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Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism

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Contents

thought," to use the shorter expression.[4] But there has been little consensus as to how that importance should be understood and evaluated. Periodically, debates over this subject have burst the confines of Tendai studies to enliven the usually staid world of academic Buddhism in Japan with heated controversy. At issue is how the original enlightenment discourse was related to broader trends in Japanese religion and culture. One school of thought has found in notions of original enlightenment an expression, couched in Buddhistic terms, of a pre-Buddhist, archaic Japanese mentality or psychological orientation characterized by the affirmation of nature and accommodation to phenomenal realities. This tendency to harmonize with outer reality is sometimes said to have originated in primitive responses to Japan's scenic beauty and mild climate, with its orderly progression of the seasons, and even to hold the key to healing the rift between humans and the natural world said to have precipitated the ecological problems of the West.[5] More recently, another group of scholars has made original enlightenment thought the target of a scathing critique. These are the exponents of the intellectual movement known as "critical Buddhism" *(hihan Bukkyō)*, of which more will be said in the next chapter. Critical Buddhism charges that notions of original enlightenment introduce into Buddhism the non-Buddhist concept of an *ātman* or metaphysical substrate, subverting the normative Buddhist teaching that all things are empty of independent self-essence. Moreover, despite its superficial semblance of egalitarianism, the claim that all phenomena are enlightened inherently serves to sacralize the given order and thus legitimates social inequities. Notions of original enlightenment, say the critical Buddhists, have served to bolster the emperor system, wartime imperial aggression, and uncritical, self-glorifying Japanism.[6]

These rival polemics have overlapped and interacted with an older controversy about original enlightenment thought, one that concerns its relationship to the new Pure Land, Zen, and Nichiren Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). These new movements emerged at a time when original enlightenment thought was flourishing, and the writings of their founders contain some points of similarity with medieval Tendai *hongaku* doctrine. What exactly was the relationship between the two? This essay represents an attempt to understand the Tendai original enlightenment discourse, to locate it in its medieval context, and to reconceive the problem of its relation to the new Kamakura Buddhism. First, however, it will be necessary to provide a fairly detailed background. Where did medieval Tendai original enlightenment thought come from? And what are the particular problems—textual and methodological—that confront the researcher in this area? These are the issues addressed in this opening chapter.

A Genealogy of Original Enlightenment Thought

The original enlightenment thought that characterized medieval Japanese Tendai Buddhism emerged in the latter part of the Heian period (794–1185). It had antecedents in the Buddhist traditions of the Asian continent and in those—particularly Tendai and Shingon—of early Heian Japan. Here, only the intellectual influences contributing to the emergence of medieval Tendai *hongaku* thought will be outlined; its institutional and social contexts will be addressed later.[7]

Continental Antecedents: The Awakening of Faith, *Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai*

Early references to "original enlightenment" (Ch. *pen-chüeh*, Kor. *pon'gak*) occur in the sinitic apocryphal sūtras *Chin-kang san-mei ching* (Sūtra of adamantine absorption) and that version of the *Jen-wang ching* (Sūtra of the benevolent kings) said to have been translated by Amoghavajra (705–774); however, the most influential early source for the term "original enlightenment" is the treatise *Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun* or *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna.*[8] Traditionally attributed to the Indian master Aśvaghoṣa, the *Awakening of Faith* is now generally thought to be a sixth-century Chinese apocryphon[9] and represents part of a larger attempt on the part of Chinese Buddhists to clarify the relation between the mind, understood as originally pure, and ignorance.[10] It synthesizes two influential streams of Mahāyāna thought, one concerning the intrinsic nature of enlightenment, and the other, the source of delusion and suffering. The first was expressed as the doctrine of the *tathâgata-garbha*, the originally pure, enlightened mind intrinsic to all sentient beings, conceptualized as the "womb" or "embryo" of Buddhahood. In ordinary worldlings, it is the potential for enlightenment; in Buddhas, the fully realized truth or *dharma-kāya*. In China, *tathâgata-garbha* thought would develop into a major Mahāyāna tradition, ranking beside those of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. It reflects an attempt to clarify the ontological basis upon which ordinary worldlings can realize Buddhahood.

However, emphasis on an innate basis for enlightenment gave rise to the question of how ignorance arises in the first place. Within the Indian Mahāyāna, this question had been addressed most explicitly by the Yogācāra doctrine of the *ālaya-vijñāna* or "store consciousness." This level of mind is imagined as the repository in which all past experiences, wholesome and unwholesome, pure and defiled, are deposited as "seeds" *(bīja)* that shape future deeds. Ignorance has its source in the defiled seeds that have accumulated in the store consciousness since the inconceivably distant past. Only their thorough extirpation can transform and purify consciousness, a process thought to require many successive lifetimes—three incalculable aeons *(asaṃkhyeya-kalpas)* being a common

estimate. Many Chinese Buddhists of the Sui (581–617) and T'ang (618–907) dynasties were dismayed by so remote a vision of liberation and sought to reimagine it in more accessible ways.[11] In approaching this problem, the *Awakening of Faith* subsumes the *ālaya-vijñāna* concept within that of the *tathâgata-garbha* by redefining the former as the none other than the one pure mind as perceived through unenlightened consciousness. The treatise begins by positing two inseparable aspects of the one mind: the mind as suchness or the mind in terms of the absolute, and the mind as arising and perishing (that is, the *ālaya-vijñāna*). These two aspects correspond respectively to the ultimate truth *(paramārtha-satya)* and conventional truth *(saṃvṛti-satya)* in Madhyamaka thought. Because the mind as arising and perishing is grounded in the mind as suchness or the *dharma-kāya,* it is said to possess the aspect of "original enlightenment," the "essence of the mind free from [deluded] thoughts."[12] However, because of not realizing this identity with suchness, deluded thoughts emerge; this state is called nonenlightenment *(pu-chüeh).* Through contemplative practice, one is able to realize that deluded thoughts have no real status; they are in essence none other than the mind as suchness, which is innately pure. The process of cultivation by which one arrives at such insight is termed "acquired" or "actualized" enlightenment *(shih-chüeh).* As the text says, "Grounded on the original enlightenment is nonenlightenment. And because of nonenlightenment, the process of actualization of enlightenment can be spoken of."[13] When enlightenment is actualized, one realizes that it is identical to "original enlightenment," the mind of suchness that one has possessed all along. Thus, in the *Awakening of Faith,* "original enlightenment" is posited in distinction to "actualized enlightenment"; it represents the inherence of suchness in the deluded mind and thus the ever-present possibility of transforming that mind into the mind of awakening.

Via the *Awakening of Faith,* the notion of original enlightenment exerted a formative influence on the development of Chinese and Korean Buddhist thought. It became especially important in the Hua-yen school, which—in addition to its central scripture, the *Hua-yen ching* (*Avataṃsaka-sūtra,* Flower Ornament Sūtra)—takes the *Awakening of Faith* as a basic text. The concept undergoes development in the thought of Chih-yen (602–668) and Fa-tsang (643–712), counted as the second and third Hua-yen patriarchs, and of later Hua-yen masters such as Ch'eng-kuan (738–839) and Tsung-mi (780–841), both of whom brought Ch'an elements to bear in their interpretations.[14]

Japanese *hongaku* thought would be indebted not only to the specific category of "original enlightenment" set forth in the *Awakening of Faith* and developed in its commentaries, but more broadly to the great totalistic systems of Chinese Buddhist thought, especially those of Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai, which envision the world as a cosmos in which all

things, being empty of independent existence, interpenetrate and encompass one another. These systems are both ontological, in explaining all concrete phenomena *(shih)* as nondual with truth or principle *(li),* and soteriological, in showing liberation to consist of insight into this unity.

Hua-yen thought sees all phenomena as expressions of an originally pure and undifferentiated one mind. As Robert Gimello has expressed it: "[T]he full diversity of sentient experience and the experienced world—the subjective and the objective, the true and the false, the pure and the defiled, the latent and the manifest—is seen to rest upon or to grow from a common noetic source."[15] Hua-yen thinkers developed new theories of dependent origination *(pratītya-samutpāda, yüan-ch'i),* such as "dharma realm origination" *(fa-chieh yüan-ch'i), "tathâgata-garbha* origination" *(ju-lai-tsang yüan-ch'i),* or "nature origination" *(hsing-ch'i),* to clarify how the one mind manifests itself as the phenomenal world.[16] Often cited in Japanese *hongaku*-related literature is Fa-tsang's formulation of the two aspects of suchness. In his commentary on the *Awakening of Faith* and elsewhere, Fa-tsang interpreted the two aspects of the one mind as suchness that is absolute or unchanging *(pu-pien)* and suchness that accords with conditions *(sui-yüan),* equating them with principle *(li)* and phenomena *(shih),* respectively.[17] Suchness in its unchanging, quiescent mode is the one pure mind; in its dynamic mode, responding to the ignorance that is the condition of sentient beings, it manifests the phenomenal world. Notions of origination from the mind or suchness are often illustrated with the metaphor of water and waves that occurs in the *Awakening of Faith:* when the water of true suchness or principle *(li)* is stirred by the winds of ignorance, the waves of differentiated phenomena *(shih)* arise, but the waves are no different in substance from the water.[18] Origination from suchness stands in contrast to both the classic "twelve-linked" model of dependent origination as the arising of birth, old age, sickness, and death in dependence upon ignorance, craving, and so forth, and the Yogācāra model in which differentiated phenomena arise from seeds stored within the *ālaya-vijñāna* and are independent of suchness. Both these understandings see the empirical world as inherently delusory, something that must be literally undone if liberation is to be achieved. The teaching of origination from suchness in effect grounds the arising of phenomena in the one pure mind and thus obliterates any ontological distinction between them. It is only because of adventitious nonenlightenment that deluded thoughts appear, producing the distinction of subject and object and thus leading to the notion of self and other as real entities, and to craving, attachment, and enmeshment in samsaric misery. Liberation lies in discerning that the differentiated phenomena of the samsaric world are, in their essence, no different from the one mind and thus originally pure.

The nonduality of principle *(li)* and phenomena *(shih)* as set forth in much of Hua-yen thought is heavily weighted toward the former. The mind is original, pure, and true, while phenomena are in contrast unreal, arising only as the one mind is perceived through human ignorance. A different sort of totalistic vision occurs in the T'ien-t'ai school, whose central scripture is the *Lotus Sūtra,* and which is deeply rooted in Madhyamaka thinking concerning the nonduality of absolute and conventional truth. "Original enlightenment" does not appear as a category in early Chinese T'ien-t'ai, nor was the *Awakening of Faith* an important inspiration for early T'ien-t'ai thinkers. Nonetheless, the T'ien-t'ai tradition represents a crucial antecedent to the development of Japanese *hongaku* thought. In contrast to Hua-yen emphasis on all things arising from the mind, early T'ien-t'ai—as well as the later T'ien-t'ai thought of Ssu-ming Chih-li (960–1028), who attempted to counter Hua-yen influences—denies that the mind is a pure, undifferentiated cosmic principle from which all things arise. In the words of Chih-i (538–597), regarded as the founder of the T'ien-t'ai school: "One may say neither that the one mind is prior and all dharmas posterior nor that all dharmas are prior and the mind posterior. . . . All one can say is that the mind is all dharmas and all dharmas are the mind. Therefore the relationship is neither vertical nor horizontal, neither the same nor different."[19]

For Chih-i, phenomena do not "arise" from principle. Principle is that form and mind are always nondual and mutually inclusive *(hu-chü);* the mutual encompassing of good and evil, delusion and enlightenment, is the "true aspect" *(shih-hsiang)* of all things. This emphasis on the mutually inclusive nature of dharmas and the mind can be seen in the structure of the threefold truth or threefold contemplation that lies at the heart of Chih-i's interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Indian Madhyamaka tradition.[20] It will be discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and 4. In Chih-i's system of meditation, one contemplates all phenomena from the three perspectives of emptiness *(k'ung),* conventional existence *(chia),* and the middle *(chung).* By contemplating the phenomena of conventional existence as arising through dependent origination, one discerns that they are empty of self-nature; this move, termed "entering emptiness from conventional existence," frees one from attachment to samsaric existence. By a reverse discernment, "[re]entering conventional existence from emptiness," one is freed from attachment to reified notions of emptiness and is able to reengage the myriad phenomena of the world in a soteriologically effective way. And by contemplation of the middle, one gains both discernments simultaneously, the perspectives of "emptiness" and "conventional existence" being mutually illuminated but also negated as one-sided extremes. The status of "conventional existence" as the point from which one begins contemplation, and to which one "returns" for bodhisattva practice, reflects T'ien-t'ai emphasis on

concrete particulars as instantiating ultimate truth: "Of every form and fragrance, there is none that is not the Middle Way."[21]

T'ien-t'ai emphasis on the mutual inclusiveness of mind and all dharmas obviously ruled out Hua-yen-style notions of a primal purity. "Mind" as the object of contemplation was for Chih-i the deluded thought-moment of ordinary worldlings, which he saw as naturally endowed *(hsing-chü)* with the ten dharma realms from hell to Buddhahood. In T'ien-t'ai thought, even the single thought-moment of the Buddha is endowed with these ten realms and thus continues to possess evil as an innate, though nonmanifested, potential *(hsing-o, shōaku).*[22] Thus purity and impurity are always mutually encompassing. Where Hua-yen develops a discourse of origination from the one pure mind *(yüan-ch'i lun, engi ron),* T'ien-t'ai maintains that all dharmas manifest the true aspect of reality *(shih-hsiang lun, jissō ron),* or that the mind by nature is endowed with all dharmas *(hsing-chü-shuo, shōgu setsu).*

Hua-yen Buddhism had not yet taken shape as an independent tradition in Chih-i's time; his critique of the position that held the mind to be prior to the dharmas was aimed rather at the mind-only doctrines of the Ti-lun and She-lun schools, which exerted a formative influence on Hua-yen.[23] However, when Hua-yen began to emerge as a rival tradition and sectarian consciousness gained strength, Chih-i's rejection of an originally pure mind prior to the arising of the dharmas became an axis along which his later followers would define T'ien-t'ai orthodoxy, especially over and against Hua-yen. The sixth T'ien-t'ai patriarch Chan-jan (711–782) drew on the *Awakening of Faith* and also borrowed key Hua-yen terms such as "mind only" and "nature origination"—but he appropriated them, vis-à-vis a largely Hua-yen audience, in the service of a T'ien-t'ai position that "take(s) issue with a one-sided [notion] of a clean and pure suchness."[24] For example, in his treatise *Chin-kang pei* (The diamond scalpel), Chan-jan used Fa-tsang's concept of "suchness according with conditions" to assert his famous doctrine that insentient beings have the Buddha nature. If all phenomena are none other than suchness, he argued, then it becomes meaningless to say that sentient beings have the Buddha nature but insentient beings do not.[25] With this doctrine, Chan-jan asserted the superior inclusivity of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism. In its distinctively Japanese incarnation as "the realization of Buddhahood by grasses and trees" *(sōmoku jōbutsu),* the doctrine of the Buddha nature of insentient beings would exert a profound influence on both Tendai thought and Japanese Buddhism generally. After Chan-jan's time, his use of Hua-yen terminology and concepts tended increasingly to be interpreted by some among his followers in light of *tathâgata-garbha* notions of an originally pure mind. This led, during the Sung dynasty, to doctrinal conflict between the so-called mountain-school *(shan-chia)* and off-mountain *(shan-wai)* factions within T'ien-tai Buddhism. The mountain

school, led by Chih-li (960–1028), identified themselves as the champions of an orthodox T'ien-t'ai definition of "mind" as the mind of the ordinary worldling, over and against the off-mountain side who advocated a more "Hua-yen"-style interpretation in light of notions of an originally pure *tathâgata-garbha*.[26]

In his study of the antecedents of Japanese original enlightenment thought, Tamura Yoshirō has characterized the Hua-yen totalistic vision as "dynamic," in that it explains how the one mind, by encountering conditions, manifests the myriad phenomena. T'ien-t'ai, on the other hand, he characterizes as "concrete," in that form and mind are mutually identified in every phenomenal particular. Hua-yen, Tamura says, moves from *li* to *shih*, emphasizing the exfoliation of particulars from the one mind, while T'ien-t'ai moves from *shih* to *li*, stressing that each particular as it stands encompasses the true aspect of reality.[27] Though their approaches differ, the two traditions addressed similar issues, and the similarity increased with mutual exchanges and borrowings from the latter T'ang period into the Sung. Both T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen can be seen as attempts to reconceive Indian Mahāyāna insights about the empty and dependent nature of the dharmas and express them in terms of Chinese intellectual categories such as principle *(li)* and phenomena *(shih)*, essence *(t'i)* and function *(yung)*, or nature *(hsing)* and outward form *(hsiang)*.[28] This involved a significant shift away from the apophatic language of Indian Madhyamaka—which maintains, in its extreme wariness about the limitations of language, that truth can be verbally illuminated only by stating what it is not—to more kataphatic modes of expression. These new modes attempt neither to reimport into Buddhism notions of metaphysical essence nor to claim that there can be adequate verbal descriptions for truth, but to employ positive language in soteriologically effective ways. Moreover, since principle and phenomena are seen as nondual, and this nonduality is expressed in every particular form, the Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai totalistic visions also entailed a reconception of the empirical world. No longer was it the product of delusion or a place of suffering to be escaped, but the very realm where truth is to be realized and liberation achieved. This reconception was critical to the sinification of Buddhism and exerted an immense impact on the subsequent development of Buddhism in East Asia.[29]

Japanese Beginnings: Saichō and Kūkai

Original enlightenment thought in Japan may be said properly to have begun in the time of Saichō (767–822) and Kūkai (774–835). These two men are revered as the founders, respectively, of the Japanese Tendai and Shingon schools, which rose to prominence during the Heian period.[30] The "six schools" of Buddhism in the preceding Nara

period (710–794) were largely under state control, and their temples were located in the capital at Nara. In contrast, the monastic centers established by Kūkai on Mt. Kōya and by Saichō on Mt. Hiei stood at some remove from the new capital of Heian-kyō and enjoyed greater independence from the government. Both Tendai and Shingon introduced remarkable innovations in doctrine and practice. Over and against the gradualist models of liberation upheld by the Nara schools, they regarded enlightenment as accessible in the near future, perhaps even in this lifetime.

Kūkai must be acknowledged as the first Japanese Buddhist to engage seriously the concept of original enlightenment. Heir to a continental tradition of Hua-yen and Chen-yen (Jpn. Shingon) interactions, Kūkai ranked Hua-yen (Jpn. Kegon) just below the esoteric teachings in his doctrinal classification of the "ten stages of mind" and drew heavily on Hua-yen thought in his systematization of the esoteric teachings.[31] In particular, he drew extensively on the *Shih Mo-ho-yen lun* (Treatise interpreting the Mahāyāna), said to be Nāgārjuna's commentary on the *Awakening of Faith* as translated by Vṛddhimata (dates unknown), but probably an eighth-century Korean apocryphon.[32] This treatise relativizes the distinction drawn in the *Awakening of Faith* between the "mind as suchness" and the "mind as arising and perishing" by postulating a third term, the "nondual Mahāyāna" *(pu-erh mo-ho-yen, funi makaen)* in which both are subsumed; Kūkai identified this "nondual Mahāyāna" with the esoteric teachings. The *Shih Mo-ho-yen lun* also elaborates in great detail on "original enlightenment," for example, by dividing it into a number of subcategories.[33] Basic to these is a distinction between "original enlightenment as [both] tainted and pure," and "original enlightenment as clean and pure." The former is very close to the meaning of "original enlightenment" as it appears in the *Awakening of Faith:* the potential for enlightenment inherent in the deluded mind. In the latter sense, however, it is given a more absolute reading, much closer to suchness itself, or to the ontological basis of the nonduality of beings and the Buddha: "The Buddha nature that is original enlightenment encompasses countless merits and neither increases nor decreases. . . . Since the beginningless past, original enlightenment that is clean and pure has not depended on practice, nor is it obtained by the power of another."[34] Kūkai drew especially on this latter usage of "original enlightenment" from the *Shih Mo-ho-yen-lun* and read it in an esoteric light, for example, as the Dharma body of the Tathâgata Vairocana which is one's own nature.[35] Where continental thought concerning "original enlightenment," especially that of Hua-yen tradition, had interpreted this concept in light of the "one mind," in Kūkai's thought, it is linked to the esoteric doctrines of identity with the cosmic Buddha and of realizing Buddhahood with this very body *(sokushin jōbutsu)*.[36] Kūkai's un-