



Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya, *Nihon no shakai sankā Bukkyō: Hōonji to Risshō Kōseikai no shakai katsudō to shakai rinri*
日本の社会参加仏教—法音寺と立正佼成会の社会活動と社会倫理

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WHILE IT IS CLEAR that Buddhist groups are involved a variety of activities in contemporary Japanese society, the reasons behind these activities in terms of doctrine and motivation have yet to be deeply explored.¹ Ranjana Mukhopadhyaya, who originally hails from India, deals with related issues thoroughly in this book using the concept of “Engaged Buddhism.” She combines historical analysis and surveys concerning the social activities of two particular Buddhist groups in the modern period, and has produced solid and valuable research. Based on her PhD dissertation attained from the University of Tokyo under the guidance of Shimazono Susumu in

1. A shorter version of this review appeared originally in Japanese in *Shūkan Bukkyō taimusu* 週刊仏教タイムス (25 August 2005). It was translated (with modifications) by Benjamin Dorman with the author’s approval and advice.

2003, this book is a significant contribution to the study of Buddhism in modern and contemporary Japan. Mukhopadhyaya, now based at Nagoya City University 名古屋市立大学, continues to conduct research on Japanese religion, Buddhism in the modern period, and the social activities of religious movements.

“Engaged Buddhism,” a term coined by the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, gained prominence with Buddhist practitioners and scholars after the 1960s. As Mukhopadhyaya points out (6–8), two works employing the title “socially engaged Buddhism” were published in the 1980s, and in 1989 the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) was formed. The publication of *QUEEN* and *KING* in 1996 saw a further development of international research on the topic.

While Japanese Buddhist movements have received some attention from this perspective, until the publication of this work there had not been a specific, comprehensive survey carried out in Japan, nor had there been any attempt to translate “Engaged Buddhism” into the Japanese context. Mukhopadhyaya defines it as *shakai sankai Bukkyō* 社会参加仏教. This term, she holds, “shows that the activities of Buddhists are not restricted to so-called religious ones, such as propagation and dissemination of teachings [布教・教化], but also included various social activities that are considered as practical applications of Buddhist doctrine. The term not only reveals the influence of these activities on the Buddhist world but also encompasses the Buddhist attitude toward society in general” (28).

Mukhopadhyaya analyzes the patterns of the social activities of the Buddhist groups Hōonji and Risshō Kōseikai. Based in Nagoya, Hōonji is a new religious movement connected to Nichiren Shū and claims around 300,000 members. As a group committed to social welfare, it is well-known for establishing Nagoya’s Nihon Fukushi Daigaku 日本福祉大学 (Japan Welfare University). Risshō Kōseikai, Japan’s second-largest new religious movement next to Sōka Gakkai, bases its principles on the *Lotus Sutra*, and claims approximately 5,600,000 members. It promotes peace, interreligious dialogue, and other social activities on a global level, and activities such as its “Brighter Society Movement” (*meisha undō* 明社運動) on the domestic level.

In analyzing these two groups, Mukhopadhyaya provides some historical background and clarifies the historical and contemporary development of their activities. After considering the ethical basis (i.e., social ethics) of these activities, she uses data obtained from questionnaires and interviews with ordinary members to show their involvement and consciousness toward them. Mukhopadhyaya points out the characteristics and differences in the patterns of social participation for both groups. We learn that Hōonji’s activities, which include the management of social welfare and educational facilities, are centered at the local level in the spirit of the “three virtues” based on principles of bodhisattva practice—“compassion, sincerity, and forbearance.” As the operation of such facilities requires special skills, the participation of non-specialist members is limited. On the other hand, Risshō Kōseikai conducts international peace activities and other forms of assistance to various groups, and at the domestic level with its “Brighter Society Movement,” which involves the partici-

pation of many ordinary members. Nevertheless, through the responses to surveys, we learn that members of both groups share a high level of understanding toward the importance of “the mutual relationship between religious and social activities,” which is an aim of their respective organizations (16, 276). This is a very important point. According to Mukhopadhyaya (292–93), the social activities of both groups do not simply involve welfare and volunteer work, but have a religious significance that is rooted in social ethics based on “modern interpretations of traditional Buddhist philosophy.”

In the third section of her introduction on theories concerning modernization and social engagement of religious organizations, Mukhopadhyaya places “Engaged Buddhism” in the context of modern society by discussing theories related to the connection between “modernization and religion,” and theories about the social function of religion, including secularization, civil religion, and public religion. The research she reviews is modeled on the relationship between modernization and religion in various Western countries, with Christianity as the target religion. Therefore, the question does arise as to whether these ideas can be directly applied to the Japanese case. In the first chapter on the book’s subjects, assumptions, and methods, she reviews work by Robert Bellah, Yasumaru Yoshio, and Shimazono Susumu on Japanese modernization and religion, and discusses “Japanese modernization and Buddhist social ethics.” The connections between these works and her research, however, are not always clear. Nevertheless, it contains a wealth of information and suggestions concerning the social participation of Buddhist movements. It shows the potential to open up new theoretical possibilities, and I hope that her future research will further examine the implications of Western and Japanese research on “modernization and religion.”

In her conclusion, raising the arguments of Jurgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, Robert Bellah, and José Casanova, Mukhopadhyaya discusses religion in the public sphere and notes that, “Socially engaged Buddhism reveals the activities of Buddhism in the public sphere” (291). These words are extremely significant. For example, in an article that discusses the peace activities of Japanese Buddhist organizations, Helen HARDACRE examines religion and civil society in Japan, showing that the activities of Japanese religious groups do form part of Japanese civil society. Hardacre’s perspective thus overlaps with Mukhopadhyaya’s research, revealing the importance of social activities of religious groups within the public arena. In Japanese society after the modern period, religion was generally confined to the private sphere, and activities in the public sphere were limited. Research such as this shows that Buddhist groups in the modern and contemporary periods are engaged in a wide range of activities in the fields of welfare, education, medicine, and peace, and that they continue to do so. Recently, a systematic database that was developed from a project conducted by Hasegawa Masatoshi on the history of postwar Buddhist social welfare activities has been established. Furthermore, with the brief report about contemporary Buddhist NGOs in Japan by Jonathan S. WATTS, it is clear that basic research on the social activities of Buddhist groups is well underway.

Within this framework of efforts to study such activities in the public sphere of modern and contemporary Japanese society, Mukhopadhyaya's work is very important. It combines detailed description of the activities of the two groups, a solid explanation of the doctrinal motivations, and, crucially, the perspectives of some of the members who carry them out. I highly recommend this book to researchers with an interest in the public role of Buddhism in Japan.

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