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James Shields

Bucknell University, jms089@bucknell.edu

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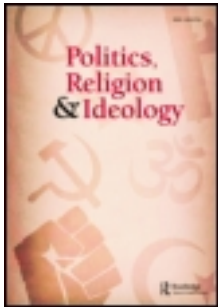
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James Mark Shields^{ab}

^a Bucknell University

^b International Research Center for Japanese Studies

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Zen and the Art of Treason: Radical Buddhism in Meiji Era (1868–1912) Japan

JAMES MARK SHIELDS^{a,b*}

^aBucknell University; ^bInternational Research Center for Japanese Studies

ABSTRACT *In the early decades of the twentieth century, as Japanese society became engulfed in war and increasing nationalism, the majority of Buddhist leaders and institutions capitulated to the status quo. At the same time, there was a stream of ‘resistance’ among a few Buddhist figures, both priests and laity. These instances of progressive and ‘radical Buddhism’ had roots in late Edo-period peasant revolts, the lingering discourse of early Meiji period liberalism, trends within Buddhist reform and modernisation and the emergence in the first decade of the twentieth century of radical political thought, including various forms of socialism and anarchism. This essay analyses the roots of ‘radical Buddhism’ in Japan by analysing the life and work of three distinctive figures: Tarui Tōkichi (1850–1922), Takagi Kenmyō (1864–1914), and Uchiyama Gudō (1874–1911). While noting their differences, I argue these three collective represent both the problems and possibilities of radical Buddhism in an East Asian and specifically Japanese context.*

Modern socialism is a product and a critique of capitalism, but not necessarily of industrialization. [. . .] No society, Japan’s included, that has tried to industrialize in the capitalist mode has failed to generate an indigenous socialist movement. [. . .] In their formative years, they draw on their predecessor and contemporary movements for models of discourse, organization, and action. At the same time, as an indigenous movement, socialism naturally and inevitably borrows traditional (pre-capitalist) sentiments, concepts, practices, and protocols of social criticism and protest, which then are selectively assimilated into and help define the particular national variant of ‘socialism’.¹

In the final decade of the Meiji Period, several events played a significant role in shaping Japanese attitudes towards progressive social activism – and ‘socialism’ in particular. The first of these was the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905. Although on one level the war helped to reignite the patriotic fervour that had swept the nation a decade previous with Japan’s defeat of China, its aftermath also saw a dramatic increase in urban social disruption – typified by the Hibiya Riots of 1905, during mobs in Tokyo expressed their anger over the ‘unfair’ Portsmouth Treaty, signed to end the

*Email: james.shields@bucknell.edu

¹William Theodore De Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur Tiedemann (eds) *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2: 1600 to 2000, Part 2: 1868 to 2000, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 212–213.

conflict.² The spectre of social discord as an inevitable ‘excess of civilisation’ (*bunmei-byō*) had been raised since the 1880s, and now it seemed that the worst fears of conservative ministers and ideologues were coming to pass. In response, the government sought ways to both forestall the more sporadic forms of protest and social activism by implementing ‘preventive’ social policies, while at the same time suppressing the emergence of organised socialism – which they (influenced by European leaders) considered little more than a pretext for chaos and anarchy. There was already precedent for the suppression of socialist organisations in the name of public harmony. In 1900 the government invoked the Public Order and Police Law (which would become the Public Order Preservation Law of early Shōwa) to ban the fledgling Social Democratic Party just two days after it was established.

Things only got worse, in the government’s eyes, in 1906, with riots (again in Tokyo) against a rise in streetcar fares, followed by a rash of strikes throughout the country in the following year. The root cause of these disturbances was not in itself hard to diagnose: the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation that had been taking place since 1900, and which would continue throughout the end of World War I. Another factor, however, frequently noted by both the press and those in power was the spread of education, which had created a class of ‘educated unemployed idlers’.³ An organised socialist movement emerged in the years following the Russo-Japanese War, organising strikes and occasional anti-government demonstrations. After the Red Flag Incident (*akahata jiken*) of 1908 and the High Treason Incident (*taigyaku jiken*) of 1910–1911, the government made further moves to eliminate the ‘plague’ (*yakubyō*) of what one top official, Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922), called ‘social destructionism’ (*shakaihakaishugi*).⁴ In this context, it may come as something of a surprise to realise that a few Buddhists risked life and limb in order to proclaim affiliation with progressive and radical political movements, including socialism and anarchism. And yet this is precisely what happened. In what follows I outline the thought and activities of several of these ‘radical Buddhists’, while providing a historical and theoretical context in which to better understand both their lives and work.

Early Hints of Buddhist(ic) Socialism: The Eastern Socialist Party

While individuals and movements self-consciously advocating ‘Buddhist socialism’ only appear in the late Meiji period, germs of the idea can be traced back to the writings of a few scholars and social activists of the 1880s. One example is the Eastern (or Oriental) Socialist Party (Tōyō Shakaitō), founded by Tarui Tōkichi (1850–1922) in 1882. Though the party was short-lived – setting a precedent for left-wing parties over the next 50 years in being forcibly suppressed by the government within months of its inception – the writings of Tarui and other founding members were, for their day, quite radical, and reveal the tensions of attempting to ‘change the world’ while remaining true to their cultural (and religious) roots.

The draft of the party’s regulations, written by Tarui, contains 17 articles, along with a number of smaller clauses. The first three articles make up the three basic principles on which the Tōyō Shakaitō was founded:

²Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 1.

³Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 177.

⁴Yamagata Aritomo, ‘Shakaihakaishugiron’ in *Yamagata Aritomo ikensho* (Tokyo: Hara shōbō, 1966), pp. 315–316.

1. We will make sincere love (*shin-ai*) the criterion for our words and actions.
2. We will stand on the principle of equality of self and other (*jita byōdō*).
3. Our aim is the greatest welfare (*saidai fukuri*) for the general public.⁵

Here we can see, in addition to general (if vague) ‘socialist’ principles, an explicit link to Buddhist doctrine. The term *jita byōdō*, used here to express a call for social and economic quality, is a traditional Buddhist term meaning ‘equality of self and other in their original nature’ (Sk. *ātma-para-samatā*).⁶ These three founding principles are followed by Article 4, which provides four ‘measures’ (*shudan*) by means of which the party intends to ‘remedy the corrupt practices of the past and destroy the heritage of divisions between rich and poor’: (1) communal ownership of property (*tenbutsu* or *tenmotsu kyōyū*); (2) a cooperative society (*kyōdō shakai*); (3) women’s education; and (4) population control.⁷ Although the ideals presented would be familiar to most European socialists of the day, the specific terms employed are distinctly Buddhist – or at least East Asian in derivation. For instance, the *tenmotsu* in *tenmotsu kyōyū* is a traditional Buddhist term meaning ‘all the living things in the world’ – though in a non-Buddhist context (as *tenbutsu*) it can simply imply ‘all things under heaven’.⁸ While it seems likely that Tarui had in mind Herbert Spencer’s argument against private property in terms of land, here as elsewhere he takes pains to frame the issue in familiar East Asian terminology rather than resort to neologisms or loan words.⁹

Article 5 provides the four ways in which the party intends to expand its message: personal study; speeches; campaigns; books, newspapers, and magazines. Next, Articles 6 and 7 give the party’s ‘oath’ (*meiyaku*), which includes a reiteration of the party’s official name, and opens up to a rather lengthy discourse on their ideals, including explicit links to Buddhist and Daoist doctrine. First, Tarui asserts that the Eastern Socialist Party aligns itself squarely with the ‘tendencies of oriental civilisation’, upon which foundation they will be able to ‘come together with common heart and mind’ to create ‘great clouds that will rain down the blessings of equality upon society’. Of note here is the metaphor of ‘clouds and rain’: *suiten no kumo to nari ichimi no ame to nari*. Within this phrase one finds the four-character set: 一味の雨, which comes directly from the ‘Parable of Medicinal Herbs’ section of the *Lotus Sutra*, where it refers to the universality of the Buddha’s teaching (more specifically of the One Law of the *Lotus Sutra*) and the power of such to lift all beings without exception towards buddhahood.¹⁰ Tarui further writes that as ‘children of the Buddha’ (*bussshi*), party members have a special mandate to look upon the people with compassion. The remaining 10 articles further emphasise the moral foundations and ‘indomitable spirit’ of the party, as well as their openness to various measures on the basis of the Buddhist doctrine of *hōben* or skilful means (Sk. *upāya*).¹¹

Even at this early stage, we see several of the tensions that would haunt such experiments in progressive Buddhism over the next several decades. First was the natural but difficult-to-sustain attempt to ‘indigenise’ socialism by appealing to traditional Asian concepts and ideas; second was the appeal to the East Asian values of peace and harmony, which were

⁵Tarui Tokichi, ‘Tōyō no kyomutō’ in Itoya Hisao and Kishimoto Eitarō (eds) *Nihon shakai undō shishō shi*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1968), p. 129.

⁶*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v., *jita byōdō*.

⁷Tarui, op. cit., p. 130.

⁸*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v., *tenmotsu*.

⁹Spencer discourses on this topic in chapter 9 of his *Social Statics* (1851), ‘The Right to the Use of the Earth’, a work that would have tremendous influence on both modern China and Japan; see Akamatsu Katsumaro, *Nihon shakai undō shi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1952), p. 11.

¹⁰T0262.09.0020b18–b19.

¹¹Tarui, op. cit., pp. 130–132.

frequently accompanied, among early socialists, with an appeal to the Emperor as benevolent protector of the social welfare of the Japanese people. In a public lecture delivered in Nagasaki in January 1882 on the theme of ‘Oriental Nihilism’ (Tōyō no Kyomutō), Tarui invoked the recent assassination of Russia’s Tsar Alexander II to warn that the spectre of nihilism could also reach the shores of Japan. Though he denounced the nihilists for their infernal crime of regicide, he appealed to the leaders of Japan to effect transformative change to relieve the people of their present conditions of oppression (by the Meiji state, of course, not the Emperor).¹² In the same speech Tarui makes a differentiation between ‘nihilism’ and both Daoist and Buddhist doctrines of ‘nothingness’ (*kyomu*). As far as Buddhism goes:

Among Śākyamuni’s teachings are both exoteric teachings, such as the excessive stories of heaven and hell, and esoteric, hidden ones, which is where we can find the doctrine that all is nothingness. To take one or two examples, all meritorious practices are said to be directed towards a blissful realization of impermanence. Also, the central point of the teaching that ‘form is nothing other than emptiness, and emptiness nothing other than form’ is one we must take heart. Thus, when we compare the use of the same word *kyomu* by both Western nihilists and our forefathers in China and India, we find that there is in fact no similarity whatsoever.

As Akamatsu Katsumaro would later write, the Tōyō Shakaitō ‘was not based on Western socialism [but rather] espoused a peculiar socialist blend of traditional Asian Buddhism and Taoism’.¹³ Of this there is little doubt, but does this mean that Tarui and the members of Tōyō Shakaitō were not ‘actually’ socialists? This, of course, is a normative question, dependent on one’s specific understanding of ‘socialism’, but it is one that most later socialists and scholars would come to answer in the affirmative, due, in large part, to the lack of a sophisticated economic analysis and a heavy reliance on traditional religious terms and ideals.

At about the same that Tarui Tōkichi was developing his ideas for social renovation, Katayama Sen (1859–1933) began promoting a ‘spiritual socialism’ similarly founded on religious ideals. Though Katayama (born Yabuki Sugatarō) relied more directly on Christianity than Buddhism, and eventually moved towards a more secular form of socialism and communism (he would help found the Japanese Communist Party in 1922), he never renounced his early conviction – developed while studying at various universities in the United States in the late 1880s and early 1890s – that religious values were crucial in developing personal character, and that such character was itself essential to the construction of community. This theme is one that would be picked up by later Buddhist socialists. Against the Marxian interpretation of religion, Katayama saw churches in America at the forefront of social welfare, and a bulwark against secular commercialism.¹⁴

While the early Shōwa-era scholar Tanaka Sōgorō (1894–1961) viewed socialism as a mixture of Confucianism, Buddhism and Western ideas, others have felt that the Mahāyāna

¹²Akamatsu Katsumaro, ‘The Russian Influence on the Early Japanese Social Movement’ in Peter Bergen, Paul F. Langer, and George O. Totten (eds) *The Russian Impact on Japan—Literature and Social Thought* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1981), p. 91. Akamatsu adds: ‘I believe that the progressive intellectuals of Japan in his day were generally more or less of the same opinion’.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴Sawada Mitzi, *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890–1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 134.

insistence on compassion was enough to render the Buddhist traditions of East Asia quasi-socialist in nature. Though most of the New Buddhists were resistant to socialism, a few, such as Mōri Saian (1872–1938), were sympathetic to the Commoner's Society (Heiminsha), a labour union formed in 1901.¹⁵ The final years of the Meiji period saw a turn towards Buddhist socialism in the writings of Shin priest Takagi Kenmyō (1864–1914) – for whom socialism was ‘much more deeply related to religion than to politics’¹⁶ – and, most dramatically, in the famous case of Uchiyama Gudō (1874–1911), the Sōtō Zen priest who protested against rural poverty as ‘unjust and anti-Buddhist’, and, as a result, was arrested (along with Takagi) and executed on trumped-up charges of plotting to assassinate the Emperor in what is known as the High Treason Incident.¹⁷ Even the writings of the Shin sect reformer Kiyozawa Manshi – whose Spiritual Activism comes under criticism from progressive Buddhists – contain hints of utopian socialism, in his references to a ‘Buddhist country’ (*nyorai no kokka*) that might one day replace the present capitalistic and materialistic one.

These experiments in progressive Buddhism are particularly striking given the growing social conservatism from the late Meiji period, as well as the general scepticism with which socialist movements have been viewed by Buddhists in Japan and elsewhere. Traditional Buddhist teachings of *karma* have long been used to both explain and inevitably to justify social inequalities, and Japan is no exception to this rule. Buddhist Enlightenment figure Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911) – though lauded by progressives for his stand in favour of freedom of religion and the separation of church and state – was neither the first or last to blame poverty on the laziness and general moral laxity of the poor.¹⁸ Moreover, for all its emphasis on compassion, East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism has a quietist side, due in part to the assimilation of Confucian political ideals (including harmony and hierarchy) as well as interpretations of more arcane philosophical teachings such as no-self and emptiness (which have been explored in some detail by the recent Critical Buddhist movement). Ironically, given the emphasis on interdependence and mutual interpenetration that one finds in East Asian Mahāyāna thought (especially the influential Kegon, Tendai and Zen schools), East Asian Buddhists have rarely used these concepts to support a critique of structural inequalities and systems of oppression, focusing instead on ‘private’ acts of sin and vice. Finally, we should note that, in addition to traditional Buddhist scepticism towards socialist ‘materialism’ and ‘individualism’, another factor that hampers the development of Buddhist socialism in any context is the residual anti-religious aspect of Marxist versions of socialism (this has also been an issue with experiments in Christian socialism and liberation theology). This anti-religious sentiment began to grow significantly in Japan in the early 1930s, with the birth of a full-fledged *han-shūkyō* movement.

At the theoretical level, Ichikawa Hakugen has explored the various problems with ‘Buddhist socialism’ in the Japanese context. In a chapter devoted to this subject towards the end

¹⁵See Ōkōchi Kazuo and Matsuo Hiroshi, *Nihon Rodo Kumiai Monogatari* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1965), pp. 159–162, for a description of demonstrations organised by Heiminsha on 2 April 1901, during which protesters massed in various areas of Tokyo to carry banners and shout slogans proclaiming the adherence to socialism.

¹⁶Takagi Kenmyō, *Yo ga shakashugi* [My Socialism], trans. Robert Rhodes, *The Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 33:2 (2002), p. 55.

¹⁷See Winston Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 169–170; Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997), pp. 66–73; Ishikawa Rikizan, ‘The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan: The Contrasting Lives of Two Sōtō Zen Monks’, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 25 (1998), pp. 87–115; Brian Victoria, *Zen War Stories* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 204–207; see Wagatsuma Sakae (ed), *Nihon seiji saiban kiroku: Meiji, go* (Tokyo: Daiichi Hōki), for a record of the High Treason Incident.

¹⁸Davis, op. cit., p. 177, n. 53.

of *The War Responsibility of Buddhists* (*Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin*, 1970), Ichikawa notes as many as 12 specific factors that hinder the emergence of a full Japanese Buddhist socialism:

- (1) Close (i.e., mutually supportive) relations between Buddhism and the state;
- (2) Buddhist views of the human and society, especially via *karma* (see above);
- (3) ‘Confucian’ ethics of hierarchy, loyalty and harmony;
- (4) Doctrines like no-self, which inhibit reflection on justice and human rights;
- (5) The Buddhist ‘ethics of feeling’ (instead of an ‘ethics of responsibility’);
- (6) The philosophy of repayment of debt/blessings (*on*);
- (7) The theory of interdependence, which subverts political criticism;
- (8) The doctrine of the Middle Way, which leads to political compromise;
- (9) Ancestor worship, which promotes nationalism via a ‘family-state’;
- (10) Reverence for the aged, and by extension, for old things (*wabi*, and so on);
- (11) Buddhist/Zen emphasis on ‘peace of mind’ (*anshin*) over justice;
- (12) The logic of *soku* or *soku/hi* (yes/no), which affirms the status quo.¹⁹

These ‘problems’ overlap with Ichikawa’s more general argument regarding the ethical failure of Buddhism – more particularly Zen – in confronting militarism during the early twentieth century. In other words, for Ichikawa, the failure of the development of Buddhist socialism is part and parcel of the ‘failure’ of modern Japanese Buddhism more generally. Upon inspection, these 12 items can be divided neatly into two categories: (1) deeply embedded features of Japanese and East Asian culture – including religious syncretism: i.e., 1, 3, 6, 9, 10; and (2) Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrines, most of which go back many centuries, and have been subject to a large variety of interpretation: i.e., 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12. While a number of recent critics have focused on the various doctrinal ‘causes’ for Buddhist complicity in modern Japanese nationalism, I am inclined towards Ives’s argument that it is the first category of Ichikawa’s factors – i.e., general features of Japanese culture and religion, of which we might include a tendency towards institutional conservatism – that are primarily ‘responsible’ for the rejection of progressive forms of Buddhism and subsequent development of Imperial Way Buddhism.²⁰ After all, with respect to doctrine, there is always the possibility of reinterpretation – a practice that new and progressive Buddhists put to good use. It is much harder to fight against deeply ingrained cultural values and practices.

With the background sketched above and Ichikawa’s parameters in mind, the rest of this essay provides a comparative and contextual analysis of the thought of the two most significant radical Buddhist priests of the late Meiji period: Takagi Kenmyō and Uchiyama Gudō.

Takagi Kenmyō: (Buddhist) Socialism as Faith and Practice

Takagi Kenmyō (1864–1914) may well be the first Japanese Buddhist priest to explicitly and publicly embrace socialism (*shakaishugi*) – albeit while insisting that it was simply an expression of his personal faith and *not* a scientific doctrine he had any interest in spreading throughout Japan or the world.²¹ Born and raised in Aichi prefecture, Takagi

¹⁹Ichikawa Hakugen, *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin* (Tokyo: Shunshūsha, 1970), pp. 150–154; also see Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen’s Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press), pp. 55–56.

²⁰Ives develops this argument – against Brian Victoria (*Zen at War, Zen War Stories*), but also, to some extent, against Ichikawa himself – in chapter 4 of his *Imperial-Way Zen*, pp. 101–127.

²¹Takagi, op. cit., p. 54; in the following discussion of *Yo ga shakaishugi* I have used Robert Rhodes’s translation, while adding fragments from the original Japanese as necessary.

entered the Shin (Higashi Honganji) priesthood, becoming head priest of Jōsenji in Wakayama prefecture in 1899, at age 35. It so happened that a large number of his parishioners were *burakumin*, and thus faced the combined suffering of economic hardship and social discrimination. The *burakumin* problem would become the driving force behind Takagi's 'conversion' to social activism and associations with secular socialists – associations that would eventually cost him his life. On 18 January 1911, Takagi was charged with 'high treason' for his alleged complicity in a plot to assassinate the Meiji Emperor, and was sentenced to death along with 25 others, including three fellow Buddhist priests, all in their 20s or 30s – Uchiyama Gudō (Sōtō Zen), Sasaki Dōgen (Shin, 1889–1916), Mineo Setsudo (Rinzai Zen, 1885–1919) – along with a Christian doctor, Ōishi Seinosuke (1867–1911). While 12 (including Gudō) were summarily executed, Takagi's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He died in prison on 24 June 1914, at the age of 51, apparently by suicide. Defrocked by Higashi Honganji on the date of his sentencing in 1911, Takagi's life and work were re-evaluated during the postwar Shin Ōtani-ha sect reforms; and in 1996, 82 years after his death, he was fully reinstated by the denomination. As Ama notes, Higashi Honganji went so far as to claim for Takagi a guiding role in their future work towards social reform.²²

In *Yo ga shakaishugi* (My Socialism), written in 1904 on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War but unpublished until 1959, Takagi outlines his hybrid vision, which, he says, he intends to 'put into practice' despite the fact that it may inspire laughter and derision among his readers. From these brief prefatory remarks we can see that Takagi's socialism is understood primarily as a tool for character transformation, which, it is implied, will lead to social transformation through good works – as such, he sees socialism in very much the way that New Buddhists and other late-Meiji progressives understood Buddhist liberation, and unlike the more radical visions of Buddhist socialism expressed in the Taishō and early Shōwa periods. This is not to suggest that Takagi was uninterested in social transformation, but simply that his vision was amelioristic and reformist rather than revolutionary.

Along these same lines, it is also of note that Takagi immediately disavows links not only with the work of Marx and Tolstoy (perhaps the two most significant foreign influences on late-Meiji Japanese socialism) but also with a number of the major left-wing figures of the day: Katayama Sen (see above), Sakai Toshihiko (Kosen, 1871–1933), and Kōtoku Denjirō (Shūsui, 1871–1911), the radical journalist and father of Japanese anarchism who would later be charged with leading the plot to assassinate the emperor and executed during the High Treason Incident.²³ While Katayama was sympathetic to religious forms of socialism, Sakai and Kōtoku represent the more radical and explicitly anti-religious extreme of the various left-wing movements of the day. Kōtoku's final work, *Kirisuto Massatsuron*, was a blistering critique of the myth of Jesus Christ, while Sakai would go on to co-found the anti-religious Nihon Hanshūkyō Dōmei (Japan Anti-Religion Alliance).²⁴

²²Ama Toshimaru, 'Towards a Shin Buddhist Social Ethics', *Eastern Buddhist, New Series*, 33:2 (2001), p. 49.

²³In November 1903, along with Sakai Toshihiko, Kōtoku founded the short-lived but influential radical newspaper *Heimin Shimbun* (The Commoner's Newspaper), the mouthpiece of the *Heimin-sha* (Commoners' Society). Sakai and Kōtoku were also responsible for the first Japanese translation of *The Communist Manifesto*. After reading the work of Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921) in prison, Kōtoku would renounce Marxian socialism for 'radical anarchism', eventually corresponding with Kropotkin and translating the latter's *Conquest of Bread* in 1909. See Frederick G. Notehelfer, *Kōtoku Shūsui, Portrait of a Japanese Radical* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

²⁴As anarchist Ōsugi Sakae (1885–1923) relates in his autobiography, among the four acknowledged leaders of the Commoner's Society – Kōtoku, Sakai, Nishikawa Kōjirō (1876–1940) and Ishikawa Sanshirō (1876–1956) – only the last 'did not despise religion'; Ōsugi Sakae, *The Autobiography of Ōsugi Sakae*, trans. Byron K. Marshall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 121–122.

As a priest within the Pure Land Shin sect, Takagi was exposed to the significant changes happening as part of the Higashi Honganji reforms of the 1890s and early 1900s, including the work of Kiyozawa Manshi, just one year Takagi's senior. Like Kiyozawa, Takagi envisioned social change arising from a process of individual transformation, based on a reformulation of the traditional Shin Buddhist concept of *shinjin* – usually translated as 'faith' but with the nuance of 'opening oneself up' to the saving grace of Other-power.²⁵ Unlike Kiyozawa, however, Takagi was primarily an activist rather than a scholar, and thus warrants the label given him by Alfred Bloom as 'an early engaged Buddhist'.²⁶ At the same time, unlike most radical and progressive Buddhists of early twentieth-century Japan, Takagi chose to remain a monk; though, as noted, his ordination was rescinded by the Shin sect upon his arrest.

As with the later Buddhist socialist Seno'o Girō (1889–1961), Takagi envisions socialism as a 'kind of practice' (*isshu no jissenhō de aru*) – i.e., as the first step towards reform, rather than simply a call for reform. And yet, as noted above, he sees socialism primarily as a form of existential transformation rather than a theory of politics: 'In proceeding to reform society, we have to, first of all, begin from our own spirituality'. This move allows Takagi to found his socialism in traditional Pure Land Buddhist principles, such as the *nembutsu* prayer: *Namu Amida Butsu*, which acts as a kind of external guiding force or light. While the power of the *nembutsu* is open to all, it shows a preferential option, we might say, for the poor and oppressed, for 'Amida's main concern is for the common people'. Takagi's traditional reliance on *tariki* or 'Other-power' is a far cry from the this-worldly tone of not only later Buddhist socialists, but even many earlier Buddhist modernists. Unlike these other Buddhist reformers, Takagi clearly believed that the best bulwark against selfishness and injustice is to maintain an external standard (i.e., Amida), representing 'the absolute transcendental compassion'.²⁷

And yet, like many other progressive Buddhists, Takagi simultaneously reaffirms and reinterprets the foundational Buddhist idea of the Three Refuges, Jewels or Treasures: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (though he avoids using these terms). While Dharma or what he calls 'doctrine' (*kyōgi*) is encapsulated in the Amida's Vow of compassion, which is turn evoked by practitioners through the *nembutsu* prayer, Takagi replaces the term 'Buddha' with *ninshi* – literally, 'teacher of human beings' – which also represents his 'ideal person'. While Śākyamuni is of course the first and most outstanding example of such, the emphasis is on his life as a supporter of the poor and suffering, rather than as a figure of worship or reverence.²⁸ Takagi's words here bear quoting, since they get to

²⁵In the words of Shinran (1173–1262): '[H]owever precious a treasure one may offer before the Buddha or give to a teacher, it is meaningless if one lacks *shinjin*. And even though one may not make a donation of even a single sheet of paper or half a penny to the sangha, if one yields one's heart to Other Power and one's *shinjin* is deep, one is in accord with the essential intent of the Vow'; Shinran, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 677; see Ugo Dessì, 'Introduction: Shin Buddhism and Japanese Society' in Ugo Dessì (ed) *The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 4.

²⁶Alfred Bloom (ed.) *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism* (Bloomington: World Vision, 2004), p. 23.

²⁷Takagi, op. cit., p. 55.

²⁸The emphasis on the 'human' Buddha had become a standard trope in Japanese Buddhist modernism from the early Meiji period; see Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 97–102, for discussion of this emphasis within nineteenth-century Western scholarship on Buddhism, dating back at least to R. Spence Hardy's *Eastern Monachism* (1850) and Sir James Emerson Tennent's *Christianity in Ceylon* (1850); though, as Snodgrass notes, Hardy and some other early Western scholars (though not Tennent) employed this as part of a *critique* of Buddhism (and the Buddha) as being 'uninspired' and thus insufficient as a solid basis for morality or religion: 'atheistic in ideal and idolatrous in practice' (p. 99).

the tensions inherent in the anachronistic attempt to affirm that Buddhism – or any ancient religious tradition – is, at heart, ‘socialist’.²⁹

Each of his [i.e., Śākyamuni’s] words and phrases reflects his theory of individualism. But what about his life? Casting away his royal rank, he became a mendicant monk, all for the purpose of removing suffering and giving happiness to people. He spent his entire life with only three robes and a begging bowl, and died under the bodhi tree. [. . .] Wasn’t he a great socialist of the spiritual realm? (Though his socialism is not identical in theory with that of the Heimisha or that of the followers of *Chokugen*.) He thought little of social rank or status. He reformed part of the social system of the time. Indeed, there is no question that he succeeded in changing a number of things.³⁰

Here Takagi takes pains to emphasise that, while Śākyamuni – and by extension, Buddhism – is certainly *socialistic*, it is not ‘identical in theory’ with modern forms of socialism, such as that of the Commoner’s Society or the left-wing newspaper *Chokugen* (Straight Talk). Takagi fails to explain the nature of the difference, which might have to do with the radically different historical, socio-economic and cultural context, but perhaps, more importantly, relates back to Takagi’s reference to the Buddha’s ‘individualism’, and which we might take to refer more generally to his focus on personal transformation as the primary goal of both Buddhism and socialism.

Takagi cites the existence of many *ninshi* following Śākyamuni, including the founders of several of the major Buddhist sects in Japan (excepting the Zen and Nichiren sects, though the antinomian Rinzai Zen monk Ikkyū is included in the list). All of these *ninshi* ‘reserved their deepest sympathy for the common people’. Unsurprisingly, given his sectarian affiliation, Takagi notes the particular dedication to social welfare of Shin sect founder Shinran (1173–1262), who was, ‘without a doubt, a socialist who realised a life of non-discrimination in the spiritual realm’.³¹ Here, again, however, Takagi adds a quick parenthetical coda – ‘(However, even this is different from the theory of present-day socialists)’ – which we might once again interpret as a way of suggesting a lack in contemporary (secular) socialism, one that may have to do with their inability or unwillingness to conceive of a realm beyond the material. At any rate, it at this point in the essay that Takagi makes his central claim: ‘I declare Buddhism to be the mother of the common people and the enemy of the nobility’.³²

And yet, to this point in his discourse Takagi has yet to discuss the third – and to some extent always the most problematic for Buddhist modernists – of the Three Jewels. Here, as with virtually all modernists and progressives, *sangha* is broadened to mean not the monastic community but society, if not humanity, at large. Yet Takagi’s interpretation is unusual in being, like his discussion of Dharma or doctrine, so deeply embedded in specifically Pure Land teachings. For Takagi, *sangha* means not simply society but the ‘ideal world’ (*risō sekai de aru*) – i.e., the Pure Land. Traditionally understood as a paradisiacal realm reached after death, and the only place in which the Dharma can be actually practiced, Takagi substitutes socialism for Dharma here, suggesting that ‘the Land of Bliss is the place in which socialism is truly practiced’. Here it would seem clear that Takagi believes in the Pure Land as an actual realm (as opposed to simply a metaphor, existential condition,

²⁹Takagi, op. cit., p. 56.

³⁰Takagi, op. cit., p. 56.

³¹Cf. Dessi, op. cit., p. 243.

³²Takagi, op. cit., pp. 56–57.

or ideal of a future society). At the same time, however, he emphasises: (1) the fundamental equality of all beings in the Pure Land (from novice bodhisattvas to Amida himself); and (2) the fact that beings in the Pure Land awaken to the ‘Buddha mind [or] the mind of great compassion’, which prompts them to ‘fly to other lands to save people to whom they are karmically related’. In other words, Takagi’s Pure Land acts not only as a heavenly model and guide for those of us remaining in the fallen world; it is also a place where beings are able to act on their fundamental reorientation towards compassion by engaging with this world of suffering.³³

We have never heard that beings in the Land of Bliss have attacked other lands. Nor have we ever heard that they have started a great war for the sake of justice. Hence I am against war [with Russia]. I do not feel that a person of the Land of Bliss should take part in warfare. (However, there may be those, among the socialists, who advocate the opening of war.) (This refers to Mori Saian.)³⁴

Another issue that bedevils Buddhist modernists is the question of *faith*, both what this implies in a modern, scientific age, and what it means within Buddhist tradition. As a Pure Land Buddhist, Takagi has less reservation in affirming the centrality of faith (*shinkō*) than some of his modernist peers, but he once again reformulates the concept in line with his socialist principles. For instance, he defines faith in terms of a ‘revolution [or turning] of thought’ (*shisō no kaiten*) – i.e., a form of personal transformation that is founded in the practice of social welfare. And yet, the traditional Pure Land teaching that we are living in a degenerate age of the end of the law (*mappō*) is also reaffirmed, with an understanding that this condition is a result of social injustice and economic oppression rather than a result of karmic fruits or some form of cosmological determinism. ‘We live in a country where the common people in general are sacrificed for the fame, peerage and medals of one small group of people . . . This is truly a world of defilement, a world of suffering, a dark night. Human nature is being slaughtered by the devil’.³⁵

As the final line indicates, although our present fallen state is a result of human greed and desire, it has implications that are deeper than simply the material; human nature – literally, the ‘true nature or humanity’ – is at stake. The only way to avoid this destruction is to ‘open ourselves up (*tainin*) to the Tathagata’s mind of compassion’ – which implies a commitment to practice, meaning social engagement. And this, Takagi insists, has nothing whatsoever to do with social status or prestigious awards: ‘we do not wish to become recipients of the Grand Order of the Chrysanthemum, general or noblemen like them. We are not labouring in order to become such people’. Here Takagi provides a succinct statement of his attempt to fuse the material and spiritual as well as the individual and social realms: ‘The only thing I wish to accomplish through my great energy and human labor is progress (*kōjō shinpo*) and community life (*kyōdō seikatsu*). We labor in order to produce and we cultivate our minds so that we can attain the Way’.³⁶ Takagi’s conclusion, which echoes in many ways the manifesto of his New Buddhist peers, calls for a focus on the *nembutsu*,

³³Ibid., pp. 57–58.

³⁴Ibid., p. 58; Mōri Saian (1872–1938), Shingon priest, journalist and publisher of the socialist newspaper *Murō shinpō*, founded in 1900. A member of the New Buddhist Fellowship, Mōri was arrested and jailed at one point for slandering an official.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 58–59.

³⁶Ibid., p. 59; Takagi’s language here, as radical as it may have sounded at the time, echoes the contemporary Constitution of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha, which states the goal of the sect as nothing less than the ‘actualisation’ of a ‘society based on [Buddhist] fellowship’ (*dōbō shakai*); see Ama, op. cit., p. 38 n. 7.

which, he asserts, will allow us to rise above the ‘struggle for existence’ and provide the foundation for personal and social transformation: ‘Inasmuch as this is what the nembutsu signifies, we must proceed from the spiritual realm and completely change the social system from the ground up. I am firmly convinced that this is what socialism means’.³⁷ Ultimately, Takagi’s Buddhist socialism, in its emphasis on personal transformation as the basis of social change, shares less in common with Marxist traditions than with the ideas of Leo Tolstoy (despite Takagi’s opening disclaimer) and Oscar Wilde, and also with contemporary Engaged Buddhists such as Thich Nhat Hanh.³⁸

Finally, like his New Buddhist peers, Takagi was quite willing to criticise the institutional Buddhist leaders of his day, though with the additional risk of being himself part of the very institution he was criticising. For instance, in *Yo ga shakaishugi*, he chastises Dr. Nanjō Bun’yū (1849–1927), Shin scholar, priest and, from 1903, president of Ōtani University, for encouraging his listeners to be fearless in attacking their enemies, since ‘if you die, you will go to the Pure Land’. This, Takagi asserts, is an appeal to feelings of hostility, and one that is used to promote violence – both of which go against the Shin emphasis on compassion.³⁹ Later on, he returns to this theme: ‘We cannot help but lament when we hear that religious functionaries are praying to gods and Buddhas for victory . . . Cease taking pleasure in victory and shouting “banzai”. This is because “Namu Amida Butsu” is the voice that leads everyone equally to salvation’.⁴⁰ It is worth noting that Nanjō, the target of Takagi’s critique, is perhaps best known for being one of the first two Japanese Buddhist monks chosen by Shimaji Mokurai and Ōtani Kōei to travel to Europe with the explicit purpose of studying buddhology – i.e., to use modern, Western methods of scholarship to fully understand and ‘reform’ Buddhism at home.⁴¹ To this end, Nanjō had joined with Murakami Senshō and Kiyozawa Manshi to form the Shirakawa Party, whose task was to overhaul the Higashi Honganji sect administration.⁴² In addition to this cosmopolitan, reformist pedigree, however, Nanjō was also in his youth a foot soldier in a Buddhist military unit known as the *Sōheitai* or Warrior Priest Force, which fought in the battles leading up to the 1868 Restoration.⁴³

There is little question that Takagi Kenmyō is a significant early voice in Buddhist socialism in Japan. He takes the reformist ideas of the mid-Meiji period Buddhist Enlightenment figures and New Buddhists and strives to embed them more fully into action towards social reform, without losing the religious principles – in this case, decidedly Shin sect principles – on which he stands. And yet, for all this, there is a certain whiff of utopianism in Takagi’s work. Despite the fact that he pushes beyond Kiyozawa’s call for a ‘Buddhist country’ by applying Shin principles of equality and compassion to problems like the *burakumin*, state prostitution and imperialist warfare, Takagi’s conflation of the Pure Land of Bliss with a socialist realm simply opens up the problem of how to bring about the large-scale social transformations that may be necessary to reach his stated goals of ‘progress’ and ‘community’ – defined by Ama Toshimaru as ‘realizing peace through thoroughgoing opposition to war and elimination of social inequality and discrimination [while bringing

³⁷Takagi, op. cit., p. 60.

³⁸See Leo N. Tolstoy, *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism*, edited by David Stephens (London: Phoenix Press, 1990); Oscar Wilde, ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’ in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (London: Penguin, 2001); Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998).

³⁹Takagi, op. cit., p. 56.

⁴⁰Takagi, op. cit., p. 59.

⁴¹See Ketelaar, op. cit., p. 126.

⁴²Ama Michihiro, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴³See Ketelaar, op. cit., p. 249 n. 67.

about a] life free from the “struggle for existence”, where labor is used only for producing sustenance so that the cultivation of one’s spiritual life can be actualized without any problems’.⁴⁴ The question remains: Will the *nembutsu* really be enough to accomplish this?

Uchiyama Gudō: Self-Awakening to Comfort and Freedom

Of all the radical Buddhists of the pre-war era, Sōtō Zen priest Uchiyama Gudō is probably the best known in the West, not least because he is discussed as the most striking exception to the rule of Zen collaboration with twentieth-century militarism in Brian Victoria’s *Zen at War* (1997).⁴⁵ Among Japanese scholars, too, Gudō’s case has long fascinated, due both to its tragic ending and, one suspects, to the character of the protagonist, who seemed dispositionally suited to the role of heroic martyr.⁴⁶

Born 17 May 1874 in the village of Ojiya, Niigata prefecture, in his youth Gudō apprenticed to his father as a carver of wooden statues, including Buddha statues and family altars. A bright student, he showed an early indication of his later political leanings by identifying strongly with the semi-legendary tale of Sakura Sōgōro (aka Sōgo-sama, 1605–1653), a *gimin* (martyr) of the early Edo period who was executed after appealing to the *shōgun* for help to ease the hardship of the peasants in his village. Indeed, the area in which Gudō was raised (former Echigo province) had long experience of rural poverty, as well as a deeply engrained tradition of peasant revolt.⁴⁷ Upon the death of his father in 1890, Gudō set off on a series of travels throughout the country, looking to further his education, which had been cut off at the elementary level. He spent some time in Tokyo, where he may have stayed at the house of Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), the Meiji Buddhist Enlightenment reformer who was a distant relative of Gudō’s mother. Unfortunately, we do not have any concrete evidence for this connection, but the possibility is intriguing, especially when we look at Uchiyama’s later turn towards Buddhist reform.⁴⁸ If Gudō did stay with Inoue in the early 1890s, this would have been a peak of Inoue’s own work, both theoretical and practical. Was it Inoue who sparked Gudō’s radicalism? If so, the student certainly went beyond the master.

Ordained as a Sōtō Zen monk in 1897, Gudō achieved the rank of abbot in 1904 at the age of 29, taking up the position of head monk at Rinsenji, a temple in the mountains of Hakone, Kanagawa prefecture. Once established, Gudō immediately set to work giving assistance to his parishioners, most of whom were poor. He also began to develop his ideas about Buddhist social organisation, looking back to the Chinese *sangha* as a model of simplicity and communal lifestyle. Around the same time, Gudō came into contact

⁴⁴Ama Toshimaru, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴⁵See Victoria, *Zen at War*, chapter 3: ‘Uchiyama Gudō: Radical Soto Zen Priest’, pp. 38–48; see also Ishikawa, ‘Two Sōtō Zen Monks’, for a treatment of Gudō and the nationalist Sōtō Zen priest Takeda Hanshi (1864–1911).

⁴⁶See, e.g., Yoshida Kyūichi, ‘Uchiyama Gudō to Takagi Kenmyō no chosaku’, *Nihon rekishi* 131 (1959), pp. 68–77; Inagaki Masami, *Kindai Bukkyō no Henkaku-sha* (Tokyo: Daizō Shuppan, 1975); Kashiwagi Ryūhō, *Taigyaku-jiken to Uchiyama Gudō* (Tokyo, 1979); Morinaga Eizaburō, *Uchiyama Gudō* (Tokyo: Ronsōsha, 1984); Yoshida Kyūichi, *Nihon kindai bukkyōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1992), pp. 402–408.

⁴⁷According to the collective research and statistical work of Aoki Kōji, Yokoyama Toshio, and Yamanaka Kiyotaka, Echigo was one of only six provinces (out of 71) to experience more than 100 *ikki* (armed peasant revolts) between 1590 and 1867. As Bix notes, memories of this legacy ran deep within the collective cultural bloodstream: ‘The traditions and practice of dramatic human sacrifice, of people victimised on behalf of their village communities, helped peasants realise the righteousness of their cause and sustained them in pursuing it’ (Bix, op. cit., pp. xxiv–xxv).

⁴⁸Ishikawa notes, in particular, the ‘germination of the idea of the “self” of “self-awakening” in Gudō’s *Heibon no jikaku* (Ordinary Self-Awakening), which may have come from Inoue; Ishikawa, op. cit., p. 99.

with the anarchist and socialist ideas, which were beginning to spread on the eve of the Russo-Japanese war. In particular, Gudō was inspired by the ideology of the left-wing *Heimin Shimbun*, to which he contributed his own declaration of principles in a piece entitled ‘How did I become a socialist?’ published in the 17 January 1904 issue. In this brief piece, citing various Buddhist texts, including the *Diamond Sutra* and *Lotus Sutra*, Gudō insists on a fundamental link between (Mahāyāna) Buddhist teachings and socialism.

Through his contact with *Heimin Shimbun* and his acquaintance with Dr. Katō Tokijirō (1858–1930), Gudō was introduced to leading socialists Kōtoku Shusui and Sakai Toshihiko. Facing pressure from the government crackdown on left-wing movements following the Red Flag Incident of June 1908, Gudō purchased equipment in order to set up his own underground press within Rinsenji (literally, under the *shumidan* altar), on which he produced socialist pamphlets and tracts, in addition to his own writings. As a result, in May 1909 he was arrested for violating publication laws, and, upon a search of Rinsenji, police claimed to have discovered a cache of materials used to make explosive devices. Implicated, along with 22 others, in the High Treason Incident, Gudō was convicted and executed on 24 January 1911. According to witnesses, he was serene and even smiling as he climbed the scaffold.

As with Takagi Kenmyō, Gudō’s priestly status was rescinded by the Sōtō Zen leadership in June 1910, five months after his death, and the sect took great pains to distance themselves from Gudō and his ideas, organising a series of meetings in the months following the renegade priest’s death in which over 100 Sōtō sect leaders, government administrators and prominent intellectuals (including Inoue Tetsujirō) denounced the man and his work, pledging themselves to the principle of ‘revere the Emperor, protect the nation’ (*sonnō gokoku*).⁴⁹ Also like the case of Takagi, this decision was eventually reversed and an apology issued by the organisation – albeit not until eight decades later, in 1993. According to the official announcement: ‘when viewed by today’s standards of respect for human rights, Uchiyama Gudō’s writings contain elements that should be regarded as farsighted’ and ‘the sect’s actions strongly aligned the sect with an establishment dominated by the emperor system. They were not designed to protect the unique Buddhist character of the sect’s priests’. Unlike the case of Higashi Honganji reversal on Takagi Kenmyō, however, the Sōtō Zen sect have not gone so far as to dedicate themselves to carrying out Gudō’s work.

What was it that made Gudō such a threat? As Victoria notes, of all four priests convicted in the High Treason Incident, Gudō was the most actively involved in ‘subversive’ (i.e., socialist and anti-governmental) activities; thus his punishment was harsher than the others. Moreover, he left behind more writings on his beliefs than did the other three. And yet:

[E]ven Gudō’s writings contain little that directly addresses the relationship he saw between the Law of the Buddha and his own social activism. This is not surprising, since neither he nor the other three priests claimed to be Buddhist scholars or possess special expertise in either Buddhist doctrine or social, political, or economic theory. They might be best described as social activists who, based on their Buddhist faith, were attempting to alleviate the mental and physical suffering they saw around them, especially in Japan’s impoverished areas.⁵⁰

While it is certainly true that Gudō and Takagi were not scholars of Buddhism (nor of sociology, politics or economic theory, for that matter), I suggest that there is more to the thought of these radical Buddhists than scholars such as Victoria suggest. Yes, they were

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 102–103.

⁵⁰Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 39.

activists first, theorists second – but they also struggled, as did their New Buddhist peers and later Buddhist socialists – to establish doctrinal links and reinterpretations of Buddhist teachings to suit the needs of their times, as they envisioned them.⁵¹ We have seen this already in the work of Takagi Kenmyō. In what follows, I would like to analyse in more detail the theoretical work of Uchiyama Gudō, by examining two representative works: *In Commemoration of Imprisonment: Anarcho-communist Revolution* (*Nyūgoku kinen museifu kyōsan kakumei*) and *Ordinary Self-Awakening* (*Heibon no jikaku*).

Anarcho-communist Revolution was the first piece published on Gudō's secret press. A 16-page pamphlet, it provides a fairly clear statement of his central principles at the time (June 1908). Gudō made 1000 copies, which were distributed throughout Japan. Eventually this piece, more than any other, would lead to Gudō's arrest and implication in the High Treason Incident. Indeed, in one of the preliminary hearings after Gudō's arrest *Anarcho-communist Revolution* was called 'the most evil writing since the beginning of Japanese history'! In any case, this was the work that would eventually lead to Gudō's incarceration and death, since it apparently inspired Miyashita Takichi (1875–1911), one of the apparent ringleaders, to carry out his plot.⁵² The primary theme is, like many of Gudō's works, the problem of rural poverty, and thus the author is led fairly quickly into a scathing critique of the (capitalist?) system that allows for a very few to monopolise the labour of the vast majority, who work with no hope of reward. The subtitle of the work – *Kosakunin wa naze kurushiika* (Why Do Tenant Farmers Suffer?) – indicates the implicit connections between Gudō's chosen theme and his Buddhist commitments. As a Buddhist, he seeks the causes and conditions of suffering, in order to eliminate them by whatever means necessary. Marius Jansen gives the following account of the conditions of a typical tenant farmer during the Edo period, conditions that had changed little by Gudō's time:

The tenant . . . shared few of the public rights and the duties of his landlord, and he lived under severe economic dependence. His plot was usually too small to give him the opportunity of accumulating anything, and the house in which he lived, and the tools he used, were probably not his own. Paternalism, vital for his life, was expressed in language, deportment, and deference summed up in his status as *mizunomi*, or 'water drinking', farmer. The landlord was his 'parent person', *oya-kata*, and he the landlord's *kokata* or child.⁵³

Here we see that the suffering of tenant farmers was both material and also psychological – as they were reduced to the position of almost total dependence on their *oyakata*.⁵⁴ Yet, while Gudō was an advocate of land reform, 'reform' alone would not be enough to solve the dire problem of rural penury: decisive actions must be taken by the oppressed themselves, in order to cut off the source of suffering at its roots. To this end, Gudō advises tenant farmers to resist by refusing to deliver rice and stop paying taxes. But he does not stop there. Later in the essay, the author recommends that farmers refuse military conscription and encourages them to denounce the emperor system, based as it is on a 'superstition' rooted in 'mistaken ideas'. Although Gudō makes no direct reference in this pamphlet to

⁵¹Whereas Victoria's remarks come across as somewhat dismissive of the intellectual work of these activist monks, Yoshida Kyū'ichi goes to the other extreme, proclaiming that, 'Uchiyama Gudō was not a thinker like Kōtoku [Shūsui]. His socialist and anarchist ideas emerged from his experience' (Yoshida, *Nihon kindai bukkyōshi*, p. 402). Here Gudō is presented as a something more than 'merely' an armchair radical.

⁵²Ishikawa, op. cit., p. 102.

⁵³Jansen, op. cit., p. 114.

⁵⁴Bix notes the increase in the power of landlord families over tenants throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, citing it as the primary reason for the growth of peasant riots during the same period; Bix, op. cit., p. xx.

any specific Buddhist text or doctrine, we can interpret Buddhist connections from several of his expressions and ideas. Perhaps the most conspicuous of these is the unusual phrase *anraku jiyū*, which appears at several key points in the piece, and may be understood as a motto for Gudō's Buddhist-socialist vision.

Recall that the Buddhist socialism of Takagi Kenmyō was self-consciously sectarian, in the sense that he rooted his socialist convictions in principles and doctrines specific to the Shin Pure Land sect. What, if anything, can we find in Gudō's vision that is specifically Zen, as opposed to more generally Mahāyāna Buddhist? Is there any evidence that Gudō saw Zen as particularly well suited to anarcho-communism? We have noted above the various catchphrases invoked by Gudō to draw the bridge between Buddhism and socialism, and that they are all doctrines rooted in the early Mahāyāna texts, and thus to a large degree foundational for all East Asian Buddhist sects. If we were to choose a single text that brings together these themes, it would be the *Lotus Sutra* – a text that, while foundational to several East Asian schools such as Tiantai/Tendai and Nichiren, is also deeply respected within other Mahāyāna streams, including Zen. Thus, while we might argue that Gudō's vision is one with roots in Zen doctrine, we would have to admit that it is not by any means a vision exclusive to Zen (unlike that of Takagi, which does seem exclusive to Shin or Pure Land teachings).⁵⁵ Indeed, in several important respects – including, perhaps, a willingness to engage in violent revolution – Gudō's 'anarcho-communism' has much in common with the Zen-Nichiren ultra-nationalism put forth two decades later by Inoue Nisshō (1887–1967). At any rate, though it would remain loosely defined from its first appearance as a concept in late Meiji through the 1920s, the appeal of anarchism, as opposed Marxism or other forms of socialism, was (1) its focus on individual freedom and liberty from all constraints – moral or political; and (2) its emphasis on 'direct action' – as opposed to social reform.⁵⁶ Though it requires some measure of interpretive verve (or deliberate misreading), one can see how a Buddhist – and particularly Zen – case could be made for these priorities as well.

At the same time, Gudō's vision for a better world is one that is also heavily informed by the monastic tradition – specifically, the simple and communal life of the (ideal) monastery. Here again, we could argue that the monastic ideal is shared by virtually all forms of Buddhism, but it appears that Gudō's inspiration was the Chinese Chan tradition(s) that gave birth to Japanese Zen. Around the time he became an abbot, in 1904, Gudō avers:

I reflected on the way in which priests of my sect had undergone religious training in China in former times [and] I realized how beautiful it had been. Here were two or three hundred persons who, living in one place at one time, shared a communal lifestyle in which they wore the same clothing and ate the same food. I held to the ideal that if this could be applied to one village, one county, or one country, what an extremely good system would be created.⁵⁷

⁵⁵On this issue, Yoshida argues that both Gudō and Itō Shoshin (1876–1963) shared a fundamental belief in the difference between 'the way of original Buddhism' (*bukkyō honrai no michi*) and the forms of sectarian Buddhism existent in Meiji Japan (Yoshida, *Nihon kindai bukkyōshi*, p. 406).

⁵⁶Interestingly, Gudō seems to have arrived at his preference for anarchism prior to Kōtoku Shūsui's famous lecture at Kinkikan Hall in Kanda, Tokyo, on 28 June 1906, entitled 'The Tide of the World Revolutionary Movement' (*Sekai kakumei undō no chōryū*) in which the founder of the Heimin-sha announced his break with social democratic (i.e., parliamentary) tactics in favour of revolutionary syndicalism, effecting an irrevocable split in Japan's young socialist movement; see Notehelfer, op. cit., pp. 133–137.

⁵⁷Inagaki, op. cit., pp. 112–113; translation is from Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 40–41, with minor modifications by me.

As Inagaki notes, Gudō's insight into the fundamental similarity between the idealised Buddhist *sangha* – rooted in dedication to simple, communal living and, most significantly, a rejection of private property – and the basic assumptions of socialism, was one that would not appear again within Japanese Buddhist thought for another nearly three decades, in the work of Seno'o Girō and the Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism.⁵⁸

Gudō's *Ordinary Self-awakening* is somewhat different in both style and content from *Anarcho-communist Revolution*. Here the rhetoric is turned down considerably, and Gudō makes a logical case for freedom and democracy using the leitmotif of *jikaku*. While this term can be fairly literally translated into English as 'self-awareness' or 'self-consciousness', it also has deep Buddhist roots and associations as a synonym for terms like *nirvana*, *bodhi* and *satori*. Thus I have chosen to render it as 'self-awakening'. It seems that Gudō intends to use the term in both its Buddhist and its 'Western' or perhaps philosophical (but also political) sense. As with his use of the compound *anraku jiyū* in *Anarcho-communist Revolution*, the term *jikaku* in this piece implies both a Buddhist awakening (i.e., an existential awareness that entails a fundamental personal transformation and encompasses or leads to liberation from suffering) and the more overtly Western philosophical sense of gaining 'autonomy' (and political 'freedom') through liberation from the constraints of tradition, authority and personal ignorance. Reading this piece, in its emphasis on 'freedom', the libertarian aspect of Gudō's vision becomes apparent, and we can see why he identified with anarchism as much as communism as a political ideal.⁵⁹ While communal living and the abandonment of private property remain a future ideal, Gudō's immediate concern was the destruction of the semi-feudal system that denied farmers the use of what is theirs by 'natural right' (*tōzen no kenri*). Thus, *Ordinary Self-awakening* reads as much like a work by John Locke or Thomas Paine – or Japanese Enlightenment figure Fukuzawa Yukichi – as of Karl Marx or Friedrich Engels.

Finally, let us return to Gudō's declaration, published in the 17 January 1904 edition of the *Heimin Shimbun*, which, however brief, is his clearest expression of the link between classical Buddhist teachings and contemporary left-wing politics. Here is the declaration in its entirety:

As a propagator of Buddhism I teach that 'all sentient beings possess Buddha nature' [*issai shujō shitsū busshō*] and that 'within this Dharma there is equality, with neither superior nor inferior' [*kore hō byōdō mu kōge*]. Furthermore, I teach that 'all sentient beings are my children' [*issai shujō mina kore ako*]. Having taken these golden words as the basis of my faith, I discovered that they are in complete agreement with the principles of socialism. It was thus that I became a believer in socialism.⁶⁰

Gudō cites three well-known phrases from the Mahāyāna sutras: (1) *issai shujō shitsū busshō* can be found in many Mahāyāna texts, including both the *Nirvana*⁶¹ and *Lotus*⁶² sutras; (2) *kore hō byōdō mu kōge* is taken directly from the *Diamond*

⁵⁸Inagaki, op. cit., p. 113.

⁵⁹Although it is often said that Gudō, following the lead of Kōtoku Shūsui and Sakai Toshihiko, abandoned socialism for anarchism, in fact he never makes a clear theoretical distinction between anarchism, socialism, or communism – just as he never makes a clear distinction between Buddhism and these economic and political theories; see Yoshida, *Nihon kindai bukkyōshi*, p. 405.

⁶⁰Originally published in *Heimin Shimbun* 10 (17 January 1904); reprinted in Kashiwagi, op. cit., p. 29; translation taken from Victoria, op. cit., with my modifications.

⁶¹T0374.12.0402c08–09.

⁶²See, e.g. T1723.34.0656a19.

Sutra,⁶³ though the more common version by far is *kore hō byōdō muyū kōge*⁶⁴ – while the even more common shorter phrase *hō byōdō* refers to ‘the sameness of truth as taught by all buddhas’ (Sk. *dharmasamata*), giving the term a nuance quite distinct from Gudō’s overtly ‘political’ interpretation; while (3) *issai shujō mina kore ako*, though less common, can be found in the *Lotus Sutra*,⁶⁵ among other texts. Of course, the speaker here is Śākyamuni Buddha, and not, as Gudō seems to imply, an ordinary monk (though one might argue, Nichiren-like, that an aspirant bodhisattva must take on this aspect of the Buddha as part of his/her vow).

Here we see Gudō seeking Buddhist foundations for equality in the early (and controversial) Mahāyāna teaching of Buddha nature, which, via Tiantai/Tendai, would eventually provide a shared foundation for virtually all East Asian Buddhist sects, including Zen, Pure Land (both Jōdo and Shin) and Nichiren. While it remains something of an open question as to whether the doctrine of Buddha nature can provide a sure foundation for a modern Buddhist conception of social and political equality, this is certainly a feature of East Asian Mahāyāna teachings that has been upheld by socially engaged Buddhists in recent decades.⁶⁶ Working against the egalitarian interpretation favoured by Gudō and socially engaged Buddhists, however, is the question of to which ‘realm’ these statements apply – a query that brings us back to our previous discussion of the Takagi Kenmyō’s rejection of the Pure Land ‘two truths doctrine’. For instance, the well-known teaching of *shabetsu byōdō* or *shabetsu soku byōdō* – usually translated as ‘differentiation is equality’ – was taken by prominent Meiji Buddhist figures like Shimaji Mokurai (see above) to imply that distinctions in social status and wealth are simply natural givens like age, sex, and so on, and have nothing whatsoever to do with the fundamental equality of the ‘absolute’ realm.

In short, rather than try to resolve the ‘problem’ of inequality in the here and now, Buddhists – according to Shimaji and others of his ilk – must focus rather on reaching the realm of undifferentiated being, by which all such superficial distinctions are recognised as illusory. Thus socialists, whether of the revolutionary or reformist hue, are mistaken in taking the material (i.e., contingent) world to be the fundamental reality – missing the forest for the trees, as it were.⁶⁷ Of course, Gudō, like most other Buddhist progressives and radicals, might turn this around and ask Shimaji and company why they are fixated on establishing a duality between this world and some other – what Ketelaar has termed ‘the bifurcation of form [*yūkei*] and formless [*mukei*]’ – when in fact no ‘ultimate’ distinction can be made.⁶⁸ As most Nichirenists and many Shin and Zen followers would have it, the world in which we live and suffer is nothing less than the ‘transcendent’ realm in its imperfect, ‘unawakened’ state. The fundamental or ‘transcendent’ equality asserted in the Mahāyāna sutras is a for Gudō a call to action – to bring about the transformation of

⁶³T1701.33.0167a09.

⁶⁴See, e.g., T0235.08.0751c24.

⁶⁵T1716.33.0698a17.

⁶⁶See, e.g., Sallie King, who argues against the Critical Buddhists that Buddha nature is both ‘impeccably Buddhist’ and useful as a foundation for Engaged Buddhism (‘The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature is Impeccably Buddhist’, in Paul L. Swanson and Jamie Hubbard (eds), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997); also Sallie King, *Buddha Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991). Ishikawa notes the similarities between Gudō and Dr B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) on the issue of employing Buddhist teachings to battle discrimination and promote social equality, as well as the struggle to connect Marxism and Buddhism (Ishikawa, op. cit., p. 100).

⁶⁷Shimaji Mokurai, *Shimaji Mokurai zenshū*, volume 3 (Kyoto: Honganji Shuppan, 1973), pp. 285–296.

⁶⁸Ketelaar, op. cit., p. 134; Ketelaar argues that this bifurcation became ‘a dominant theoretical position of late-nineteenth-century Buddhist thought’. I concur, with the caveat that this paradigm would persist in much of twentieth-century Buddhist thought, as well, including the work of the primary figures of the Kyoto School.

this world of inequality and suffering into a perfected 'Buddha land' in which there is 'comfort and freedom' (*anraku jiyū*). After all, the key here for Gudō is the logical chain that: (1) suffering exists in this world; (2) social inequality is a primary cause for suffering and thus must be eliminated; and (3) in order to eliminate social inequality, the system that creates such inequality must be replaced – even at the risk of one's life.

Conclusions

Uchiyama Gudō's concern with preserving individual liberty against the economic and political control of the elites (including, but not limited to, the 'thief in chief' – the Emperor) reflects to some degree his anarchist-libertarian leanings, but also tells us something about the way 'socialism' more generally was conceived in Japan at this relatively early stage, by its supporters as well as its detractors. As we have seen, government opposition to socialism was rooted not simply in fear of chaos but also in the perception of socialism as foreign, individualistic, and materialistic. Already by the late Meiji period, *kokutai* ideology was promoting an organic state with deep 'historical' roots in the imperial line and associated myths. Thus the main opposition to socialism, beyond it simply being a foreign import, was that it was unsuited to the constitution (in the metaphorical but also literal sense!) of the Japanese people. On the other hand, while a number of self-proclaimed socialists (or anarcho-communists) like Gudō were self-consciously promoting liberal 'rights' and 'freedoms', others felt more keenly the weight of the above critique and sought to ground their vision of 'socialism' more deeply in Japanese history and 'values'. Thus we have early socialists like Abe Iso'o (1865–1949) writing that 'an accurate account of the development of socialism in Japan entails going back to the early days of our history and examining the principles which influenced our sovereigns in governing their people in those far-off times'.⁶⁹ Moreover, at one of the earliest mass demonstrations of workers, held in the Mukōjima district of Tokyo on 3 April 1901, at which 20,000 people defied a police ban on large public assemblies to pass a series of resolutions for labour legislation and extension of the suffrage, the meeting opened with a pledge of allegiance to 'His Majesty the Emperor', only to conclude with a rousing chorus of '*banzai!*'⁷⁰

As contradictory as such statements may sound, they alerts us to several important facts discussed in this essay: (1) the definition of 'socialism' is more fluid than we (including many scholars) tend to assume; (2) this is perhaps even more so in late Meiji Japan, when various key texts remained untranslated, and when various permutations of left-wing thought were arriving in Japan simultaneously (allowing for an interesting historical parallel to the arrival of Buddhism in Japan some 14 centuries earlier).⁷¹

⁶⁹Abe Iso'o, 'Socialism in Japan', In Shigenobu Ōkuma (ed.) *Fifty Years of New Japan*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Eldeb & Co., 1909), p. 494; also see Crump, who all too readily dismisses such claims as 'bizarre'; John Crump, *The Origin of Socialist Thought in Japan* (New York: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 29. Although he avoids the term 'socialism', well-known pre- and postwar Buddhist historian Tsuji Zennosuke writes of the 'social welfare' foundations of the imperial state – and thus of the Japanese as a whole – in several books translated into English by the Japanese Red Cross society in the early 1930s (and thus presumably for foreign consumption); see Tsuji Zennosuke, *Nihon-jin no Hakuai*. Tokyo: Kinkōdō Shoseki, 1932; republished together with *Nihon Kōshitsu no Shakai Jigyō* in 1934.

⁷⁰See Crump, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁷¹Along these lines, just as they have always been scholars who question the 'authenticity' of the transmission of Buddhism to Japan (or, more recently, to the United States), so too we encounter scholars who question the legitimacy of Japanese socialism; Crump, a self-proclaimed 'real socialist', stands at the forefront of these; Crump *op. cit.*, pp. xi–xii.

Notes on contributor

James Mark Shields is Associate Professor of Comparative Humanities and Asian Thought at Bucknell University (Lewisburg, PA), and Japan Foundation Visiting Research Fellow at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Kyoto, Japan, 2013–2014). He conducts research on modern Buddhist thought, Japanese philosophy, and comparative ethics. In addition to various published articles and translations, he is author of *Critical Buddhism: Engaging with Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought* (Ashgate, 2011), and is currently completing a monograph on progressive and radical Buddhism in Japan.