

## Medieval Tendai *Hongaku* Thought and the New Kamakura Buddhism

### A Reconsideration

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*Medieval Tendai original enlightenment thought (hongaku shisō) had its formative stage during roughly the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, a period that precedes and then coincides with the emergence and early growth of the so-called new Kamakura Buddhism. Scholars have long assumed some connection between Tendai hongaku ideas and the doctrines of the new Buddhist schools, though the nature of that connection has been disputed. This essay outlines the theories on this subject to date and raises questions about how the problem has been formulated. It argues for a more contextualized understanding of hongaku discourse that locates it within both the specifics of the medieval Tendai tradition and the broader historical setting.*

NOTIONS OF “ORIGINAL ENLIGHTENMENT” (*hongaku* 本覺) informed the mainstream of Japanese Tendai Buddhism from roughly the Insei period (1086–1185) until about the Genroku through Kyōhō eras (1688–1735) of the Edo period. This is the period known in that tradition’s intellectual history as “medieval Tendai” (*chūko Tendai* 中古天台; HAZAMA 1948, pp. 1–2). Medieval Tendai ideas about original enlightenment are developed in a huge corpus, including records of oral transmissions (*kuden* 口伝), debate texts, ritual manuals, and commentaries. This literature presents a morass of bibliographical difficulties. Only a fraction of the relevant texts are available in printed editions. Moreover, before the fourteenth century, documents related to *hongaku* thought were not signed by their compilers but retrospectively attributed to great Tendai masters of the past, such as Saichō or Genshin. Even after about 1300, when works of reliable attribution begin to appear, one still finds those whose authorship is uncertain (TAMURA 1973, p. 538). Thus dating and attribution are extremely

difficult matters. Nonetheless, the painstaking efforts of modern scholars have established a tentative chronology of important texts, and it is now generally agreed that *hongaku* thought underwent its most creative phase from roughly the twelfth through fourteenth centuries (for the most detailed chronology to date, see TAMURA 1965, pp. 403–51; 1973, pp. 521–41.) This time frame begins somewhat before and then coincides with the emergence of the so-called “new Kamakura Buddhism.” The men regarded as the founders of the new Kamakura schools—Eisai, Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen and Nichiren—began their careers as Tendai monks and studied on Mt. Hiei, where *hongaku* thought was flourishing. Moreover, some of their ideas share points of similarity with certain medieval Tendai *hongaku* texts, including the primacy of faith, the direct accessibility of Buddhahood, and optimism about the possibility of salvation for ignorant and evil persons. The nature of the connection between Tendai *hongaku* thought and the new Kamakura Buddhism has been debated heatedly. The present article will also address this theme with the aim, not of providing a definitive answer, but of raising questions about how the problem has been formulated to date, in the hope of thus contributing to future inquiry. First, however, it will be well to touch briefly on the chief term in this discussion and the difficulties it presents as a scholarly category.

### What is “Original Enlightenment Thought”?

The term “original enlightenment” (Chn. *pen-chüeh*, Kor. *pon'gak*) has its locus classicus in the *Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun* 大乘起信論 or *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (T #1666, 32.575–83), where it refers to true suchness considered under the aspect of conventional deluded consciousness and thus denotes the potential for enlightenment in unenlightened beings. It is used in the *Ch'i-hsin lun* in contrast to “acquired enlightenment” (Chn. *shih-chüeh*, Jpn. *shikaku* 始覺), the process by which this innate potential for enlightenment is actualized. In China and Korea, notions of original enlightenment developed primarily within the Hua-yen tradition and also influenced Ch'an.

The first Japanese Buddhist to engage the concept was Kūkai 空海 (774–835), founder of the Japanese Shingon school. Kūkai quoted extensively from the *Sōk Mahayōn-ron* 釈摩訶衍論 (T #1668, 32.591–668), an eighth-century Korean commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*, appropriating its discourse of “original enlightenment” and “nondual Mahāyāna” to the esoteric teachings. Developments in Tendai esotericism (*taimitsu* 台密) from the time of the Japanese

Tendai founder Saichō 最澄 (767–822) were also crucial to the formation of medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought. A distinct tradition grounded in the premise of original enlightenment emerged within Tendai in the latter part of the Heian period. Though it was strongly influenced by esotericism, Tendai *hongaku* doctrine was developed under the rubric of “exoteric teachings” (*kengyō* 顕教) and associated specifically with the *Lotus Sūtra*. The term “original enlightenment” in this medieval Tendai context involves the claim, not merely that all beings have the potential for enlightenment, but also that all beings are enlightened inherently. Not only human beings, but even ants and crickets, mountains and rivers, grasses and trees, are all innately Buddhas. Indeed, the whole phenomenal world is the primordially enlightened Tathāgata. Seen in their true light, all forms of daily conduct, even one’s delusive thoughts, are, without transformation, the expressions of original enlightenment. Not all medieval Tendai thinkers embraced this position. The exegete Hōchibō Shōshin 宝地房証真 (fl. late 12th, early 13th cent.), for example, criticized it as a denial of causality and a heterodox teaching (see ŌTANI 1991, pp. 228–37). Still, it appears to have represented the medieval Tendai intellectual mainstream.

Medieval Tendai texts use the terms “original enlightenment,” “original enlightenment teaching” (*hongakumon* 本覚門) or “original enlightenment doctrine” (*hongaku hōmon* 本覚法門). “Original enlightenment thought,” however, is a modern category. The term was first popularized through studies by Shimaji Daitō (1875–1927) published in the 1920s. Introducing terminology that would echo through decades of later scholarship, Shimaji characterized nondual original enlightenment thought as “absolute affirmation” of the phenomenal world and “the climax of Buddhism as philosophy.”

The late Tamura Yoshirō (1921–1989), who devoted much of his scholarly career to the study of this doctrine, expanded upon Shimaji’s characterization and attempted to define “original enlightenment thought” more precisely. It consists, says TAMURA, in two philosophical moves (1983, pp. 123–26). First, the Mahāyāna idea of nonduality is pushed to its ultimate conclusion. All existents, being empty of independent self-nature, are seen as interpenetrating and mutually identified. This move negates any ontological difference between the ordinary person and the Buddha, the mundane world and the Pure Land, self and other, and so forth. All conventional distinctions of the phenomenal world are thus collapsed in a breakthrough into an undifferentiated, nondual realm. Second, on the basis of this insight into absolute nonduality, one “returns,” as it were, to the phenomenal world, affirming its relative distinctions, just as they are, as expressions of ultimate nondual reality or original enlightenment. This second move is often

expressed in such classic Mahāyāna terms as “the worldly passions are precisely enlightenment” (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提) or “birth and death are precisely nirvāṇa” (*shōji soku nehan* 生死即涅槃). Tamura’s definition is heuristically useful and helps illuminate conceptual structures underlying a great number of texts.

Nonetheless, certain caveats are in order about the term “original enlightenment thought.” Especially when supported by a very systematized definition such as Tamura’s, it may tend to suggest a unified body of material, thus obscuring the plurality of approaches, genres, and subject matter of the writings informed by *hongaku* perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Medieval Tendai notions of *hongaku* are developed primarily in a diverse body of texts known as orally transmitted doctrines (*kuden hōmon* 口伝法門). Some of these texts explicitly treat the concept of original enlightenment, while others present it only as a tacit premise informing a discussion of other subjects, such as the Sannō cult of Mt. Hiei, initiation rituals, the perfect and sudden precepts, or topics of religious debate. Oral transmission texts account for an estimated twenty percent of the Tendai sect’s Eizan Library holdings (KOJIMA, KODERA, and TAKE 1975, p. 372), and Eizan is only one of several archives housing such documents. There are also works dealing with original enlightenment that do not take the form of oral transmissions. Subsuming all this material under the single rubric “original enlightenment thought” works to obscure its heterogeneity.

A second problem lies in the notion of “original enlightenment” as *thought*, which gives the impression of a primarily or even purely philosophical enterprise, independent of practice, ritual, or institution. Until quite recently, the discipline of Buddhist studies in both Japan and the West tended to stress doctrine to the exclusion of other concerns. In the case of medieval Tendai, this tendency has been exacerbated by the difficulty of dating and attributing texts, which makes their ideas particularly difficult to contextualize. There may also be historical reasons why *hongaku* thought has so often been presented in a chiefly philosophical light: SHIMAJI, who characterized it as the “climax” of Buddhist philosophy in Japan, saw it as the perfect counter to a criticism, evidently current in his day, that “Japan has religion but no philosophy” (1926, pp. 189–91).

“Original enlightenment thought” is a convenient designation for the range of concepts, interpretations, and doctrinal formulations informed by *hongaku* ideas. In using it, however, we must bear in mind that it was a multivalent discourse, and one embedded in specific lineages, rituals, and institutional contexts.

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Paul Groner for first calling this to my attention.

*Theories about Hongaku Thought and the New Kamakura Buddhism*

What was the relationship between Tendai original enlightenment discourse and the doctrines of the new Kamakura Buddhism? Rather than attempting to detail the views of every scholar who has taken part in this discussion or to present a precise chronology of their arguments, we will summarize the major theories on this issue. At the risk of some oversimplification, these may be regarded as falling into three basic positions, which for convenience' sake we shall term "Tendai as matrix," "the radical break," and "dialectical emergence." In reality, there is considerable shading and overlap, rather than an absolute difference, among the three.

The "Tendai as matrix" position sees Tendai *hongaku* thought as the "womb" or intellectual matrix of the new schools of Kamakura Buddhism. This idea was first proposed by SHIMAJI Daitō in a seminal essay entitled "Nihon ko Tendai kenkyū no hitsuyō o ronzu" [On the necessity of studying ancient Japanese Tendai thought] (1926). Up until that time, the new Kamakura schools had been viewed chiefly as sectarian traditions developing independently out of the activities of *hijiri* 聖 or holy men outside the formal monastic establishment, or as responses to fears about the degenerate Final Dharma age (*mappō* 末法). Shimaji's proposal enabled them to be considered within a common, transsectarian intellectual framework. A pioneer in this field, Shimaji was among the first to recognize that many texts attributed to Saichō and Genshin were apocryphal, but tended to accept as genuine texts attributed to Tendai masters of the Insei period such as Chūjin 忠尋 (1065–1138), attributions that later scholars have questioned. Thus he saw Tendai original enlightenment thought as having developed much earlier than is now accepted. This chronology supported his suggestion that the new schools had emerged from the matrix of mature *hongaku* thought.

While stressing the intellectual indebtedness of the new Kamakura Buddhism to medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought, Shimaji nonetheless found the new schools superior in terms of practice and ethics. He perceived a certain moral danger in an idea that affirmed all activities of life, just as they are, as the acts of an originally inherent cosmic Tathāgata. *Hongaku* doctrine, SHIMAJI suggested, had proceeded in two directions: "One took form as the bright Kamakura Buddhism that purified original enlightenment thought, while the other sank to a naturalistic, corrupt thought and brought about the deterioration of Buddhism on Mt. Hiei" (1933, p. 473).

The second major theory, the "radical break," arose largely in response to Shimaji and his successors, and maintains that the new

Kamakura Buddhism should be understood as a thorough rejection of original enlightenment thought. It has been advanced most vigorously on two sectarian fronts, having been initiated within the academic wing of Nichirenshū based at Risshō University and later taken up by some scholars of Sōtō Zen.

Among the large corpus of writings traditionally attributed to Nichiren (1222–1282) are many that deal with original enlightenment ideas. When Shimaji Daitō first published his research, it was generally held both inside and outside Nichirenshū that Nichiren had taught *hongaku* doctrine. For scholars outside the Nichiren tradition, this tended to reduce him to an offshoot of Tendai. For example, Shimaji, while acknowledging points unique to Nichiren in his approach to practice and application, nevertheless maintained that “the content of his doctrine hardly differs from that of medieval Tendai thought” (1986, p. 469). Nichirenshū sectarian scholars, however, sought to clarify the difference between medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought and the *hongaku* thought of Nichiren, making use of the distinction between *ri* 理, “principle,” and *ji* 事, “phenomena” or “concrete actuality.” These categories held a time-honored place in the Nichiren tradition, having been used by Nichiren himself to distinguish between the introspective meditation taught by the Chinese T’ien-t’ai founder Chih-i 智顛 (538–597) and his own form of practice, the chanting of the *daimoku* 題目 or title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, said to embody the reality of the Buddha’s enlightenment (*Kanjin honzon shō* 観心本尊抄, RISSHŌ DAIGAKU NICHIREN KYŌGAKU KENKYŪJO [RDNKK] 1988, vol. 1, p. 719; *Toki nyūdō-dono gohenji* 富木入道殿御返事, vol. 2, p. 1522). Applied to the issue of distinguishing between medieval Tendai and Nichiren versions of *hongaku* thought, however, the *ri/ji* distinction became, not a contrasting of two modes of religious discipline, but a distinction of theory and practice. Tendai original enlightenment thought was characterized as a mere theoretical, abstract statement that beings are inherently enlightened by nature (*honrai jikaku* 本来自覚), while Nichiren’s teaching was presented as the actualization of inherent enlightenment through faith and practice (*shikaku soku hongaku* 始覚即本覚; see, for example, TAKADA 1913).

This theory/practice distinction was eventually assimilated to pre-war critical studies of the Nichiren canon, which suggested that many of the works attributed to Nichiren that emphasize *hongaku* ideas are probably apocryphal. ASAI Yōrin (1883–1942), who pioneered such studies, was perhaps the first scholar to present a new Kamakura Buddhist founder—Nichiren—as having rejected Tendai *hongaku* thought (1945, especially chapter 6). Asai argued that medieval Tendai emphasis on secret teachings and subjective interpretations

had undermined orthodox doctrinal study, while *hongaku* claims that “the worldly passions are enlightenment” had encouraged the licentiousness of monks (pp. 80, 221). Nichiren, in contrast, had sought to restore normative emphasis on practice and doctrinal study. Asai’s disciple, Shigyō Kaishū (1907–1968), extended Asai’s argument for Nichiren’s rejection of medieval Tendai to the other new Kamakura Buddhist founders. SHIGYŌ wrote that *hongaku* thought “cuts off discrimination between good and evil, right and wrong” and “does not acknowledge concepts of value distinction”; its claim that “this body is itself Buddha” (*sokushin zebutsu* 即身是仏), he said, had in reality done nothing to alleviate human suffering amid the upheavals of the latter Heian period. In contrast, the new Kamakura schools “developed as a shift from the old theoretical Buddhism to a practical Buddhism, squarely facing reality and concentrating on the problem of how to change it” (1954, pp. 45, 49–51). This position has by now become a sort of orthodoxy in some Nichirenshū academic circles. ASAI Endō, for example, writes that *hongaku* thought “became an empty theory divorced from the times,” unable to effect positive results in an age of turmoil accompanying the rise of the warrior class. Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen and Nichiren shared a common resolve to “overthrow [this] abstract theory” (1974, pp. 145, 146).

Disjunctures between *hongaku* ideas and the thought of the new Kamakura Buddhist teachers, especially Dōgen, have also concerned sectarian scholars within Sōtō Zen. Many of their discussions have taken shape in response to Tamura, who saw Dōgen’s teaching concerning the oneness of practice and enlightenment (*shushō ittō* 修証一等) as influenced to some degree by original enlightenment ideas (1965, pp. 548–75). One strand of Sōtō argument holds that Dōgen drew, not on the *hongaku*-influenced Tendai of his own time, but on the classic Chinese T’ien-t’ai tradition (e.g., IKEDA 1992). Another acknowledges some influence from Tendai *hongaku* thought but suggests that Dōgen radically modified it. Kagamishima Genryū, for example, writes that Dōgen found himself “stymied” by Japanese Tendai original enlightenment thought, which had “fallen into a naturalistic view of practice and enlightenment that held practice to be unnecessary,” and turned instead to Chinese Ch’an. However, Ch’an had by Dōgen’s time developed an orientation of “acquired enlightenment” or *shikaku*, i.e., approaching enlightenment as a future goal to be realized. While Dōgen’s emphasis on practice derives from Chinese Ch’an, his exposure to Tendai *hongaku* thought made it impossible for him to accept this *shikaku* approach, and he maintained instead that practice and enlightenment are one (KAGAMISHIMA 1983). Yamauchi Shun’yū, who takes a strong “radical break” position, denies even this

degree of influence. Discussing the *Kankō ruijū* 漢光類聚 [Collection of the light of Han], a Tendai text of Dōgen's time or perhaps slightly later, YAMAUCHI writes that, by its identification of persons at the stage prior to practice with the original Buddha, "practice is completely nullified.... This was precisely the object of Dōgen Zenji's criticism and bears no structural similarity to his thought" (1985, pp. 547). In his estimation, the new Kamakura founders "maintained throughout a vigorous emphasis on practice" in order to "overcome" the nondualism of original enlightenment thought (1980, p. 21).

Another argument, related to the "radical break" position but confined to the realm of Dōgen studies, regards the medieval Tendai *hongaku* doctrine as a substantialist heterodoxy, against which Dōgen is said to have reasserted the orthodox Buddhist position of impermanence and nonsubstantiality. This argument was first advanced by the Tendai scholar HAZAMA Jikō, who suggested that Dōgen's criticisms of the so-called "Senika heresy"—belief in an immortal, inner spiritual intelligence—were in fact a veiled critique of Tendai *hongaku* ideas about the "constant abiding of the mind-nature" (*shinshō jōjū* 心性常住) found in some early *kuden* texts (1948, pp. 298–318).<sup>2</sup> Similar criticism has also been leveled by Hakamaya Noriaki and others of the intellectual movement known as "Critical Buddhism" (*hihan Bukkyō* 批判仏教).<sup>3</sup> Hakamaya employs the term "original enlightenment thought" to mean, not only the mainstream of medieval Tendai, but virtually all immanentist forms of Buddhist thought. "Original enlightenment," he argues, represents the archaic, fundamentally non-Buddhist notion of "topos"—a metaphysical substrate, pretemporal condition or locus from which all things arise and to which they return. A thorough critique of this position is, he says, the "definitive perspective for understanding Dōgen" (HAKAMAYA 1989, p. 319). "The enemy he [Dōgen] staked his life on attempting to negate" was a "thoroughly compromising original enlightenment thought" that was "completely unconcerned with the determination of right and wrong" in a Buddhist sense. Dōgen was "unshakable in his blunt criticism that this was not Buddhism" (p. 396). The question of whether or not *hon-*

<sup>2</sup> TAMURA sees this and similar criticisms by Dōgen as directed against certain strands of Southern Sung "sudden" Ch'an, especially the doctrines of the Lin-chi master Ta-hui Tsung-kaō 大慧宗果 (1089–1163), which were upheld by followers of the Nihon Daruma-shū (1965, pp. 556–64). Bernard FAURE argues convincingly that Dōgen's criticisms were aimed at the Daruma-shū (1987, pp. 41–44). As both scholars point out, some connection may also have existed between Daruma-shū doctrine and Tendai *hongaku* discourse.

<sup>3</sup> The key sources for an understanding of "Critical Buddhism" are HAKAMAYA 1989 and 1990, and MATSUMOTO 1989. For a discussion of these works and other articles by Hakamaya, and of responses to the Critical Buddhism movement, see SWANSON 1993.

*gaku* thought represents a substantialist position is an intriguing one but exceeds the scope of this paper. Since *hongaku* discourse is heterogeneous, there may not be a univocal answer.

“Radical break” arguments tend to serve sectarian interests by emphasizing the intellectual independence of the founder—Nichiren or Dōgen, as the case may be—from the parent Tendai tradition. Such arguments have made a substantial contribution in calling attention to the distinguishing characteristics of individual Kamakura-period Buddhist founders and countering the tendency of the “matrix” theory to reduce them to unproblematic emanations of original enlightenment thought. Nonetheless, there are difficulties with the attempt to define the new Kamakura Buddhism as a reaction against *hongaku* discourse. Dōgen’s writings do indeed contain passages critical of the claim that ordinary worldlings are Buddhas prior to practice. It is also true that some elements in the teachings of the new Buddhist founders do not square readily with *hongaku* ideas, Hōnen’s emphasis on the transcendent “Other-power” (*tariki* 他力) of Amida’s Original Vow being an obvious instance. Yet nowhere in the writings of these men do we find the sort of explicit critique of Tendai *hongaku* doctrine seen, for example, in Hōchibō Shōshin. Thus it remains questionable just how far the new Buddhist movements defined themselves as deliberate reactions against Tendai *hongaku* thought.

Before moving on to the third position, we may note one further strand of scholarly argument that, while neither sectarian nor doctrinal, has worked to reinforce the idea of the new Kamakura Buddhism being a reaction against original enlightenment thought. This is the scholarship of historians of the *kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制, the system of exoteric doctrine and esoteric ritual that permeated the established forms of Buddhism in the medieval period. The late historian KURODA Toshio (1926–1993) was the first to see Tendai *hongaku* thought as typical of *kenmitsu* ideology (1975a, pp. 443–45, 487–88). SATŌ Hiroo has argued that nondual *hongaku* ideas equating this world with the Pure Land served to legitimize established systems of rule (1987, p. 57). TAIRA Masayuki sees *hongaku* thought as contributing to a climate in which strict observance of monastic precepts was devalued (1992, pp. 473–74; 1994, pp. 270–71). In that these scholars have drawn attention to *hongaku* thought as an ideology of the dominant *kenmitsu* Buddhism, and defined the new movements—the *itanha* 異端派 or marginal heterodoxies—as resisting *kenmitsu* authority, their work has

<sup>4</sup> KURODA actually saw the new Kamakura Buddhist movements (the *itanha*) as engaged with issues that overlapped original enlightenment thought and not in direct or complete opposition to it (1975a, p. 488). In contrast, TAIRA sees all the *itan* thinkers (except Dainichi Nōnin) as “grounded in a stance opposed to *hongaku* discourse” (1994, p. 289).

contributed to the picture of the two as standing in opposition.<sup>4</sup>

A third theory, one reconciling the “matrix” and “radical break” positions, is found in the influential work of Tamura Yoshirō.<sup>5</sup> Although Tamura himself did not use these terms, he in effect saw the new Kamakura schools as evolving out of medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought by a process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; and thus I call his theory “dialectical emergence.” Tamura’s argument may be summarized as follows: Tendai *hongaku* thought, as Shimaji recognized, represents an “absolute affirmation” of the phenomenal world and the “climax” of Buddhist philosophical achievement, having broken through every sort of dualistic construction to illuminate a realm of “absolute nonduality.” Yet this very nonduality “gave rise to problems in the realm of practice and ethics” (TAMURA 1965, pp. 467–68). Hōnen, who lived and taught during the troubled times of the late Heian, rejected this too-facile affirmation of the enlightenment inherent in deluded beings. Out of acute awareness of human limitations and as a matter of perceived soteriological necessity, Hōnen reasserted the duality of this defiled world and the Pure Land, and of deluded beings and the Buddha. Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren, however, were active at a later time, after the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1222, when it became clear that a vigorous new order was emerging under *bushi* leadership. The political upheavals and uncertainties of Hōnen’s time having to some extent been resolved, the philosophical attraction of nondual *hongaku* thought reasserted itself. Tamura sees Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren as attempting to synthesize the philosophical subtlety of Tendai *hongaku* “absolute nonduality” with the consciousness of human shortcomings expressed in Hōnen’s “relative duality.” Tamura’s work has proved especially valuable in illuminating transformations and appropriations of Tendai *hongaku* ideas by the new Kamakura Buddhist teachers.

Each of the arguments outlined above has advanced our understanding of both continuities and disjunctures between Tendai *hongaku* ideas and those of the new Kamakura Buddhism. After Shimaji, virtually all voices in the discussion have been raised in response to one another, sometimes disagreeing with considerable heat. Nevertheless, it should by now be clear that these rival theories share several interrelated assumptions. First is that original enlightenment thought, by asserting the absolute nonduality of Buddhas and deluded beings,

<sup>5</sup> Tamura’s theory of the relationship between the new Kamakura schools and Tendai *hongaku* thought is discussed in several of his writings. The most detailed treatment appears in TAMURA 1965, especially chapter 5. A convenient summary of his argument, complete with diagrams, may be found in 1975, pp. 202–209. For an introduction to Tamura’s work in English, see HABITO 1991.

in effect denies the need for Buddhist practice. Over and against so clearly problematic a stance, the teachers of the new Buddhism—especially Dōgen and Nichiren—are represented as reasserting the primacy of practice. Where *hongaku* thought is seen as an intellectual abstraction or uncritical “world affirmation,” the leaders of the new Buddhist movements are shown as actively grappling with the contradictions and sufferings of real existence, avoiding the moral pitfalls inherent in the nondual *hongaku* position. There is also the pervasive assumption that *hongaku* thought was deeply implicated in monastic corruption, both as a contributing cause and as its expression.

It is important to note how this characterization of *hongaku* thought works to privilege the new Kamakura schools. It carries more than a trace of stereotypes about a vibrant, reformist “new Buddhism” arising against an elitist, degenerate “old Buddhism.” It also suggests an evolutionary, even teleological view of Japanese religious history, in which the *raison d’être* of Tendai *hongaku* thought—whether as an intellectual matrix, as the focus of a counterreaction, or as a combination of the two—was to give rise to the new Kamakura Buddhism. But is this characterization in fact accurate? Or does it need to be qualified by a more contextualized understanding of the realm in which *hongaku* discourses were conducted? This is the question to which we will now turn.

### *The World of Medieval Tendai*

As Kuroda Toshio has made clear, the dominant forms of medieval Japanese Buddhism were Tendai, Shingon, and the Nara schools—the so-called *kenmitsu* Buddhism—and not the new Kamakura movements, which remained fairly marginal until late in the medieval period. Certain features of the mainstream Buddhist institutions often dismissed as “corruption”—such as their vast landholdings and maintenance of monastic armies—should instead be seen in the context of a medieval sociopolitical structure in which temple-shrine complexes emerged as major powers (KURODA 1975b, pp. 246–48). Kuroda and his successors have focused largely on the ideological and political authority of *kenmitsu* Buddhism, including Tendai. But medieval Tendai also exhibited a burgeoning of new religious forms, a few of which will be outlined here.

Medieval Tendai ideas about universal and originally inherent Buddhahood were elaborated within an institutional setting that valued lineage and master-disciple transmission. Doctrinal interpretations reflecting *hongaku* perspectives were handed down in Tendai “exoteric” teaching lineages, first orally, then on strips of paper called

*kirigami* 切り紙 that were eventually collected in larger works. By the late Kamakura period, detailed doctrinal systematizations were elaborated, such as the “threefold seven great matters” (*sanjū-shichi ka daijū* 三重七箇大事), which encapsulates the major works of Chih-i from the standpoint of original enlightenment (UESUGI 1935, vol. 1, pp. 599–703; HAZAMA 1948, pp. 124–30). In the Muromachi period, a voluminous commentarial literature was produced. The two main lineages involved in these transmissions were the Eshin-ryū 恵心流 and the Danna-ryū 檀那流, both of which had many subbranches. These schools claimed descent respectively from Eshin Sōzu 恵心僧都 (Genshin 源信; 942–1017), and Danna Sōzu 檀那僧都 (Kakuun 覚運; 953–1007), the leading disciples of the eighteenth *zasu* or abbot of Mt. Hiei, Ryōgen 良源 (912–985). This was, however, a retrospective construction; the Eshin and Danna lineages did not appear until well after Genshin and Kakuun’s time.<sup>6</sup>

Conventions of secrecy surrounded the transmission of their teachings. Many *kuden* texts warn against divulging their contents to outsiders, or say that they are to be transmitted only to one carefully chosen disciple (*yuiju ichinin* 唯授一人). While in reality monks often received transmissions from both the Eshin and Danna schools (ŌKUBO 1991a), the rhetoric of secrecy was vital in legitimizing the authority of lineage. It derived in part from Tendai esotericism, whose rituals were passed down secretly from master to disciple. Rival *taimitsu* lineages, like the Eshin and Danna schools and their subbranches, tended to be based in geographically differentiated areas of Mt. Hiei (the so-called “three pagodas and sixteen valleys”), and it is possible that divisions within *taimitsu* may underly those of the Eshin and Danna lineages (HAZAMA 1948, pp. 46–47). Divisions within medieval Tendai lineages, both esoteric and exoteric, were in turn often grounded in factions among aristocratic families. As the nobility increasingly monopolized high clerical offices from the time of Ryōgen on, these factions were transplanted to Mt. Hiei. Many noble monks established private temples, supported by estates donated by the patron families whom they served as ritual specialists. Within both the Eshin and Danna schools, occasional instances occurred of father-to-son Dharma transmission (*jisshi sōzoku* 実子相続; HAZAMA 1948, pp. 78–80), a practice that has often been criticized as reflecting the monastic corruption encouraged by world-affirming *hongaku* thought.

<sup>6</sup> When exactly the Eshin and Danna lineages emerged is not altogether clear. HAZAMA maintains that they appeared around the Insei period (1948, p. 24), while ŌKUBO has suggested they did not take definitive form as rival schools until later in the Kamakura period (1963).

However, it probably owes far more to a social context that placed extreme value on lineage, including that of family.

In ways not yet fully understood, the formation of the Eshin and Danna lineages was also related to the Tendai system of debate-style examination begun by Saichō and systematized by Ryōgen. Monks were trained and tested in doctrinal learning through a series of debates (*rongi* 論義), which formed a major feature of the religious assemblies (*kō* 講) held regularly in the various valleys and pagoda precincts of Mt. Hiei (IKEYAMA 1986, pp. 93–104). A number of Eshin and Danna transmissions deal with standard debate topics (*sandai* 算題), on which they purport to deliver a secret interpretation, often in terms of *hongaku* notions. It is possible that the various Eshin and Danna lineages had roots in divergent interpretations of debate topics that developed among monks living in different precincts of Mt. Hiei (OZAKI 1971, pp. 175–86; ŌKUBO 1991b, pp. 188–93).

All Eshin and Danna lineages claimed to transmit teachings received by Saichō in China. These, it was asserted, had in turn been passed down from the T'ien-t'ai patriarchs Hui-ssu 慧思 and Chih-i, who had allegedly heard them from Śākyamuni Buddha when he preached the *Lotus Sūtra* on Sacred Vulture Peak. Medieval Tendai *kuden* in fact represent a creative “reinvention” of Saichō’s heritage, grounded explicitly in two passages from his writings. Saichō wrote that his Chinese teacher Tao-sui 道邃 had taught him “the threefold contemplation in a single thought, transmitted in one phrase” (*isshin sangan dennō ichigon* 一心三觀伝於一言; *Kenkairon* 顯戒論, HIEIZAN SENSŪ-IN 1989, vol. 1, p. 35). He also stressed the importance of a teacher’s verbal explanations in making clear the analogy of the “perfect interfusion of the mirror and its images” (*kyōzō en'yū* 鏡像円融; HIEIZAN SENSŪ-IN 1989, *Shugo kokkai shō* 守護国界章, vol. 2, p. 266). The threefold contemplation in a single thought (*isshin sangan* 一心三觀) taught in Chih-i’s *Mo-ho chih-kuan* 摩訶止觀 (Great calming and contemplation) is to perceive, through contemplation of the mind, that all phenomena are empty of substance, provisionally existing, and the middle, or both empty and provisionally existing simultaneously. The “mirror and its images” is Chih-i’s analogy for the inseparability of these three truths: the reflective surface of a mirror represents emptiness; the images that appear in it, provisional existence; and the mirror itself, the middle (T # 1911, 46.9a). These two passages from Saichō inspired a vast body of *kuden* texts purporting to represent the content of Tao-sui’s transmission to him concerning the threefold contemplation. The threefold contemplation in a single thought lies at the core of both the Eshin and the Danna doctrinal systems (HAZAMA 1948, pp. 112–22). Both schools developed transmission rituals

in which actual mirrors were used as visible metaphors of nonduality and the interpenetration of the dharmas (ŌKUBO 1980).

There were also other sorts of medieval Tendai lineages, overlapping and drawing on Eshin/Danna transmissions and employing *hongaku* ideas. Lineages of chroniclers (*kike* 記家) studied, transmitted, and interpreted the “documents” (*kiroku* 記録) of Mt. Hiei, focusing on the traditions of the mountain, including its sacred precincts, Buddha images, numinous manifestations of kami, powers of nation-protection, rituals, and regulations (HAZAMA 1948, pp. 245–62; KURODA 1989, pp. 146–54). Transmissions of the *kike* often convey secret meanings of these traditions interpreted from the standpoint of original enlightenment. *Kike* also played a significant role in the development of the system of Sannō Shintō 山王神道, which took form around the cult of the Hie shrines located at the eastern foot of Mt. Hiei. The kami of these shrines, understood as local manifestations of specific Buddhas and bodhisattvas, were often interpreted in terms of the threefold contemplation and other essentials of Tendai doctrine (HAZAMA 1948, pp. 263–65; see also GRAPARD 1987). There was in addition a precept lineage (*kaike* 戒家), based at Kurodani in the precinct of the Western Pagoda, that transmitted the “perfect and sudden precepts” (*endonkai* 円頓戒), interpreted from a *hongaku* perspective. These various, often interconnected, lineages all developed their own distinctive transmissions, texts, and initiation rituals, and drew on ideas of original enlightenment.

One striking feature of medieval Tendai was its expansion into the Kantō region, as monks sought opportunities for patronage by the bakufu and other powerful military families. Along with Tendai temples, a number of Tendai seminaries, or *dangisho* 談義所, were established. Eventually there were at least thirty-eight Tendai *dangisho* in the Eastern provinces (OGAMI 1970, part 2, p. 10). Here, monks were trained rigorously through a system of debate-style examinations paralleling that of Mt. Hiei. These *dangisho* produced vast numbers of debate manuals and *hongaku*-related doctrinal commentaries. After Oda Nobunaga razed Mt. Hiei in 1571, its archives were restored by drawing on those of the Kantō Tendai *dangisho* (OGAMI 1970, part 1, p. 3). Kantō Tendai represents an important but little-known aspect of medieval Japanese religion. Its continuities and discontinuities with the religion of Mt. Hiei remain to be investigated.

Whatever “corruption” may have meant in the context of Kamakura-period Tendai, it entailed neither institutional vitiation nor lack of intellectual creativity. Medieval Tendai may not, in many respects, have conformed to normative monastic ideals, but it was nonetheless a rich, varied, and thriving tradition that deserves to be considered on

its own terms. Further investigation of its particulars promises to yield a more contextualized understanding of medieval *hongaku* discourse.

*The Alleged Denial of Practice in Tendai Hongaku Thought*

As noted above, the new schools of Kamakura Buddhism have often been characterized as a revitalization of practice, over and against an original-enlightenment thought whose extreme emphasis on nondualism in effect denied its necessity. Is it in fact the case that Tendai *hongaku* thought denied Buddhist practice? In addressing this question, let us consider two Tendai documents written during the late Heian and/or Kamakura periods, shortly before or during the time when the new Kamakura Buddhism was taking form.

The *Shinnyokan* 真如觀 (Contemplation of true suchness), a twelfth-century text retrospectively attributed to Genshin, is written in a “mixed” style of Chinese characters and Japanese phonetic syllabary. It is not a *kuden* text and appears to have been addressed to a sophisticated lay reader. Its central argument is that all phenomena have as their nature true suchness (*shinnyo*), which is equated in this text with the Dharma body, the Buddha nature, and original enlightenment. “Turning one’s back on original enlightenment” is the error that produces delusive thoughts, attachments, and the round of rebirth. But when one discerns oneself and all others as being identical to true suchness, that is “returning to original enlightenment”; it is the guarantee of birth in the Pure Land and the realization of Buddhahood in this very body. The text acknowledges, however, that such insight is hard to sustain:

Beings of the sharpest faculties, like the dragon girl, discern that they themselves are precisely true suchness, and in an instant become Buddhas. Beings of dull faculties may discern at one moment that they are precisely true suchness, but at the next moment, because it has been their way since time without beginning, on seeing forms or hearing voices, their mind moves in accordance with external objects. Meeting with objects that are pleasing, it arouses the defilement of greed; meeting with objects that are not pleasing, it arouses the defilement of anger.... In accordance with the distinction of superior and inferior faculties, there exists the inequality of sooner or later in the perfection of contemplative practice. Thus there are those who can manifest enlightenment in a day, two days, a month, two months, or a year, or those who require a lifetime.

(TADA et al. 1973, p. 144)

Thus, although all are Buddhas inherently, some may take a while to achieve and sustain that realization. Toward that end, the *Shinnyokan* acknowledges the need for, and even encourages, continued practice:

Since we have just now begun the contemplation of true suchness, we are pulled by conditions, and in the face of circumstances, it is easy to retreat and hard to continue. By what useful expedient may one put a stop to the delusive thoughts to which we have been accustomed since the outset and manifest the true principle of suchness? First, one should cultivate the contemplation of emptiness [of the dharmas], loosening one's attachment to samsāra so as to manifest in oneself the principle of true suchness. (p. 143)

In addition to the contemplation of emptiness (*kūkan* 空觀), the invocational nenbutsu is recommended, although it must be based on knowing the nonduality of oneself with Amida and all other Buddhas (p. 142). The practitioner is also urged to contemplate oneself as true suchness “day and night, walking, standing, sitting and lying down, without forgetting” and, with this understanding, to “say the nenbutsu and recite the sutra, transferring the merit [from such acts] to all living beings” (p. 148). Here is one text, at least, in which the premise that all beings are originally Buddhas does not lead to a denial of the need for practice.

Now let us turn to the *Shuzenji-ketsu* 修禪寺決 (Decisions of Hsiuch'an-ssu), which stands within the *kuden* tradition. It presents itself as Saichō's record of the transmissions he received from his Chinese teachers, Tao-sui and Hsing-man 行滿. Estimates of its dating range from the latter Heian through mid-Kamakura period.<sup>7</sup> Here we will focus on the first fascicle of this text, which deals with the threefold contemplation in a single thought, considered under the threefold perspective of teaching (*kyō* 教), practice (*gyō* 行) and realization (*shō* 証). This threefold categorization later became a standard feature of Eshin-school transmissions.

In the section on teaching, the threefold contemplation is discussed from a variety of doctrinal perspectives, which will not detain us here. In the section on practice, it is considered under four sub-

<sup>7</sup> Attempts at dating have been complicated by several references in the text to chanting the *daimoku*, or title of the *Lotus Sūtra*, a practice usually associated with Nichiren. For example, it has been argued that the *Shuzenji-ketsu* represents a Tendai appropriation of Nichiren Buddhist practice, or conversely, a forgery on the part of Nichiren's disciples attempting to legitimate their teacher's form of practice by connecting it with Saichō (for a summary of the discussion see HANANO 1976). However, as TAKAGI Yutaka has established, the *daimoku* was being chanted well before Nichiren's time (1973, pp. 430-65); thus there is no reason to assume that the *Shuzenji-ketsu* must postdate him.

categories. First is that of “fundamental understanding” (*honge* 本解):

Each dharma, down to the smallest particle of dust, is simultaneously empty, provisionally existing, and the middle, completely separated from deluded thoughts. When the subtle principle of the threefold contemplation is [thus] illuminated, there is nothing to practice and nothing to realize. At the time of practice and realization, how can one dispute over now [attaining enlightenment] versus [being enlightened] originally?

(TADA et al. 1973, p. 44)

It soon becomes clear, however, that the “fundamental understanding” of “nothing to practice and nothing to realize” is not intended to deny the need for practice, but to inform its concrete methods. These are divided into three categories: practice for specific times, for ordinary times, and for the moment of death. These categories are drawn from Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 [Essentials of birth in the Pure Land], but their content differs from Genshin’s text. “Practice for specific times” involves formal secluded meditation for periods of seven, twenty-one, or a hundred days. A square hut is to be erected in a secluded place. Inside, icons are to be enshrined in each of the four directions: Shaka (Śākyamuni) to the north, Amida (Amitābha) to the west, Kanzeon (Avalokiteśvara) to the south, and Monjushiri (Mañjuśrī) to the east. The practitioner sits in a half-lotus posture facing Amida. By each icon, a mirror is to be placed so that it reflects simultaneously both the icon and the practitioner.

On the first day, one should practice the contemplation of Buddhas and living beings being a single suchness. Since the mind is the essence of all dharmas, living beings and the Buddha are all encompassed in the one mind. How could they be separate entities? The object of worship and the practitioner both appear in the same mirror because the beings and the Buddha are nondual. If the beings and the Buddha were truly separate, how could they appear in the same mirror? ...The practitioner’s three categories of action [i.e., body, speech and mind] are in no way separate from those of the object of worship. The person of the practitioner who contemplates this is the subtle body of the sea of [wondrous] effects, forever released from the form of a deluded person. (p. 45)

Chih-i’s analogy of the mirror, by which he illustrated the threefold truth, is here employed as an aid to meditation through the use of actual mirrors. Also evident is the influence of esoteric notions of the three mysteries: the union of the body, speech, and mind of the prac-

tioner with those of the cosmic Buddha in the act of esoteric ritual. This meditation can, the *Shuzenji-ketsu* says, be undertaken to achieve liberation from transmigration, to prolong life, or to transfer merit to specific persons or to all beings generally.

The next category, practice for ordinary times, is a formless meditation in which one performs the threefold contemplation in the midst of daily activities, and appears to correspond to the “neither walking nor sitting samādhi” (*higyō hiza zanmai* 非行非座三昧), the last of the four kinds of samādhi taught in Chih-i’s *Mo-ho chih-kuan*. The last category is practice for the moment of death (*rinjū* 臨終). Since the pain of the body’s impending dissolution blunts one’s spiritual faculties as death approaches, ordinary forms of contemplation may become impossible. Thus,

At this stage, one should practice the threefold contemplation in a single thought as encompassed in the Dharma container (*hōgu* 法具). The “threefold contemplation in a single thought as encompassed in the Dharma container” is precisely *Myō-hō-rence-kyō*.... At the time of death, one should chant *Namu-myōhō-rence-kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經. Through the workings of the three powers of the Wondrous Dharma [i.e., the powers of the Dharma, the Buddha, and faith], one shall at once attain enlightened wisdom and not receive a body bound by birth and death. (p. 46)

The *Shuzenji-ketsu* then poses the following question:

Question: If we go by the original intent of the *Chih-kuan*, the Buddha and the beings are from the outset nondual; there is no aspect of delusion or enlightenment. Why do you now separately confer such contemplative practices that are of inferior form [i.e., in presuming a duality of delusion and enlightenment that is to be bridged]?

Answer: The intent of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* is that concrete phenomena are precisely the realm of truth and that existence and nonexistence are nondual. Thus the three contemplations clarified above, for specific times, ordinary times, etc., are precisely the forms of [practice established on the basis of] the nonduality of Buddhas and beings. If you postulate apart from these a practice of the nonduality of Buddhas and beings—the original intent of the *Chih-kuan*—it is not to be found.... Dwelling in the original mind that is without form, one returns and becomes identical with that which has form. This is the actual practice for realizing the Buddha’s enlightenment. (pp. 48–49)

The compilers(s) of the text here seem to have considered the possibility that notions of nondual original enlightenment would cancel the need for concrete practices, and rejected it.

Lastly, the threefold contemplation in a single thought is discussed in terms of “realization.” This section reads in part:

As for the threefold contemplation from the perspective of realization: since [this contemplation] is originally inherent, there is no need to practice anything. One need not fear evil thoughts nor rejoice in good ones, because both are originally endowed with the threefold contemplation. (p. 50)

It is only here, from the standpoint of “realization”—the “Buddha-eye view,” so to speak, of one who has already realized original enlightenment—that ordinary thoughts can be termed equivalent to meditation. From the perspective of “practice,” specific forms of discipline are still required.

Like the *Shinnyokan*, the *Shuzenji-ketsu* addresses the issue of individual faculties. This discussion is placed in the mouth of Hsing-man, in response to a question from Saichō as to why people who chant the name of the *Lotus Sūtra*, even with earnest faith, do not at once become Buddhas. Hsing-man responds that persons of keen faculties can, with a single utterance of the sūtra’s name, transform their accumulated delusions into the three virtues of the Dharma body, *prajñā*, and liberation. However, in the case of persons of dull faculties, their physical and mental constituents have been produced by evil deeds in prior lives, so this transformation does not occur at once. Nevertheless, at the time of death, such people invariably attain the subtle body of the Dharma nature and can travel freely among the Buddha lands (pp. 75–76). However, the need for continued practice is not always associated in this text with inferior capacity. Although the theme is not developed, the *Shuzenji-ketsu* twice refers to a form of the threefold contemplation in a single thought in which a person of superior faculties, having realized enlightenment, continues always to practice for the “pleasure of contemplation” (*yukan* 遊觀; pp. 51, 96).

Two texts do not make an exhaustive case. Nevertheless, the passages discussed above from the *Shinnyokan* and the *Shuzenji-ketsu* argue for a more contextualized understanding of those strands of *hongaku* rhetoric that seemingly deny the need for practice. Claims about “nothing to practice and nothing to realize” may represent an outward rhetorical stance, grounded in a philosophical commitment to undercutting the distance between deluded beings and the Buddha. At the same time, however, they seem to have been accompanied by a recognition that some form of continuing effort was necessary. If so,

this calls into question a major distinction that has been drawn between medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought and the new Kamakura Buddhism. The *Shinnyokan* and the *Shuzenji-ketsu* also suggest that rhetoric of “absolute nonduality” existed in combination with and was modified by other ideas that did not necessarily conform to its logical structure, such as birth in the Pure Land, merit transference, and the need to ritually mediate the moment of death.

### Hongaku Thought and the Question of Evil

Let us now turn to the charge that Tendai *hongaku* thought, in its extreme emphasis on nonduality, represented an uncritical “world affirmation” that in effect legitimized evil conduct. As an avenue of approach, we will consider the notion that “karma is precisely liberation” (*gō soku gedatsu* 業即解脱) discussed in a number of medieval Tendai texts. It is treated at length in the *Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki* 三十四箇の事書 (Notes on thirty-four transmissions), probably dating from the twelfth century (SUEKI 1993, pp. 292–94).

Question: Does “karma is precisely liberation” mean that deluded action, without transformation of its essence, is itself liberation? Or that liberation follows upon the transformation of deluded action?

Answer: According to the interpretation of our school, being originally nondual in essence is called “identity” (*soku* 即).... When one knows the doctrine of perfect interpenetration that is the true aspect, deluded action in its essence is endowed with all dharmas; thus it is not merely deluded action but the perfect interpenetration of the dharma realm in its entirety. A hawk seizing a bird is, without transformation of its essence, precisely the true aspect of liberation. A fierce dog pursuing a beast is, without transformation, precisely the true aspect of liberation. And all other sorts of actions should be understood in light of these examples. The point is to understand the constant abiding of the dharmas. “Constant abiding” means that the dharmas perfectly interpenetrate and none is lacking. One should simply sweep aside all partial views and dwell in the undifferentiated true aspect. One who does not dwell in understanding of the undifferentiated dharma realm has not yet grasped the meaning of karma being precisely liberation. One who has understood it should not further publicize this oral transmission. (TADA et al. 1973, p. 179)

It is not hard to understand why critics of *hongaku* thought have seen

so extreme an emphasis on nonduality as morally problematic. The passage makes clear that “karma is liberation” only for someone who has achieved insight into the nondual nature of reality. However, the text seems to reflect an awareness of the potential dangers of such a doctrine, in its warning against making it public. The moral implications of this doctrine are more explicitly addressed in a passage from the *Kankō ruijū*:

Question: To press you again, this is still difficult to conceive. Even if it should be the true purport of the perfect and sudden [teaching], how am I to understand that the essence of evil karma is the same as the wondrous essence of liberation? If so, is the practitioner of calming and contemplation (*shikan* 止観) able to commit evil deeds such as killing or theft without fear, according to whim?

Answer: ...Karma has as its essence the three thousand realms [i.e., all dharmas] and three truths, and is lacking in none of them. Therefore it is said that karma is precisely liberation. But as for whether the practitioner of calming and contemplation can commit evil deeds at whim: Absolutely not. There are several arguments to be made here. First, karma and liberation are [in terms of their essence] both the ungraspable, inconceivable naturalness of the Dharma. This is called karma being precisely liberation. How could such a person [who has realized this] fall into a one-sided emotion and commit evil deeds? (This is the first point.) Moreover, evil karma is endowed with the three thousand realms, and liberation is also endowed with the three thousand realms. Therefore, “karma being precisely liberation” means that self and other are nondual, and that all dharmas are of a single nature, which is without self. At this time [of so realizing], how could one entertain separate discriminations of this and that, and so commit evil deeds? (This is the second point.) However, if, returning [to the realm of daily affairs] from the inner enlightenment of calming and contemplation, one were to commit evil deeds unintentionally (*musa* 無作) in accordance with one’s destiny (*nin’un* 任運), there could still be no difference [between karma and liberation]. This is what is meant by Kannon appearing as a fisherman and killing many fish.

(*maki* 2, BUSSHO KANKŌKAI 1912–22, vol. 17, pp. 40–41)

Here, a person with insight into the nonduality of self and other is said to be incapable of arousing the discriminative passions that lead to deliberate commission of evil. Nevertheless, the text acknowledges that such a person might still do evil without intent, as the result of

destiny, and that such unavoidable misdeeds would not obstruct that person's liberation. This is remarkably similar to Shinran's argument that those who have placed their faith in Amida will not commit evil deliberately but might do so as a result of past karma, and that such deeds would not obstruct their birth in the Pure Land (*Tannishō* 歎異抄, sections 13–14; DOBBINS 1989, pp. 53–56). The references in these passages to “a hawk seizing a bird” and the bodhisattva Kannon appearing as a fisherman link this strand of *hongaku* thought to the period's larger concerns about the Buddhahood of evil persons (*akunin jōbutsu* 悪人成仏), those whose hereditary professions involved them in killing.

On the basis of these examples, we can say that notions of original enlightenment do not carry nonduality to the point of uncritically legitimizing evil. “Karma is liberation” is a statement about the nondual nature of reality and is meaningful only in the case of someone who has realized that nonduality; it is not an endorsement of misconduct. On the other hand, such notions provide little basis for making moral judgments or for resisting evil, and the message of nonduality is easily misunderstood as an excuse for wrongdoing—a point that the compilers of the texts seem to have recognized.

Since the idea of original enlightenment could potentially serve to rationalize misconduct, we may assume that it probably was so used, at least on occasion. However, finding historically verifiable instances proves unexpectedly difficult.<sup>8</sup> The rise of *hongaku* ideas may have contributed to an atmosphere in which strict observance of the precepts and rules of conduct was not valued—although at least one Tendai *kuden* lineage, the Kurodani lineage of Ejin 惠尋 (d. 1289) and Kōen 興円 (1262/1263–1317), sought to revive the precepts (ISHIDA 1986, pp. 398–406). However, the suggestion that original enlightenment thought *caused* monastic “corruption” accords doctrine an exaggerated degree of historical agency and overlooks the role of political, social, and other factors.

Complaints from the Kamakura period about misuse of nondual Mahāyāna doctrine abound. Mujū Ichien 無住一円 (1226–1312), for example, complains about monks justifying “impure acts” on the basis of tantric ideas (*Shasekishū* 沙石集, WATANABE 1966, p. 497). The Nihon Daruma-shū, founded by Dainichi Nōnin 大日能忍 (twelfth century),

<sup>8</sup> According to several early (thirteenth century) versions of *Heike monogatari*, when the warrior monks from the Enryaku-ji torched the Kannon Hall of the Kiyomizu-dera, their leader recited a verse about sinful deeds being without substance and ordinary persons being originally Buddhas. On this basis, AKAMATSU Toshihide has suggested that prevalent *hongaku* ideas provided intellectual support for the activities of warrior monks (*akusō* 悪僧) (1976, pp. 460–65). However, without additional evidence, this may be too much to conclude from one passage in a work of literature.

was repeatedly criticized for the antinomian character of its teachings, though these criticisms may have been prompted by the Daruma-shū's attempt to establish itself independently of existing religious institutions, and not by immoral behavior on the part of its adherents (FAURE 1987, pp. 27–35, 39–45). However, one also finds accusations of misdeeds being rationalized in the name of a doctrine often described as dualistic—namely, the exclusive nenbutsu of Hōnen and his followers, which was sometimes misunderstood as a form of “licensed evil” (*zōaku muge* 造悪無碍; see DOBBINS 1989, pp. 47–62). As is well known, Hōnen, Shinran, and others taught that the evil the believer does unavoidably, for example, because of past karma, cannot obstruct the workings of Amida's vow. Morally problematic though such a claim may be, the intent was not to rationalize or encourage evil, but to alleviate anxieties about retribution for the evil one cannot avoid committing. Behind it lay the fears of hell and the consequent attraction to karma-transcending “theories of salvation” that appeared during this period (LAFLEUR 1983, pp. 48–59).

It is in this same light that we should understand some of the more ethically disturbing passages in the *hongaku* literature. The comparison with the exclusive nenbutsu is instructive here, in that it suggests that the moral ambiguity of medieval Tendai texts should be seen, not as a problem unique to nondual *hongaku* doctrine but as embedded in larger intellectual concerns of the age. Pure Land claims that human sins cannot obstruct the workings of Amida's compassion were, at least in part, responses to fears of what were seen as inexorable, degenerative historical processes, such as the coming of *mappō* and the shift of power from court aristocrats to warriors. Although doctrines do not have fixed, singular meanings, it seems likely that *hongaku* thought in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods may have worked in a similar way. The idea of original enlightenment would have given assurance of salvation in an age seen as soteriologically unfavorable, offering an enlightenment that was unobstructable because it was innate from the outset.

We know that the Pure Land teachers Hōnen and Shinran often cautioned their followers that the absolute compassion of Amida's Original Vow did not constitute license to sin. We also know that doctrines about Amida saving even (or especially) the wicked, or faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* protecting the believer from the consequences of worldly misdeeds, were complemented in early Pure Land and Nichiren confraternities by Confucian and other forms of social morality, and in no way constituted the whole of followers' ethical frameworks (see for example DOBBINS, n.d.). In the case of Tendai

*hongaku* writings of the same period, however, we have much less sense of context, knowing very little about who wrote them or under what circumstances, or about what role they played in the lives of those who produced and transmitted them. Thus it has perhaps been too easy to read them in the abstract as “uncritical affirmations” of evil.

*Tendai Hongaku Thought and the New Kamakura Buddhism:  
Another Perspective*

The models by which medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought and the new Kamakura Buddhism have been contrasted tend, as we have seen, to privilege the new movements. While they have made significant contributions to our understanding, ample grounds exist on which to reassess their assumptions that Tendai *hongaku* thought reflected institutional decline, effectually denied the need for Buddhist practice, and uncritically legitimized evil. Is there then another perspective from which the two can fruitfully be considered? Since the new schools drew in part on older Tendai elements of doctrine and practice, continuities are to be found. On the other hand, as Kuroda and his successors have demonstrated, the new movements stood in ideological and political tension vis-à-vis the parent tradition: Tendai represented the *kenmitsu* Buddhism that constituted establishment religion, while the new schools represented the *itan*, or marginal heterodoxies. Thus it is no surprise to find both continuities and disjunctures between the two.

It is striking, however, that within the same time frame—the Kamakura period—they were both engaged in elaborating a similar constellation of ideas about enlightenment and salvation. Within their vastly differing institutional contexts, they may be seen as working together—Tendai in the center and the new schools on the periphery—to create a new model or paradigm for thinking about Buddhist liberation. Tracing the outline of this paradigm or constellation of ideas thus throws into relief some of the major religious concerns of the period. While subject to countless local variations, it may be broadly sketched in terms of the following characteristics:

(1) *Emphasis on the soteric potential of a single moment.* On a rhetorical level, achieving Buddhahood as a linear process of cultivation and attainment is dismissed as an inferior view; liberation is said to occur in a single moment. This claim appears repeatedly in medieval Tendai texts. For example:

According to the provisional teachings expounded in conformity with their hearers' capacity, cultivation culminating in

enlightenment requires immeasurable kalpas. But from the standpoint of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the treasury of profound secrets, manifesting the Dharma-body Buddha who is [one's own] mind occurs in the space of a moment.... One who awakens to the Buddha essence of the mind-nature achieves realization instantaneously.

(*Tendai Hokkeshū gozu hōmon yōsan* 天台法華宗牛頭法門要纂,  
in TADA et al., 1973, p. 39)

The notion of salvation or liberation in a single moment also occurs in the doctrines of some of the new movements. Shinran stressed the moment when faith first arises in one's heart. At that moment, having cast off all reliance on self-effort, one is seized by the compassionate workings of Amida's Vow, never to be let go, and dwells in "the company of the truly settled" (*shōjōju* 正定聚). Dōgen emphasized, not one specific moment in the course of a lifetime, but the "absolute now" (*nikon* 而今) in which practice and enlightenment are inseparable. The rhetoric of the soteric potential of a single moment works to suggest the direct accessibility of salvation or liberation by undercutting a perceived distance between ordinary consciousness and the Buddha's enlightened state. It does not negate the importance of continued effort, but that continuation is characterized, in Dōgen's words, as "practice on the basis of realization" (*Bendōwa* 弁道話, KAWAMURA 1988–1993, vol. 2, p. 546); or, in one Tendai text, as "skillful means subsequent to enlightenment" (*Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki*, TADA et al. 1973, p. 180); or, in Shinran's thought, as the nenbutsu recited in gratitude for a salvation that is already assured. Ongoing devotion is conceptualized, not as progress toward a future goal, but as the deepening or confirmation of a liberation that in some sense is already present.

(2) *Sufficiency of the first step.* What had traditionally been regarded as merely an initial step toward enlightenment—faith, the stage of verbal identity, or a simple act of practice—is now said to contain the entire path. In the classic T'ien-t'ai/Tendai *mārga* scheme, the path consists of six stages, the so-called "six identities" (*roku-soku* 六即). The first stage, identity in principle (*ri-soku* 理即), denotes the stage prior to practice, in which one is in principle endowed with Buddhahood, but has not yet learned the Buddha Dharma. At the second stage, that of verbal identity (*myōji-soku* 名字即), one hears and understands this nondual principle. In the subsequent stages, wisdom is gradually cultivated and delusions extirpated. Tendai *hongaku* thought, however, stresses only the stage of verbal identity, in which Buddhahood is said to be fully contained (see SUEKI's discussion of this idea as treated in

the *Sanjū-shi ka no kotogaki*, 1993, pp. 332–38; see also Sueki's article in this issue). Nichiren, too, emphasized only the the stage of verbal identity, which he equated with faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Shishin gohon shō* 四信五品鈔, RDNKK 1988, vol. 2, pp. 1294–1300), and held that Buddhahood is inherent in the act of chanting the *daimoku* (*Kanjin honzon shō*, vol. 1, pp. 702–21). Shinran similarly wrote that faith was equivalent to the Dharma nature and rendered one “equal to Tathāgathas” (e.g., *Mattōshō* 末燈抄, SHINRAN SHŌNIN ZENSHŪ HENSHŪ DŌNIN 1957–1961, vol. 6, pp. 69–70, 71).

(3) *Single condition*. Liberation is said to depend, not on a variety of good acts, but on one factor alone. In the case of *hongaku* discourse, the determining factor is held to be whether or not one discerns the truth of nonduality: “One who knows this is called a sage; one deluded with regard to this principle is called an unenlightened person” (*Tendai Hokkeshū gozu hōmon yōsan*, TADA et al. 1973, p. 35). Or sometimes faith, rather than discernment, is held to be the determining condition:

Whether we fall into the Avīci Hell or are born in the Land of Utmost Bliss depends solely on our [attitude of] mind in this lifetime. We ourselves are precisely true suchness. One who does not believe this will surely fall into hell. But one who believes it deeply without doubting will be born in [the Pure Land of] Utmost Bliss. (*Shinnyokan*, TADA et al. 1973, p. 123)

This emphasis on a single condition provides an example of how similar conceptual structures were appropriated in ideologically different ways. In the new Kamakura movements, the single condition on which enlightenment depends is usually associated with a single form of practice or single object of devotion, as seen in Hōnen's exclusive practice of the nenbutsu and Nichiren's exclusive devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*. As the *kenmitsu* historians have pointed out, this notion of single practice was a potentially subversive one (KURODA 1967, p. 203; TAIRA 1992, pp. 240–55; 1994, pp. 292–97). It in effect denied the validity of the rites and observances of the leading cultic centers that provided thaumaturgical support for the ruling elites, and it established a single, transcendent source of moral authority. In contrast, in Tendai *hongaku* discourse, liberation depends on a particular insight or attitude, rather than a specific practice; thus it did not challenge devotion to the cults of particular Buddhas, bodhisattvas, or kami that supported the authority of local rule. Both Tendai *hongaku* thought and the new Kamakura schools are structurally similar, however, in seeing salvation as dependent on one, rather than a plurality, of factors.

(4) *Denial of the obstructive power of evil karma.* The causal connection between morality and salvation is relaxed, in that liberation is no longer directly tied to the eradication of sin or the production of merit. This idea finds expression in *hongaku*-related claims that enlightenment does not depend on the eradication of defilements, claims found in the discourse of *akunin jōbutsu*, and in Pure Land teachings that evil karma cannot obstruct the workings of Amida's Vow. Nichiren, too, taught that one who has faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* and chants the *daimoku* will not be dragged down into the lower realms of transmigration by ordinary worldly misdeeds (*Shō Hokke daimoku shō* 唱法華題目鈔, RDNKK 1988, vol. 1, p. 184; *Hokekyō daimoku shō* 法華經題目鈔, pp. 391, 393). Such ideas are always open to anti-nomian readings. In historical context, however, they would have served to give assurance of salvation in an age widely seen as a degenerate one when enlightenment was difficult to attain. They may also represent a reaction against the fears of rebirth in the hells and near-obsessive emphasis on merit accumulation that characterized much of late Heian religion.

This paradigm, found in both medieval Tendai and the new Kamakura Buddhist thought, by no means exhausts the whole of Kamakura Buddhism; competing models were available. Nor did it exist in any actual Buddhist community as neatly as presented here, but was combined with and modified by other, not necessarily logically consistent, elements, such as rules of conduct, miscellaneous forms of merit accumulation, and apotropaic rituals. Its component concepts each had origins long predating the Kamakura period. Nonetheless, it represents an extremely influential complex of ideas that seems to have crystallized in the latter part of the Heian, and, by the late Kamakura period, had achieved in its varied contexts the status of an orthodoxy.

The suggestion that Tendai original enlightenment thought and the new Kamakura Buddhism both reflected and contributed to an emergent model of directly accessible Buddhahood or salvation is in no way intended to collapse important distinctions in their doctrines, nor to deny significant differences in their organizational structure and forms of practice or the very real political and socioeconomic tensions between them. Nevertheless, the formative period of *hongaku* thought and the emergence of the new Kamakura schools significantly overlapped, and the two reflect certain shared concerns. From this perspective, the *hongaku*-dominated Tendai that took shape in the late Heian and Kamakura periods is also a “new Buddhism” and, together with the new Kamakura movements, represents a powerful response to changing times.

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