Buddhist Studies Review 23(2) 2006, 249–58
doi: 10.1558/bsrv.2006.23.2.249

ISSN (print): 0256-2897
ISSN (online): 1747-9681

The Death and Rebirth of Buddhism in Contemporary Japan[1]

George Tanabe, Jr.
Professor Emeritus, University of Hawaii,
gtanabe@hawaii.edu

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the theme of the death and rebirth of Buddhism in contemporary Japan as treated in several works written by Buddhist priests, scholars, and writers for the general public. Though Buddhist rituals and customs are still widespread, most people and even many priests do not understand their meanings. This empty formalism is perceived as the death of Buddhism. There are many calls for reviving Buddhism, and they comprise two types. The first seeks the rebirth of Buddhism through socially and culturally engaged activities that have little or no connection with Buddhist teachings. The second suggestion calls for the revival of traditional doctrines. What is missing is the medieval pattern of truly new interpretations, which by definition must deviate from old understandings significantly enough to be heresies.

It is a familiar complaint about politics and religion in Japan: excessive bureaucracy, favoritism, too many officials, a dearth of able people, and masters treating disciples in father–son relationships. A high-ranking priest sees the situation as hopeless, and finds no alternative but to despair. 'So what should be done in this age? In reflecting about the deficiencies of man, I simply become depressed and have no confidence that my expectations will be realized, so I now wish only for an immediate and quick death' (Brown & Ishida, 1979: 236).

When the Senior High Priest Jien (1155–1225) registered this complaint in 1219, Buddhism had already been in decline since 1052, the year when *mappō*, the End of the *Dharma*, was widely said to have begun in Japan. Other priests start the *Dharma*'s decline in 552 CE, the year (by one calculation) when Buddhism was officially introduced from Korea (Blum, 2002: 80). Even earlier, scriptures such as the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, and treatises like the *Abhidharma-kośa* articulated the idea of *mappō* as a doctrinal fact, which periodically reflected actual social conditions. From at least the fifth century CE on, Buddhists have been insisting on the demise of their religion as a matter of principle and experience.

The usual cause of Buddhist entropy is the present, which is worse than the golden past and inferior to a promising future. Like most complainers, Jien was

1. Paper delivered at the 'Buddhism and Popular Culture' conference of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, Lancaster University, 14-16 July, 2006.

Published online 2007
equinox

disgusted with the people and conditions of his age. As a religion, Buddhism is always perfect, but is corrupted by people and their times. The problem is time and the course it follows away from an original perfection. This happened in the past and continues in the present. The problem, in short, is modernity.

In the 1970s and 80s, Buddhist scholars and priests in Japan complained about modernity (*gendai*) and its corrupting effects. Hirakawa Akira, an eminent Buddhist scholar at Tokyo University, wrote a book in 1970 to restate the ever-perfect teachings of Buddhism to lay readers blinded by modernity and its materialism. Lamenting the destruction of ancient culture and a beautiful natural environment bequeathed by the ancestors, Hirakawa pointed out that people are aware of the problem but do nothing about it. The reason for their inaction is modern civilization, which is dedicated to sensory pleasure. 'A lifestyle that grants highest privilege to the senses and its pleasures gives priority to material benefits and leads to a contempt of human beings themselves' (Hirakawa, 1970: 14). Even when modern people satisfy their desires, they are not truly happy. Sensory pleasures turn people into material objects incapable of true happiness, which can only be found in an inner spiritual truth. Hirakawa identifies this inner sanctity as the Buddha nature (*busshō*) and the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodaishin*) (p. 15).

Hirakawa criticizes the use of religion as a business tool for placating the economic anxieties of workers, and for creating harmonious relationships among them. This is a complete misuse of religion, and in fact is administered to workers as an opiate. This again is a consequence of treating people as objects (Hirakawa, 1970: 14–15). Religion should be used for character development, something that mothers in the Meiji Period (1868–1912) did well. They did not have much education, but they had a lot of religion, especially Buddhism. Mothers instilled good values in their children, and taught them to have faith in a deep inner truth polished by mind and heart. Through their characters, they exuded a radiance (pp. 18–19). Modern Japan has many good features, he admits, but its vices outweigh its virtues. 'The modern age is rich in pleasures that people in the past did not even dream were possible, but I do not think that modern people are happier than people in the past' (p. 171).

Hirakawa does not share Jien's view that even Buddhism is in decline in the present age. In fact, Buddhism can cure Japan of its ills by showing people the middle path to true happiness rather than momentary pleasure based in self-satisfaction. 'Everyone is endowed with the power to deny the pleasure-seeking self and thereby realize a self with a higher value' (Hirakawa, 1970: 178). 'Buddhism positively affirms the power of self-denial and becomes an agent for the discovery of the true self' (p. 179). But the ultimate goal is truth itself, which transcends the self and cannot be described in words (p. 183). What can be said of the truth is that it has a universal nature and it resides in each person as the Buddha nature. Happiness arises from its discovery (p. 189).

Hirakawa represents a popular genre of Buddhist writing that presents Buddhism as a cure for the disease of modernity. Through the Buddhist Searchlight

Published online 2007
equinox

Center, Matsunami Kōdō has published over thirty works in Japanese and nearly twenty in English, French and Spanish. The pamphlet of his works describes his *Light in Dark Times* as appropriate for our unprecedented age in which values are so complex and in which it is so hard to know good from bad. *Staying on Track* offers a practical system of thought capable of overcoming the stranded rationalism and 'modernist' teachings of today. Throughout his *Essentials of Buddhism: Its History, Evolution, and Modern Significance*, Matsunami characterizes the modern world and Japan in particular as plagued with conflict, waste, destruction, rivalries, delinquency, egocentrism, economic instability, political corruption, broken schools, disquiet, bad news, overindulgence, and suicide. 'Japan seems to have come to a point where no hope is left' (Matsunami, 2005: 137).

Writing in 2005, thirty years after Hirakawa, Matsunami presents the basics of all of the major sects of Japanese Buddhism as solutions to current problems. Except for a brief mention of how Buddhism has become just another profession concerned with the death industry, Matsunami is not critical of the Buddhist establishment. Upon recovering from the devastation of the Second World War, Buddhism is a healthy religion.

> Temples show greater vitality than they did in the prewar era. Today's Buddhism is finding a new path, through trial and error, away from the Buddhism of the past, which was identified in terms of funeral services, tourism, and rituals, to one characterized more by a return to its original spirit of salvation and faith of the individual. (Matsunami, 2005: 53)

Nine years earlier, however, Matsunami had harsh words for Buddhist priests and temples. In his 1996 work called *Nihon Bukkyō kaikaku ron* (*The Reformation of Japanese Buddhism*), Matsunami described Buddhism as a religion useless except for funerals and memorial services. Few Buddhists put the teachings into practice in their everyday lives, and priests simply take care of their temples and live easy lives devoid of religious practice. Priests use Buddhism only to make a living for themselves and their families, and they cannot be called true priests. They are 'sham priests' (*ese-sōryō*) (Matsunami, 1996: 56–7). Modernity contributes to the degeneration of Buddhism, and Matsunami repeats the familiar condemnations of excessive materialism, rationalism, and technology that contribute to the degradation of the natural environment and the quality of human relationships. In acquiring material comforts, Japan has destroyed religion, and Matsunami summarizes the situation by citing Yamaori Tetsuo, a popular public intellectual, who said that 'Buddhism has become empty, Shinto is not a religion, and modern Japanese are godless' (p. 20). Buddhism is no longer a religion of propagation, that is, a religion with doctrines worth teaching (pp. 52–5).

Failure to propagate teachings is cited by Horii Mitsutoshi, a sociologist at Shumei University and Chaucer College Canterbury, as evidence that the Buddhist priesthood has lost its status as a profession. Buddhist priests have undergone a process of 'deprofessionalisation', which entails the loss of unique functions, a monopoly over distinctive knowledge, and authority over clients. Priests have

Published online 2007
equinox

become service workers whose once unique roles are now performed by lay instructors who teach about Buddhism, counselors who provide therapeutic services, and funeral directors who hire priests as part-time officiants. Horii notes that the post-war census no longer uses the category of 'Buddhist priest', the Statistics Bureau regards priests as 'employees', and the Religious Corporation Law of 1951 replaced 'priests' with the legal term 'directors' (Horii, 2006: 14). Buddhist priests, in short, have become secular functionaries providing services that are also available from others.

Matsunami agrees, but believes that the situation can be reversed if priests were to return to being religious. He suggests that they preach the *Dharma* at funerals and wake services, keep a file of updated information on their parishioners to help them understand their circumstances, disseminate newsletters about temples activities, erect bulletin boards with weekly messages and announcements, and preserve the peaceful environment of temples and the dignity of priests (Matsunami, 1996: 127–30). While these strategies can improve communication and public relations, they do not address the issue of the content of the messages. Towards the end of his book, Matsunami finally defines the Buddhist message that must be propagated for the sake of contributing to the progress of modern Japan. The first is the teaching that all things change (*shogyō mujō*). Over and against the modern emphasis on money and materialism, the doctrine of change asserts that such priorities can be changed. People do not have to acquiesce to the destruction of the environment, the loss of agriculture, the transformation of fields into golf courses, excessive industrialization, and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Matsunami concludes that 'making progress is not a matter of just making new things and accumulating wealth, but lies in renewal, rebirth, and practical applications according to the teaching that all things change' (p. 176).

The second teaching is that all things are without self (*shobō muga*), and is necessary for the elimination of economic, ethnic, and political conflicts. Ever since Nietzsche said that God is dead, people have substituted themselves for God. This made it possible for Hitler and Stalin to proclaim that they were absolute beings. But the principle that all things are without self erases all differences, and makes us realize that we share common births, common deaths, and common destinies (pp. 177–8). It would seem that Matsunami's prescriptions are laudable but impractical platitudes, but he does admit that the teachings of change and selflessness are easy to speak of but hard to put into practice (p. 178).

Matsunami's presentation of standard Buddhist ideas hardly adds up to the reformation or revolution he promises in the title of his book. His Buddhism is generic and traditional, unaltered by any new interpretations. The Rinzai Zen priest Akizuki Ryōmin, however, is more explicit about fomenting revolution, and calls for nothing less than a New Mahāyāna Buddhism. Like other Buddhist writers, he is critical of the current state of Buddhism in Japan, and voices the familiar complaint that since Buddhist priests are exclusively ritualists for funerals and are not expounding the *Dharma*, they cannot be called Buddhist monks or sacred ministers (Akizuki, 1990: 17). Akizuki declares that

Published online 2007
equinox

> the Buddhism of the establishment is dead. The monks either earn their living by performing funeral or other ceremonies for the dead, or feed off the treasures left them by their predecessors, extracting 'entrance fees' from tourists visiting their temples and gardens. (Akizuki, 1990: 61)

In 1993, Akizuki wrote *Gokai-darake no Bukkyō* (*Buddhism Misunderstood*), in which he affirmed the early Buddhist teachings that he characterized as concerning non-self, atheism, and the rejection of extraterrestrial worlds. He devoted a whole chapter to explaining the complete absence in early Buddhism of funerals and memorial rites (Akizuki, 1993: 89-97). So much of Japanese Buddhism is at odds with true or correct Buddhism, and Akizuki wants to set the record straight in no uncertain terms.

It is not just Japanese customs that have skewered Buddhism, but modernity (not surprisingly) is also at fault. True Buddhism can be found in pre-modern times, and, if Akizuki can have his way, in a post-modern return to what he saw as early Buddhism as well. His proposal for a New Mahāyāna is a call to revive a past free of the ills of modernity with its debilitating symptoms of rational thinking, materialism, egocentrism, and scientific objectivity.[2] The academic study of Buddhism has destroyed its essence, and Akizuki raises 'a vehement protest against modern objective Buddhology' (Akizuki, 1990: 82). Scholars like Ui Hakuju, who rejected the inclusion of faith in academic inquiry, have produced 'a Buddhist studies bereft of the soul of Buddha' (pp. 127–8).

Over and against what he saw as this seriously misunderstood Buddhism, Akizuki asserts his version of a true Buddhism that seeks original purity of mind (Akizuki, 1990: 26), the original self[3] or Buddha nature (p. 27), a nondiscriminating wisdom (p. 29), the realization of oneself as Śākyamuni (p. 38), the eye of enlightenment (p. 51), the achievement of Buddhahood (p. 52), the non-duality of self and others (p. 87), the self's original nature (p. 91), emptiness (p. 96), original enlightenment (p. 97), the formless self (p. 100), and egolessness (p. 108). A disciple of D.T. Suzuki, Akizuki repeatedly invokes the words and authority of his master, along with other Zen teachers like Hisamatsu Shin'ichi. 'My prayer', he writes, 'for a New Mahāyāna shares in Hisamatsu Sensei's vision as a post-modernist: to modernize what needs to be modernized and to overcome the "sickness unto death" of the idea of the "ego" that lurks at the bottom of European modernity' (p. 44). Akizuki's analysis of the problem and his proposed solution are familiar refrains, and his New Mahāyāna is nothing but the by now old Zen of D.T. Suzuki. This characterisation of the essence of true Buddhism is common to other writers, and comprises what I have called the popular orthodoxy in contemporary Japan (Tanabe, 2004).

2. Sasaki Shōten uses the term 'postmodern' in a similar way to characterize a new interpretation of Jōdo Shin Buddhism that overcomes the limitations of modern rationalism. Sasaki's postmodern Shin Buddhism is discussed in Reader & Tanabe (1998: 94–7).
3. While he also affirmed the teaching of non-self, he somehow related the 'original' or 'real' self to this.

Published online 2007
equinox

For Endō Makoto, one of the harshest critics of Japanese Buddhism, the basic problem lies not with modernity but with priests. A lawyer by profession, Endō suffered from depression, and recovered by practicing *zazen* meditation. He became a disciple of Kino Kazuyoshi, one of the most prolific lay writers of Buddhism, and joined Kino's non-sectarian Shinnyo-e organization, where he studied major *sūtra*s and the writings of sectarian patriarchs from the past: Saichō, Kūkai, Hōnen, Shinran, Ippen, Yōsai, Dōgen, Ingen, and Nichiren. In 1995 he published *Ima no otera ni Bukkyō wa nai* (*There is No Buddhism in Today's Temples*), a detailed indictment of temple organizations and priests, often identified by name, for going against the teachings of the Buddha and their own sectarian founders. Charging them with scandals, exorbitant fees for Buddhist posthumous names, and discrimination against Burakumin, Endō cast his most serious criticism on their complicity with the war effort. During the Pacific War, priests supported the militarists, violated the first precept against killing, and therefore 'should all fall into hell alive' (Endō, 1995: 80). Every sect was guilty, and Endō cites liberally from the writings of their leaders. Shiio Benkyō, for example, a leading Jōdo scholar and president of Taishō University, published *Kokutai to Bukkyō* (*The National Essence and Buddhism*), in which he praised Hitler's policy against Jews, and said that true belief in Amida Buddha is to follow the Emperor. Shiio's book appeared in November, 1941 (p. 111).

Endō died in 2001, but his book continues to exert an influence. In 2004, Fujii Masao, a well-known professor emeritus at Taishō University and the son of a high ranking Jōdo priest, edited a book called *Bukkyō saisei e no michisuji* (*The Path to the Rebirth of Buddhism*), a title that presupposes its death. Following Fujii's preface, the book opens with a conversation between Fujii and Sasaki Kōkan, a professor emeritus from Komazawa University, the leading Sōtō Zen institution of higher learning. Under the heading, 'Is today's Buddhism degenerate?', Fujii initiates the conversation by noting Endō's criticism that only about one percent of priests understand the *sūtra*s they chant in funeral services. Against this he points out that Śākyamuni's enlightenment was not something that he could explain to others, and therefore is not subject to understanding. While Śākyamuni did not consider his own funeral to be important, he did not ban mortuary rites (Fujii, 2004: 17–18). Sasaki makes an even more explicit defense of funerals, calling funeral culture important. What counts is the atmosphere of the ritual. 'As for myself, I prefer the reading of sutras in a quiet voice without understanding meaning' (p. 20). Ritual is a matter of feeling.

Endō had identified the congregational system (*danka seido*) as one of the primary reasons for the decline of Buddhism. Established in the Tokugawa period by the Shogun, it forcibly made everyone members of temples, and priests no longer needed to persuade people to support them (Endō, 1995: 25). Fujii and Sasaki counter this criticism by saying that without congregations, Buddhism could not have spread. As opposed to doctrinal Buddhism there is living Buddhism (*seikatsu Bukkyō*), which consists of unseen elements drawn mostly from folk traditions. These elements are more important than doctrinal meanings. Fujii admits that

Published online 2007
equinox

Endō rightly pointed out many abuses, but this does not mean that sincere and serious priests do not exist (Fujii, 2004: 25–8).

Their discussion ends with descriptions of some innovative programs that are attempting to bring about a rebirth of Buddhism. Tōchōji, a Sōtō Zen temple in Tokyo, has a system of members (*kai'in seido*) instead of a congregation. Members must take part in meditation, *sūtra* copying, seminars and other specifically religious activities. They undergo lay ordination (*tokudo*) and are given precept names (*kaimyō*), which are ordinarily granted to the deceased. The precept name indicates that they have 'the same status as that of a Buddha', and they are allowed to ascend the altar while the head priest prays to them from below (Fujii, 2004: 40–41).

Fujii and Sasaki are engaged in a strange apologetic exercise, in which they recognize that Buddhism is in need of rebirth and yet counter Endō's assertion of its death. They do not offer their own account of Buddhism's demise, and their answer to the initial question – is Buddhism degenerate? – would seem to be negative. They cite examples of hope, but admit that these temples are very rare.

Ueda Noriyuki's book, *Gambare Bukkyō* (*Do Your Best Buddhism*), is all about examples of hope. Like others, Ueda starts with a dire description of a Buddhism that is mostly useless except for funeral rites and traditional customs. Traditional Buddhism is listless and may be on the verge of extinction. Temples exist, but people do not even think of seeking any kind of salvation through them. As a religion, Buddhism is in a state of collapse (Ueda, 2004: 8). In short, 'sooner or later, Japanese Buddhism will die' (p. 10).

And yet the subtitle of his book is 'A Time for a Renaissance of Temples'. Having been raised in a family that had almost nothing to do with Buddhism, Ueda's interest in Buddhism was purely an academic matter in his undergraduate studies of the sociology of religion. He traveled to Sri Lanka, where he encountered a living Buddhism for the first time. It was completely different from the meaningless formalism of Japanese funeral Buddhism, and he was impressed by the way in which Buddhism was integrated into everyday life and everyone's views. Upon returning to Japan, he attended a conference on volunteerism, and met a priest named Takahashi Takushi in a workshop on nonviolence training. Takahashi carried himself less as a priest and more as an intelligent and concerned person (Ueda, 2004: 30–33).

Ueda accepted Takahashi's invitation to visit his temple in Matsumoto, and found it to be a centre of cultural and intellectual activity. There was a constant stream of novelists, poets, essayists, comedians, and others giving lectures and performances. Workshops and talks addressed issues such as the environment, terminal care, the treatment of Buddhism in modern literature, nuclear proliferation, and the future of humanity. From 1988 on, the temple has sponsored two concerts a year, each of which is attended by about 400 people. Outspoken in his criticism of temple profiteering, Takahashi established an open budget system in which anyone can examine his salary, family expenses, and temple expenditures. For the first time, Ueda saw something positive and exciting about Buddhism (Ueda, 2004: 33–5).

Published online 2007
equinox

Thereafter Ueda encountered a number of priests who did not fit the pattern of uselessness. Arima Mitsunori was a Sōtō Zen priest who persuaded the authorities of his sect to support his efforts to help Cambodian refuges in Thailand. In 1980, he organized the *Sōtōshū tōnan Ajia nan'min kyūsai kaigi* (JSRC) to send volunteers to operate a mobile library servicing the camps. It was a significant success, but by the end of the year, the Sōtō administrators, afraid of possible mishaps, canceled the program over Arima's vigorous objections. Arima then turned his energies to the formation of the Sōtō Volunteer Association, which became well-known for its work of providing over 310,000 meals for victims of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995. Despite the fact that it was not an official organization of the Sōtō sect, it was described in the media as an example of the 'Sōtō Sect on fire' (Ueda, 2004: 89).

A year after the Kobe earthquake, Arima chaired a symposium on the role of volunteers in Kobe. It was a pan-sectarian event that included a Catholic priest as a panelist. Ueda was shocked to find the hall only half-filled with barely twenty Buddhist priests in attendance. The symposium was followed by a comedian and a reception complete with young female 'party companions', and for that event the room was packed with over a hundred priests. 'I thought', writes Ueda, 'that this was a scene of *mappō*. The burning fields of Kobe had been hell, but in its midst there were people who carried torches of hope. But here there was no hope. There were no bodhisattvas. The Buddha was dying' (Ueda, 2004: 104–5).

If Fujii's positive assessment of contemporary Buddhism counters his assumption of a Buddhism in need of rebirth because it is dying, Ueda does the opposite with his negative observations that call into question his assumption about a Buddhist renaissance. But Ueda is determined to find hope, and his journey takes him to Osaka, where Akita Mitsuhiko heads the Ōten-in, a subtemple of Dairenji, which belongs to the Jōdo sect. A modern concrete building, the Ōten-in looks like an art gallery, which is not an accident since Akita's approach to Buddhism is through art. Akita's objective is to draw in young people, and his temple is said to have attracted the largest number of young people in all of Japan. Like Tōchōji, which was mentioned by Fujii as an example of reborn Buddhism, Ōten-in does not have a congregation and is organized through a system of membership. Without congregants, Akita does not have to perform funerals, and devotes his time and efforts to organizing art shows, classes, film discussions, drama performances, lectures by visiting artists, and concerts. Lectures and workshops also address social issues, though they tend to focus on personal relations. The temple's motto is 'learning, healing, and having fun' (Ueda, 2004: 116–18).

But what about Buddhism and its doctrines and practices? Ueda returns to the case of Takahashi Takushi to examine his 'new system of funerals'. Most assessments of the decline of contemporary Buddhism place the primary blame on 'funeral Buddhism' (*sōshiki Bukkyō*), a pejorative term signifying empty formalism. If the problem with funerals is the loss of meaning, then the solution is to resuscitate the complex of ideas that have been forgotten. Takahashi's new system bypasses the funeral home, and is based on a relationship between the deceased, the family, and the temple. The entire process from the moment of death to the

Published online 2007
equinox

interment of ashes must be explained in detail, and Takahashi works with parishioners not only to educate them but to incorporate their own wishes and ideas. In order to expose the thick meaning of what is ordinarily experienced as a mindless ritual, Takahashi conducts 'mock funeral' (*mogi sōgi*) seminars that last a full three days (Ueda, 2004: 141–3).

Takahashi explains every step and possible choices. He gives exact costs of each stage, and offers a variety of plans. He works with families planning the funeral of the deceased, but also with preplanning each person's own preferred commemoration. There should be no ambiguity about the process, its cost and meaning, and Takahashi aims at having people take ownership of their funerals. The ritual is rehearsed, the high point coming with an elderly volunteer agreeing to be nailed shut in a coffin. At the workshop Ueda attended, the man who agreed to play the part of the cadaver, which in Japanese is referred to as *hotoke* (Buddha), emerged from the coffin and reported that the best part of the entire workshop was when the lid was closed over him. 'I was not in the least frightened', he reported, 'and it really felt good'. A thousand people attended the last day of the mock funeral (Ueda, 2004: 144).

The rest of Ueda's book discusses other priests and temples working to give life back to Buddhism. These pockets of revival give Ueda hope, enough for him to speak of a renaissance. But in his final assessment, he is cautious, noting that the examples of hope are few and far between, that efforts at reinvigoration are being carried out by a small minority. Ueda has highlighted them, and is their cheerleader.

> I want to raise a loud voice. Let us expect something from temples. Let us expect something from priests whose eyes have been opened. I want to say to priests and those aiming to be priests, '*Bōzu bi ambishasu*!' (Priests, be ambitious!) I want to say something to the great tradition of Japanese culture. *Gambare Bukkyō*! (Buddhism, go for it!). (Ueda, 2004: 311)

Ueda's final words are rousing and telling. All of his examples of hope fall into two patterns: those who seek revival through social and cultural programs, most of which have only indirect connections with Buddhism, and those who are trying to recover traditional Buddhist meanings. Hirakawa and Matsunami think that a moribund Buddhism can be revived by understanding traditional doctrines. Akizuki's new Māhāyana turns out to be nothing but the old Suzuki Zen, and the even older theory of original enlightenment. Endō is a harsh critic with no particular plan for reform. Fujii and Sasaki recognize that Buddhism must undergo rebirth, but suggest that current forms, rightly understood, will suffice. Ueda points to an emerging socially and culturally engaged Buddhism, and also hails the attempts to revive 'the great tradition of Japanese culture'. Takahashi's new funeral system tries to make people aware of very old meanings.

When, in the twelfth century, Jien complained of the decline of Buddhism, his views were shared by many, and the responses were remarkable. Hōnen's exclusive *nembutsu*, Shinran's faith without practice, Nichiren's apotheosis of the *Lotus Sūtra*,

Published online 2007
equinox

Dōgen's enlightenment through sitting, and Ippen's salvation by talismans were truly new. In the Buddhist context, genuine innovation entails a break from tradition, and must be sufficiently unprecedented to suggest, if not amount to, heresy. Most of the medieval reformers mentioned above were accused of heresy.[4]

All of the attempts at revival, rebirth, and renaissance in contemporary Japan claim to offer something new, but 'new' in these cases amounts to nothing more than a renewal of something traditional. The problem of the loss of meaning is solved by resuscitating old meanings, but there is yet to appear genuinely new, unprecedented meanings. What is missing are bold new developments whose authors are not afraid of being treated as heretics. Should a viable 'heretic' appear, however, my guess – and here I betray my own assessment – is that the Buddhist establishment will immunize itself by placing the rebel in a quarantine of that convenient and dismissive category called 'new religion'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akizuki, Ryōmin, 1990. *New Mahāyāna: Buddhism for a Post-Modern World,* James W. Heisig & Paul L. Swanson (trans.). Berkeley: Asian Humanties Press. [This is a translation of Akizuki's 1988 book, *Shin Daijō: Bukkyō no posuto modan.*]

Akizuki, Ryōmin, 1993. *Gokai-darake no Bukkyō.* Tokyo: Heibonsha.

Blum, Mark L., 2002. *The Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism: A Study and Translation of Gyōnen's Jōdo Hōmon Genrushō.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brown, Delmer & Ichirō Ishida (trans.), 1979. *The Future and the Past: A Translation and Study of the Gukanshō, An Interpretive History of Japan Written in 1219.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Endō, Makoto, 1995. *Ima no otera ni Bukkyō wa nai.* Tokyo: Gendai shokan.

Fujii, Masao (ed.), 2004. *Bukkyō saisei no michisujii.* Tokyo: Bensei shuppan.

Hirakawa, Akira, 1970. *Gendaijin no tame no Bukkyō.* Tokyo: Kōdansha.

Horii, Mitsutoshi, 2006. 'Deprofessionalisaton of Buddhist Priests in Contemporary Japan'. *Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* (25 June), www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2006/Horii.html (accessed November 2006).

Matsunami, Kōdō, 1996. *Nihon Bukkyō kaikaku ron.* Tokyo: Yūsankaku.

Matsunami, Kōdō, 2005. *Essentials of Buddhism: Its History, Evolution, and Modern Significance,* Gaynor Sekimori (trans.). Tokyo: Omega-Com.

Reader, Ian & George J. Tanabe, Jr., 1998. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan.* Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Tanabe, George J. Jr., 2004. 'Popular Buddhist Orthodoxy in Contemporary Japan'. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 31(2), pp. 291–313.

Ueda, Noriyuki, 2004. *Gambare Bukkyō.* Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō shuppan kyōkai.

4. Though Eisei was not so accused, probably because a good part of his 'Rinzai' teaching and practice was identical to that of Tendai. Dōgen was not formally charged or exiled, but he was accused of having thoughts that were 'dangerously personal'.

Published online 2007
equinox