

Why They Say Zen Is Not Buddhism

Recent Japanese Critiques of Buddha-Nature

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EARLY IN AD 817, Saichō, the founder of Japanese Tendai, entered into a debate with Tokuitsu over the idea of Buddha-nature and universal enlightenment. Tokuitsu, a Hossō monk who lived in the Kantō region, had written a tract called “On Buddha-Nature” (*Busshōshō*), to which Saichō responded with “Vanquishing misunderstandings about the *Lotus Sutra*” (*Hokke kowaku*). For the next four years the two scholars engaged through essays and arguments in what grew to be one of the most important doctrinal debates in Japanese Buddhist history. In short, Saichō championed the idea of universal Buddhahood, the *ekayāna* ideal espoused in the *Lotus Sutra* that all beings are destined for the highest enlightenment of a Buddha, while Tokuitsu supported the Yogacara interpretation of five *gotra*, or five different potentials latent in sentient beings, including that of the *icchantika* who have no hope of ever attaining Buddhahood.¹

What, one might ask, does this debate have to do with the contemporary study of religion and our understanding of Buddhism in Japan? Just this: we are in the midst of a very provocative “rethinking” of Japanese Buddhism by some prominent Buddhist scholars and thinkers who claim that Ch’an/Zen, the *tathāgata-garbha* (“seed,” “matrix,” or “womb” of the Buddha) tradition,² *hongaku shisō* (“original” or “inherent” enlightenment), and related ideas are “not Buddhism.” This is tantamount to saying that most, if not all, of Japanese Buddhism is not Buddhist.

In a sense what these scholars are saying is not all that new: the *tathāgata-garbha* tradition and Buddha-nature ideas have always been open to the charge that they posit an un-Buddhist substantialist or atman-

like existence. This looks very much like the debate between Saichō and Tokuitsu transferred to our times and context. What is the meaning of Buddha-nature? What is the correct understanding of the teaching of the Buddha? Which, if any, of the many and varied strands of Buddhist tradition should be accepted as correct and proper, and which rejected as contrary to the Buddha-Dharma? What are the wider social implications of accepting or rejecting certain interpretations of the Buddhist tradition?

It is usually assumed that Saichō “won” the debate with Tokuitsu. Certainly Saichō’s view of universal Buddhahood became the accepted presupposition for most of Japanese Buddhism, and in fact represents the dominant religious ethos in Japan. The idea of universal Buddhahood led eventually to *hongaku shisō*—a way of thinking that came to include such ideas as the inherent enlightenment of all things (including non-sentient beings such as grasses and trees, rocks and mountains); the identity of samsara and nirvana; nondifferentiation of the “indigenous” kami and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas; and the transcendence of all dualities, including good and evil—and this ethos grew to be pervasive and unquestioned in much of Japanese religious activity and thought. However, there have also been times, though few and far between, when the idea and implications of *hongaku shisō* were questioned. Now is such a time.

The current attack is led by two Buddhist scholars at Komazawa University (associated with the Sōtō Zen sect): Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō. The main focus of their attacks is the *hongaku shisō* tradition (strictly speaking, the idea that all things are “inherently” or “originally” enlightened) and the implications of this kind of thinking (such as the ideal of *wa*, “harmony” or “conformity”) that function as largely uncritical assumptions in Japanese society at large. In what follows I propose briefly to examine the development of this tradition in Japan, its significance for Japanese religion and society, and the recent critique of this tradition by Hakamaya, Matsumoto, and other Japanese scholars.

HISTORY OF *HONGAKU SHISŌ*

The term *hongaku* (Chin. *pen-chüeh*) has no Sanskrit equivalent;³ it makes its first appearance in the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (T Nos. 1666, 1667), a text almost certainly compiled in China,⁴ and in two Chinese apocryphal Buddhist texts, the *Jen-wang ching* (T Nos. 245, 246)⁵ and the **Vajrasamādhi Sutra* (T No. 273).⁶ In the *Awakening of Mahayana*

Faith, *hongaku* is used in contrast to *shigaku*, the “inception” or “actualization” of enlightenment, that is, the process by which one realizes enlightenment in this life; hence the English rendering “original” enlightenment. The *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* teaches that

“original enlightenment” indicates [the essence of Mind (*a priori*)] in contradistinction to [the essence of Mind in] the process of actualization of enlightenment; the process of actualization of enlightenment is none other than [the process of integrating] the identity with the original enlightenment.⁷

This idea of original or inherent enlightenment, along with the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* in general, had an immense influence on the development of East Asian Buddhism.⁸ To give but a few examples: Fa-tsang (643–712), the Hua-yen patriarch, is well known for his influential commentary on the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*;⁹ the idea was pervasive in the Ch’an tradition; and it contributed to the development of the concept of “the Buddha-nature in non-sentient beings” in the T’ien-t’ai tradition.

In Japan *hongaku* thought took on a life of its own. Its influence was felt in the Shingon school, particularly through Kūkai’s extensive use of the *Shakumakae-ron* (T No. 1668), an apocryphal commentary on the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* attributed to Nāgārjuna. The development of *hongaku shisō* was especially extensive in the Tendai school. After the Tendai school was introduced into Japan by Saichō it underwent many developments,¹⁰ one of which was the growth of an identifiably independent branch called *hongakumon*. Texts devoted to *hongaku shisō* made their appearance in the late Heian and Kamakura periods, some of them being attributed to prominent Tendai figures like Saichō, Genshin, and Ryōgen. These texts include the *Honri taikō shū*, attributed to Saichō, which interprets the most important Tendai teachings in terms of *hongaku shisō*; “Hymns on Inherent Enlightenment” (*Hongaku-san*), with commentary attributed to Ryōgen (*Chū-hongaku-san*) and Genshin (*Hongaku-san shaku*); and texts such as the *Shuzen-ji ketsu*, attributed in part to Saichō, which contains details on the oral transmissions (*kuden*) of *hongaku* ideas, practices, and lineages.¹¹ Such oral transmissions and the accompanying lineages form an important part of the *hongaku* tradition.

It is no accident that these developments took place contemporaneously with, and indeed were a part of the growth of, the syncretistic *honji-suijaku/shinbutsu shūgō* movement, the tendency to emphasize the unity

of Buddhist and “Shinto” deities and practices. The influence of *hongaku shisō* can be seen in the growth of Shugendō (the way of mountain asceticism), in Shinto, and in all of the Buddhist schools. Building on the Mahayana idea of the “identity of samsara and nirvana,” *hongaku shisō* evolved into an ethos (to use Tamura Yoshirō’s words) of “absolute non-duality” and “total affirmation” of the mundane world. The ideal is perhaps best expressed in the phrases *sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu* and *sansen sōmoku shikkai jōbutsu* (the grasses, trees, mountains, and rivers all attain Buddhahood), phrases that pop up almost incessantly in Japanese literature, art, theater, and so forth.¹² This religious ethos constituted the status quo for most of Japanese history, and continues to dominate today despite attempts by the State in the early Meiji period to forcibly “separate” Buddhist and Shinto elements (*shinbutsu bunri*).

A few exceptions to the dominance of the *hongaku* ethos in Japan stand out. Noteworthy is the work of Hōchibō Shōshin in the twelfth century.¹³ Shōshin was critical of *hongaku shisō*, saying that one should not understand it to mean that sentient beings are “already” enlightened, and that such an interpretation denies causality and is the heresy of “naturalism” (*jinen gedō*).¹⁴ It is often pointed out that what are called the “new” Kamakura Buddhist schools arose in reaction against the *hongaku* stance of the Tendai establishment, but I think it more likely that as these new movements became established sects, they soon “reverted to” what Hakamaya and Matsumoto criticize as a *hongaku* ethos. In the Tokugawa period Myōryū Jisan (1637–1690) and Reikū Kōken (1652–1739) of the Anraku school urged a revival of the keeping of the precepts based on the *Ssu-fen lü* (Jpn. *Shibun-ritsu*), in response to what they perceived as a decadence encouraged by *hongaku shisō*. This movement was exceptional, however, and the *hongaku* ethos has survived as an unquestioned assumption in much, if not all, of Japanese Buddhism.

RECENT CRITIQUES OF *HONGAKU SHISŌ*

The current controversy concerning *hongaku shisō*, as we noted, centers around Matsumoto Shirō and Hakamaya Noriaki, but is not restricted to them. It is not insignificant that these figures are all first-rate textual scholars and philosophers, as well as faculty members of the Sōtō-Zen-affiliated Komazawa University. Theirs are not casual criticisms leveled broadside by outsiders, nor are they based on slipshod scholarship or half-

baked social commentary due to a lack of familiarity with the Buddhist tradition and its texts. These are first-rate academic studies prepared by committed Buddhists.

Matsumoto Shirō, a specialist in Madhyamika Buddhism, published a collection of his essays in 1989 called *Pratītyasamutpāda and Emptiness—Critiques of the Doctrine of Tathāgata-garbha*. I begin with a résumé of the main points made in these essays.

The Doctrine of Tathāgata-garbha Is Not Buddhist

The first essay, provocatively titled “The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist,” leaves no doubt as to Matsumoto’s position or intent.¹⁵ If *tathāgata-garbha* thought is not Buddhist—what, then, *is* the teaching of the Buddha? Buddhism is the teaching of non-self (*muga; anātman*) and the teaching of causality (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This teaching of causality is not that of universal mutual co-arising and non-temporal causality developed later (as, for example, in the Hua-yen tradition), but the temporal, twelvefold chain of dependent arising as discovered by the Buddha during his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and classically expressed in the *Mahāvagga*.¹⁶ The crucial point is the denial of any eternal, substantial, underlying basis or locus on which everything else depends upon or arises from. This “locus” that is denied by the teaching of causality is given the name *dhātu*, and any teaching that implies the existence of a *dhātu* is called *dhātu-vāda* (a Sanskrit neologism coined by Matsumoto). *Dhātu-vāda* is antithetical to Buddhism, since it is the very teaching that Śākyamuni intended to deny. The idea of a *tathāgata-garbha*, the “womb,” “matrix,” or “seed” of Buddhahood inherent in all sentient beings, is a form of *dhātu-vāda* and thus is not Buddhist. *Dhātu-vāda* is depicted graphically and its steps outlined systematically (see page 170 below).

An important part of Matsumoto’s argument is that the teaching of *dhātu-vāda* gives the false appearance of a teaching of “equality”—after all, it claims that all things are based on a single, universal, eternal reality. In practice it leads to discrimination, since if one assumes a single basis and underlying reality for all things—that good and evil, strong and weak, rich and poor, right and wrong, are fundamentally “the same”—there is no need or incentive to correct any injustice or right any wrong or challenge the status quo. In practice, then, *dhātu-vāda* supports and fosters discrimination and injustice. The idea of a universal, inherent Buddha-

hood appears optimistic, but in fact reinforces the status quo and removes incentives for improving the human condition.

The article closes with a three-part conclusion:

1. *Tathāgata-garbha* thought is a form of *dhātu-vāda*.
2. *Dhātu-vāda* is the object of Śākyamuni's criticism, and the correct Buddhist teaching of causality (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is a denial of *dhātu-vāda*.
3. Contemporary Japanese Buddhism can only claim to be truly Buddhist insofar as it denies the validity of *tathāgata-garbha* thought.

A Reinterpretation of Pratītyasamutpāda

Beginning with the second essay, “On *Pratītyasamutpāda*,” the rest of Matsumoto's book expands on and gives detailed support to the basic assertions outlined above. Here he criticizes the work of many of the most prominent modern Japanese Buddhist scholars, among them Ui Hakuju, Watsuji Tetsurō, Hirakawa Akira, Tamaki Kōshirō, Fujita Kōtatsu, and Tsuda Shin'ichi.

Some of the more interesting points made in this long essay include the following: There is no religion without time. The correct understanding of causality is not that of a theoretical, spatial, or mutually inclusive causality, but of a temporal causality of an effect following on a cause. The twelve-linked chain of causation refers not to relationships between things, but to the temporal sequence from cause to effect. In terms of the scheme in Matsumoto's chart (see page 170 below), *pratītyasamutpāda* is a sequence of super-loci without an underlying locus; a sequence of properties and not things (dharmas). There is no reality (*dhātu*) beyond or underlying this temporal sequence. The concept of *hongaku* posits a “pre-time” or state beyond time from which all things arise, or in which all things are simultaneously and mutually related. This is *dhātu-vāda*.

Matsumoto adds that the *dhātu-vāda* way of thinking can be found in all ancient societies, both East and West. It is the idea that “all things arise from and return to an all-encompassing One.” If so, it is possible to say that *tathāgata-garbha* thought/*dhātu-vāda* is the theoretical or philosophical development of “native” (*dochaku*—dare I say “primitive”?) animistic ideas and “folk religion” (*minzoku shūkyō*).¹⁷ Some have claimed that the idea of “the Buddhahood of grasses and trees” is the climactic development of Buddhist thought, but for Matsumoto it is no more than

a form of animism. At no time in history has animism been held in higher esteem than it is today. At a recent conference in Japan, a certain scholar claimed that “The basis of the religious consciousness of the Japanese people is animism and ancestor veneration.” This view of folk religion is closely related to *tathāgata-garbha* thought. Both are the theoretical development of “native” (*dochaku*) ways of thinking. Representative of this way of thinking is the “Japanism” (*Nihongaku*) of Umehara Takeshi, and it comes as no surprise to find him arguing in favor of both Japanese folk religion and *tathāgata-garbha* thought.

A Critique of “Japanism”

This last theme is taken up again in the third essay, “Buddhism and the Kami: Against Japanism.”¹⁸ Here Matsumoto criticizes the kind of easy “Japanism” and pro-Japan glorification represented by the *Nihongaku* of Umehara Takeshi. He first introduces the ideas of Umehara, which often speak of the superiority of the Japanese race and present Japanese Buddhism positively in terms of its *tathāgata-garbha* elements, the “Buddhahood” of inanimate things, and the emphasis on *wa* (“harmony”). He points out that ideas such as “no-thought and no-conceptualization” (*munen musō*), “direct intuition” (*chokkan*), and “non-reliance on words” (*furyū monji*), all of which have been proposed to the West as representative of “Zen,” are in fact based on *tathāgata-garbha* and *hongaku* thought, and should not be considered positive Buddhist virtues.

The “Japanism” of Motoori Norinaga, Kawabata Yasunari, and Mishima Yukio are then briefly outlined in order to explain how each of these figures closely identified themselves with the country or concept of “Japan.” Matsumoto concludes that such thinking is a “philosophy of death” (*shi no tetsugaku*), which as a Buddhist he must reject:

The notion that the ancient Japanese view of life was optimistic and only turned pessimistic with the introduction of Buddhism is nonsense propagated by people who know not the first thing about the meaning of religion. In fact, the ancient Japanese had no ground for any kind of hope. Their lives were spent in the frightened but stoic anticipation of death and the journey to the dreaded land of darkness (*yomi no kuni*). Their first hope for life, the first conviction of resurrection in the next world, came through the encounter with Buddhism.

He closes with the personal observation that, in conformity with the Buddhist teaching of no-self, Buddhists should not be attached to patriotism towards their own country.

Other Essays in "Pratītyasamutpāda and Emptiness"

The fourth essay, "A Critique of Realism," deals with Tsuda Shin'ichi's criticisms of Matsumoto's position. Matsumoto makes a detailed, technical, and textual argument against understanding "dharma" as "existence," and expands on his critique of *dhātu-vāda*.

In the next essay, on "Liberation and Nirvana: Some Non-Buddhist Ideas," Matsumoto carries his critique a step further to argue that there is no greater misunderstanding than to say that the final goal of Buddhism is "liberation" (*gedatsu; vimukti*). The reason is that the idea of liberation (*vimukti*) is based on the non-Buddhist idea that there is a self (*ātmavāda*) to be liberated, which is an anti-Buddhist idea. Not only liberation, but nirvana, a concentrated state of mind (*jhāna, samādhi*), and even "mind" (*citta*), are all based on the non-Buddhist idea of a self. In this essay Matsumoto sets aside the ideas of *jhāna, samādhi*, and *citta* in order to concentrate on liberation and nirvana. In short, he argues that the ideas of liberation and nirvana presuppose a "self" to be liberated, and is thus a *dhātu-vāda*. He argues against the prevalent interpretation of nirvana as "extinction"—based on the etymology of *nir/vā*, to "blow out"—and instead argues for the etymology of *nir/vr*, to "uncover." A painstaking textual study in support of his contention concludes with four points:

1. The original meaning of "nirvana" was not "extinction" but "to uncover."
2. The basic idea of "nirvana" is "the liberation of the atman from what is not atman," and is thus related to the idea of "liberation" as the goal of Buddhism. Thus both ideas of "nirvana" and "liberation" are based on the idea of an atman.
3. The atman is often compared to "light" or said to give forth light. If one uncovers or takes away what is hindering the light, then the light can shine forth and illuminate the darkness. Thus the "extinction of light" cannot be the meaning of a liberation or "nirvana" of an atman.
4. "The liberation of the atman from what is not atman" is the liberation of the "spirit" from the "body." Thus, complete liberation is possible only by completely escaping the body, which is why this kind of liberation constitutes a "philosophy of death."

We have yet to see how far Matsumoto is willing to go in his rejection or reinterpretation of traditional Buddhist terms and concepts. As we shall see later, Takasaki Jikidō takes Matsumoto to task for going too far and leaving nothing that can be called “Buddhist.”

The sixth essay, “The *Prajñāpāramitā* Sutras and *Tathāgata-garbha* Thought,” shows how the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras began (with the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā*) as writings based on the idea of emptiness (*sunyata*); but as *dhātu-vāda*-type ideas gradually crept in, one must be careful to discriminate the contents of the texts. One of the main arguments here is that the earliest extant version of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā*, the Chinese translation made in AD 179 (T No. 224), does not contain the famous passage that the “mind is originally pure” (*prakṛtis cittasya prabhāsvarā*), a passage used to support *tathāgata-garbha*-like ideas. Matsumoto concludes that the early *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras taught emptiness, but gradually incorporated *tathāgata-garbha* tendencies, culminating in the compilation of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, an influential commentary on the *Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā Sutra* that embraces *tathāgata-garbha* ideas. Matsumoto advocates studying early versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras to help weed out these later, mistaken accretions.

The next essay, “The *Śrīmālādevī Sutra* and Ekayana Theory,” is an early essay by Matsumoto, the arguments of which are better developed in other essays. By examining the *tathāgata-garbha* ideas in the *Śrīmālādevī Sutra* Matsumoto concludes that

Indian Mahayana Buddhism is usually considered to have had two major scholastic traditions: the Madhyamika and Yogacara. This is adequate for classifying the *scholastic* traditions, and I see no need to support the proposal that the *tathāgata-garbha* tradition was a third school. In India there were certainly scholastic debates within the Yogacara school and within the Madhyamika school, and there were also debates between the Yogacara and Madhyamika schools, but can it be said that there were debates between the *tathāgata-garbha* and Yogacara schools?

The question is rhetorical for Matsumoto. The context makes it clear that his answer is in the negative.

The final essay, “On Emptiness,” discusses *sunyata* from the perspective of *pratītyasamutpāda*. Matsumoto argues that the main theme of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* is not emptiness but *pratītyasamutpāda*. He does not claim that *sunyata* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are

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opposing or contradictory concepts, but he does caution that sunyata must be understood in terms of *pratītyasamutpāda*, and not the other way around. If not, there is the danger of misunderstanding sunyata as a kind of *dhātu-vāda*.

Critical Studies on Zen Thought

In 1993 Matsumoto published another collection of essays, entitled *Critical Studies on Zen Thought*, in which he expanded on his critiques. The opening essay on “The Meaning of Zen Thought” presents an analysis of the teachings of Mo-ho-yen and Shen-hui, concluding that insofar as Ch’an/Zen thought insists on the denial or cessation of conceptual thinking, it cannot be regarded as Buddhist.¹⁹

The next two essays, “Shen-hui’s Commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*” and “The Basic Thought of Lin-chi,” take a closer look at the Chinese Ch’an tradition, concluding that Shen-hui and Lin-chi base their teachings on *dhātu-vāda*-like assumptions.²⁰

The fourth essay, “*Padma-garbha* and *Tathāgata-garbha*,” speculates on the development of *tathāgata-garbha* thought, and concludes that it derived at least in part from the idea of *padma-garbha* (the “Lotus matrix”), and that the whole *garbha* discourse is a reversion to a Vedic-type atman theory.

The fifth chapter, on Sanlun teachings, concludes that Chi-tsang denied *pratītyasamutpāda* and that his philosophy is nothing but *dhātu-vāda*.

The final chapter, on the “Jinshin inga” (deep faith in causality) chapter of the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*, consists of Matsumoto’s criticisms of Hakamaya’s views on the subject. Specifically, Matsumoto disagrees with Hakamaya’s conclusion that Dōgen completely rejected Buddha-nature and *dhātu-vāda*-like ideas in his later years, claiming rather that Dōgen never completely rejected *tathāgata-garbha* ideas.

Despite this criticism, and as Matsumoto points out many times in his work, he considers Hakamaya Noriaki a colleague and confidante, whose thinking has developed in tandem with his own. This brings us to the critique of *hongaku shisō* developed by Hakamaya.

THE CRITIQUE OF *HONGAKU SHISŌ* BY HAKAMAYA NORIAKI

Hakamaya Noriaki, formerly a faculty member of the Buddhist Studies department of Komazawa University and currently Professor at Koma-

zawa Junior College, is a noted specialist on the Yogacara school. He is a prolific writer, scholar, and social critic with a long list of textual studies to his credit. He has published two collections of essays on the subject at hand: *Critiques of the Doctrine of Original Enlightenment* (1989) and *Critical Buddhism* (1990).

In his preface to *Critiques* Hakamaya clearly spells out his intent: to show that *hongaku shisō* is not Buddhism. In addition, he claims that Zen, the Kyoto school of philosophy, even the teaching of non-duality in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, are not Buddhist. And as a specialist in Yogacara, he hopes eventually to write an essay demonstrating that Vijñaptimātratā is not Buddhist!

Hakamaya understands *hongaku shisō* in a broad sense: a way of thinking that all things are embraced in a basic, singular, ineffable reality (a state of “original enlightenment”) that functions as an authoritarian ideology and does not admit the validity of words, or concepts, or faith, or intellect. The structure of reality is expressed as consisting of a “pure” basis (object)—expressed as “original enlightenment,” the basis, essence, or principle—and the results (subject) that are based on this reality—expressed as “actualized enlightenment,” traces, function, or phenomena. This “basis,” however it be called, is a *dhātu*, and Hakamaya maintains that anything that admits a *dhātu* is not Buddhist.

What, then, is Buddhism? In a substantial introduction,²¹ Hakamaya lays out three defining characteristics of Buddhism as a rule by which to measure what is and what is not Buddhism:

1. The basic teaching of the Buddha is the law of causation (*pratītya-samutpāda*), formulated in response to the Indian philosophy of a substantial atman. Any idea that implies an underlying substance (a “topos”; *basbo*) and any philosophy that accepts a “topos” is called a *dhātu-vāda*. Examples of *dhātu-vāda* are the atman concept in India, the idea of “nature” (Jpn. *shizen*) in Chinese philosophy, and the “original enlightenment” idea in Japan. These ideas run contrary to the basic Buddhist idea of causation.
2. The moral imperative of Buddhism is to act selflessly (*anātman*) to benefit others. Any religion that favors the self to the neglect of others contradicts the Buddhist ideal. The *hongaku shisō* idea that “grasses, trees, mountains, and rivers have all attained Buddhahood; that sentient and non-sentient beings are all endowed with the way of the Buddha” (or, in Hakamaya’s words, “included in the substance of Buddha”) leaves no room for this moral imperative.

3. Buddhism requires faith, words, and the use of the intellect (wisdom, *prajñā*) to choose the truth of *pratītyasamutpāda*. The Zen allergy to the use of words is more native Chinese than Buddhist, and the ineffability of “thusness” (*shinnyo*) asserted in *hongaku shisō* leaves no room for words or faith.²²

The paradigm for these three characteristics, Hakamaya insists, is to be found in the thought and enlightenment experience of the Buddha himself. Śākyamuni realized (Hakamaya prefers the word “chose”) the truth of causation during his enlightenment (Hakamaya prefers “thinking”) under the Bodhi tree, resisted the temptation to keep the truth and bliss of enlightenment to himself in favor of sharing it for the benefit of others, and preached about his discovery of the truth of causation with words, appealing to people’s intellect as well as to their faith.

This pattern, Hakamaya points out, is also found in T’ien-t’ai Chih-i’s critique of Taoism. From the standpoint of Buddhism Chih-i rejected his country’s native philosophy—one of the few to do so—because it does not recognize causality (*ingā*), because it lacks the ideal of benefiting others (*rita*), and because it tends towards a denial of words (*zetsugon*).²³

After briefly summarizing each of Hakamaya’s essays in his two major collections, I will take up a few other representative essays.

Critiques of the Doctrine of Original Enlightenment (1989)

The first essay, on “Problems in Understanding Sunyata,” concerns various uses and interpretations of sunyata in Buddhist texts and the importance of words (*logos, vāc*). The next essay, on “Critical Notes on the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*,” consists of a critique of the concepts of thusness (*shinnyo, tathatā*) and “mind” in this text. The essay on “*Pratītyasamutpāda* and Suchness” is an important study originally included in the commemorative volume of essays in honor of Hiraakawa Akira; it is a warning against understanding *pratītyasamutpāda* in terms of *tathatā* or “réalité.” The fourth essay, on “Observations on Norinaga’s Critique of Buddhism,” and the sixth, on “Norinaga’s Critique of Ryōbu Shinto: The Relationship between Thought and Language,” address Norinaga’s criticisms against Buddhism and *hongaku* influence in Ryōbu Shinto, emphasizing the importance of words as more than the proverbial “finger pointing at the moon.”

The fifth essay, “Thoughts on the Ideological Background of Social Discrimination,”²⁴ is a talk given at the Osaka Buraku Liberation Center

in which Hakamaya addresses the role of *hongaku shisō* in encouraging and maintaining discrimination against outcasts in Japanese society. The seventh essay, on “Prolegomena to a Critical look at the ‘Four Criteria’,” is a warning against accepting the traditional Buddhist criteria that people should depend on the Dharma but not on people, on the meaning but not the words (of the teachings), on the “definitive meaning” but not on the “interpretable meaning,” and on wisdom but not on consciousness.

The eighth essay, “Buddhism and the Kami: Against Japanism,” complements an essay by Matsumoto of the same title.²⁵ The ninth essay, “Critique of the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*,” is an early paper by Hakamaya on the idea that the teaching of non-duality in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* is not Buddhist. First given at a conference of the Association for Indian and Buddhist Studies, it was one of the first volleys of Critical Buddhism and occasioned a famous exchange with Takasaki Jikidō.²⁶ The next essay is “A Critique of the Structure of Faith in the *Ratnagotravibhāga*,” followed by “*Tathatā* as Topos,” a critique of “topical philosophy” (*basho no tetsugaku*) in contrast to “critical philosophy” (*bihan no tetsugaku*).

The second section of the book consists of a series of essays on Dōgen. “The Definitive Standpoint for Understanding Dōgen” argues, against the majority view, that Dōgen should be understood as critical of *hongaku shisō*. Hakamaya then offers “How to Read the *Bendōwa*,” followed by “A Reexamination of Theories Concerning the Compilation of the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*,” which argues that the 12 fascicles written by Dōgen late in his life were critical of *hongaku shisō* and should replace the earlier fascicles of the *Shōbōgenzō*.²⁷

In “Some Thoughts Critical of the ‘Unity of the Three Teachings’,” Hakamaya argues that Buddhism should not accept the fuzzy and mistakenly tolerant idea that the religious traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are “fundamentally compatible.” “A Critique of Understanding Dōgen in Terms of the ‘Complete Unity of the Buddha Dharma’” is a response to comments by Hakamaya’s colleague Ishii Shūdō, and is a critique of the interpretation of Dōgen based on the theory of one (*ichi*) and all (*zen*). This is followed by “The ‘Transmission Outside the Teachings’ and the Unity of Teachings and Meditation.” This section closes with an essay on “What Dōgen Denied” in which Hakamaya claims that in later years Dōgen rejected the fuzzy spirituality based on *hongaku shisō*; and another essay on “The ‘Arousing the Supreme Mind’ Chapter in the 75-Fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* and the ‘Arousing

Bodhicitta' Chapter in the 12-Fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*," arguing that both of these chapters deal with the same subject but come to completely different conclusions, thus showing that Dōgen's thought changed and that his final views are to be found in the latter work.

Critical Buddhism (1990)

Hakamaya's next collection opens with "Introduction to Critical Buddhism: 'Critical Philosophy' versus 'Topical Philosophy'."²⁸ Its point, in a word, is that to be a Buddhist is to be critical, that is, to be able to make distinctions; that the only truly Buddhist stand is to be critical; that Buddhism must be a "critical philosophy" able to make distinctions, not an experiential "topical philosophy" (such as *hongaku shisō*) that is "all-inclusive" and uncritically tolerant.

The first section begins with "A Critique of the Kyōto School," in which Hakamaya criticizes the idea of *bashō* in the Kyoto school of philosophy (Nishida Kitarō and Nishitani Keiji) and argues that it is an extension of the non-Buddhist idea of *hongaku shisō*. The third essay, "Scholarship as Criticism," argues for the importance of a critical method for scholarship, and argues that what is wrong should be pointed out as wrong and not papered over for the sake of a shallow harmonious tolerance.²⁹ This is followed by "A Critique of Kobayashi Hideo's *My View of Life*."

The second section opens with "A Glance at the State of Buddhism in the United States: Remarks on a Paper Given by a Young Buddhist Scholar," a report on Hakamaya's experience at the U.S.-Japan Conference on Japanese Buddhism held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 25–28 August 1985, and in particular his agreement with the paper by Paul Griffiths, "On the Possible Future of the Buddhist-Christian Interaction."³⁰ The next essay, "*Tathatā, Dharmadhātu, Dharmatā*," discusses the non-Buddhist implications of these concepts. In "The Anti-Buddhist Character of *Wa* and the Antiviolent Character of Buddhism" Hakamaya argues that the idea of *wa* is not a positive Buddhist virtue, but in practice represents an excuse for uncritical syncretism and plays into the hands of the powerful in coercing conformity from above. True Buddhist virtue is antiviolent, and requires a critical stance against discrimination and injustice; "faith" should be the ideal, not *wa*. The essay on "Rejection of False Buddhism" stresses the importance of choosing what is right and rejecting what is wrong. The section closes with an essay on "Problems in Watsuji Tetsurō's Understanding of 'Dharma' and 'Emptiness'."

The last section contains two essays: “Thoughts on ‘Truth’ while Reading *Sickness unto Death*” and “*Vijñāpti-mātra* and *Anātman*: My ‘Seated Meditation’.”

Hakamaya continues to write prolifically, publishing highly technical textual studies as well as Buddhological essays and social criticism. As many of the points Hakamaya makes in his technical “Buddhological” essays are already covered in the above summary of Matsumoto’s work, I will concentrate here on Hakamaya’s social commentary.

“*Wa*,” *Antiviolence, and Buddhism*

“The Anti-Buddhist Character of *Wa* and the Antiviolent Character of Buddhism” (1990)³¹ opens with a lengthy quote from Nishitani Keiji on the increasing interest in religion in Japan, the cooperation between state and religion, and why this is a good thing for the country. Except for the dated style, one gets the impression that the quote was written quite recently, given the fact that Japan is now experiencing another *shūkyō būmu*. The perspective shifts, however, when one realizes that the quote was written in 1941 as Japan was feverishly engaged in a world war, religious persecution, and domestic repression. Hakamaya uses this quote as a springboard to argue that the idea of *wa* (“harmony”) is promoted as a positive ideal in Japan, but in reality it is a repressive principle wielded by the powerful to maintain the status quo and social order, and to restrict criticism. For Hakamaya, the *wa* promoted since the time of Prince Shōtoku and his famous 17-Article Constitution is not a Buddhist virtue. *Wa* is an enemy of Buddhism and an enemy of true peace. Buddhists should not give in to a compromising and mushy “tolerance” that uncritically accepts all things as “equal.”

Coeval with the ideal of *wa* is the religious ethos of *hongaku shisō*. Both support an attitude of uncritical tolerance, which Hakamaya compares to mixing *miso* and *kuso* (brown bean paste and dung—“curds and turds,” if one is to preserve the play on words). Both support a superficial syncretism that ignores differences of right and wrong or good and bad, and thus ironically works to maintain discrimination and injustice and the whims of those in positions of power and authority.

Rather than *wa*, the Buddhist should emphasize faith. *Wa* encourages acceptance of any teaching or idea, be it Confucian, Taoist, native Japanese animism, or un-Buddhistic *dhātu-vāda* tendencies. “Faith”

requires a firm belief in certain Buddhist truths and rejecting ideas that are contrary to these truths. Thus Buddhist faith (Jpn. *shin*, Skt. *śraddhā*) is the same as the Latin *credo*—one believes in order to be able to judge whether an idea is correct or not correct. This is “faith” as taught in the *Lotus Sutra*. The “faith” taught in *tathāgata-garbha* texts such as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, in contrast, emphasizes the unity of the believer and the object of belief, and confidence in one’s own Buddha-nature or potential to become a Buddha. The faith of the *Lotus Sutra*, on the other hand, means believing the words of the Buddha, and then distinguishing with one’s intellect (*prajñā*) between the correct and the incorrect, and criticizing the incorrect with words.

Hakamaya argues that the *wa* ethos led people in prewar Japan uncritically to sacrifice themselves to the war effort and maintain silence. Buddhist faith requires intellect to critically respond with words and actions against mistaken notions and activity. This is the “antiviolence” stand of Buddhism. To oppose *wa* is to be truly antiviolent and antiwar.

Thoughts against the Emperor System

Hakamaya’s essay, “Thoughts against the Emperor System” (1989), opens with a quote from Dōgen:

Sentient beings should not be full of fear and take refuge in the mountain deities, *oni*, kami, and so forth, or take refuge in non-Buddhist (*gedō*) spiritual powers (*caitya*). There is no liberation from suffering by relying on such things. By following the mistaken teaching (*jakyō*) of non-Buddhist ways, ...one does not attain any causes for liberation. The wise person does not praise these things; they add to suffering and not to good recompense. Thus one should not take refuge in mistaken ways, but should clearly exclude them.

Hakamaya takes the occasion of Emperor Shōwa’s death, and the period of “voluntary restraint” (*jishuku*) among the Japanese people during the emperor’s terminal illness, to comment on the place of the emperor system in modern Japan and its inherent dangers. He wonders how it can be claimed that Japan is a country “with unusual freedom of thought and expression” when social pressures during this period were so strong that hardly anyone dared to make any comment or take any action that could be construed as “inappropriate” to the occasion.

For Hakamaya, the emperor system is like the *hongaku* and *honji sui-jaku* ethos: it is an ineffable center, held together by a murky syncretism, and relies on the ideal of *wa* to muffle any ideological criticism. It is a non-Buddhist spirituality that Dōgen clearly rejected. Buddhists must be critical of the emperor system and its surrounding hothouse atmosphere that stifles dissent.

A Critique of Zen

In an essay entitled “A Critique of the Zen School,” Hakamaya reiterates and expands his criticism that “Zen is not Buddhism,” makes a blistering attack on the Zen interpretations of Yanagida Seizan and D. T. Suzuki, and responds to some questions raised by his colleague Ishii Shūdō.

One passage in particular clarifies the intent of Hakamaya’s critique:

I have said that “Zen is not Buddhism” but do not recall ever saying that “Chinese Ch’an is not Buddhism.” This difference may appear minor, but it is an important distinction. The reason is that anything which shows no attempt at “critical philosophy” based on intellect (*prajñā*), but is merely an experiential “Zen” (*dhyāna*, *bsam gtan*), whether it be in India or Tibet or wherever, cannot be Buddhism.³²

Hakamaya’s harsh criticism of Yanagida Seizan and D. T. Suzuki is based on the idea that if, on the one hand, the correct Dharma (*saddharma*) of Buddhism is a critical philosophy and a foreign and imported way of thinking; if, on the other hand, Zen is a topical philosophy no different from the customs and ways of the culture into which it was imported, then the fact that both Suzuki and Yanagida wrote books concerning two phenomena that should be understood as diametrically opposed to each other, namely “Buddhism” and “Japanese culture,” shows that they are not aware of the fundamental opposition between the two. According to Hakamaya, the triumph of Zen in China and Japan is the triumph of indigenous (*dochaku*) thinking in absorbing Buddhism into itself and neutralizing the critical thrust of the Buddha’s teaching.

In concluding this essay and in response to questions from Ishii, Hakamaya clarifies his position on certain points. For example, he states clearly that there is no such thing as “good” *hongaku shisō*, as if certain parts of the theory could be accepted as Buddhist and others rejected. He also takes issue with Ishii’s claim that the correct Dharma (*saddharma*) recognizes both sitting in meditation and various religious rituals as valuable,

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and also recognizes a proper role for a teacher to guide one in the correct Dharma. For Hakamaya, one must completely reject the authoritarian idea that a teacher is absolute and never mistaken.

Buddhism as Critical of the Idea of “Nature”

In another 1990 article Hakamaya argues that Buddhism does not teach “oneness with nature” but rejects the atman-like idea of an all-encompassing “nature” (*shizen*); a Buddhist must escape from “nature” while yet protecting “nature” from destruction by becoming the “masters and possessors of nature” (*maîtres et possesseurs de la nature*). In his inimitable way Hakamaya adds:

D. T. Suzuki never tired of praising the “Eastern” view of nature, and he certainly played a large role in implanting this mistaken view not only abroad but also in Japan. However, since Suzuki was a “Zen person” and not a Buddhist, perhaps we should not complain that he was always praising “nature.” The real tragedy would be if Buddhists followed his example.³³

Original Enlightenment and the Lotus Sutra

Hakamaya prepared a paper on “The *Lotus Sutra* and *Hongaku Shisō*” for a conference on the “*Lotus Sutra* and Japanese Culture” held at the University of British Columbia in August 1990.³⁴ This paper repeats and neatly summarizes many of his major points. He points out that the *Lotus Sutra*, since it claims to proclaim the only right and true Buddhism, and is an imported way of thinking, should be understood as antithetical to the indigenous ways of thinking in the countries it enters. *Hongaku shisō*, in contrast, is naturally amenable to indigenous ways of thinking. Thus, at least theoretically, these two standpoints stand in opposition to each other.

Mention was made above of Hakamaya’s view that *hongaku shisō* is a *dhātu-vāda*, and that the three criteria for a “correct” Buddhism are that it teaches causality, that it promotes an altruistic, other-benefiting ideal, and that words are valued to express the truth. The *Lotus Sutra* meets all these criteria. The *Lotus Sutra* is a “critical philosophy” in contrast to the “topical philosophy” of *hongaku shisō*. It urges people to have faith, is critical of mistaken understanding of the Buddha Dharma, and values the skillful use (*hōben, upāya*) of language.

Unfortunately, Hakamaya says, for most of Japanese history the *Lotus Sutra* has been understood in an un-Buddhistic way. The interpretations of Seng-chao, Chi-tsang, and others, who understood the *Lotus Sutra* in terms of Taoist or Buddha-nature ideas, were imported into Japan from the earliest days, influenced the *wa* ethos attributed to Prince Shōtoku, and from the very beginning turned the critical *Lotus Sutra* approach into an overly tolerant ethos. Thus from the very beginning the *hongaku shisō* attitude won out over the radical, critical, and truly Buddhist approach of the *Lotus Sutra*.

Thoughts on Rituals for Removing Evil Karma

Hakamaya continues to write prolifically on a variety of subjects. One ongoing series of noteworthy articles, the sixth and most recent supplement having appeared in March 1996,³⁵ concerns rituals used for getting rid of evil karma, a practice that Hakamaya rejects as based on *ātmavāda*. In these articles his focus shifts to speculations on the origins of Mahayana Buddhism, in the course of which he argues that an important role was played by “supervisors” (*vaiyāvryakara*) who acted as a bridge between the ascetic home-departed monks and the lay believers who provided support for the Buddhist organization. These speculations, like Hakamaya’s work in general, are part of an ongoing process of working out the implications of Critical Buddhism.

RESPONSES AND OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ISSUE

Although Matsumoto and Hakamaya are the central figures in this controversy, there are other scholars who have made claims similar to theirs and otherwise have contributed to the debate. In this connections, the work of four more faculty members of Komazawa University merits attention.

Ishii Shūdō has published an important volume, *Studies on the History of the Ch’an School during the Sung Period* (1987). In his introduction he refers to the work of Matsumoto and Hakamaya and their conclusion that “Chinese Zen is not Buddhism (i.e., not anti-Upaniṣad).” He adds that “this may seem rather strange at first glance, but it corresponds to my understanding that ‘the indigenous Taoist thought is not Buddhist,’ and their statements promise to be valuable in my attempt to clarify the character of Chinese Ch’an.”³⁶ Ishii is careful not to give full support to the

claims of Hakamaya and Matsumoto, however, and, as we have seen from Hakamaya's responses to Ishii's queries, both parties are currently engaged in a public debate to clarify their positions. Ishii appears willing to admit that "indigenous" elements have value and do not necessarily compromise Buddhism; Hakamaya will have none of it.

Yamauchi Shun'yū has published two massive tomes, *Dōgen's Zen and the Tendai Hongaku Tradition* (1985) and *Zen and Tendai Meditation* (1986). The former presents detailed studies on the development of *hongaku shisō* and underscores Dōgen's critique against it. In the preface to this work Yamauchi acknowledges that his studies are an extension of the work of Hazama Jikō and Tamura Yoshirō.

Yoshizu Yoshihide has published *Studies in the History of Hua-yen-Ch'an Philosophy* (1985), focussing on Fa-tsang, Ch'eng-kuan, and Tsung-mi, with special attention to the influence of *hongaku shisō*. He concludes that

although the thought of original awakening (*hongaku shisō*) is said to have taken root in Japanese Buddhism from the Heian period through the Kamakura period, further research must be conducted on the contact and incurring differences [*sic*] between the Chinese meaning of original enlightenment, which I have called here Hua-yen-Ch'an, and the Japanese usage of the concept of original awakening.³⁷

Itō Takatoshi has written a number of articles (compiled in his *Critical Studies on Chinese Buddhism* in 1992) on the early Chinese assimilation of Buddhism. He focuses on the work of Seng-chao and his influence on Chi-tsang, the systematizer of the Sanlun school. He notes the current view that these two figures were very influential in helping Buddhism take root in China, only to counter that in fact these two figures assimilated Buddhist teachings on the basis of indigenous Chinese ideas. In his essay on "matching terms,"—a phrase usually used to describe only the early, pre-Seng-chao phase of the introduction of Buddhism into China—Itō argues that "All of Chinese Buddhism, from the time of its introduction to the dominance of the Ch'an school, is a Buddhism of 'matching terms'."³⁸ In other words, Chinese Buddhism is always understood on the basis of the indigenous ideas such as *tao* and *li*. A Buddhism of "matching terms" is no more than an extension of indigenous Chinese ideas (*rōsō shisō*), and cannot be considered correct or proper Buddhism.

RESPONSES TO THE CHALLENGE BY BUDDHIST SCHOLARS

Tamura Yoshirō

The topic of *hongaku shisō* was brought to the fore of current Buddhist studies through the work of Tamura Yoshirō, who followed in the footsteps of Hazama Jikō and Shimaji Daitō in identifying *hongaku shisō* as a dominant ethos in Japanese Buddhism and religion. Tamura's study on the influence of *hongaku shisō* on the new Kamakura Buddhist movements (1965), and his work in the compilation of *hongaku* texts, laid the foundation for current studies on *hongaku shisō*.³⁹

It was a great loss to the world of Buddhist scholarship when Tamura passed away in 1989. We can only speculate how he would have responded to the challenge presented by Matsumoto and Hakamaya. Tamura is on record as saying that *hongaku shisō* was the climactic development of Mahayana Buddhism, and he was a tireless advocate of the positive influences of this ethos, not only on Japanese religion but also in various areas of Japanese culture. What D. T. Suzuki claimed for "Zen," Tamura would probably have claimed for *hongaku shisō*.⁴⁰ Since he cannot respond directly to these new developments, his collected works on the subject (published in 1990) must serve as his "response" on the subject.

Takasaki Jikidō

The greatest authority on *tathāgata-garbha* thought in Japan today is Takasaki Jikidō, and his masterful *The Formation of Tathāgata-garbha Thought* was published in 1974. Both Matsumoto and Hakamaya did graduate work under Takasaki and quote his work with respect, while in certain recent publications Takasaki makes a preliminary response to their arguments.⁴¹ Takasaki praises them for their careful scholarship and critical approach, but cannot accept their conclusion that *tathāgata-garbha* thought and *hongaku shisō* "are not Buddhist." He points out that the *tathāgata-garbha* texts themselves are constantly aware of the possible criticism that they are positing an atman, and deny the charge.⁴² Yet their openness to this charge did not lead anyone in India to accuse them of being "not Buddhism." It is true that the Madhyamika school criticized the *tathāgata-garbha* and the Yogacara traditions in general for using expressions that implied substantial existence, but the Madhyamikas still accepted such language as being part of Mahayana Buddhism, even though they regarded it as an "incomplete" teaching. The *tathāgata-garbha* ideas were also accepted in Tibet as part of the Mahayana tradition.

As for Matsumoto's idea of a *dhātu-vāda*, Takasaki adds, it is a useful proposition with which to criticize *tathāgata-garbha* and Yogacara ideas, as it is indeed structurally similar to the Upaniṣadic idea of the unity of Brahman and atman. At the same time, Takasaki doubts whether it is necessarily always un-Buddhist or anti-Buddhist, and whether it can serve as a reliable litmus test to determine what is and is not Buddhism. Takasaki finds Matsumoto's defining characteristics of Buddhism too restrictive, and wonders if perhaps Śākyamuni himself was "poisoned" by *dhātu-vāda* influences. Matsumoto's logic should lead him to criticize the Madhyamika idea of "supreme truth" (*paramārtha-satya*), and eventually any and all aspects of the Buddhist tradition.⁴³ Matsumoto does admit that ultimately he can only rely on "an absolute Other," which leads Takasaki to wonder if Matsumoto will eventually embrace Christianity.

Hakamaya, Takasaki points out, attacks *tathāgata-garbha* more as a social critic, and there is no denying that Buddhism has contributed to social injustice and discrimination.⁴⁴ But the blame for these shortcomings cannot be laid solely at the feet of *hongaku shisō*, since a "pure" philosophy of emptiness could have led to the same results. In any case it is obvious that a Buddhist should have compassionate concern for others and not ignore proper practices. He also feels that Hakamaya's critique of language makes important points, and that logical, verbal expressions are important in Buddhism, but Takasaki thinks that one must recognize the limits of language. It is not anti-Buddhist to admit these limits.

Takasaki concludes his brief comments by noting that important questions have been raised, and it is time to rethink *tathāgata-garbha* ideas and the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, and for him personally to reconsider the conclusions presented in his early work.⁴⁵

Hirakawa Akira

Hirakawa Akira, one of the deans of Buddhist studies in Japan, responds to Matsumoto's work in the leading essay of a collection of articles he edited on "*tathāgata-garbha* and the *Awakening of Faith*."⁴⁶ He begins with his own understanding of *tathāgata-garbha* as the "nature" or "potential" to attain Buddhahood. It is not static but is ever changing: this is the *tathāgata-garbha-dhātu*. *Dhātu* does not necessarily mean a substantial "foundation" or "basis" as Matsumoto claims. In fact there are passages in the Āgama sutras that identify *dhātu* with *pratītya-samutpāda*. The *Śrīmālādevī Sutra* itself says that the *tathāgata-garbha* is

not an atman (T No. 353, 12.222b19–21). Hirakawa agrees with Matsumoto that *pratītyasamutpāda*, sunyata, and *anātman* are the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, but cannot agree that therefore *tathāgata-garbha* thought is not Buddhist.⁴⁷

Lambert Schmithausen

Lambert Schmithausen has published “Remarks on N. Hakamaya’s view of the problem of ‘Buddhism and Nature,’”⁴⁸ where he criticizes Hakamaya’s view of Buddhism and nature and concludes that, despite his espousal of a “genuine Buddhism,” some of his ideas are borrowed from the Western tradition and are “rather Cartesianism in a Buddhist garb.”⁴⁹

RESPONSES OUTSIDE THE WORLD OF BUDDHIST SCHOLARSHIP

Response of the Sōtō Sect

The response by the Sōtō sect to Hakamaya’s and Matsumoto’s writings has been mixed.⁵⁰ The daily routine of Sōtō temples, like those of most other Japanese Buddhist sects, mostly involves funerary rites and is closely associated with the type of ethos that Hakamaya attacks.⁵¹ On the practical level, the *hongaku* ethos is as prevalent in Sōtō circles as in any other Buddhist sect, and their economic base requires a continuation of the status quo. As for the theoretical level, what would be the reaction among church members in England if an established Biblical scholar or theologian at a major seminary (or Cambridge University) claimed that the Church of England is “not Christian”?

Hongaku shisō and Japanese Feminism

One of the most interesting responses to the critique of *hongaku shisō* comes from the side of Japanese feminists, who have picked up on the theme and applied it to their critique of contemporary Japanese society. Ōgoshi Aiko, Minamoto Junko, and Yamashita Akiko made a considerable splash with their best-selling book, *Buddhism as a Promoter of Sexual Discrimination*.⁵² They point out that to date the feminist movement in Japan has largely consisted in activities and analyses influenced by Western models, and that if feminism is to take root and be meaningful for Japanese society, it must respond to the indigenous situation. In this context they refer to Hakamaya’s critique of *hongaku shisō* and argue that this ethos has contributed greatly to sexual discrimination in Japan. They point out that the *wa* ethos puts the burden for staying at home and

maintaining the “harmony” of family life on women, and this acts to inhibit the liberation of Japanese women from restrictive traditional roles, not to mention its unconscious effect on all aspects of their daily life. Minamoto attacks *wa* as a repressive element of Japanism (*Nihonshugi*) and a discriminatory ethos based on *hongaku shisō*.

Surely no one familiar with the place of women in Japanese society can deny the claim that women are discriminated against in Japan. The claim that *hongaku shisō* is responsible is another matter, and requires further analysis.

Some Personal Observations

The question still remains whether or not all Buddha-nature formulations need to be classified *dhātu-vāda* and thus antithetical to Buddhism. There are certainly examples of Buddha-nature formulations that take pains to avoid such a substantialist interpretation. T’ien-t’ai Chih-i’s concept of threefold Buddha-nature (*san’in bussō*), for example, proposes a synergy of reality, wisdom, and practice intended to avoid reliance on a substantial *dhātu*. Buddha-nature is threefold: Buddha-nature as the way things are (the “direct” cause of Buddhahood), the wisdom that illuminates the way things are (the “sufficient” cause of Buddhahood), and the practice that perfects this inherent disposition for wisdom (the “conditional” causes of Buddhahood). In order to avoid a simplistic treatment of whether or not Buddha-nature “exists,” Chih-i interprets Buddha-nature in terms of the *ekayāna* principle of the *Lotus Sutra*: the promise of potential Buddhahood for all beings. Buddha-nature is thus not a static entity, and yet one cannot say that it does not “exist.” Everyone is not a Buddha “just as they are”—a process is required to manifest the inherent potential of Buddhahood. Buddha-nature is part of a larger world of experience that involves three aspects: the way things are, the wisdom to perceive things correctly, and the practice required to attain this wisdom.⁵³

As for *hongaku shisō*, perhaps the difficulty in rendering this term in English reveals the tension and danger in the term itself. For my part, I have always had reservations about the translation “original” enlightenment because it has too strong a temporal implication, and yet many of the interpretations of this term (and of the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* itself) do indeed encourage such an understanding and hence provide Matsumoto and Hakamaya with sufficient cause to reject it as *dhātu-vāda*. The terms “innate” and “inherent” enlightenment also smack of a

substantialist heterodoxy. If indeed *hongaku shisō* and universal Buddha-nature are valid expressions of the Buddha Dharma, it is incumbent on the proponents of this kind of thinking to show how they can be reconciled with the basic Buddhist teachings of *anātman* (non-self) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (causality).⁵⁴

Finally, apart from the technical argument as to whether Buddha-nature ideas and *hongaku shisō* are “orthodox” or “not really Buddhist,” it cannot be denied that the ethos has failed to provide a broad ethical dimension or stimulate a social ethic in Japanese society. Japanese Buddhists may—and in fact have—argued that this is not a problem, and that for Zen (for example) the priority is for the individual to realize his/her own enlightenment, after which compassion and concern for others should “flow forth spontaneously.” Nevertheless history has shown that this ethos tends to support the status quo; it provides neither a stimulus for necessary social change and altruistic activity, nor a basis to resist social structures that prey on the weak and oppressed. Was the Zen master who dismissed a beggar at the gate and refused him food and clothing saying, “He has the Buddha-nature,” failing as a Buddhist to be compassionate; or was he merely following through with the implications that flow naturally from the Buddha-nature ethos?

RÉSUMÉ

The criticisms of Hakamaya and Matsumoto seem to be aimed at a number of different targets, often at the same time and not always clearly defined. In general, the targets touch on three levels: Buddhological, sectarian, and social criticism.

1. At the Buddhological level Hakamaya and Matsumoto are questioning the consistency of concepts such as Buddha-nature and *hongaku shisō* with other basic Buddhist concepts such as *pratītyasamutpāda*. They use textual and doctrinal arguments in an attempt to show that Buddha-nature ideas (*dhātu-vāda*) are incompatible with other, more basic, Buddhist teachings. Whether or not one agrees with the specifics of their argument, the time is ripe for a Buddhological, and Buddhist, reevaluation of the Buddha-nature concept.
2. At a sectarian level they are resisting what they perceive to be an incorrect understanding of Dōgen’s teachings by their own Sōtō sect, and seek to reform the sect by reevaluating Dōgen’s teachings, especially with regard to the idea of Buddha-nature.

3. At the level of social criticism they intend to show that the acceptance of the Buddha-nature/*bongaku shisō* ethos in Japan has led to objectionable social structures and attitudes, and that a recognition of the danger of this ethos is necessary to right this state of affairs. That such social criticism should arise at this time in Japanese society, and from within the Buddhist community itself, is a matter of great significance not only to those interested in Buddhism and its development in East Asia and its potential meaning for the West, but also to those interested in the dynamics of religious ideas and their influence on society, both in the past and in the present.

One concluding remark. The favorable yet stereotyped description of Japanese Buddhism, and Japanese religion in general, shows a stress on harmony with nature and a “harmonious” society; absolute immanence; an uncritical acceptance of phenomena as they are; the interdependence or identity of kami and buddhas; love of peace; an affirming and positive attitude toward life in this world; and so on. On the negative side, Japanese religiosity is said to show a lack of socio-ethical concern; an unquestioning support for the status quo; a weak idea of justice and social injustice, thus leaving people easy prey to political propaganda and social pressures to conform; an irresponsible “hands-off” disposition that contributes to pollution, reckless use of natural resources, littering, and destruction of public property, as well as a disregard for the interest of anyone outside of one’s own “group”; and an absence of foundations for making ethical judgements between right and wrong, good and bad, correct and incorrect.

These may be no less an oversimplification of the Japanese religious ethos than were the simplistic attempts to blame the world-wide environmental destruction of the last century on the Biblical injunction in Genesis to “fill the earth and subdue it.” In any case it is just this ethos that Matsumoto and Hakamaya see as encompassing the totality of their critical concerns. What is the true understanding of the Buddha Dharma? What are the social implications of various interpretations of the Buddha Dharma? What is the role of Buddhism in Japanese society today? How should developments in Buddhist doctrinal history be understood? What were the social, political, and economic influences in Japan of the uncritical acceptance of the idea of an inherent and universal Buddha-nature? Can contemporary Japanese society be criticized from a Buddhist perspective, and if so, how? The questions they ask cannot be ignored.

WHY THEY SAY ZEN IS NOT BUDDHISM

The sharpness of their critique demands no less a sharpness in the response. In this sense Critical Buddhism remains an unfinished task, and an ongoing challenge.