be mentioned that this book unfortunately does not contain a glossary of terms and names in Japanese characters.

Finally, whereas the author provides immediate historical contexts for her subject, she fails to locate Tetsugen's specific contribution in particular, and Ōbaku-shū's in general, in the wider context of Buddhist history in Japan. Such a contextualization, for example, would bring to light a monk who overcame the narrow borders of typical Japanese sectarianism, especially through his Buddhist canon project. His "ecumenical" (trans-sectarian) contributions to Japanese Buddhism thus still await proper evaluation. Similarly it should be asked: what is the significance of the fact that a number of Jōdo Shin-shū priests, such as Saigin, Tetsugen and others, could not be satisfied religiously by the lack of meditation and the neglect of precepts in their school? The first issue appears again today as a considerable problem between the American branch of Jōdo Shin-shū and Nishi Hongan-ji. And finally what does the revival of the precepts in 17th century Rinzai-shū and Ōbaku-shū mean in the light of previous similar movements (such as in the early Kamakura era) as well as in the context of the later abolition of precepts observance among most schools since the Meiji period? Situated in such broader historical contexts, Tetsugen's specific significance as well as that of Ōbaku-shū would more clearly come to light.

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Elisabetta Porcu
Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture
Leiden and Boston: Brill (Numen Book Series, vol. 121), 2008, pp. xii, 264.

Elisabetta Porcu's *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture* is an excellent corrective to the widespread conception that there is one unitary thing that may be called Japanese Buddhism, that it is effectively identical with Zen, and that all other forms of Buddhism in Japan are somehow less creative, less important, less relevant to the contemporary world. Her focus on Pure Land Buddhism provides a much needed additional perspective for seeing the relation between religion and culture in modern Japan.

Porcu's work is divided into four main chapters, together with an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter focuses on the process by which the contemporary representations of Japanese Buddhism have been created, starting with the World's Parliament of Religions. It is revealing to learn that the journey to Chicago was as

much for the sake of internal Japanese politics as it was a way of showing Japanese religion to the world. She goes on to examine the nationalistic character of Okakura Kakuzō's writings and certain representations of Japanese religion during World War II, including the work of Giuseppe Tucci and Ruth Benedict.

What Porcu tells us about Benedict's representations of Buddhism in Japan are worth noting. On the one hand there is Benedict's idea that neither Shintō nor Buddhism in Japan are textual, and on the other, the notion that the practice of austerities like those of Indian yoga are unknown. Remarkably, Benedict's *Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (sponsored by the US Office of War Information in 1944) has been continuously available ever since its publication in 1946. Given its influence on two or more generations of students—as I recall, it was being used in college in the 1970s—is it any surprise that scholarship on Buddhism in Japan has given so much attention to the aesthetic, and so little to the scholastic and ritual?

The next two sections of the first chapter focus on D.T. Suzuki. There is perhaps no single work more responsible for distorting our understanding of Japanese religious culture than D.T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Porcu demonstrates the imperialistic character of Suzuki's rhetorical claims that Zen was the inspirational source for all aspects of Japanese culture, from rock gardens to tea ceremony, from the samurai cult of *bushidō to haiku*. While other authors have addressed Suzuki's influence, those works have largely focused on his representations of Zen. The particular strength of Porcu's study is that she brings greater attention to Suzuki's treatment of Shin.

Porcu's critical treatment is particularly important since, as she points out, "It is not uncommon, even within the Shin Buddhist environment, for Suzuki's understanding of Jōdo Shinshū to be considered appropriate and trustworthy." (p. 73) Porcu gives the reader additional perspective on Suzuki's treatments of Shin by discussing the critiques of his work by two figures who worked with him in the translation of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Soga Ryōjin and Kaneko Daiei.

The closing section of the first chapter looks at the treatment of Shin in the Kyoto School. Here we see the rejection of logic and a mystification of Buddhism that, despite being identified with Zen, has its origins equally in the Romantic opposition to reason found in German Idealism. Porcu indicates this in her mention of Eugen Herrigel and his wife Gusty Herrigel. The author points out that their writings promote "a vision of Japanese art as a means of allowing the practitioners to understand the beauty of life, not in a rational way, but by going beyond rationality directly to the essence of things, thus achieving enlightenment." (p. 64) Such ideas, despite originating in European Romanticism, come back to the West dressed in Zen robes, giving them the dual authority of the very familiar and the very exotic.

Porcu ends the first chapter by summarizing the representations of Buddhism in Japan as being "characterized by the emphasis on the exclusivity of Japanese

spirituality, mostly typified by Zen Buddhism, and can be counted perhaps among the most influential presentations in the image-formation of Japanese culture from the end of the nineteenth century onwards in Europe and America, the effects of which can still be seen." (p. 88) Reaching this point in her critique, the reader can only feel that the final clause of the sentence constitutes an understatement.

The next three chapters, which constitute the bulk of the work, are more expository in character, while still raising important critical issues. The second chapter focuses on Shin and literature. In some cases, such as Niwa Fumio's 1955 *Buddha Tree* (*Bodaiju*), what we find is Shin as part of the daily life of a temple family—though it serves not just as background, but plays a pivotal role for the motivation of characters at a key moment in the plot development.

Another writer discussed here is Itsuki Hiroyuki, whose works include one published in English, *Tariki: Embracing Despair, Discovering Peace*. This latter work has become far more influential than it deserves. For example, Huston Smith tells readers of his recent *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction* that this "is a candid, autobiographical account of someone who had been brought to the brink of despair by a series of cataclysmic misfortunes and is redeemed by the Other Power (*tariki*) that comes to him through Pure Land Buddhism." (p. 225) That the nature of other power as represented here should be so easily conflated with the notion of redemption, redolent as it is of Christian conceptions of spirituality, should itself be reason to be suspicious of the representation of Shin by Itsuki. Additionally Porcu reveals in Itsuki "conservative stances which are typical in the promotion of Japanese Buddhist 'uniqueness'," (p. 127) together with what Porcu elsewhere calls "occidentalism," a kind of "inverted Orientalism," that is, a simplistic dualism between "East" and "West" in which the former is positively valued, while the latter is negatively valued. Such an inverted Orientalism is, of course, typical of D.T. Suzuki as well, as for example in his invidious comparison of Tennyson and Bashō in his *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (pp. 82–83).

The next chapter focuses on what Porcu calls the "creative arts." Here, for example, we find Yanagi Sōetsu, responsible at the beginning of the twentieth century for the initiation of the *mingei*, or folk crafts movement. This is a Japanese form of the ideas regarding ethnicity and authenticity that are rooted in Romanticism, and which contributed to the "blood and soil" (*Blut und Boden*) ideology of the Third Reich. Porcu then turns to the woodblock artist Munakata Shikō, himself closely related to the *mingei* movement. The final artists studied are contemporary, including the work of Mori Mariko. Employing esoteric Buddhist elements, Mori's work challenges the simplistic equation of Pure Land symbolism and ideas with sectarian Buddhist institutions, serving to point to that blurry area in popular religion where *nenbutsu* and *mudrā* intermingle.

The last chapter, aside from a brief "Conclusions," is concerned with tea ceremony, another area colonized for Zen by Suzuki. The link between Zen

meditation and tea ceremony has been fostered by the presumption that such a link has a causal character, that is, that tea ceremony is influenced by Zen meditation, and is best interpreted as a reflex of Zen meditation. Such ideas fit well with the prevalent religious studies assumptions regarding religion and cultural production discussed further *infra*. However, as Porcu indicates, cultural productions are complex matters, and that there exists a "variety of different influences on Japanese culture in which intermingled aspects exist together." (p. 189)

Porcu's research reveals the profound extent to which Pure Land Buddhism played a key role in the formation of many aspects of Japanese culture. One question which this reviewer is left with, however, is whether or not a shift of attention of this kind is ultimately adequate. The perplexity behind this all-too-vague question goes far beyond the project that Porcu set herself, and which she completed quite excellently. But one wonders whether there is not an underlying assumption—not perhaps in Porcu's work *per se*—but rather in the entire approach to the relation between religion and culture. That is, the intellectualist presumption commonly found in the religious studies project which understands religion, particularly religious beliefs, as being a primary causal factor for cultural production. For example, were we to exclude global artistic influences, particularly experimentation with serendipitous effects, from our understanding of Munakata's development of his ideas regarding how "a print springs out of itself," (p. 171) and attribute this idea solely to his exposure to Pure Land teachings regarding *tariki*, it would seem to distort our understanding by giving causal primacy to religious factors. Further, while such a presumption may seem unproblematic to religious studies scholars, it does seem to provide a dangerous opportunity for constellating patterns of things that are not in fact causally related.

One of Porcu's significant contributions is the way in which she highlights the role of "a discourse based on the dichotomy between 'East' and 'West,' characterized by occidentalist features. We have therefore on the one hand 'western' thought, which is dualistic and discriminatory, while on the other we have Japanese-Buddhist thought, which is non-dualistic and beyond discrimination—a representation which seems to derive from a long-standing and deep-rooted legacy aiming at the demonstration of the validity (and superiority) of Japanese civilization." (p. 140) It is not simply a trick of sophistry to point out that an "occidentalist" view is self-contradictory—were the claim true, it could not be made by anyone having a truly non-discriminatory view.

Readers interested in either Japanese culture or Pure Land Buddhism will find much of value in this work. Its value is more broadly applicable, however, extending as it does the project of self-reflective criticism in Buddhist studies. Such self-examination has become one of the most important projects within Buddhist studies over the last two plus decades. Works such as Lopez's *Curators of the Buddha* and MacMahan's *Buddhist Modernism* have worked at the interface

between postmodern critical theory and the study of Buddhist tradition understood as incorporated as a part of Western religious culture, both academic and popular. Indeed ever since Schopenhauer attempted to justify his own philosophic position by citing both Hinduism and Buddhism as exotic and authoritative confirmations, Buddhist thought has been put to use for a variety of Western purposes. In this process, one of the most pervasive influences on the formation of the modern popular representation of Buddhism in the West has been Zen as an idealized tradition and more generally Japanese scholarship on Buddhism which is often itself of a sectarian nature.

Porcu's work can thus be added to the list of exemplary works of critical self-reflection on the study of Buddhism, and while the importance of Porcu's critical study applies specifically to the case of Japan, it is in fact much more widely relevant. The representations of Buddhism forged in Japanese occidentalist discourse in the early twentieth century have deeply informed modern representations of Buddhism *per se* throughout Western popular religious culture. It is, in fact, on the basis of those very representations that the question—sometimes raised by students being introduced to the study of Buddhism—as to whether Pure Land Buddhism is "really" Buddhism can arise in the first place. The simplistic identification of Buddhism with meditation which is pervasive in popular culture, an identification ever more deeply reinforced by marketing strategies in a competitive consumerist spiritual marketplace, further evidences the distorting role of the representations of Buddhism this book examines.

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Christopher Ives
Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009, 275 pp.

The clearest and most uncompromisingly critical voice among postwar Japanese Zen Buddhists belonged to Ichikawa Hakugen (市川白弦, 1892-1986). His 1970 work, *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin* (The Responsibility of Buddhists for the War) remains a singular record of condemnation against the supportive activities and statements among Buddhist leaders during the years of military escalation and imperial expansionism. Christopher Ives's *Imperial-Way Zen* provides Western readers with a thorough treatment of Ichikawa's thought while examining the broader meaning of Buddhist ethics and the challenges Buddhist practitioners continue to face in constructing an authentic resistance to socio-political injustice.

As the subtitle of his book indicates, Ives does not claim to offer a resolution to the contradictions and ambiguities of Buddhist ethics, but through examining the struggles of Ichikawa's writing he is able to lay out in clear detail the questions that still require answers if Buddhism is to respond to the call of political activism.

In his introduction to the text Ives states that his intention is not to mount an attack on Japanese morality, but to critically assess Imperial-Way Zen as an example of the more pervasive ethical problems one finds throughout the history of Buddhism, as well as to address the larger question of the relation between religion and violence. The author's treatment of the subject does in fact prove to be a more nuanced and even-handed examination than Brian Victoria's work, for an earlier example, or even Ichikawa's for that matter. There is no final judgment provided here, but rather mainly a number of effective, probing questions. We are also given a brief biography of Ichikawa in the introduction, not a great deal of detail, but enough of the important points to give the reader a sense of the man behind the words examined in subsequent chapters. Even during his early education we find Ichikawa feeling a clear sense of discomfort with his indoctrination into the Imperial-Way, where the elements of the emperor, soldiers and death, for him, formed a trinity. (p. 5) In the many years of his association with the Rinzai Myōshin-ji Temple and the affiliated Hanazono University, his anti-militarism did get the attention of authorities, both before and after the war. Ichikawa was questioned by police in 1929 and was asked to resign from Hanazono in 1951 because of his published writings. He resisted being forced from his position and remained there until his retirement in 1972, later succumbing to pneumonia in 1986.

The chapter titles of this work alone provide the reader with clear and direct indications of Ives's central arguments—beginning with the historical context, "Useful Buddhism, 1868-1945," then continuing with Ichikawa's critical evaluation of the inherent tension in Buddhist practice between soteriological goals and social responsibility, "Peace of Mind at Any Price." Next, he addresses the socio-political fall-out resulting from the Japanese Buddhist values of tolerance, harmony, and non-resistance, "Indebted in our Proper Places." In the second half of the text, Ives first contrasts his own causal explanations for Imperial-Way Zen with those offered by Victoria and Ichikawa, in "Modern Buddhism for the Protection of the Realm." This chapter is followed by a thorough and candid discussion of the dearth of postwar responses to both prewar and wartime collusion, "Quick Conversions and Slow Apologies in Postwar Japan." In "From Collaboration to Criticism," Ives discusses the necessity for greater development of Japanese Buddhist thought in the realm of social ethics while presenting Ichikawa's own sense of how such a development might proceed. The text ends with a chapter entitled "Absent Ethics, Present Ethics," where Ives poses a number of "lingering questions" for

contemporary Buddhists, questions which he argues must be clearly resolved in order for a viable social ethics to emerge.

Ives begins with a broad historical overview of the strategic reactions from Buddhist institutions when confronted with the Meiji separation between Buddhism and Shintō and the subsequent emergence of State Shintō. In order to prove useful to the Imperial Realm, the leaders of all the major Japanese Buddhist sects responded to their political demotion by instituting systems of support for the military buildup, protection of the nation, and veneration of the emperor. The numerous examples provided by the author reveals that the great majority of Buddhist discourse supported the Imperial militarism of the period, with only rare examples of dissent, like the Sōtō priest Uchiyama Gudō, or Seno'o Girō, who formed the socialist Alliance of New Buddhist Youth. Both were however, effectively silenced—Uchiyama, through execution and Seno'o, through arrest and interrogation. Although Ichikawa did publish materials that were critical enough to get the attention of the police in 1929, he also found himself unable to mount any serious resistance, later admitting, "The war made it clear that I lacked the kind of mental constitution that would render me unafraid of emphasizing 'correct principles'… especially in the sphere of social ethics—and [able to] act in accord with them as an expression of what Buddhism refers to as fearlessness…" (p. 10)

Given both the clear lack of resistance and the numerous examples of collusion during this period of Japanese history, Ichikawa's postwar writings set out to clarify the reasons why Buddhism failed to make any real political difference. In his chapter "Peace of Mind at Any Price" Ives presents the main arguments developed by Ichikawa to explain the ethical shortcomings of Buddhist practice. Ichikawa claims that among the prevalent features of Buddhist thought, the ultimate Buddhist concern for peace of mind, its ethic of non-self, non-discrimination and harmony, its logic of "none other than," and its logic of becoming one, all contributed to the lack of resistance and acquiescent support for the Imperial Way. Likened to a mirror mind that no longer discriminates but is instead unified with the objective world in a state of non-duality, Buddhist freedom does not allow for the kinds of discriminating choices and actions necessary for an ethical life. Rejection and resistance of wrongs is weakened. Liberation only changes "one's mental state, not one's surroundings." (p. 72)

Ichikawa's critique of Buddhism is compelling, insightfully revealing a number of the difficulties in forming a clearly principled Buddhist social ethic. He also considers the effects of other East Asian influences like Confucian national morality and ancestor worship, but it does not seem, at least from Ives's presentation, that Ichikawa constructs a well-developed historical explanation for the syncretistic dimensions of Japanese Buddhism. Consequently, it is difficult to establish to what extent the ethical problems discussed by Ichikawa can simply be reduced to Buddhist doctrine or to the more complex phenomenon of syncretistic development.

For example, in Ichikawa's construction of the five facets of Japanese Mahāyāna thought, he argues that the religious epistemology of the universal principle in the individual thing leads to an overemphasis on the household, including both the individual family household, and "the national household (*kokka*)—the nation-state—headed by the patriarchal emperor." (p. 55) But one can trace these kinds of value systems to pre-Buddhist or even pre-imperial Japan, back to the very early clan-based households formed and unified through the early practices of Shintō. The question still remains, how can we really measure the extent to which Mahāyāna thought *per se* implicitly leads to an overemphasis on the household, or is this more a Shintō-based rendering of Mahāyāna thought?

Ives does, in fact, argue that Ichikawa fails to develop a historical explanation for the arising of Imperial-Way Buddhism, depending too heavily on a critical evaluation of Buddhist epistemology in the abstract. While Ives recognizes that Ichikawa's arguments may serve to explain the passive non-resistance of early 20th century Buddhists, he does not explain their active collaboration. He does not find a clear causal explanation in the work of Brian Victoria either, who traces the Buddhist support for militarism to the practices of samurai *bushidō*. Ives finds very little historical evidence for such a claim, although he also admits that Victoria may have been arguing that *bushidō* was not the cause of the support, but rather the justification of the support. (p. 102) Instead, Ives traces the rise of Meiji period imperialism to the court support found in the earliest forms of Japanese Buddhism. During the Nara and Heian periods Buddhist ritualism was appropriated from China in order to protect the nation, namely in the person of the emperor. Buddhist institutions continued to emphasize their role in the protection of the realm during later historical periods as well, up through the Tokugawa when these practices were redirected towards the needs of the *shōgun*.

Tracing this historical thread leading to the events of the early 20th century is an important contribution in our attempts to better understand the cultural particularity of Imperial-Way Zen. But Ives does share a commonality with the approaches of Victoria and Ichikawa in attempting to reduce his causal explanation to a single, if not, primary determinant. But it would seem more persuasive to argue that there were multiple factors, many now unknowable, contributing to the actions of the individuals faced with these events. Of course, one of the most obvious, yet most impossible to measure, is self-preservation. Examples like Uchiyama and Seno'o provide us with enough evidence of the realities on the ground to suggest that active resistance would have required one to be willing to risk one's own demise. Peace of mind is not only a Buddhist concern, but a fundamentally human concern, although one might turn to a Buddhist argument in order to find support for one's personal interests. For the great majority of us, if we suddenly find ourselves in the middle of our own *Jātaka* tale, the limits of our bodhisattvic selflessness will become abundantly clear. With all his rare courage, even Ichikawa recognized his own

inability to actively resist in prewar Japan. Moreover, not only passive acceptance, but even better, active support ultimately ensured one's own safety; it is quite possible there were those who personally disagreed with policies even while publicly getting on board. The subsequent phenomenon of quick conversions in postwar Japan revealed a lack of commitment to any particular point of view as long as one benefitted personally from outwardly espousing what was politically expedient.

Ives turns to the larger question of Buddhist ethics to conclude his study. Although the great majority of *Imperial-Way Zen* is focused on the particular context of Japan, the author's main concerns are ultimately aimed at better understanding the possibilities of socially engaged Buddhism broadly. In "From Collaboration to Criticism" Ives begins with ethical arguments from recent Japanese Zen leaders and considers how they might move Zen towards a greater social activism. Overall, he finds little depth in their words in comparison to Ichikawa's writings and spends the majority of the chapter focusing on ways the earlier writer attempted to reimagine Zen ethics.

Certain arguments presented by Ichikawa, like suggesting that the teachings of emptiness and causality could form the basis of a social ethics, would not sound very novel to Zen practitioners today. But his emphasis on human alienation does provide specificity to the meaning of *dukkah* for the modern world and could begin to offer greater clarity to the aims of contemporary Buddhist ethics. Each human being, according to Ichikawa, exists at the center of a horizontal alienation, due to prevalent political and cultural power structures, and a vertical alienation, which is the main concern of Buddhism. There is spiritual freedom in overcoming vertical alienation and social freedom in overcoming horizontal alienation, but because the ground of human existence originates from the center of these two axes, human freedom by necessity includes both, what Ichikawa calls, "origin humanism." (p. 163) He states:

> In the place of dynamic unity of these two types of freedom we confront the problem of Zen freedom and social justice. We should not negate the wisdom of the [religious] state of mind by virtue of which one lives freely in places that lack freedom, nor scorn the effort, while living in the contemporary culture of commercialism, to work as free from the logic of commercialism as possible… (Ibid.)

Ives offers his own critical reflections on Zen Buddhist ethics in his final chapter, "Absent Ethics, Present Ethics." He brings into question a number of the common associations made between traditional Zen practices and social ethics. The precepts have been quite variable among different schools of Zen, and are mainly understood in terms of monastic rules; Buddhist compassion has traditionally been associated with soteriological benefits and is only vaguely construed in terms of social ethics; the teaching of no-self has historically lent itself to acquiescence to totalitarianism, and has diminished or negated the value of the individual; Zen

iconoclasm is held up as an ideal, but is rarely observed historically in either the confines of the monastery or in the world at large. For Ives, it is necessary to ground an ethics in the texts of Buddhism, while at the same time maintaining a greater critical distance from the claims of Buddhists in order to evaluate them in a clear, descriptive manner, rather than relying on an idealized or prescriptive approach. Ultimately, the author returns to the problem of human suffering, arguing that if there is to be a socially relevant Zen ethics there needs to be a clear recognition of suffering in all its forms and a clarification of the actual connections between these different forms. He concludes:

> Specifically, insofar as Zen aims—ideally—at leading people out of suffering to awakening, the overarching principle or criterion for action is what values, practices, political stances, and institutions lead to the greatest net decrease in suffering or, positively put, the greatest net increase in awakening. (p. 186)

Certainly not an easy assignment—and attempting to measure net losses or net gains, or even choosing who exactly should be included in net losses or net gains, is always tricky ethical business. But here Ives does attempt to move Zen towards a rather solid foundation of canonical meaning and provides an opening for a broader contribution to the human good. However, the main point of *Imperial-Way Zen* is to leave us with a clear warning: namely, that without serious critical reflection on the socio-political implications of Buddhist teachings and practices, the potential for future religious support of violence by Buddhists continues to loom.

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Dennis Hirota
Asura's Harp: Engagement with Language as Buddhist Path
Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006, pp. 156.

The title of this recent, relatively brief book by Dennis Hirota, professor at Ryūkoku University and the most prominent single translator working today of texts relating to the medieval Buddhist thinker Shinran (1173-1262), refers to a classical quotation from the Chinese Buddhist Pure Land thinker T'an-luan. The quotation contains a metaphor of Asura's harp, an instrument which plays music spontaneously without being touched; the metaphor suggests the activity of the Buddha, which proceeds through the working of the Primal Vow according to Pure Land Buddhist doctrine. However, in this book Hirota expresses larger ambitions than just a recapitulation of Shinran's doctrines in English. Rather, building on a past century of gradual change in philosophical thought towards the hermeneutical or nonfoundational, (particularly in the West), change which has produced a

considerable degree of convergence with traditional Buddhist perspectives, his aim is to establish groundwork for enhanced communication between contemporary philosophical thought and Pure Land Buddhism.

> Sakyamuni's initial skepticism, while still beneath the bodhi tree, regarding the communication of his awakening and his subsequent rejection of abstract speculation as soteriologically fruitless have colored much of later Buddhist thought with an alertness to the hazards in ordinary language use and a centrally pragmatic orientation regarding the illumination of reality. At the same time, as seen especially in the conception of "skillful means," Buddhists have treasured the creative and adaptive use of language to provide living beings guidance to self-realization. In their attention to the diverse capacities of language in human awareness, Buddhist thinkers may be seen to share some themes and assessments in common with recent Western thinkers. (pp. 2-3)

A brief allusion to long-standing Christian analogies is also mentioned, if only in passing:

> Shinran's Buddhist path... holds strong resemblances to elements and conceptual structures of Western religious traditions, thereby facilitating comparative perspectives. (p. 5)

Now, those two opening points—philosophical convergences, and Christian analogies—are separately already well known to anyone acquainted with the fields of Buddhism and Pure Land studies. Therefore, readers might immediately wonder what they profitably will learn that will be new. Hirota proposes an answer in his prefatory statement for the book:

> [Shinran's] outlook... highlights basic points of divergence between Buddhist analyses of the human condition and recent trends of Western thought. Perhaps the crucial difference lies in the conception of delusional egocentricity as evil in the Buddhist sense, rooted in a pervasive and obsessive ignorance and ceaselessly giving rise to perceptions, thoughts, and actions that result in pain for oneself and others. (pp. 7-8)

The crucial interest, then, is moral and is located not so much in the background of nonfoundational, hermeneutical theories of knowledge but rather in the existential concerns for the polarities of ignorance and wisdom which are sharper on the Buddhist side. However, Hirota's actual design is to present an argument which combines several lines of thought. The first and second lines include the philosophical convergence and the existential acuity on the Buddhist side (where the analogies with Christianity may perhaps be seen), but the third, additional line is a polemic on behalf of the special religious discourse of Shinran. Indeed, the crux of this book is supposed to be language: according to Hirota, Shinran is particularly suited for a productive Buddhist-Western conversation because of the central

role played by language in Shinran's Buddhist path. The linguistic vehicle for this conversation is however not just any language, but Shinran's Pure Land mythopoetic discourse.

With Hirota's starting claim that Shinran's is a way to awakening in and through the medium of language, the book's chapters thus deliver an explanatory apologetic for various of Shinran's concepts, emphasizing the supplementary notion that language is the key thing that makes Shinran's thought different from—and superior to—other forms of Buddhism.

> … the language of the Pure Land path must be accessible to people who perform no disciplines to nullify ordinary (in the Buddhist view, delusional) modes of thought, and at the same time it must possess the power to transform their existence by severing the bonds of delusional thought. That is, language, which normally functions as a medium of false discrimination between subject and object and among things as objects, also serves to lead people to break through the horizons and conceptual frameworks of the world and the self constructed through our cultural and social conditioning and our ordinary, egocentric modes of apprehension. (pp. 12-13)

The main text proper begins with "Shinran's Buddhist Critique of Language," which is more or less a standard Buddhist perspective on language as reifying and thus delusional, a view supported by the recognition that human beings are prone to be linguistical in just that way. Accompanying is a standard observation that Buddhists also assume at the same time that language guides and manifests in relation to Dharma. A challenge seems to exist in the interpretation of Shinran's view that "reality is language" (p. 27), but the reader is helped to understand quickly that certain foundational premises are at work: Shinran's proof of the truth of the language of the *Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha* (sometimes rendered in English as *The Larger Amida Sūtra*), an assumption which underlies all his teaching, is based on the notion that the words have emerged from the deep *samadhi* of Śakyamuni,

> which is itself true reality… and therefore their delivery manifests reality beyond ordinary verbal expression and conceptualization. Truth in Shinran's thinking, therefore, is not primarily a matter of superficial correspondence or coherence. It may seem to be foundationalist in that its veracity rests on the realization of the Buddha. but we must note that there is a critical rift between the reality realized by the Buddha, which transcends our words and concepts, and the verbal expression of the teaching, so that logical, methodical construction of a doctrinal edifice upon an unshakeable foundation of truth is impossible. (pp. 28-29)

In other words, while Shinran's teaching does not involve an unshakeable foundation of ontological truth, nevertheless it involves an absolutely privileged language, a mythopoesis flatly beyond conditions of critical reflection, a translogical

transcendent truth in which certain items of language are simply co-existent or co-terminous with Reality. Accepting, or at least at some level intellectually grasping, such an idea of ultimately privileged language is the key to understanding Shinran's *nenbutsu* (the vocalization of the Name of Amida).

> According to Shinran, the Name is not simply language that, as in invocation or prayer, provides a relation to Buddha, or that communicates propositional truth that enables one to move toward enlightenment. Rather, the Name itself is reality or wisdom. (p. 33)

From this position, the author goes on to explain that the characteristic Mahayana double sense of language as capable simultaneously of being form and formless (static and dynamic) is a primary understanding shared by Shinran, and one which directly applies to the concepts of "Vow" and "Name" in Pure Land teaching.

> True language as the Name of Amida must be characterized by both conception and inconceivability, form and formlessness. It may be understood in terms of the concepts of Vow and Amida Buddha and, at the same time, it is not different from suchness or reality as things as they truly are. This does not mean that the Name may be comprehended as simply the form of that which is formless or as a word that refers to Buddha or reality. In such an understanding, the Name as word becomes an instrument appropriated within our ordinary modes of thought and speech. It is considered a means (invocation, prayer, practice) by which a relationship with the real may be established. (pp. 37-38)

The book subsequently addresses the question of how one engages with this special mode of teaching via this language of the real. Here is taken up a specific interpretive problem in Shinran related to a passage cited from a canonical commentarial text attributed to Nagarjuna concerning the "Four Reliances" (bases of reliable authority); in the passage in question it is stated, among other things, that a follower should "rely on meaning, not on words." (pp. 49-50) (cf. the familiar Buddhist metaphor of the finger merely pointing at the moon of truth, with finger and moon not to be confused with each other). However, Hirota does not take the message here to be a relativization of the Pure Land sutra language; rather for him the implication is a transcendentalization of the privileged sutra language:

> Since the words arise from wisdom, one must apprehend them through wisdom. To encounter them with our ordinary thinking, dominated by attachment to a delusional self, is to fail to grasp the actual meaning. (p. 50)

So again, how does one engage with language in the Pure Land path? Here Hirota deals with the characteristic non-teleological, circular question of how *shinjin* experience occurs in Shinran—though of course axiomatically it means

hearing and voicing of the Name. The author describes the engagement in terms of a dialectic between unawakened and awakened states, which is actually a conventional Buddhist idea. The most interesting question is, what is the really distinguishing role of the unique language—the Pure Land language that is "realer" than any other language—which seems to separate the case of Shinran? After a passage about the mythopoesis of the Vow which does not refer to language per se, the book proceeds with the theme of "personal encounter with Truth."

> … in Shinran's path "nirvana is attained without severing blind passions." This means that one does not traverse the path by extricating oneself from the "lies and gibberish" of ordinary life. Rather, it is an essential characteristic of the path that its language be accessible to use just as we are, "possessed of blind passions," and bound to the linguistic universe of a particular locale in the history of a culture and society. At the same time, however, the true language of the teaching is not authentically apprehended if it is not distinct from the words of our ordinary life. If the words of the Buddha are grasped merely as confirming our delusional worldview or as teaching a means to enhance the existence of the egocentric self, we reduce them to language of ordinary life. It is here that we see the significance of Shinran's stark dichotomy of false and true language. (p. 57)

Hirota here emphasizes the necessarily personal nature of encounter, and the way in which Shinran's thought problematizes any typical positive sense of religious moral ethics, centered on the critique of "calculation" (*hakarai*). In subsequent chapters, taking up themes such as "Shinran Face to Face" and "Hearing the Vow," the author treats other facets of Shinran's thought, such as how the irreversibility of authentic engagement leads to a collapse of the doubled self which was formerly marked by ignorance.

Hirota finally returns to the relationship of language and the realization of *shinjin*. Here he briefly touches the problem of explanation for why, even before Shinran, the vocalization of the *nenbutsu* was thought to be inseparable from "trust in the Vow," suggesting that it can be related to avoidance of religious fragmentation. Yet the kernel question of this book is "the role of language in the attainment of *shinjin*." (p. 98) Clearly *shinjin* entails a shift in linguistic activity, namely hearing and saying the *nenbutsu*, and the religious act goes beyond ordinary guidance and therapy. One aspect is a kind of "dissolution of Vow and Name" into a sense of Mahayana wholeness; another is a newly wholistic apprehension of the unity of samsaric existence and true reality. And what of the Name of Amida? Its ultimate meaning is glimpsed via expressions like "reality manifest in hearing the Name," "crystallization of reality in the Name," or the Name as "reality making itself known to beings." "To hear the Name is to hear or apprehend the power of light." (pp. 105-108) This leads to the final chapter on "Saying the Name as Transformation" and "the Name as a New Paradigm of Language."

In a postscript entitled "Shinran and Hermeneutical Thought" the author briefly considers some thinkers and topics where he suggests Shinran and modern Western thought can make interesting contact: these include Heidegger, Gadamer, and especially Paul Ricoeur (on the creativity of metaphor formation, and the invented nature of time and narrative).

There is much to praise in this book: Hirota's extraordinary absorption into and knowledge of Shinran's texts, the often lovely and eloquent writing, and the basic project of crossing boundaries between traditions. Many sections of the text are finely-expressed summaries of Shinran's ideas. But the book also displays some significant problems which are not uncommon in representations of Shinran's thought, even when these representations imply that they are communications for the purpose of reaching general audiences.

The book offers a voice whose audience is not always clear. Some sections present a neutral philosophical stance, but other passages are overtly sectarian. On one hand, the work seems to be aimed at specialists, but from the standpoint of an insider to Buddhist studies or Shin Buddhist studies several aspects of the discourse are familiar. For example, his representation of the logical way in which Buddhist thinkers handled mythopoetic concepts is conventional in large parts of Buddhism, and much of the book's core refers, in Shinran's terms, to the "two truths" structure of Mahayana discourse and how they can be interpreted to exist in interaction in the instance of the Name of Amida. *Asura's Harp* also handles Shinran's mythopoetics as if they are already known to readers, even though the book originated as a series of talks for nonspecialists.

In view of its overlap with so much of Mahayana two-truths discourse in general, there is not much support in the book for its central notion that there is, in the context of the larger Buddhist tradition, anything unique about Shinran and language. The author offers his view on Shinran's superiority as a Mahayana thinker due to Shinran's honesty and accessibility (pp. 4-5) but the direct connection with the privileged language of the Name of Amida is not clear. Much of the text does not even address the question of language directly. The appearance of overgeneralizations like "the" Western, "the" Pure Land, "the" Buddhist or "the" Mahayana tradition and the tendency to overstate differences with other forms of Buddhism present some problems.

The language used to explain Shin doctrine is permeated by Shinran's language itself. The risk is therefore the use of a highly idiomatic, and (it must be said) near hermetical language in this book. The "teachings of the tradition are true because they arise from the Primal Vow of Amida." (p. 61) Yet this argument while overriding one type of authority merely substitutes another which is expressed in its idiomatic mythopoetic way. Thus in spite of the rhetoric of dialogue the book seems rather monologic in form. Such a celebration of privileged language seems to reflect a basic tension in the quality of accessibility claimed for Shinran's teachings:

on the one hand the language of the Buddhist path must be accessible to persons "just as they are," and accessible in any given cultural context anywhere, yet on the other hand the language is also transcendentally special and privileged and "true." The result in this context appears to be a religious teaching which has a self-image according to which it is accessible to the ordinary person, but also has features of a hermetic code.

An interesting question which is not addressed in the book concerns the translatability, at all, of the Name of Amida. This name originates in north India, emerges in Sanskrit, is phonetically rendered into Chinese, losing meaning in the process, is encountered by Shinran in Japanese, and when rendered into modern English loses further meaning. The Name is, according to Hirota, a linguistic phenomenon, but there are actually multiple versions of it even in the premodern Asian context. It would have been interesting to answer these questions: which version is the "right" one? All of them? Which one did the Buddha speak? In the book, however, the shifting, normally relativizing history of Buddhist textual languages is not taken into account.

The author does not frame his material in the larger context of Shin school doctrine. Interpretation of Shinran was elaborated, especially in the later Tokugawa period, on the basis of many thousands of hours of debate in the Shin school among people who knew Shinran's texts intimately. That tradition has had hundreds of major participants over the last three hundred years or so and has included, even in the modern period, episodes of skepticism or interrogation. The problematic regarding the relationship between *shinjin* and the vocalized *nenbutsu* (the *gyōshin* 行信 question) is a very longstanding problem which always required a certain balancing act.[1] Of course there does exist an embedded idea in Shin Buddhist tradition that the spirituality of later participants in the tradition will closely parallel Shinran's own in the thirteenth century, but this book paints a picture of a quite conservative "neo-Shinranism." It might be argued that—since the point of the book is to discuss how Shinran handled language in the form of Amida's name—taking into account the interpretive history within Japan would have been desirable, in particular for English-language readers.

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1.   Eventually, a standard interpretation became: *shinjin shōin shōmyō hōon* 信心正因 称名報恩 (roughly, "the inward *shinjin* change of consciousness is the real 'cause' or condition for the dissolution of a person's karma into nirvana at death; the vocalization of the Name of Amida [even if expected to be somehow simultaneous] is a matter of expression of a kind of gratitude"). This perspective was not so much concerned with an analysis in terms of "two truths" theory as in stating a practical psychological interpretation of Shinran's teachings. The absolute necessity of vocalization was not maintained universally.

Doubts about how this presentation lays the projected groundwork for any special cross-traditional conversation are reinforced by observation of yet more issues which are not taken into account in this book. There are no references to general religious studies (e.g. ritual), or the literature on mysticism, or mythopoetics, or psychology, or anthropology, or linguistics (e.g. Austin and performativity), or theories of religious representation (e.g. cataphatic *vs.* apophatic), or critical terms such as "re-interpret" or "re-read." At root the author's approach seems to be ahistorical. There are no references in the book to studies of Buddhism and language in Indian or Tibetan traditions, making it impossible to position its author in relation to other parts of Buddhist traditions. There is no allusion to the known fact that Theravada Buddhist traditions incorporate understandings about the non-voluntary or spontaneous nature of stream-entry transformations which are perhaps parallel to *shinjin*. A particular absence this reviewer has encountered is of comparisons to representation specifically in other fields of Buddhism, e.g. Tibetan traditions, which are replete with deities (symbolic language in a larger sense) which in ways similar to *nenbutsu* instantiate and embody form and formlessness at the same time. Overall, the discourse of this book tends to be based on assertion.

For an ordinary historian of religions, Shinran's doctrine can be viewed as a rationalizing project brought into being by a particular creative moment in Japanese Buddhist history which required Shinran to re-read sutras and commentaries so as to re-inform and re-infuse the old language with a new sensibility. Shinran's experience involved a fresh synthesis of path-entry experience together with the preexisting linguistic phenomenon of *nenbutsu* vocalization. Although for Shinran this combination was contextually natural, for human beings after Shinran, alive after the *tariki* psychological principle had been well articulated and established by later generations of Japanese Buddhists, it would seem an open question whether their religious experience would have to exactly match Shinran's experience at his crossroads moment in the thirteenth century. Could not be asked it is really in accord with Shinran's hope and temperament, when people living after him reify every aspect of what we understand to be his apparent individual intellectual and religious experience? Alternatively, a normal historical view would obviously suggest that even the *nenbutsu* as formulated by Shinran is itself in some way contingent. This book offers no recognition that textual hermeneutics which are *situational* and *contextual* are a virtually universal activity among human religious thinkers—including Shinran.

Three features of Shinran's teaching and the Shin tradition (the latter indeed successfully vectored Shinran's thought to some significant extent) present obstacles to outsiders who first approach it: the underlying *tariki* theory of spontaneity or "grace;" the intellectual problematic created by Shinran's text reading and re-interpretive infusion of meaning; and the self-consciousness and identity-seeking which became attached to the tradition due to both the institutional formations of

the Tokugawa period and to the pressures of modern cultural nationalism. Given these several difficult features, Shinran as represented here is deep, but narrow. The book unfortunately does thus not escape the influence of the persistent "brand-seeking" which is so characteristic of the Shin school, i.e. the tendency to present Shinran's ideas not only as profound and worthy, but as even more unique than they were historically in the larger context of Buddhism. An excessive identity-seeking damages the cause of cross-traditional "open" conversation. Thus, it is hard to grant that this sort of depiction is an adequate hermeneutically multiperspectival communication of the possibilities inherent in the great medieval Buddhist thinker. It appears to be bent much too far towards one specialized issue, the textual apologetic.

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