

## A Reexamination of Critical Buddhism

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THE TERM “CRITICAL BUDDHISM” was used by Hakamaya Noriaki as the title of a 1990 book in which he defines it as the position that “Buddhism is criticism” or that “only that which is critical is Buddhism.” Hakamaya further uses the term “critical philosophy” to distinguish it from “topical philosophy.” For the purposes of this essay, I shall employ the term “Critical Buddhism” to refer to a movement in Buddhist scholarship that is represented by Hakamaya and one of his colleagues at Komazawa University, Matsumoto Shirō, and that is characterized by its critique of traditional attitudes in Japanese Buddhist studies. Strictly speaking, the positions of the two are not identical, but since they have collaborated so closely and have had considerable influence on one another, it does not seem out of place to treat them under the same rubric. I would also note that whereas the label of “Critical Buddhism” has been widely used among Buddhist scholars in the United States, this is not the case in Japan.

Although Hakamaya and Matsumoto prepared a number of critical studies in the early 1980s, they began to publish their main work in 1985. In that year Hakamaya released a number of important articles that were later to be included in his well-known book *Critiques of the Doctrine of Original Enlightenment*. It was in 1986, when Matsumoto read his paper “The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist” at the annual meeting of the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies, that Critical Buddhism first caused a stir in Japanese Buddhist studies.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath Hakamaya and Matsumoto churned out one essay after the other, many of which were subsequently collected and published as separate volumes: Hakamaya’s *Critiques* (1989), *Critical Buddhism* (1990), *Dōgen and Buddhism* (1992); and Matsumoto’s *Pratītyasamutpāda and Emptiness* (1989) and *Critical Studies on Zen Thought* (1994).

The response in Japanese academic circles to their criticisms was mixed. A few scholars reacted positively, but most scholars withheld approval. Hakamaya and Matsumoto (especially Hakamaya) made no pretense to objectivity and politeness in presenting their ideas, but rode roughshod over the customs of Japanese academia, setting forth their subjective opinions in a bold and forthright manner, attacking other scholars head-on, and not infrequently using disparaging language. This was part of a strategy aimed at insuring that the issues they raised would not be ignored or get swept aside in the general current of minute scholarly problems. From the start, they wanted public attention and debate.

Their strategy succeeded and catapulted their names into prominence. But at the same time, their radical and aggressive attitude incurred the anger of most Japanese scholars and led to the unfortunate result that their underlying intentions were neither understood nor discussed for a rather long period. The handful of scholars who stood up for them included some of their colleagues at Komazawa University like Ishii Shūdō and Itō Takatoshi, who were able to read between the lines of the exaggerations of Hakamaya and Matsumoto. Perhaps the only person to respond seriously to their criticism in the early stages was Tsuda Shin'ichi, a somewhat unique scholar specializing in esoteric Buddhism. Most scholars simply ignored them, preferring not to get involved rather than to court danger. Critical Buddhism became the sort of issue in Japanese Buddhist scholarship that everyone knew about, but few discussed openly. Scholars in the United States, unaffected by the taboos of Japanese academia, took a more open-minded approach. The 1993 meeting of the American Academy of Religion included a panel on Critical Buddhism.

In any event, after Hakamaya and Matsumoto had finished the first stage of their work, Japanese scholars eventually began to take up the questions they were raising. In 1994 the Association of Buddhist Philosophy published a special issue of its *Journal of Buddhist Studies* in commemoration of ten years of the establishment of the association. In the lead article Takasaki Jikidō, the president of the association, made a survey of Buddhist studies in Japan over the past ten years, devoting more than half of his treatment to Critical Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> This left no doubt that he considered it to be the principal issue in the previous decade of Japanese Buddhist studies. In addition to the comments of Takasaki, articles by Maeda Egaku, Yoshizu Yoshihide, and Tsuda Shin'ichi in the same volume also took up the question. The taboo had begun to lift.

In this essay, I would like to begin with an overview of the issues raised by Critical Buddhism and the responses to it by Japanese scholars, and then go on to briefly outline my own participation in this debate and my current views on this issue.

#### ASSERTIONS AND SCHOLARLY REACTIONS

##### *Hakamaya's Ideas*

In contrast to Matsumoto Shirō, who usually approaches questions from an academic standpoint, Hakamaya often reverts to a journalistic style. His thoughts range broadly across a number of issues at the same time, weaving a complex web of connections that is not always easy to follow. Paul Swanson has distinguished three levels in the critique of Hakamaya and Matsumoto (see pages 27–8 above): the Buddhological, the sectarian, and the social-critical. I would like to add a fourth: the philosophical.

##### THE SECTARIAN LEVEL

An important stimulus to Hakamaya and Matsumoto's promotion of Critical Buddhism came from their participation in a committee formed to study the problem of discrimination in the Sōtō sect. Japanese Buddhism has long lent support to social discrimination—even from before the Tokugawa period—and contemporary Buddhism has come to recognize the need for self-examination in this regard. In contrast to the Jōdo Shin sect, whose fight against discrimination has a comparatively long history, the Sōtō sect has lagged behind. It was only after a discriminatory statement issued by the leaders of the Sōtō sect attracted widespread public attention that the sect began to take up the question in earnest.<sup>3</sup> The writings of Hakamaya and others on this question need to be read in this light.

Hakamaya concluded that the traditional doctrines that supported discrimination in the Sōtō sect had derived from the monistic view of the *hongaku shisō* or the doctrine of “original enlightenment.” This explains in part his vehement attacks against *hongaku* thought. In its place, he promotes what may be called the “Protestant character” of Critical Buddhism, insisting on the need to modernize the teachings of the Sōtō sect, which has lagged far behind in terms of facing discriminatory elements in its own tradition past and present.

Naturally, the critique of traditional doctrines means grappling with the philosophy of Dōgen, the founder of the Sōtō sect. The “new” idea that Hakamaya proposes is that the main subject of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen’s magnum opus, is a criticism of *hongaku shisō*. He further argues that the 12-fascicle version of the *Shōbōgenzō*, hitherto neglected, should be reinstated as Dōgen’s consummate contribution.<sup>4</sup> The idea that the “Bendōwa,” the prologue of the *Shōbōgenzō*, contains a criticism of Tendai *hongaku* thought is, of course, nothing new. Scholars outside the Sōtō tradition such as Hazama Jikō and Tamura Yoshirō have made this point often in the past. But prior to the publications by Yamauchi Shun’yū in 1985, there had been no public acknowledgment of the fact within the Sōtō sect. Hakamaya developed Yamauchi’s ideas and argued that the *hongaku* thought criticized by Dōgen is not restricted to a tendency of the Japanese Tendai school, but is a way of thinking broadly accepted in Japan. He added that this criticism of *hongaku* thought is not merely the subject of one passage of the “Bendōwa,” but constituted the main subject of the whole of the *Shōbōgenzō*. From his standpoint, the 75-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*, which has been accepted as the core of Dōgen’s philosophy, contains traces of the influence of *hongaku* thought and is thus inferior to the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* of Dōgen’s later years, where Hakamaya finds a more decisive stand against *hongaku* thought.

#### THE BUDDHOLOGICAL LEVEL

Hakamaya’s criticism of *hongaku* thought is not restricted to the sectarian level but encompasses a wide range of studies in the history of Buddhist thought. *Hongaku* thought in the narrower sense refers to a tendency within the Tendai school in medieval Japan characterized by the absolute affirmation of the phenomenal world, and occasionally referred to as “Tendai *hongaku* thought.” *Hongaku* thought in the wider sense refers to tendencies in Buddhist philosophy to attach importance to the idea of “original enlightenment” as a result of the influence of the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*.

Hakamaya’s definition of *hongaku* thought is broader still. His definition includes three elements:

1. the assumption of substantial “place” (*topos*), usually mixed with non-Buddhist native or indigenous thought;
2. an ideology that is linked to authoritarianism and self-affirmation;

3. an attitude that makes light of the intellect and attaches importance to the “experience” of enlightenment.

In contrast, he proposes three defining traits of genuine Buddhism:

1. the idea of causation that is critical of the idea of substantial place;
2. the idea of self-negation and altruism based upon the idea of no-self;
3. the doctrine of dependent causality based on the faith and intellect.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, Hakamaya expands the meaning of the term *hongaku* thought to include not only indigenous anti-Buddhist elements in Buddhist history, but also non-Buddhist indigenous ideas that have influenced such anti-Buddhist elements within Buddhism. These are not restricted to Japan but are also to be found in India and China. According to Hakamaya, Buddhism becomes true Buddhism when it criticizes *hongaku* thought in this very broad sense.

Hakamaya’s redefinition of *hongaku* thought has close parallels to Matsumoto’s treatment of the doctrine of *tathāgata-garbha*, and in fact was clearly influenced by it. But unlike Matsumoto, who tries to clarify the fundamental ideas of Buddhism, Hakamaya’s main interest is to criticize tendencies in Japan. This is why he focuses on *hongaku* thought rather than the doctrine of *tathāgata-garbha*.

Both Hakamaya and Matsumoto are specialists in Tibetan Buddhism who studied under Yamaguchi Zuihō, Japan’s foremost Tibetologist. In the sense that Yamaguchi criticizes Buddhism in East Asia from the standpoint of Tibetan Buddhism, the Critical Buddhism of Hakamaya and Matsumoto may be considered a further development of Yamaguchi’s position.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE PHILOSOPHICAL LEVEL

The term “critical” in Critical Buddhism derives from the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), who referred to the philosophy of Descartes as a “critical philosophy” to contrast it with his own “topical philosophy.” Hakamaya, in contrast, sets out to criticize topical philosophy from the critical standpoint. For him, the “critical” represents true Buddhism, and the “topical” standpoint corresponds to *hongaku* thought. His support of the Cartesian critical attitude shows that his approach stands closer to modern rationalism than it does to either pre-modern irrational approaches or postmodern criticism. For those conversant with modern Japanese philosophy, the talk of “topos” or “place”

(*basho*) at once calls to mind the thought of Nishida Kitarō and the Kyoto school. Hakamaya's own critique of the Kyoto school, however, is not aimed at the mainstream figures like Nishida but at the nationalistic attitudes of figures like Umehara Takeshi.

#### THE LEVEL OF SOCIAL CRITICISM

As stated above, one of the sparks that ignited the cause of Critical Buddhism was the critique of social discrimination. Hakamaya's strong interest in social problems is patent. As noted earlier, he has spoken openly against recent Japanese nationalistic tendencies. He rejects the emperor system and related elements in contemporary Japanese society (such as reliance on harmony or *wa*). It is because of this radical social criticism that his activities have not been restricted to the academic world and have created something of a sensation in the wider Buddhist world of Japan.

#### *Matsumoto's Ideas*

Although the range of Hakamaya's activities is very wide, he owes much of his fundamental perspective to Matsumoto Shirō. In contrast to Hakamaya, Matsumoto has contributed a great deal to the study of more fundamental problems of Buddhism. Because of this, and the fact that the range of study is more restricted than that of Hakamaya, his studies have given Buddhist scholarship in Japan a stronger jolt. His main ideas appear in the 1989 book *Pratītyasamutpāda and Emptiness*, while critical essays against the Ch'an tradition in China are more prominent in his 1994 work, *Critical Studies in Zen Thought*. The core of his approach is laid out clearly and concisely in the opening essay of the former book, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist."

According to Matsumoto, Buddhism is based on the principles of no-self and causation, which deny any substance underlying the phenomenal world. The idea of *tathāgata-garbha*, on the contrary, posits a substance (namely, *tathāgata-garbha*) as the basis of the phenomenal world. Theories that allow for such substances he calls *dhātu-vāda* (combining the Sanskrit words for substratum and opinion or theory). He asserts that *dhātu-vāda* is the object that the Buddha criticized in founding Buddhism, and that Buddhism is nothing but unceasing critical activity against any form of *dhātu-vāda*.

Matsumoto's idea clearly falls within the tradition of the Madhyamaka school in India and the dGe lugs school in Tibet, and in this respect

represents a highly orthodox interpretation of Buddhist philosophy. The reason it caused such a sensation among Buddhist scholars is rather due to his radical criticism of the whole of the East Asian Buddhist tradition—including, of course, Buddhist scholarship in Japan—for tacitly assuming the orthodoxy of *tathāgata-garbha* or Buddha-nature theory. In this sense, his criticism represents a fundamental challenge to close the gap in understanding between Tibetan and East Asian traditions of Buddhism.

*Responses to Critical Buddhism*

As noted earlier, supporters of the efforts of Hakamaya and Matsumoto include a number of their colleagues at Komazawa University.<sup>7</sup> In particular, Itō Takatoshi and Ishii Shūdō have composed major works under their influence.<sup>8</sup> Itō, a specialist in Chinese Buddhism, agrees that Chinese Buddhism is dominated by the characteristics of the *dhātu-vāda* owing to the influence of Taoist philosophy. Ishii is a specialist of Chinese Ch’an history who has also studied the relationship between Chinese Ch’an and Dōgen. While he is critical of Hakamaya’s ideas in some respects, the influence of Hakamaya and Matsumoto is apparent in his critique of Chinese Ch’an thought and in the importance he attaches to the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*.

One of the most radical opponents of Critical Buddhism is Tsuda Shin’ichi, a specialist in esoteric Buddhism who insists that Buddhism does allow for something similar to a substance grounding the phenomenal world.<sup>9</sup> In taking issue with Matsumoto, Tsuda admits to taking the standpoint of *dhātu-vāda*, claiming in effect, “I am a *dhātu-vādin*.”<sup>10</sup> We may also mention here Ueda Shizuteru, one of the principal successors of the Kyoto school, who criticizes Hakamaya’s interpretation of the *Shōbōgenzō* and claims that the “Genjō kōan” fascicle presents the final position of the *Shōbōgenzō*.<sup>11</sup>

MY PARTICIPATION IN THE PROBLEM OF CRITICAL BUDDHISM

In my own written work, I have made mention several times of the issues raised by Critical Buddhism, though without taking them up in any systematic way. The first mention dates from a 1988 essay that attempted a critical survey of the history of studies on Japanese Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> My main point was that Buddhist studies before and during World War II had strong ties to Japanese nationalism and that this fact prevented scholars

from studying the doctrinal problems of Japanese Buddhism objectively. On the one hand, I took a positive attitude to the criticisms of Hakamaya as a rejection of the facile nationalistic praise found in Japanese Buddhism. On the other hand, I questioned his ideas for leaving the impression of negating the whole of Japanese Buddhism. As an example, I mentioned the idea of *sansen sōmoku shikkai jōbutsu* 山川草木悉皆成仏 (mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees all attain Buddhahood), an idea praised by Umehara Takeshi and other nationalists and criticized as such by Hakamaya. My complaint there against Hakamaya was that he had not made the historical development of the idea sufficiently clear in his work.

Hakamaya responded to my criticism in detail in the preface of his 1989 book. His principal counterargument was that my attitude was too moderate to allow me to take part in the critique of social problems outside the academic world. Once again, he reiterated the problem of *sansen sōmoku shikkai jōbutsu*. I took up this question directly in my next book,<sup>13</sup> but did not, and have not, responded to his criticism of my moderate attitude, failing to see why moderate attitudes should necessarily be morally inferior to radical ones.

In a 1991 essay on medieval Tendai and *hongaku* thought,<sup>14</sup> I gave a positive evaluation of his criticism of *hongaku* thought for opening up a new perspective on the question. At the same time, I criticized his definition of *hongaku* thought as too broad to be useful for the study of the development of the idea. In addition, I posed some questions about the appropriateness of the three points of his definition of *hongaku* thought.

Hakamaya treated Hōnen and Myōe in his 1992 book, locating Hōnen on the side of the anti-*hongaku* thought and Myōe on the side of *hongaku* thought. I attacked the idea as simplistic,<sup>15</sup> noting that Myōe's critique of Hōnen, *Zaijarin*, followed Myōe's criticism that the uselessness of practice taught in the contemporary Kegon school was similar to *hongaku* thought. Myōe's criticism of Hōnen made a similar point. This demonstrates the problem with counterpositioning Myōe and Hōnen on the question of *hongaku* thought.

I also discussed Matsumoto's ideas in an essay on methodological problems of Buddhist studies.<sup>16</sup> I agreed with Matsumoto's criticism of the so-called objectivity of Buddhist studies. As for his criticism of the *tathāgata-garbha* theory, I find myself sympathetic with the sincerity of his intentions, although there are certain points with which I continue to

disagree. In my view, the standpoint of no-self that negates the *dhātu* is a standpoint that views the *dhātu* as a form of a negation. The very negation of the idea reconfirms the almost innate stubbornness with which it keeps appearing and reappearing in Buddhism. Because it rejects the solid foundation of a *dhātu*, the standpoint of no-self and emptiness tends to have an unsettling effect, with the result that efforts are made to find some way to counter the negation and restore the *dhātu*. This unsettling quality of the Buddhist standpoint, as I see it, has been a dynamic force in the history of Buddhism's development. In this context I have also proposed the idea of approaching Buddhism as a "method," to which I return at the conclusion of my remarks.

#### MY VIEW OF CRITICAL BUDDHISM

I am prepared neither to join camp with Critical Buddhists nor to reject it out of hand, but I do see the benefit of examining the questions they raise and feel that they will help deepen our understanding of Buddhism. In particular, I should like to focus on four points: the interpretation of Dōgen's philosophy and *hongaku* thought, the evaluation of Chinese Ch'an, the evaluation of native or indigenous ways of thinking, and an alternative to Critical Buddhism that I call "Buddhism as a method."

#### *Dōgen and Hongaku Thought*

Hakamaya and others have taken the tenth "question-and-answer" of the "Bendōwa" as a starting point and from there conclude that Dōgen's main intent was to criticize *hongaku* thought. This reading in turn led to the "discovery" of the value of the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*. The first problem to be examined, then, is whether or not this particular question-and-answer is the criticism of *hongaku* thought that Hazama and others claims it is.

He Yan-sheng recently published an essay in which he asserts that the object of the criticism of the tenth question-and-answer is not *hongaku* thought in Japan but the Hung-chou and the Ho-tse schools in the Chinese Ch'an tradition.<sup>17</sup> To support his interpretation, he points out that Dōgen cites the terms *reichi* 靈知 (spiritual intellect) or *reishō* 靈性 (spiritual nature) as used by the opponents whom he criticizes. Criticism against the *reichi* theory can also be found in the "Sokushin zebutsu" fascicle. While these terms are rarely found in the literature of *hongaku*

thought in the Japanese Tendai school before Dōgen, it is well known that Tsung-mi (780–841) of the Chinese Ho-tse school often used the term *ling-chih* (*reichi*). This raises a serious doubt concerning the view that the object of Dōgen’s criticism is the *hongaku* thought of Japanese Tendai.

I would also draw attention to the *Jisshū yōdō ki* of Enni (1202–1280),<sup>18</sup> a work that surveys the doctrines of the ten sects of Japanese Buddhism—the six sects in Nara plus the Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo, and Zen sects—and asserts the superiority of the Zen sect. In this work Enni mentions the theory of *reichi* as characteristic of the Zen sect, and asserts that from the standpoint of the Zen sect, practice is unnecessary in that sentient beings have no evil desires and are already enlightened. This claim seems to be the target of Dōgen’s criticism. It is not possible for Dōgen to have read the *Jisshū yōdō ki* before he wrote the “Bendōwa,” because the latter was composed in 1231, whereas Enni sailed to China in 1225 and only returned to Japan in 1241. It is possible, however, that some of the advocates of Zen asserted similar ideas, and that Dōgen was trying to counter such a tendency.

In any event, it is by no means as certain as it may seem at first blush that Dōgen’s criticisms were aimed specifically at Tendai *hongaku* thought, and still less at *hongaku* thought in general as Hakamaya asserts. To make any claims about Dōgen’s intentions, it is important to locate the object of his criticism as clearly and precisely as possible.

As for the term “*hongaku* thought” itself, Peter Gregory uses it to characterize Tsung-mi’s ideas.<sup>19</sup> It is true that Tsung-mi used the term *hongaku* as a key term in his philosophical system, and it is not inappropriate to apply it to his philosophy. But his main idea is not the same as the *hongaku* thought found in Japanese Tendai. Whereas the latter affirms the phenomenal world, Tsung-mi puts the stress on the self-awakening of the *hongaku* or the *reichi*. Such a development took place in Japanese Tendai on a full scale only under the influence of Chinese Ch’an ideas, although it was not absent before then. Because of this difference in their ways of thinking and in their use of the term, I prefer to avoid using the same term, *hongaku* thought, to point to these distinct trends.

As for the issue of the 12-fascicle and 75-fascicle versions of the *Shōbōgenzō*, the rediscovery of the value of the 12-fascicle version represents a significant contribution of Critical Buddhism. That having been said, I am not convinced that this is the only way, let alone the only correct way, to read Dōgen. Interpretations that put the emphasis on the 75-

fascicle version continue to retain their validity. The 75-fascicle version reflects Dōgen's effort to accept and interpret the koans of the Chinese Ch'an tradition. In this respect, Dōgen is a successor to the Ch'an tradition, and it is impossible to say simply that he is critical of it. If the 75-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* is undervalued, there is no way to come to a fair appreciation of the work Dōgen did in the prime of life.

*The Evaluation of Chinese Ch'an*

From the standpoint of Critical Buddhism, Chinese Ch'an is criticized for being a kind of *hongaku* thought on the grounds that it stresses the direct experience of enlightenment and denies the validity of language. Even Ishii Shūdō says that the central idea of Chinese Ch'an is *kenshō* 見性 (seeing one's nature) and *tongō* 頓悟 (sudden awakening). *Kenshō*, he says, points to a return to the original foundation and *tongō* to the accomplishment of the return.<sup>20</sup> I find such interpretations too facile to cover the many phases of Chinese Ch'an.

The first question is whether in fact Chinese Ch'an denies the validity of language. To be sure, *pu li wen-tzu* 不立文字 (*furyū monji*; not using words) is one of the most famous slogans of the Ch'an school. But this does not of itself entitle us to take it literally. The Ch'an tradition requires proper, if not ordinary, expression. This is what Dōgen means by *dōtoku* 道得 (the attainment of the expression).

In daily life words points to things and ideas. We cannot get along without these everyday meanings, but at the same time we recognize that our words reach their limits when it comes to talking about how the world truly is. Nāgārjuna demonstrated in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* how the meanings of words do not necessarily correspond to the facts of the world. This is what he calls "emptiness."

The language of the koan tries to deconstruct the everyday system of the meaning in order to point to the side of the world that our words conceal from us. For this reason, the koan neither denies language nor does it claim to be a method for acquiring a language-transcending truth. It is rather a form of language that tries to open one up to a new way of seeing the world.

An example may help to make this clear. Chapters 70, 71, and 72 of the *Blue Cliff Record* deal with answers of Wei-shan, Wu-feng, and Yün-yen to the question of Pai-chang as to how one speaks "with your throat, mouth, and lips shut." Shutting the throat, mouth, and lips symbolizes

the denial of ordinary language, but it does not refer to the rejection of language as such, since Pai-chang asks each of them to say something. The three monks give quite different answers to the enigmatic question. For example:

Pai-chang: With your throat, mouth, and lips shut, how will you speak?

Wei-shan: Please, Teacher, you speak instead.

Pai-chang: I don't refuse to speak to you, but I fear that (if I did) in the future I would be bereft of descendants.<sup>21</sup>

Although Wei-shan's words "Please, Teacher, you speak instead" seem to avoid Pai-chang's question, it is, in truth, an answer with which he tries to speak with his throat, mouth, and lips shut. Both Pai-chang's question and Wei-shan's answer have to do with a deconstruction of the language of daily life, not with the elimination of language altogether. Quite the contrary, Chinese Ch'an puts great stress on language, though always in such a way as to avoid confusion with our ordinary, everyday way of using words.

The next question is whether Chinese Ch'an is a type of *hongaku* thought based upon *tathāgata-garbha* or Buddha-nature theory. No doubt the Ch'an tradition presupposes the notion of Buddha-nature, but this is not to say that it simply affirms it. Consider, for example, the "Busshō" fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*, where Dōgen mentions many Chinese koans that treat Buddha-nature. We find that most koans take the form of an affirmation of Buddha-nature followed by its denial. The typical example is the koan by Chau-chou of the Buddha-nature of a dog. A monk asks Chao-chou whether a dog has the Buddha-nature, and Chao-chou answers both "yes" and "no" on different occasions. "Yes" seems to be the ordinary answer on the basis of the theory of Buddha-nature; upon further reflection, this answer seems too "easy." When Chao-chou gives the answer "No," he gives as his reason the ineluctable fact of *karma-vijñāna* (fundamental influences of no-consciousness that arouse desires), which impede the advance toward enlightenment. Whatever cannot attain enlightenment because of the *karma-vijñāna* would have to be said not to have the Buddha-nature. In this way, Ch'an makes the point that the affirmation of Buddha-nature is something that requires deep self-reflection.

The dispute over the *tathāgata-garbha* or Buddha-nature between Critical Buddhism and its opponents seems to be concentrated on the question of whether the *tathāgata-garbha* or Buddha-nature “exists” or not. It seems to me that the more important question is to clarify what the words mean.

*The Evaluation of Native or Indigenous Ways of Thinking*

As stated above, Critical Buddhists have criticized indigenous ways of thought and forms of Buddhism like *hongaku* thought that have come under their influence on the grounds that the aim of Buddhism is to criticize such ways of thinking. But Hakamaya fails to clearly demonstrate why indigenous modes of thought need to be rejected. In his article “*Tathatā* as Topos,”<sup>22</sup> Hakamaya makes a contrast in terms of brain physiology:

{	thinking with the right half of the brain	{	topical philosophy <i>hongaku</i> thought
{	thinking with the left half of the brain	{	critical philosophy Buddhism

It is impossible to arrive at the conclusion that Buddhism is correct and *hongaku* thought is wrong on the basis of this model. On the contrary, *hongaku* thought seems to have the same importance to Buddhism that the right side of the brain has to the left.

If anything, I feel the need for a closer examination of indigenous elements at work in Buddhist sects in Japan. Buddhism exists in Japan not merely as a system of individual faith and philosophy, but also as a complex of sects hierarchically structured and wielding considerably economic power. Most lay believers belong to this scheme by virtue of the traditional *danka* system and come in contact with Buddhism through funerals and memorial services which in turn provide the main source of financial support for the temples. Funerals and memorial services incorporate a great many indigenous elements, and to reject them would be tantamount to undermining the economic base of Japanese Buddhist institutions.

It was Keizan Jōkin (1268–1325) who first introduced native elements into the doctrines and ceremonies of the Sōtō sect, and thus developed the socioeconomic power of the sect. In this way, indigenous

elements came to be very important for Sōtō Zen as well as other Buddhist sects. What do the Critical Buddhists make of this situation? Were all the indigenous elements to disappear, the Sōtō sect would disappear with it. If Critical Buddhism is to take a clear position with regard to the Sōtō sect, they must address this question directly.

*Buddhism as a Method*

One of the great achievements of Critical Buddhism is that it has challenged the tradition of objective, value-free, positivistic Buddhist studies. The main concern of religion is not with objective facts of the outside world but with a way of life. Critical Buddhism is right to have insisted on this point, but it is inconsistent to turn around then and insist on the objectivity of their historical and doctrinal claims without falling into the very objectivism they set out to criticize.

In order to avoid this pitfall and lend greater flexibility to the spirit of Critical Buddhism, I propose a new approach to Buddhist studies that I call “Buddhism as a method.”<sup>23</sup> It aims to understand Buddhism not as a fixed system but as a perspective from which to reflect on life and culture. The expression “Buddhism as a method” derives from the idea of studying “Asia as a method” proposed by Takeuchi Yoshimi, and “China as a method” proposed by Mizoguchi Yūzō.<sup>24</sup> Reflecting on the invasion of Asia by Japan, Takeuchi concluded that it resulted from a misguided form of modernization. In studying Asian countries that tried to struggle against the imperialism and colonialism of Western countries and Japan, he was struck by what seemed to him a new type of modernization different from that of the West. This led him to argue that Japan should abandon its adoration of the West and adopt a new approach towards its neighboring Asian lands. This rethinking he called “Asia as a method”—that is, a method for thinking about the world and the direction of history.

Takeuchi’s approach made more sense when Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai were at the height of their power in China and when Gandhi and Nehru were active in promoting their ideals in India. But when these countries reached the limit of their development in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea lost its persuasive power. Mizoguchi stepped in at this point to advance the idea by advocating what he called “China as a method.”<sup>25</sup> Observing that the study of China in Japan had been governed by the vested interests of Japan rather than by “China as it is,” he proposed studying China as an independent cultural system, and then envisioning the world

as a collection of such independent cultures. In this way, the study of China became a method for reimagining the world.

Even though Mizoguchi viewed cultures a fair share more dispassionately than Takeuchi was able to, his position is not entirely satisfactory, in that it lacks the recognition that in studying a culture other than one's own, perfect impartiality is impossible. As I reflected on the attempts of Takeuchi and Mizoguchi, it occurred to me that we might broaden our perspective on Buddhism and consider it as a "method" along similar lines—namely, as a method to study Japanese culture. As a religion of foreign origins, Buddhism provides us with a perspective from which to see Japanese culture from the outside, as it were, and hence to combat ethnocentric or nationalistic views of culture. In addition, given the wide range of Buddhisms to be found through Asia, the study of Buddhism can serve as an effective means for taking a broader view of other Asian cultures, one unaffected by presumptions of cultural superiority. Finally, envisioning Buddhism as a "method" can also aid scholars in the attempt to look at Buddhism without the distortions of sectarian and doctrinal bias. As I see it, such an approach holds out more promise than the tack taken by Critical Buddhism.