

A Reexamination of the *Kenmitsu Taisei* Theory

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Kuroda Toshio's theory of the kenmitsu taisei (exoteric-esoteric system) is a well-established interpretive model of Japanese medieval society and religion. It has had a great influence on our understanding of Japanese history and the development of religion in Japan. However, there are many aspects of Kuroda's kenmitsu taisei theory that remain ambiguous. The present article reexamines Kuroda's theory and attempts to evaluate his contributions.

KURODA TOSHIO'S THEORY of the *kenmitsu taisei* 顯密体制 (exoteric-esoteric system) has long occupied an important position in the historical study of Japanese Buddhism, and has been thoroughly discussed by scholars in the field. There are three reasons why I have chosen to examine this well-established interpretative model once again.

1. The *kenmitsu taisei* theory attempts to synthesize the various developmental phases of Japanese Buddhism. As part of this effort Kuroda traces the evolution of doctrine and seeks to clarify the role it played in the growth of Buddhism in this country. Since my own field is the history of Buddhist doctrine in Japan, I find this aspect of Kuroda's thought to be of particular interest. Since Kuroda's theories have yet to be thoroughly examined from the doctrinal standpoint, a reexamination may reveal new possibilities for his work.

2. The terms "*kenmitsu taisei*" and "*kenmitsu* Buddhism" have gained wide currency among scholars, yet are often used without due consideration of their meaning. Certain scholars seem under the illusion that they can resolve the problems of Buddhist history by simply categorizing people and ideas into either the *kenmitsu taisei* "orthodoxy"

* This article was prepared in English for the *JJRS*, but a longer version was published also in Japanese; see SUEKI 1996.

or the “heterodoxy” against it. The notions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are not as clear as they might seem, however. For example, I do not find the interpretation of Kuroda’s theory offered by Taira Masayuki 平雅行, regarded as the most authoritative successor of Kuroda, to be entirely satisfactory (see below). The *kenmitsu taisei* theory is rather ambiguous, and it can be risky to use it without a thorough understanding of its content.

3. Kuroda was a committed Marxist dedicated to social change in Japan. No inflexible doctrinaire, Kuroda had an open, flexible mind and maintained an independence stance when developing his criticisms against the reactionary trends of modern times. In this sense he was one of the last of the progressive intellectual giants of postwar Japan. Though we may not agree with all that he believed in, we who have been influenced by his thought owe it to him to carry on his efforts in a way suited to the needs of our times.

Thus the task of reexamining Kuroda’s *kenmitsu taisei* theory is a timely one, and one crucial for furthering our understanding of the development of medieval Japanese Buddhism.

The Study of Kamakura Buddhism before Kuroda

Prior to Kuroda’s proposal of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory, the central concept in the study of medieval Buddhism was that of “Kamakura New Buddhism.” Although it is not easy to define exactly what Kamakura New Buddhism is, it is widely agreed that the movement was represented by such figures as Hōnen 法然, Shinran 親鸞, Dōgen 道元, and Nichiren 日蓮. Although I have been unable to pinpoint exactly when the idea of Kamakura New Buddhism entered the modern study of Buddhism, it was already popular with prewar scholars, and its influence continued in postwar times. And indeed, the great strides that have occurred since World War II in our understanding of Buddhist history owe much to the theoretical framework of New Buddhism as employed by such outstanding scholars as Ienaga Saburō and Inoue Mitsusada, who regarded New Buddhism as the central force of medieval Buddhism. I call the approach they represent the New Buddhism-centered view of history (*Shin Bukkyō chūshin shikan* 新仏教中心史観). The *kenmitsu taisei* theory was proposed as a critique of the New Buddhism-centered view.

As an extensive analysis of the New Buddhism-centered view is not the object of this article, I would like to cite here just three relevant points. First, although it is sometimes thought that there is a decisive gap between the New Buddhism-centered view and the *kenmitsu taisei*

theory, I believe that the values of the former inform the latter. Second, although it may appear that the New Buddhism-centered view has been totally rejected by the *kenmitsu taisei* theory, this is in my opinion a misunderstanding. Third, I believe that the work of Tamura Yoshirō serves as a bridge between the New Buddhism-centered view and the *kenmitsu taisei* theory. I will touch upon these points again in the course of the discussion below.

THE NEW BUDDHISM-CENTERED VIEW AND “TRANSCENDENTAL EVALUATION”

Although the New Buddhism-centered view seems objective enough at first sight, it is based upon a rather dogmatic sense of values, as seen in Ienaga’s view of some of the Kamakura Buddhist sects.

To situate the Jōdo Shin sect, Nichiren sect, and Zen sect equally under the name of New Buddhism does not correctly reflect their historical significance. The only form of New Buddhism that is truly basic is the Jōdo sect of Hōnen; the others are merely epigones or branches. (IENAGA 1955, p. 63)

Although the first sentence has a certain validity, the latter is entirely too arbitrary. On what basis can one say that Dōgen is an epigone of Hōnen? IENAGA earlier says of Dōgen, “Dōgen’s teachings were based on a Buddhist system imported mechanically from Song-period China. Thus his thought, although quite profound in doctrinal content, remained extremely one-sided and could not avoid being fatally limited in its theoretical aspect” (1955, p. 52). Although Ienaga is unquestionably one of the finest modern historians, are his qualifications as a thinker so far beyond those of Dōgen as to justify his condemnation of Dōgen’s thought as “fatally limited”? I think not. I call such judgments “transcendental evaluations,” as they do not attempt to understand an idea from within the mental framework of the idea’s creator, but only from a detached standpoint selected by the evaluator himself. From this “semidivine” position the evaluator then proceeds to pass judgment on the merits and demerits of past thinkers.

That transcendental evaluations of this type have gone largely unchallenged is, I believe, one of the most serious problems in postwar Japanese historical scholarship. This acceptance, though based on the progressive view of history championed by Marxists, was shared by most other postwar historians as well. Such thinkers saw it as their responsibility to transform premodern, nonrational ways of thinking into ones more modern and logical, in the same way that they believed feudalism must evolve into capitalism, and (in the case of the Marxists anyway) capitalism into socialism. In concrete terms, they believed that the processes of Japanese modernization were unbal-

anced during the period between the Meiji Restoration and World War II, and needed correction if Japan was to be rebuilt along truly modern lines. This “progressive” stance influenced views of religious history, making it easier, for example, to judge the Pure Land teachings of figures like Hōnen and Shinran—with their rationality, egalitarianism, and rejection of magic—as more modern and thus more advanced than other expressions of Buddhism. Positioning such teachings at the center of New Buddhism was the logical result.

INOUE too, though rather more sophisticated than Ienaga in this respect, held to a Pure Land-centered view of New Buddhism, as can be seen in his book *Nihon Jōdo-kyō seiritsu-shi no kenkyū* [A study of the formation of the Pure Land tradition in Japan] (1956).

When doubts arose about the progressive view in the 1970s, Kuroda proposed the *kenmitsu taisei* theory in an attempt to open a new approach to Buddhist historical interpretation. Reflecting Kuroda’s basic Marxist orientation, the theory brilliantly caught the intellectual currents of the times, though it retained certain elements of the New Buddhism-centered view (such as a belief in the superiority of Hōnen and Shinran).

THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN HEIAN AND KAMAKURA BUDDHISM

Kuroda’s *kenmitsu taisei* theory is interpreted in a broad sense and a narrow sense by Taira Masayuki, who sees as one characteristic of the narrow sense a stress by Kuroda on the activities of the *hijiri* 聖 and mid- to late-Heian Pure Land figures as links in the historical development of the *kenmitsu taisei* (TAIRA 1994, p. 21).

The *hijiri* were monks who taught Buddhism to the ordinary people, operating principally from *bessho* 別所 (lit., “separate places”), small temples distant from the main Buddhist establishments. It was one of the central ideas of the New Buddhism-centered view that New Buddhism did not appear suddenly with the teachings of Hōnen and Shinran, but had its precursors in such late-Heian figures as the *hijiri*. IENAGA, for example, clearly states that ideas similar to those of Shinran and Nichiren were already found in the late Heian period, and concludes that Shinran’s teachings in particular were a natural consequence of traditional Heian spirituality as deepened through Shinran’s consciousness of karma and wrongdoing (*zaigokan* 罪業感) (1955, p. 28). INOUE, too, emphasizes the role of mid- to late-Heian Pure Land Buddhism in the development of Hōnen’s thought (1956).

In contrast, Kuroda, who viewed the *hijiri* as marginal to but still within the bounds of the temple-shrine orthodoxy, posited a distinct difference between them and the heterodox figures of the Kamakura

period as represented by Hōnen (KURODA 1980, p. 84). TAIRA carries this argument to its limits, criticizing Inoue's position in a five-point argument (1992). Although it is not our purpose to critique this argument here, it should be pointed out that Kuroda was not as radically opposed as Taira to the New Buddhism-centered view, at times recognizing the continuities between the *hijiri* and the heterodox figures. He writes, for example, "The [heterodox-reform movement] succeeded to the lineage of medieval *hijiri* that emerged in the eleventh century" (KURODA 1994, p. 292). He also says, "Although the religious thought of [the *hijiri*] still lay within the bounds of the *kenmitsu* system, there were among them truth seekers like Zōga 増賀 [917–1003] and Kyōshin 教信 [d. 866?] who prefigured the Kamakura-period critics of *kenmitsu* ideology" (KURODA 1995, p. 304). One also finds passages where he situates New Buddhism alongside the *hijiri* teachings within the margins of *kenmitsu* Buddhism (see KURODA 1994, p. 304).

In my opinion it is impossible to ignore the continuity between Heian Buddhism and Kamakura Buddhism. Hōnen, for example, was led to Pure Land thought through his study of the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集, a Pure Land work by the Tendai priest Genshin 源信 (942-1017), and Shinran included Genshin among the seven Pure Land Patriarchs. Although it would be simplistic to label Hōnen's and Shinran's thought as linear developments of Heian Pure Land Buddhism, it would be similarly unsound to divide the two traditions entirely. The very ambiguity of Kuroda's discourse on the relation between the two may be seen to reveal his awareness of this historical reality.

NEW BUDDHISM AND HONGAKU THOUGHT

Recent scholarship widely recognizes the role played by *hongaku shisō* 本覚思想 (original enlightenment thought) as the common ideological foundation of Kamakura New Buddhism. Even the view that Dōgen opposed *hongaku* thought (e.g., HAKAMAYA 1989) presupposes a recognition of the influence of this thought upon him. Although the importance of *hongaku* thought in Kamakura Buddhism was first stressed by Shimaji Daitō 島地大等 and Hazama Jikō 裕慈光,¹ the present acceptance of this view is largely due to the work of Tamura Yoshirō. TAMURA's *Kamakura shin Bukkyō shisō no kenkyū* (1965) was one of the earliest works to reveal the need for a paradigm shift in the New Buddhism-centered view, as it demonstrated that the supposedly new Kamakura Buddhism was founded on the "Old Buddhist" underpinnings of Tendai *hongaku* thought.

¹ On the history of research on *hongaku* teaching, see my article "Tendai *hongaku shisō kenkyū no shomondai*" 天台本覚思想の諸問題 (in SUEKI 1993, pp. 284–311).

This seminal, and difficult, work was the complex product of Tamura's wide background in contemporary Buddhist and philosophical thought. As the title of the book indicates, his own outlook is based upon the New Buddhism-centered view, identifying Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren as the exemplars of Kamakura Buddhism and citing pretty much the same representative ideological elements as those emphasized by earlier scholars. Earlier scholars, however, had tended to lump together as "New Buddhism" the teachings of all figures who diverged from the orthodoxy of the day without identifying exactly what it was that linked these teachings together. Tamura, by clarifying the underlying current of *hongaku* thought, not only offered a unifying element but indicated the continuity between Old Buddhist and medieval Buddhism.

In this way, Tamura proposed the notion of a Kamakura New Buddhism rising from the foundations of traditional *hongaku* thought. Although neither idea was original with him, the combination of the two was quite significant. It is not too much to say that this idea, coming after the publication of the main works of the New Buddhism-centered view and before the appearance of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory, comprised the turning point between the two standpoints. Tamura's studies marked the beginning, not the completion, of the work on *hongaku* thought—even now many issues relating to this doctrine require further investigation. Still, Tamura's contribution to the development of our historical understanding of Kamakura Buddhism has yet to receive the attention it deserves.

Kuroda discerned the importance of *hongaku* thought and, under the influence of Tamura, adopted it into his system earlier than other historians. For Kuroda, *hongaku* thought represents the ideological aspect of the *kenmitsu* system. Although I personally have some reservations about his interpretation, which I will discuss below, I have no hesitation in asserting that he was the first scholar to situate the *hongaku* teachings within the broad perspective of medieval history.

Let us end this section with another intriguing indication of Kuroda's interest in Tendai thought. When editing an anthology of representative modern articles about the intellectual history of pre-modern Japan (1979), one of the pieces he chose was Shimaji Daitō's "Nippon ko-Tendai kenkyū no hitsuyō o ronzu" [The need to study early Japanese Tendai thought], which first appeared in 1926. This was the first article to assert the significance of the *hongaku* teachings, though it did not carry the analysis as far as Tamura did. That Kuroda included it along with articles by Marxist writers shows his recognition of the importance of Shimaji's insight.

Methodology in Intellectual and Religious History

Although Kuroda first proposed the *kenmitsu taisei* theory 1975, he had for quite some time been concerned with the methodological problems involved in the study of intellectual and religious history. His main work in this area appeared in the form of two articles, “Shisō-shi no hōhō ni tsuite no oboe-gaki” 思想史の方法に関する覚書 [A note on the methodology of intellectual history] (KURODA 1994, pp. 356–72; first published in 1960) and “Bukkyō-shi kenkyū no hōhō to seika” 仏教史研究の方法と成果 [Methods and achievements in the study of Buddhist history] (KURODA 1994, pp. 373–403; first published in 1962). Although these articles present a more dogmatic standpoint than that taken in later work, they display certain elements that would find fuller expression in the *kenmitsu taisei* theory.

In the former article Kuroda asserts that a scientific methodology for the historical study of thought and culture has yet to be established, and proposes a large-scale hermeneutic approach that would objectively locate religious ideas within the totality of history. His *kenmitsu taisei* theory of later years may be seen as an attempt to implement this proposal.

In the latter article Kuroda identifies four approaches to the study of Buddhist history: sectarian studies (*shūgaku* 宗学), Buddhist studies (*Bukkyōgaku* 仏教学), orthodox historical studies (*seitōteki shigaku* 正統的史学), and folklore studies (*minzoku-gaku* 民俗学). After examining the background of these four approaches he identifies their respective problems, then once again asserts the necessity for a comprehensive methodology that deals with the history of Buddhism as part of religious and intellectual history. He adds that this is possible only if we apply objective categories that reveal the relation between this history and contemporary social constructs. This too he attempted to actualize in his *kenmitsu taisei* theory.

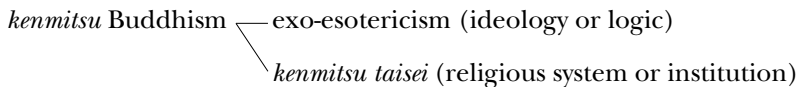
Kuroda’s emphasis on the necessity of objective knowledge may be traced to the influence of Marxist epistemology. From our perspective in the present day we may question whether he ever achieved such an objectivity; indeed, as discussed below, Kuroda himself in his later works abandoned this attempt at objectivity and recognized the inevitably ideological character of historical scholarship, including his own.

The Kenmitsu Taisei Theory

Kuroda introduced the *kenmitsu taisei* theory in his book *Nihon chūsei no kokka to shūkyō* (1975). This was followed by *Jisha seiryoku* (1980), a good introduction to the history of medieval Buddhism. His articles

published during the 1980s, collected in *Nihon chūsei no shakai to shūkyō* (KURODA 1990), reveal the development of his thought after the publication of his first book.²

The *kenmitsu taisei* theory is not easy to understand, resulting as it did from Kuroda's struggle to transform the old historical paradigm. Many basic concepts appear to shift in meaning from one article to the next, and the distinctions between such key terms as *kenmitsu taisei*, *kenmitsu* Buddhism, and *kenmitsu shugi* 顯密主義 (exo-esotericism) are often blurred. Generally speaking, *kenmitsu* Buddhism is a higher category, with exo-esotericism and the *kenmitsu taisei* forming subdivisions of it; exo-esotericism comprises the ideological or logical aspect, while the *kenmitsu taisei* comprises the institutional aspect.



According to Kuroda, exo-esotericism is a system of logic that interprets Buddhism—and indeed all religion—from the standpoints of exotericism and esotericism, and attempts to understand it in terms of the relationship between the two. Kuroda does not place exotericism and esotericism on the same level, however, saying that exo-esotericism developed within a framework that accepted the absolute superiority of the esoteric aspect. Indeed, exo-esotericism might be characterized as a distinctively Japanese form of esotericism (KURODA 1994, p. 291).

The *kenmitsu taisei*—the institutional aspect—emerged as a result of the connection between the government authorities and the *kenmitsu*-based sects. This system gained influence through the support of the large temples of Nara and Mt Hiei, which comprised important elements of the medieval *kenmon taisei* 権門体制 (ruling elites) power structure. Thus the *kenmitsu taisei* was by no means a mere conceptual or cultural construct, but formed a solid order in its own right with a secular presence backed by governmental power and associated social groups (KURODA 1994, p. 292).

In Kuroda's opinion, exo-esotericism emerged and developed in the ninth century and reached maturity in both its doctrinal and orga-

² In addition, a few articles are included in his book *Ōbō to buppō* 王法と仏法 (1983). Certain short essays in volume 2 and 3 of his collected works form good introductions to this theory. The following explanation is mainly based upon the description in Kuroda's article "Kenmitsu taisei-ron no tachiba 顯密体制の立場 (The standpoint of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory) (1994, pp. 287-300).

nizational aspects during the tenth century. The *kenmitsu taisei*, in contrast, began to take form towards the end of the tenth century and became an established system in the latter half of the eleventh century. The revival movements that emerged in the late twelfth century formed a heterodox-reformist challenge to the orthodoxy, but did not seriously shake the foundations of the old system. It was only with the conflicts of the mid-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth-century *sengoku jidai* (warring states period) and the consequent breakdown in the medieval power structure that the *kenmitsu taisei* finally lost its historical vitality.

As even this quite brief summary shows, the *kenmitsu taisei* theory opened a much wider perspective on the established Buddhism of the medieval ages. Previously relegated to a secondary role by the proponents of the New Buddhism-centered view, "Old Buddhism" was suddenly shown to have had a great richness of its own. As TAIRA points out (1994), the *kenmitsu taisei* theory ushered in a new era in the study of medieval religious history. Buddhism is now viewed not as an isolated system but as an aspect of medieval society as a whole. Serious scholarship presently examines medieval Buddhism in association with government and social organizations as well as such areas as architecture, visual art, poetry, music, Nō drama, and the tea ceremony. Even in the field of Buddhist history proper there has been a great broadening of outlook to include subjects like temple history, esoteric ritual, the precepts, and kami worship, which are now seen as elements in an organically interrelated system.

These and other effects of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory are now well known, and are explained quite clearly in Taira's article. In the remainder of this article I would thus like to discuss Kuroda's theory from a quite different perspective, one that attempts to clarify his basic premises through the analysis of certain unresolved problems.

The principal problem concerns Kuroda's assumption that exotericism is really a form of esotericism. As indicated above, in Kuroda's theory the term *kenmitsu* does not signify an equal combination of *mitsu* (esotericism) and *ken* (exotericism), but rather a *mitsu* that incorporates *ken*. It should be noted first that what Kuroda intended by the term *mikkyō* (esotericism) is not always certain, since, citing the difficulty of the concept, he refrains from attempts at definition (KURODA 1975, p. 447). Kuroda's reason for wishing to emphasize esoterism may nevertheless be surmised. Esotericism provided the central element that brought Buddhism into contact with Japanese society: esoteric rituals for the prosperity of the state linked *kenmitsu* Buddhism to the ruling authorities, and the esoteric acceptance of

thaumaturgic rites allowed Buddhism to incorporate popular religious practices. Esotericism was thus the element that enabled Buddhism to affiliate itself with the state authorities on the one hand and with the common people on the other. It was esotericism's uncritical acceptance of everything that allowed *kenmitsu* Buddhism to become the ideology of the medieval establishment. And it was through the esoteric elements of Buddhism that the authorities ruled the common people.

Kuroda's stress on esotericism may thus be seen as an expression of his underlying view of history. And indeed, one cannot ignore the fact that esotericism provided a basis that shaped the development of Japanese Buddhism. Nevertheless, it seems a bit simplistic to characterize *all* of *kenmitsu* Buddhism in terms of this tradition. As KURODA himself notes, "*Kenmitsu* is not a new term but one that was commonly used during medieval times" (1994, p. 304), when it indicated both esotericism *and* exotericism as distinct and viable traditions. The exoteric teachings of the various sects followed their own independent processes of development; though related to the esoteric teachings, they were not subsumed under them. It is precisely because of the mutual development of the exoteric and esoteric aspects that the *kenmitsu taisei*—and *kenmitsu* Buddhism as a whole—emerged as such a dynamic force.

An examination of the development of *kenmitsu* Buddhism might help clarify the point. According to Kuroda, *kenmitsu* Buddhism had its beginnings in the early Heian era when, he explains, Buddhism was consolidated through the medium of esotericism during the period between the introduction of Kūkai's thought and the completion of the Tendai esoteric system (*taimitsu* 台密). Kuroda, however, does not clearly situate the Buddhism of this time as either a form of ancient Buddhism or as an early version of medieval Buddhism. Such ambiguity forms a significant weakness in his theory, for doctrinally speaking this was a time of critical importance in the development of Japanese Buddhism (*kodai Bukkyō*), one in which its fundamental ideas took form (SUEKI 1995). It is also questionable whether one can characterize the Buddhism of this period as largely esoteric—even a figure like Annen 安然 (841–889/98), who is thought to have brought the *taimitsu* system to completion, wrote several important works on exoteric subjects (SUEKI 1994, 1995). The view that Buddhism consolidated under the esoteric teachings is arguable as well, although there was indeed some moving together of the various sects following the debates of the late eighth century.

Questions also arise concerning Kuroda's view that the Pure Land

Buddhism and *hijiri* Buddhism of the mid- and late-Heian period were expressions of esoteric Buddhism. It is true that most currents of the Pure Land tradition in this era tended toward esotericism, and that representative Pure Land figures like Genshin (942–1017) do not deny esoteric Buddhism. Nevertheless, the Pure Land Buddhism presented in Genshin's famous *Ōjōyōshū* has few esoteric elements, which is all the more remarkable in view of the esoteric nature of the *taimitsu* thought that preceded him.

Much the same can be said with regard to Tendai *hongaku* thought. Although influenced by esoteric Buddhism, *hongaku* thought is not essentially esoteric in nature. Even the lineage of the secret oral tradition of the *hongaku* teachings is not the same as that of Tendai esotericism. KURODA himself, when presenting *hongaku* thought as “a form of *mikkyō*” (1975, 445), admitted in a note the likelihood of disagreement on this point (1975, 447). Thus Kuroda's attempt to reduce the entire *kenmitsu taisei*, or all of *kenmitsu* Buddhism, to esotericism is problematic at best.

In what way might this affect the overall validity of the theory? As mentioned above, it is unquestionable that the *kenmitsu taisei* theory has given scholars a new standpoint from which to view medieval Buddhism. That does not necessarily mean, however, that every aspect of medieval Buddhism can be explained in terms of this theory. There is the problem, for example, of what, or who, represents the orthodox position of *kenmitsu* Buddhism. Japanese Buddhism in the early Heian period was still in its developmental stages. Mid-Heian Buddhism, as the example of Genshin shows, was less esoteric in nature and was thus hardly typical of *kenmitsu* thought. Kuroda presents *hongaku* thought as doctrinally representative of the medieval Buddhist establishment, but recognizes that in some ways it was inimical to the *kenmitsu* system: “[*Hongaku* thought] contained forces that tended to exclude mythological and thaumaturgic elements.... and it presented a path to overcome the state of religious stagnation of the medieval period” (KURODA 1990, p. 318).

It is thus quite difficult to identify exactly what the representative doctrine of orthodox *kenmitsu* Buddhism is. Such problems are to be expected, though. It is natural that worthy new theoretical constructs should find difficulty in fitting into preexisting frameworks. The history of systems does not always share the same viewpoint as the history of ideas; problems relating to the latter discipline therefore cannot always be explained in terms of theories associated with the former (such as the *kenmitsu taisei* theory).

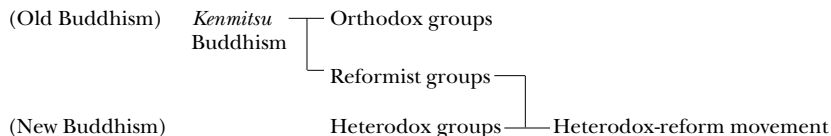
The *kenmitsu taisei* theory provided scholars with a new paradigm, one broad enough in scope to open a wide range of new research pos-

sibilities. Like all such theories, however, it is limited in its capacity to explain the complexities of history. Nevertheless, the *kenmitsu* concept provides important hints for the study of medieval Buddhism, and can be effectively employed as a methodological category for considering issues relating to medieval religious history.

Buddhist Revival Movements

HETERODOX-REFORM MOVEMENTS

As noted above, from the twelfth century there were already movements critical of the *kenmitsu* system, although none was influential enough to seriously threaten it. These Buddhist revival movements (*Bukkyō kakushin undō* 仏教革新運動) included both the New Buddhist groups and reformist groups within Old Buddhism, to use the terminology of the New Buddhism-centered view. Kuroda called the former the heterodox group (*itan-ha* 異端派) and the latter the reformist group (*kaikaku-ha* 改革派). Together he referred to them as the heterodox-reform movement (*itan-kaikaku undō* 異端改革運動). These various currents might be represented as follows:



Thus in Kuroda's system *kenmitsu* Buddhism corresponds to Old Buddhism, and heterodox Buddhism to New Buddhism. Kuroda's categories, however, contain new elements that do fit the earlier system. Kuroda tends to combine the heterodox and reformist groups and not to attach much importance to the differences between them. This contrasts with the New Buddhism-centered view, which draws a clear line between the former group (= New Buddhism) and the latter group (= Old Buddhism), and rates the former much more highly. Kuroda sees the heterodox Buddhism/*kenmitsu* Buddhism dichotomy as less important than that between the main current of *kenmitsu* Buddhism and the heterodox-reform movements. This effected a fundamental change in the earlier paradigm, opening the way to a higher evaluation of the thought and activity of reformist figures. Kuroda's more flexible heterodox-reform category includes even Ise Shinto and the Tachikawa-ryū 立川流 (an extreme esoteric sect with sexual rituals) (KURODA 1975, p. 503). Kuroda comments that his standpoint

sees the development of Buddhism not in terms of an either/or choice between New Buddhism and Old Buddhism but as a much more complex interplay between the forces of the orthodox and heterodox movements....[The heterodox-reform movement] was a continuum of figures ranging from clear-cut heretics to compromising reformers, with the difference between the heretics and the reformers being in some cases paper-thin. (KURODA 1975, p. 502)

Over time, though, there was a remarkable development in Kuroda's views of the heterodox-reform movement. In *Nihon chūsei no kokka to shūkyō* (1975) he saw the movement mainly in terms of its Kamakura-period activities. Dividing the medieval period into three stages (late twelfth to early thirteenth century; mid-thirteenth to early fourteenth century; mid-fourteenth to fifteenth century), he focused on developments during the first stage (i.e., the Kamakura period) and devoted little attention to the second two, during which the *kenmitsu* system changed and declined. However, in his article “Bukkyō kakushin undō no rekishiteki tenkai” 仏教革新運動の歴史的性格 [Historical nature of the Buddhist revival movements] (1990, pp. 303–50), Kuroda extended his analysis to the later stages as well. In the third stage the center of orthodox *kenmitsu* Buddhism shifted to revival groups like the Zen and Ritsu sects, while the reform movement expressed itself principally in militant Pure Land activities (*ikkō-ikki* 一向一揆).

The notion of the heterodox-reform movement, like the *kenmitsu taisei* theory as a whole, provided scholars with a much wider framework within which to analyse medieval Buddhism, but the very scale of the concept inevitably resulted in a number of ambiguities. One concerns Kuroda's very combination of the heterodox and reform movements. How, one may ask, are the reformers to be differentiated from the heterodox dissenters? This may, in fact, be impossible. In medieval Europe the Catholic Church clearly distinguished between orthodoxy and heresy, but the situation was not as clear-cut in medieval Japan, where, as we have seen, even the *kenmitsu taisei* “orthodoxy” was rather blurry in outline. Kuroda himself suggests two features as possible criteria for defining heterodox movements: an exclusive focus on a single practice, and a downplay of the precepts (KURODA 1975, pp. 482–83). Although these criteria seem clear enough at first, they are in fact rather vague. According to the first criterion, Hōnen, Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren are all within the heterodox group; according to the second criterion, Hōnen, Dōgen, and Nichiren are not, since they kept, and even emphasized, the precepts.

In my opinion, Kuroda's concept of heterodoxy suffers from several

types of categorical confusion. First is a confusion between doctrine and deed. Hōnen, for example, was heterodox in doctrine, but was—with his *bessho* temple at Kurodani 黒谷 and his relations with the royalty and nobility—at least as orthodox in lifestyle as the *hijiri* of an earlier age. Second is a confusion between individuals and groups. Kuroda's treatment of heterodoxy is generally focused on individuals (Hōnen, Shinran, and others), but when the Ikko sect is at issue the problem is obviously one of groups. This gives rise to the question of whether the investigation of heterodoxy is to be carried out at the level of individual intellectual history or at the level of social/organizational history. Kuroda's theory remains vague on this point, though one must also recognize that this very ambiguity is one of the factors that has given the theory its wide applicability.

In "Bukkyō kakushin undō no rekishi-teki tenkai," Kuroda extends his ideas beyond the confines of the medieval period to the modern age. Kuroda sees the mainstream of Tokugawa- and Meiji-period Buddhism as constituting *ie* (household) Buddhism, and interprets reactions against this mainstream as expressions of the revival movements. However, he includes even late-Tokugawa Shinto and anti-Buddhist agitation among the revival movements, thus widening the category to the point where it is no longer of much use.

TAIRA'S INTERPRETATION OF KURODA'S THEORY

Taira Masayuki, Kuroda's best-known successor, offers an interpretation of Kuroda's theory different in many points from mine. He considers the New Buddhism-centered view and the *kenmitsu taisei* theory to be more similar than they might seem at first, with the difference between the two hinging on whether they stress quality or quantity:

The advocates of the New Buddhism-centered view are fully aware of the...social weight carried by Old Buddhism in medieval times. But they see such *quantitative* factors as ultimately less significant than the *qualitative* changes in religious thought introduced by people like Shinran, changes like the new stress on faith, the easy path, and the exclusive use of a single practice. It is because of the importance that they place on such qualitative differences that they identify medieval Buddhism with Kamakura New Buddhism.... Thus on one side we have Kuroda with his stress on quantitative factors, and on the other side we have the advocates of Kamakura New Buddhism with their stress on qualitative factors.

(TAIRA 1994, p. 18)

He further emphasizes the similarities between Kuroda and the New

Buddhism-centered view in a passage several pages later:

[Kuroda and the advocates of the New Buddhism-centered view are basically alike in their evaluation of] Shinran and the other New Buddhist figures, whose religious contributions are held in equal esteem by both sides. The problem, as I see it, is whether one chooses to see a figure like Shinran as a representative of Kamakura Buddhism or as a heterodox thinker who is nevertheless still within the pale of Old Buddhism. It is, in other words, a problem of terminology. (TAIRA 1994, p. 20)

But is the difference between the two paradigms truly only one of terminology, or of “quality” versus “quantity”? I cannot agree. Kuroda’s thought, as I have tried to show, represented a paradigm shift from earlier views of “Old” and “New” Buddhism. As mentioned above, the New Buddhism-centered view tends towards “transcendental evaluations” that (to risk overstating my case a bit) painted Old Buddhism as the villain and New Buddhism as the hero. One of the chief contributions of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory is that it counters such value judgments through its reevaluation of the contributions of Old Buddhism. Taira appears to have ignored this point and, in effect, returned to the bounds of the New Buddhism-centered view, thus closing the way to a new perspective on medieval Buddhism.

Taira’s interpretation of the heterodox-reform movements also contrasts with mine. In my view, Kuroda’s combination of the reformists with the heterodox dissenters allows us to escape the fixed notions of the past and perceive the similarities between the two groups. Taira, however, seems to view the lack of a clear qualitative distinction between the two groups as a defect in Kuroda’s thought. This “defect” may better reflect the reality, however—as we have seen, the borders between the two groups tended to be rather fluid, making it impossible to separate them into clear-cut camps.

In this way, whenever Kuroda offers the way to a new paradigm Taira attempts to return to the New Buddhism-centered view. Though Taira’s interpretation of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory is presently regarded as orthodox among Japanese historians, I would like here to suggest the possibility of alternate approaches. Which interpretation offers more potential for the development of new directions in Buddhist studies remains open to future discussion.

Succeeding to Kuroda’s Critical Spirit

Kuroda was a Marxist who always maintained a critical stance towards

the changing contemporary world. Having analyzed the unbalances in the Japanese modernization process that had led Japan to fascism and the aggressive war in Asia, he was always watchful for reactionary forces attempting to return the nation to its prewar situation. Indeed, he writes, this was one reason he took up the study of medieval religion—he saw the continuing attempts to “resurrect the ghosts of prewar Japan” as partially rooted in the fact that scholars had not sufficiently clarified the premodern roots of such notions as “the divine nation (*shinkoku* 神国)” (KURODA 1975, p. 551). Despite this orientation he remained open-minded as a thinker, a quality that made it possible for him to overcome the formulistic tendencies of his early work and create new paradigms for the historical analysis of Japanese Buddhism.

In the preface and postscript of *Nihon chūsei no shakai to shūkyō* Kuroda stated his awareness of the changes in the world, particularly the worldwide retreat of Marxism. He nevertheless believed that certain basic concepts of the Marxist historical view—like the theory of class struggle—retained their essential validity, and attacked positions that presented themselves as nonideological: “The more ‘nonideological’ or ‘supra-ideological’ a theory presents itself to be, the more intricate its ideological composition is likely to be” (KURODA 1990, p. 12). Yet this led him to reflect on the ideological nature of his own work.

The academic discipline of history is inevitably ideological in essence. Regardless of what might be the case with individual historical events, historical narration is always the result of a series of selective choices, so that the influence of the historian’s standpoint is inescapable.... The description of religious history, objective though it may appear, always incorporates an inner struggle and search. (KURODA 1990, p. 12)

Thus Kuroda, who began his career striving for historical objectivity, had finally to recognize the impossibility of this and admit to the ideological character of his own historical thought. It was his sincerity as a scholar that made possible this change of attitude on such an important matter.

During his final days the world situation changed rapidly, and after his death in 1993 the Soviet Union and the communist nations of Eastern Europe collapsed. Although it is now difficult for us to share his communist views, we must in some way carry on his legacy of critical, independent thought. How to do this is one of the most pressing problems for contemporary historians.

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