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Review: Ōtani Ei'ichi, Kindai bukkyō to iu shiza: sensō, Ajia, shakaishugi (The Perspective of Modern Buddhism: War, Asia, Socialism) (Perikansha, 2012).

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and polysemy. One apparent paradox then in the intellectual history of twentieth century Japanese Buddhism – considering the tremendous productivity of paper by its scholars – is the limited interaction of its resources with what we might think of as a “global” intellectual society. Klautau’s work provides a splendid stepping stone for potentially reaching out in richer and more stimulating ways to new phases of narrating Japanese Buddhist history and perhaps encouraging it to talk to the world more productively.

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Ōtani Eiichi 大谷栄一

Kindai bukkyō to iu shiza: sensō, Ajia, shakaishugi 近代仏教という視座 – 戦争・アジア・社会主義 (The Perspective of Modern Buddhism: War, Asia, Socialism).

Tokyo: Perikansha, 2012. 294 pp.

In Japan, the study of “modern Buddhism” (*kindai bukkyō*) – which originally meant primarily if not solely Meiji Buddhism – has witnessed several waves in the seven decades since the end of the Asia Pacific War (1941-1945). The undisputed pioneer of the field is Yoshida Kyūichi (1915-2005), whose *Nihon kindai bukkyōshi kenkyū* (Studies in the History of Buddhism in Modern Japan) was the first scholarly work to focus on the “modernistic” – including social and political – aspects of Meiji-era Buddhism (Yoshida 1959). Yoshida was followed in the next several decades by Kashiwahara Yūsen (1916-2002) and Ikeda Eishun (1925-2004), who together comprise what is known in scholarly circles as the “Big Three” of modern Buddhist studies in Japan (see also Kashiwahara 1969 and Ikeda 1976). After a slight lull, a new generation of scholars from both Japan and the West began to emerge in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many of whom working under or alongside Sueki Fumihiko, whose own scholarship had moved from medieval to modern thought. The author of the present volume, Ōtani Eiichi, is unquestionably on the forefront of this recent *kindai bukkyō* boom, and in many respects *Kindai bukkyō to iu shiza* presents a summary of his work over the past decade – and as such provides a fine introduction to the key components of modern Buddhism in the Japanese context.

The book is divided into three sections: 1) “Revisiting Modern Buddhism,” 2) “Modern Buddhism and the Nation-State,” and 3) “Modern Buddhism Beyond Borders,” each of which is divided in turn into three separate chapters.

In the first section, Ōtani begins by providing a critical re-examination of the standard narrative of the “making of modern Buddhism” while elucidating some new perspectives emerging from recent research. In particular, he is critical of the fact that previous scholarship had assumed an *a priori* “Buddhism” that was then subject to “modernization” from the Meiji period. In contrast, Ōtani follows the more recent trend towards focusing on the emergence of categories such as “religion” and “Buddhism” in the modern period. This is followed by a chapter on the emergence and development of “new Buddhism,” including but not limited to the New Buddhist Fellowship (*Shin Bukkyō Dōshikai*), which Ōtani helpfully characterizes as a manifestation of a “youth culture” movement in late Meiji Japan. This initial section of the book is rounded off with a brief examination of a later experiment in “new Buddhism” – the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism (*Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei*), a Buddhist socialist movement founded by Nichiren lay-Buddhist Seno’o Girō (1889-1961). Here Ōtani sets the Youth League into the context of the maelstrom of early Showa, including the growing anti-religious (*han-shukyō*) movements of the day.

The second section of the book is dedicated to exploring the links between modern Buddhism and the nation state. This is a topic that is fundamental, of course, to any study of modern Buddhism in Japan or elsewhere, and it is one that Ōtani has dealt with in other publications. After critically examining the public role of Buddhists by way of the work of José Casanova, he turns his attention to the case of Tanaka Chigaku’s Kokuchūkai, a socially active lay Nichiren movement that flourished in the 1920s. In the final chapter of this section Ōtani flips to the other side of the political coin by describing the pacifist and anti-war arguments of a few twentieth-century Buddhists like Takenaka Shōgen (1867-1945) and Inoue Shūten (1880-1945).

In the third and final section on the “transnational” aspects of modern Japanese Buddhism, Ōtani first discusses the theoretical and practical missionary work of Nichiren priest Takanabe Nittō (1879-1953) before moving into a discussion of the “ultranationalist” Buddhism of Inoue Nisshō (1887-1967), whose Ketsumeidan (Blood Pledge Corps) carried out a number of assassinations of political and business leaders in the early 1930s. The book concludes by returning to the life and work of Seno’o Girō and the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism as an instance of a Buddhist anti-war and anti-fascist perspective.

As noted above, the book works well as a primer to modern Buddhism in Japan, particularly when it comes to understand the various ways in which Buddhists in the early decades of the twentieth-century understood themselves in relation to society and the state. Although repetitive in places – it reads as a series of separate papers

rather than a single narrative, such that several of the figures, including Seno'ō, are re-introduced with virtually identical language on three or four separate occasions – Ōtani covers a wide-range of interlocking “problems” faced by modern Buddhists from late Meiji through early Shōwa (1926-1989).

Although Ōtani asserts early on that modern Buddhism is best approached from a “broad” rather than “narrow” perspective – by which he means a view that takes into account forms of practice and ritual in addition to belief – the rest of the book sticks fairly close to the standard narrative of Buddhist “beliefs” about society, the state, and the world. In the estimation of this reviewer, the author opens up but deigns to fully pursue some important issues of the meaning of belief in relation to practice (or *praxis*) among the various forms of “new Buddhism” that emerged in modern Japan – for instance, the possibility (pursued by a number of socialists) that these categories may collapse into one. The book might also be criticized for sectarian bias, since more than half of the figures dealt with come from the Nichiren tradition, but as someone who has studied the social and political manifestations of modern Buddhism during these tumultuous decades I can attest that Tanaka Chigaku's Nichirenism, in particular, stands out as a dominant force in Japanese Buddhist modernism, producing figures as diverse as Seno'ō Girō, Inoue Nisshō, Kita Ikki (1883-1937) and Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933). Having said that, and while realizing that the book does not intend to be comprehensive, it would have been nice to see more attention paid to some of the “alternative” forms of modernism emerging from the Shin Ōtani and Honganji sects during this same period. And finally, as at least one other reviewer has noted, the book would have greatly benefitted from a concluding chapter in which the author might have reflected more deeply upon the implications of his work.

On the whole, the book is highly recommended, especially for those with some background in Japanese Buddhism or modern Japanese history but little familiarity with modern Japanese Buddhism.

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