

## Kuroda Toshio and the *Kenmitsu Taisei* Theory

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*The theory of the exoteric-esoteric system (kenmitsu taisei), proposed by Kuroda Toshio more than twenty year ago, has exerted a profound influence on the study of Japanese history and religion. The time has come for a thorough reexamination of both the contributions and deficiencies of Kuroda's theories. This essay outlines the development of Kuroda's thought, examines the contributions of the kenmitsu taisei theory, and discusses a number of remaining issues.*

KURODA TOSHIO FIRST PROPOSED the theory of the exoteric-esoteric system (*kenmitsu taisei* 顯密体制) in 1975, the same year that he advanced the notion of the temple-shrine power complexes (*jisha seiryoku* 寺社勢力). Together, the two ideas exerted a profound influence on the study of Japanese religious history, giving rise to a new approach that interpreted medieval Buddhism in terms of these concepts rather than of the earlier theory of Kamakura New Buddhism.

However, despite the large number of studies that have drawn upon the *kenmitsu taisei* theory, analyses of the theory itself have been less than adequate. Critics of the theory have often misunderstood its basic thrust, while supporters (myself included) have tended to get so wrapped up in the issues it raises that we have neglected to consider possible shortcomings. The theory has therefore remained on its altar, as it were, beyond the reach of critical scrutiny.

Two decades have passed since the appearance of the theory. Though many of its implications have yet to be explored, it has nevertheless reached the stage of maturity that allows for, and indeed demands, a frank and thorough examination of both its contributions and its deficiencies. As a long-time supporter of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory,

\* This is a translation (by Thomas Kirchner) of the article "Kuroda Toshio-shi to kenmitsu taisei ron" (TAIRA 1994a).

I feel it would be most appropriate in the present article if I shifted gears and focused more on its weaknesses than its strengths. Let me preface my comments, however, by notifying the reader that my analysis is based primarily on Kuroda's earlier work, and may not always take sufficient account of writings subsequent to *Jisha seiryoku* (KURODA 1980), writings such as those dealing with household Buddhism (*ie Bukkyō*) and the pacification of spirits (*chinkon* 鎮魂).

### *The Development of Kuroda's Thought on Religious History*

Before we begin our investigation of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory itself, let us first review the development of Kuroda's overall ideas on Japanese religious history. This development can be divided into three basic periods, which, for convenience sake, we will examine out of order. The first period was characterized by a focus on the *ryōshusei* 領主制 (the estate-owner system) and the third period by a consideration of factors other than the *ryōshusei*. The second period was one of transition between these two approaches.

One representative work of the first period was "Kamakura Bukkyō ni okeru ikkō senju to honji suijaku" [Nenbutsu practice and *honji suijaku* in Kamakura Buddhism] (1953). This article, which associated *ikkō senju* 一向專修 (the exclusive calling of the Name) with medieval rural Japan and the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 concept with ancient urban society, examined why *nenbutsu* practice was marginalized during the historical process through which the contradictions of the *ryōshusei* were resolved. Here Kuroda saw both the *shōen* 莊園 (landed estates) and so-called Old Buddhism as part of ancient (*kodai* 古代), rather than medieval (*chūsei* 中世), Japan.<sup>1</sup>

During the third period Kuroda published a number of studies based on the notion of the *kenmon taisei* 権門体制 (the system of ruling elites) and proposed an approach that looked elsewhere than the *ryōshusei* for explanations of the development of Japanese Buddhism. In representative works of this period, such as "Shōensei shakai to Bukkyō" [The landed-estate system and Buddhism] (1967), "Chūsei ni okeru kenmitsu taisei no tenkai" [The evolution of the *kenmitsu taisei* during the medieval period] (1975a), "Chūsei jisha seiryoku ron" [A study of the theory of medieval temple-shrine power complexes] (1975b), and *Jisha seiryoku* [Temple-shrine power] (1980), Kuroda elaborated his notion of a Japanese Buddhism whose development

<sup>1</sup> The terms "Old Buddhism" and "New Buddhism" are used in the present article only as a convenient way to distinguish pre-Kamakura Buddhism from medieval Buddhism, and are not intended as analytical categories.

was shaped by the dynamics of the exoteric-esoteric Buddhist establishment and the temple-shrine power complexes. His thought differed from that of his first period in that it situated Old Buddhism at the very core of medieval Japanese spirituality. During the first period, for example, the opposition between the Old Buddhist establishment and the advocates of exclusive *nenbutsu* practice was viewed as a clash between ancient Buddhism and medieval Buddhism, while during the third period it was viewed as a dispute between orthodox and heterodox forces within medieval Buddhism itself. Thus the so-called Old Buddhism of the medieval period, seen during Kuroda's first period as a remnant of ancient Buddhism, was reinterpreted during his third period as the expression of medieval Buddhist orthodoxy.

Kuroda's second period is represented by such important studies as "Chūsei kokka to shinkoku shisō" [The medieval nation and the concept of the divine nation] (1959a), "Buppōryō ni tsuite" [Concerning the Buddhist domain] (1959b), and "Shisōshi no hōhō ni tsuite no oboegaki" [A memorandum on methodology in intellectual history] (1960). The writings of this period are sometimes rather difficult to categorize, however, which might be a reflection of their transitional position in the development of Kuroda's thought. In "Shisōshi no hōhō ni tsuite no oboegaki," for example, a clear critique of and departure from the methodology of traditional Buddhist sectarian history is accompanied by a search for an individual approach to the understanding of medieval religion.

Earlier scholars of intellectual history, extracting similarities from the thought of figures like Hōnen, Nichiren, and Dōgen, posited a New Kamakura Buddhism characterized by sects that emphasized a single type of practice (*senju* 専修), acceptance of the "easy path" (*igyō* 易行), and proselytization among the populace (*minshūsei* 民衆性). Kuroda, in contrast, attempted to understand medieval religion through an analysis of the structural characteristics of feudal society in general. Kuroda pointed out that despite the general prevalence in feudal times of polytheism and magical practices, medieval religions tended to stress a monotheistic outlook and the notion of another world, with sectarian regulations (i.e., the precepts) serving as an apparatus to enforce adherence to the group's ideology. He pointed to the Shin sect as the purest expression of this trend, with divination thought (*shinkoku shisō* 神国思想) arising in reaction to it.

We should note here that although Kuroda characterizes divination thought as a reaction to contemporaneous religious developments, he nevertheless sees it as a form of medieval religion. This conclusion, though perhaps the inevitable outcome of his view that

Old Buddhism comprises the basis of medieval religion, nevertheless reveals the convoluted nature of Kuroda's thought at this stage in its development. On the one hand he says that magical practices were more widespread in medieval times than in ancient times, while on the other he identifies Jōdo Shinshū, known for its opposition to magic, as the most representative form of medieval Japanese religion. The student is left wondering exactly what the medieval Japanese attitude to magic was. Nor is Kuroda any clearer on the question of whether the medieval period saw a widening belief in polytheism or a increasing drive toward monotheism. Such confusion results from the fact that Kuroda fails to distinguish the ideological side of medieval religion from the folk-spiritual side.

Further confusion is caused by the fact that Kuroda uses the concept of medieval religion to mean the ruling ideology of feudal society. The student can only conclude that in a single country two completely different medieval religions—and thus two completely different ruling ideologies—coexisted even as they stood in confrontation. The overall reasoning of Kuroda's work from this period is something I personally find quite hard to follow. For example, Kuroda explains his identification of Shin Buddhism as a ruling ideology by characterizing the sect's stress on the "other shore" (*higan* 彼岸) as an attempt to escape from the sufferings of this world (the religion-as-the-opium-of-the-people hypothesis), a position that is questionable at best (see TAIRA 1989).

In any event, if during his first period Kuroda viewed the opposition between Old Buddhism and *nenbutsu* Buddhism as a clash between ancient Buddhism and medieval Buddhism, and that during his third period he saw it as a dispute between the orthodox and heterodox forces of medieval Buddhism itself, then during his second period he treated it as a conflict between the two ruling feudal ideologies.

In spite of the difficulties inherent in this second-period view, it may be seen as a direct precursor to Kuroda's later, more mature thought. Thus his attempt to trace the special characteristics of medieval religion to the structural features of feudal society, though not entirely successful, did set the stage for his subsequent theories of Buddhist development. In the essay "Shōensei shakai to Bukkyō" (see KURODA 1994, pp. 3-44), Kuroda argued that the union between technology and magic rendered inevitable the acceptance of the latter in medieval Buddhism. He was the first to discern the significance of the annual ritual calendar and the cycle of agricultural rites, thus anticipating the work of such recent scholars as IHARA Kesao (1986, 1991). This insight, deepened and developed, led eventually to Kuroda's *ken-*

*mitsu taisei* theory. Indeed, during his second period Kuroda was already situating Old Buddhism with medieval religion, and using the expression *kenmitsu shoshū* 顯密諸宗 (the various exoteric-esoteric sects). His third-period thought was clearly beginning to emerge.

### *Contributions of the Kenmitsu Taisei Theory*

The *kenmitsu taisei* theory might best be understood by considering it in terms of a broad sense and a narrow sense. The theory in its broad sense refers to the new methodology that Kuroda advocated in his research on medieval religion; the theory in its narrow sense refers to Kuroda's distinctive interpretation of intellectual and religious history as related to the emergence and development of medieval religion. The two categories are often difficult to distinguish, of course, but they nevertheless provide a useful framework for the analysis of Kuroda's thought.

First let us examine the theory in its broad sense. In the *kenmitsu taisei* theory Kuroda accomplishes two things. First, he situates *kenmitsu* Buddhism at the very core of medieval Japanese religion. Second, he deepens his critique of the methodology of traditional religious history, stressing the invalidity of the earlier historical model of Old Buddhism versus New Kamakura Buddhism.

Kuroda's first point followed naturally from his theory of the "ruling elites" (*kenmon taisei*), which situated the clergy and court nobles at the center of the medieval establishment that controlled feudal power through its ownership of the *shōen*. Kuroda, in identifying Old Buddhism as the core of medieval religion, called into question the basic assumptions of traditional Buddhist sectarian history, and did so in the context of an argument that offered a viable historical narrative as an alternative. Indeed, evidence of the internal contradictions of the traditional sectarian model is not hard to find. Why, for example, is the Saidai-ji movement of the Ritsu sect priest Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290)—a movement quite different in both doctrine and makeup from traditional Risshū—classified as a "reform" of Old Buddhism, while Nichiren's contemporary effort to revive the Tendai Lotus sect is categorized as "New Buddhism"?

Kuroda was not, of course, alone attempting to overturn the sectarian model of Japanese Buddhist history, but he was the only one to carry the critique to the point of rejecting the Old-Buddhism-versus-New-Buddhism model as false. This model, he held, arose from modern attempts by the sects to explain their origins, and not from an internal analysis of medieval religion as it actually was. Kuroda proposed a dif-

ferent set of concepts for understanding medieval religious history, concepts such as *kenmitsu* Buddhism, reformism, and heterodoxy. Academic opinion on these concepts is by no means uniform, of course, and as scholarship advances they will no doubt be called into question. What will remain, I think, is Kuroda's basic insight that the concepts by which medieval religious history is analyzed must derive from an understanding of the internal dynamics of medieval religion itself. This basic stance can be seen as the decisive contribution of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory.

Let us now turn to a more detailed examination of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory in its broad sense. With regard to this there are three main points I would like to consider, each of which I will deal with at some length.

The first point concerns the problem of how to understand Kamakura Buddhism vis-à-vis medieval Buddhism. Kuroda's classification of medieval Buddhism as a form of *kenmitsu* Buddhism was based on his perception of the deep influence that the latter had on all aspects of medieval society. Concerning this perception, however, the advocates of the Kamakura New Buddhism model differ little from Kuroda, they too being fully aware of the quantitative social weight carried by Old Buddhism in medieval times. But they see such *quantitative* factors as ultimately less significant than the *qualitative* changes in religious thought introduced by people like Shinran, changes like the new stress on faith, the easy path, and exclusive use of a single practice. It is because of the importance that they place on such qualitative differences that they identify medieval Buddhism with Kamakura New Buddhism.

Thus on one side we have Kuroda with his stress on quantitative factors, and on the other side we have the advocates of Kamakura New Buddhism with their stress on qualitative factors, setting the stage a fruitless and unending dispute. Perhaps a better approach would be to seek points of similarity between concepts linked to medieval religion and concepts linked to medieval society and government. If we identify the rise of medieval society and government with the social and political delimitation of the populace's desire for liberation, then surely we should identify the rise of medieval religion with the ideological delimitation of the same desire (that is, with the appearance of the medieval ruling ideology). The concept of medieval religion should not be defined on the basis of arbitrary academic criteria, or of value judgments favoring either quality or quantity. Only if we determine meaningful correspondences with contemporary political and social developments can medieval religion be discussed within a

general historical framework. This is not to say that such an approach is in every case the most productive one, or is even in every case possible. Still, with the formulation of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory we have reached the point where such conceptual coordination is possible, and it would be great loss to return to old patterns of thought without adequately exploring the possibilities of the new.

The second point I wish to discuss concerns the dramatic advance in scholarship ushered in by the *kenmitsu taisei* theory. I noted above that there is little substantive difference in the view of Kamakura Buddhism held by advocates of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory and that held by advocates of the Kamakura New Buddhism theory. This is not, however, to deny the contributions of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory to our understanding of medieval Japanese religion. For example, the theory of Kamakura New Buddhism, while recognizing the continuing authority of Old Buddhism in medieval times, showed little inclination to investigate such basic questions as the actual extent of Old Buddhism's influence or the sources of its enormous power—the medieval presence of Old Buddhism was acknowledged and things were pretty much left at that. Just as academic distinctions between mainstream culture and popular culture have been used to dismiss the latter as a topic unsuitable for scholarly research, the definition of Old Buddhism as a remnant of the ancient age has been employed to rationalize the academic neglect of Old Buddhism's role in medieval times. This has rendered the theory of Kamakura New Buddhism rather static, and has distorted the discussion of medieval religion.

In contrast, Kuroda's interpretation clearly shows *kenmitsu* Buddhism to be the religion of medieval Japan. His analysis of medieval Buddhism as a continuation of Heian *kenmitsu* Buddhism has opened the door to numerous vital issues. When and how, for example, did *kenmitsu* Buddhism take on a recognizably medieval character? What were the forces behind this medievalization process? What was the composition of the popular base that sustained it? What political policy changes fostered the process of medievalization, and what effect did they have on the Buddhist world? How did *kenmitsu* Buddhism interrelate with medieval society, culture, and art, and what influences did it exert on them? What were the everyday circumstances of the *kenmitsu* clergy and the temple-shrine establishment, and how did they relate to *shōen* society and the medieval state? The *kenmitsu taisei* theory brought the significance of these and many other questions into sharp focus.

The *kenmitsu taisei* theory has also opened many possibilities for contact with other disciplines. Anyone who has attempted to grasp the

meaning of medieval writings—whether diaries, *shōen* documents, narratives, military chronicles, or artistic materials—has realized how important an understanding of *kenmitsu* Buddhism is. The great majority of medieval materials are perfectly comprehensible with no knowledge of the teachings of Shinran and Nichiren, but are impossible to understand with any degree of accuracy unless one has studied *kenmitsu* Buddhist thought. In light of the relatively minor medieval influence of figures like Shinran and Nichiren, any theoretical system that places them at the center of medieval religious thought effectively cuts off meaningful exchange with other academic disciplines, leaving the field of Buddhist historical studies to engage in sterile discussions within its own self-enclosed world.

Largely because of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory, the field of medieval religious history has experienced an enormous influx of new data and concepts from disciplines as varied as sociology, political studies, poetry, music, *Nō*, *sadō*, and flower arrangement. Indeed, research in the field of medieval religion is now inconceivable without access to such resources. This recognition of the relevance of all cultural phenomena, of all human activity, in the overall context of the debate may be seen as one of the most significant contributions of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory.

Let us now move on to my third point, which concerns certain scholarly critiques of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory, such as those of IMAI Masaharu (1982) and IENAGA Saburō (1994). There are two basic aspects to these critiques. The first concerns Kuroda's above-mentioned stress on quantitative rather than qualitative factors, an approach that, it is claimed, disregards historical evaluations of New Buddhism's place in the development of Japanese religious thought.

I believe that this critique is based on a misunderstanding of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory. To emphasize quantitative factors when defining medieval religion is not the same as ignoring the importance of figures like Shinran in Japanese intellectual history. Kuroda's stress on quantitative considerations was intended only as a means of clarifying the true nature of medieval religion. I have already mentioned that Kamakura New Buddhism was viewed in much the same way by Kuroda as by the advocates of the Kamakura New Buddhism theory. The same can be said with regard to Shinran and the other New Buddhist figures, whose religious contributions are held in equal esteem by both sides. The problem, as I see it, is whether one chooses to see a figure like Shinran as a representative of New Kamakura Buddhism or as a heterodox thinker who is nevertheless still within the pale of Old Buddhism. It is, in other words, a problem of terminology.



Creating the category of “Kamakura New Buddhism” for Kamakura Buddhist figures like Shinran and Nichiren is indeed one way of emphasizing the historical significance of their teachings. This term fosters the misconception, however, that these teachings constituted the mainstream of Buddhism during the medieval era. One can see the effects of this misconception in the way that religious history is taught today. In contrast, use of the term “heterodox thinker” expresses something of both the social isolation and the religious accomplishments of these individuals. I therefore find the latter term far more appropriate.

The second aspect of the scholarly critiques concerns the relative overrepresentation of Kamakura New Buddhism and underrepresentation of Old Buddhism that supporters of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory have noted in textbooks and historical studies. Ienaga counters that this situation is quite natural given the dynamic spiritual legacy of Kamakura New Buddhism, which retains its significance even in the context of modern religious thought. In comparison, he notes, the modern legacy of *kenmitsu* Buddhism is virtually negligible. Ienaga’s argument is extremely lucid, and I have no quarrel with his major points—certainly no one would argue against the value of Kamakura New Buddhism’s spiritual legacy.

Still, I find the textbook presentation of Kamakura-era Buddhism to be quite unbalanced. The lack of any real consideration of Old Buddhism, save for movements of criticism and reform, leaves a gaping void, as if a work of general medieval history were to place so much emphasis on populist and democratic movements that it excised all mention of the shogunate and the imperial court. Students are probably left wondering exactly what it was that Shinran, Nichiren, and the others were reacting against. Furthermore, scholars have a certain obligation to present the story not only of those groups whose legacies have persisted until the present day, but of those whose influence may not be as great as it once was. And in any event, I am not convinced that *kenmitsu* Buddhism’s legacy is as negligible as Ienaga would have us believe.

To summarize, we may say that, despite reservations on the part of certain scholars, Kuroda’s *kenmitsu taisei* theory in its broad sense has been largely accepted by modern historians. Let us now proceed to a consideration of the theory in its more narrow sense.

### *The Kenmitsu Taisei Theory (2)*

Considered in the narrow sense, Kuroda’s ideas regarding the forma-

tion and development of medieval religion have made a number of contributions to historical scholarship, just as they have left a number of issues unresolved. I will start with a summary of the contributions.

First, Kuroda's approach allowed the *hijiri* and Pure Land teachings to be seen as links in the chain of *kenmitsu* Buddhism. The earlier scholarly explanation of these phenomena was basically as follows. In the middle and late Heian period Old Buddhism became decadent and corrupt as it increasingly stressed lineage and identified more with the nobility. A certain number of the clergy, critical of this situation, sought to preserve their spiritual purity by leaving the large Buddhist centers (*honji* 本寺) and moving to outlying temples (*bessho* 別所), and there they developed into the *hijiri*. The *hijiri* rejected the teachings of Old Buddhism and devoted themselves to Pure Land thought; out of this tradition eventually emerged such Kamakura New Buddhist thinkers as Hōnen and Shinran.

Kuroda responded to this view with the hypothesis that the Pure Land movement emerged as part of a Tendai move toward self-assertion in the midst of the generally uniform *kenmitsu* Buddhist scene. Kuroda's Old-Buddhism-centered approach was even clearer in his explanation of the *hijiri*. KURODA characterized the *hijiri* as within—albeit at the margins of—the temple-shrine power structure, with which they were linked in an “organic generative relationship” (*yūki-teki na seisei kankei* 有機的な生成関係) (1980, p. 84). Kuroda warned against misinterpretations of the *hijiri*'s religious stance, commenting, “The *hijiri* were fundamentally supporters of the *kenmitsu* position, and in most cases it was their single-minded devotion to the *kenmitsu* teachings that led them to separate themselves from the main temples” (“*Ōbō Buppō sōiron no kiseki*” 王法仏法相依論の軌跡, reprinted in KURODA 1994, p. 211). Similar comments are found in his notes for a series of lectures he gave at Kyoto University in 1978. The *hijiri*, he claimed, comprised a “system outside of the system” that existed in an “organic relationship” with the *kenmitsu taisei*, which, in turn, “supported the vitality of the *hijiri* by alternately expelling and reabsorbing them.”

Kuroda's position shook the established view, rejecting as it did the notion that the *hijiri* stood in opposition to Old Buddhism and proposing instead that they served a supplementary role in the existing system. Yet this position now forms the central current of scholarly opinion on the *hijiri*. It is for this reason that I see the teachings of Shinran, not as a development of Heian-period *hijiri* thought and Pure Land Buddhism, but as a rejection of them; my interpretation is, I believe, a clear extension of Kuroda's thought (see TAIRA 1992).

The second contribution of Kuroda's theories is the concept of

*kenmitsushugi* (exo-esotericism). Supporters of the Kamakura New Buddhism theory have studied the common features of the thought of Shinran, Nichiren, and the other Kamakura New Buddhist figures, but they have not looked into the overall characteristics of the Old Buddhist teachings. The same may be said of scholars in the field of doctrinal studies, who, despite their research on the thought of the Kamakura-era Tendai, Shingon, and Hossō sects, do not display much interest in the broader implications of Old Buddhist teachings. Kuroda changed this state of affairs by identifying exo-esotericism as the unifying logic underlying the various Old Buddhist traditions, and further distinguishing Mikkyō (esotericism) as the common denominator of *kenmitsu* thought. From there SATŌ Hiroo (1987), myself (TAIRA 1994b), and others identified such common features of the Old Buddhist groups as intersectorian harmony (*yūwa shugi* 融和主義), ideological pluralism (*shisōteki tagenron* 思想的多元論), and the reciprocal acceptance of expedient means (*hōben no sōgo shōnin* 方便の相互承認), making it possible for the first time to explain on an ideological and doctrinal plane the factors that united the eight *kenmitsu* sects.<sup>2</sup> The concept of exo-esotericism thus redirected the study of medieval intellectual history away from an endless search for new trends in medieval rhetoric and toward an understanding of the actual condition of popular Buddhism, a rather indeterminate entity grounded in the ruling ideology of *kenmitsu* thought.

The third contribution brought about by the *kenmitsu taisei* theory is the new tendency to see the Kamakura Buddhist thinkers more as representatives of reform and heterodox movements and less as isolated spiritual geniuses. In contrast to earlier studies, which tended to pass judgment on medieval figures from the lofty vantage point of modern value systems, the approach of the *kenmitsu taisei* theorists has been to evaluate the individual Kamakura Buddhist thinkers in terms of how far they diverged from the norms of the ruling ideology and the exo-esotericism-based medieval religious system. This gives scholars a tool for the qualitative evaluation of Kamakura Buddhist thought; hence the criticism that the *kenmitsu taisei* theory discounts the qualitative significance of religious teachings is clearly based on a misunderstanding. With the *kenmitsu taisei* theory it became possible to perform an ideological analysis in concert with the “great thinkers” theory of religious development (*chōtenteki shisōka ron* 頂点的思想家論), just as it became possible to establish standards for evaluating forms of religious thought that take into account the internal norms of

<sup>2</sup> The eight *kenmitsu* sects are the six Nara sects plus the two Heian sects of Tendai and Shingon.

medieval society. Or to put it another way, we have reached the stage where it is no longer possible to apply the “great thinkers” theory without taking due account of the historical context of the ruling ideology and popular Buddhism.

Because of this a great change has occurred in the way that Eisai and the Rinzai sect are viewed, and it has become possible to consider Shinran, Nichiren, and Dōgen separately from, respectively, the Shin sect, the Nichiren sect, and the Sōtō sect. In point of fact, given the Sōtō sect’s reliance on funeral services and *kitō* 祈禱 rituals from the time of the Nanbokuchō period (1336–1392), it is necessary to assess Dōgen’s thought independently of considerations of the Sōtō school’s organizational development. Even if individuals like Dōgen, Shinran, and Nichiren can be characterized as heterodox thinkers, it is hard to label as heterodox the Sōtō, Shin, and Nichiren sectarian organizations of the Nanboku and Muromachi (1392–1568) periods; judged on the basis of their teachings they are more accurately classified as reformist. By allowing such distinctions the *kenmitsu taisei* theory provides a way to consider religious thinkers separately from the sects associated with them.

The fourth contribution of Kuroda’s theories is their clarification of the mutual dependence between the *ōbō* 王法 (imperial law) and the *buppō* 仏法 (Buddhist law). Kuroda’s research demonstrated that the relative weight of the Buddhist presence in the national government was greater during the medieval period than during the Heian period. Earlier scholars hypothesized that the transformation from ancient Buddhism to medieval Buddhism was accompanied by a shift away from state Buddhism and communal forms of religion and towards more individual types of spiritual expression—the spread of Pure Land teachings and personal religious practices was believed to have occurred within the context of a general decline in Buddhism’s role as protector of the nation. Kuroda, however, pointed out that the new prominence of personal practices was no more than one aspect of the transformation process from ancient to medieval Buddhism, and that the highly pluralistic medieval temples offered activities ranging from rites of national protection to more individual disciplines. As a result of Kuroda’s studies, scholars have reinterpreted the core of medieval Buddhism as consisting of state Buddhism rather than Pure Land thought.

This hardly exhausts the list of Kuroda’s contributions. For example, in elucidating the fact that Ise Shinto is based upon *hongaku* thought (and is thus an offshoot of exo-esotericism), Kuroda took the lead in demonstrating how the boundaries of such academic disciplines as Buddhist history and Shinto history may be transcended. His

work on the *kike* 記家 (chroniclers) of Mt Hiei is also deserving of mention. At this point, however, I would like to proceed to an examination of some of the remaining problems in Kuroda's thought.

### *Outstanding Issues*

In order to clarify some of the weaknesses of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory it is first necessary to look at the theory's content in a bit more detail than we have until this point. The doctrinal development of the *kenmitsu taisei* was interpreted by Kuroda as occurring in three stages (see KURODA [1975a] 1994, p. 78):

- 1 the unification of Japanese religion based on thaumaturgic rites for the repose of spirits (*chinkon jujutsu* 鎮魂呪術);
- 2 the appearance of teachings expressive of the doctrinal unification of the respective *kenmitsu* sects, and the formation of sectarian rules for *kenmitsu* ritual;
- 3 the recognition by secular society of the legitimacy of the eight traditional sects (*hasshū*) and the formation of a type of religious social order.

The *kenmitsu taisei*'s historical development was summarized by Kuroda as occurring in the following stages:

- 1 the ninth-century integration of Japanese religion based on esoteric thought;
- 2 amidst the esotericization of Japanese religion, the tenth-century development of the Pure Land movement as a move by the Tendai sect toward self-assertion;
- 3 the eleventh-century appearance of the concept of *ōbō-buppō* mutual dependence, and the solidification of the *kenmitsu taisei*'s position as the controlling orthodoxy. KURODA comments, "At this stage, the *kenmitsu taisei* was more than just a religious system (that is, a system of beliefs). It merged with the state power structure, and in that sense assumed the status of an orthodox establishment religion" (1994, p. 79).

To these stages Kuroda added the following, based on later progress in temple-shrine historical research:

- 4 the eleventh-century establishment of the large temples' and shrines' status as "ruling elites" (*kenmon*).

With this as a basis let us now proceed with our discussion of the problematic points in Kuroda's thought. The first problem concerns the imprecision of the *kenmitsu taisei* concept itself, an imprecision that

arises from Kuroda's use of the term *kenmitsu taisei* in two different senses. In one sense the term refers to the system in which the exoteric and esoteric teachings coexisted among the eight *kenmitsu* sects, or in which these sects interacted among themselves. For example,

In the present article I use the term *kenmitsu taisei* to refer to the system of coexistence between the exoteric and esoteric teachings (by system here I mean not so much a legal or political system as a kind of ideological order); when I refer more specifically to the logic or the style of thought characteristic of this system I use the term *kenmitsu shugi*. (KURODA 1994, p. 75)

Examples of the use of *kenmitsu taisei* to refer to the organizational interaction of the *kenmitsu* sects include such statements as, "The *kenmitsu taisei* was the system based on the interdependence of the respective *kenmitsu* sects" (KURODA 1994, p. 134), and, "I refer to this orderly system of the [*kenmitsu*] sects as the *kenmitsu taisei*" ("Chūsei 'kenmitsu' Bukkyō ron" 中世顯密仏教論, in KURODA 1994, p. 314).

In other places, however, Kuroda uses the term to indicate something quite different: the medieval union between Buddhism and the state based on the notion of *ōbō-buppō* mutual dependence. He says, for example, "In the medieval era it was thought that religion and the state...properly existed in a relationship of mutual conformity. The *kenmitsu taisei* was a system of this type" (KURODA 1994, p. 45). Or again, "The distinctive system in which *kenmitsu* Buddhism and state authority were conjoined—this I refer to as the *kenmitsu taisei*" (KURODA 1995c, p. 74). Finally, "I use the term *kenmitsu taisei* to refer to the religious system that united the *kenmitsu* sects with the state power structure" ("Kenmitsu taisei ron no tachiba" 顯密体制論の立場, in KURODA 1994, p. 292).

The first usage relates to the interrelationship between the *kenmitsu* sects themselves, while the second usage relates to the connection between the *kenmitsu* sects and the state. The use of the same term to refer to these quite different concepts has led to a lack of clarity in the key concept of Kuroda's thought. Although I have been a supporter of the *kenmitsu taisei* theory since it first appeared, I must honestly admit that this obscurity has been an unending source of puzzlement. From the time of my first meeting with Kuroda I questioned him on this point, but was unable to gain a satisfactory response (in part, no doubt, because my own views on the matter were unsettled). I am thus all the more interested to take this occasion to reach some kind of conclusion on the matter.

To begin with, it seems to me that Kuroda's use of the term *kenmitsu taisei* to indicate the state of ideological unity between the eight

*kenmitsu* sects is conceptually inappropriate. The state of vague, indeterminate coexistence that was involved can be quite adequately expressed with the terms “*kenmitsu* Buddhism” and exo-exotericism, and need not be labeled a “system.” The notion of a “system” better fits the *kenmitsu taisei* referred to in Kuroda’s second usage of the concept, the *kenmitsu taisei* as a merger of *ōbō* and *buppō*. There are a number of historical phenomena that can be seen as expressions of the *kenmitsu taisei* in this sense: the state system for reception of the precepts; the bestowal of official rank on clergy members; the imperial appointment of clergy; the joint participation of *kenmitsu* clergy and the medieval state in the construction and ritual of *kenmitsu* temples; and the government suppression of heterodoxy at the *kenmitsu* temples’ request. Many of these points came to light only after Kuroda first presented his theory, so he can hardly be expected to have anticipated them. Still, I feel that Kuroda’s use of the *kenmitsu taisei* concept in the first-mentioned sense reveals a certain weakness consequent to his approach of presenting ideas in the form of historical narration. Further problems have probably been caused by the fact that the *kenmitsu taisei* theory begins with a consideration of the transitional period between the ancient and medieval eras, and never sufficiently analyzes the links with ancient religious history.

Why, then, did Kuroda persist with the first-mentioned interpretations of the *kenmitsu taisei* as well as the second-mentioned one? I suspect that the reason is closely connected with Kuroda’s conception of the historical process through which the *kenmitsu taisei* developed. As mentioned above, Kuroda held that a religious unification based on Mikkyō took place during the ninth and early tenth centuries, followed in the eleventh century by the concept of *ōbō-buppō* mutual dependence and the merger of *kenmitsu* Buddhism with the state power structure. Kuroda believed, in other words, that there was a period when *kenmitsu* Buddhism was *not* identified with the state. It was probably for this reason that Kuroda needed to retain the first-mentioned concept of the *kenmitsu taisei*, which covered the stage of history before *kenmitsu* Buddhism’s recognition by the state as the controlling orthodoxy.

But was there, in fact, a historical stage when no close connection existed between *kenmitsu* Buddhism and the state? Was there a period when no controlling orthodoxy was present? In point of fact a condition of mutual dependence between Old Buddhism and the government existed since the Nara period, and it is impossible to conceive of any subsequent time when such a link was absent. The concept of *ōbō-buppō* mutual dependence did indeed initiate a new epoch in the rela-

tionship between Buddhism and the state, but it by no means marked the first appearance of a controlling orthodoxy. The reason that I oppose the first-mentioned usage of the *kenmitsu taisei* concept is not only that it tends to obscure the concept itself but also that it suggests the existence of a fictitious time when Buddhism and the state were separate.

Kuroda's model of the historical development of the *kenmitsu taisei* may have been based on his belief that the ideological integration of *kenmitsu* Buddhism was a self-generated process carried out independently by the eight *kenmitsu* sects and leading to the emergence of the *jike* 寺家 (*kenmitsu* clerical establishment). According to this model, *kenmitsu* Buddhism followed its autonomous formation of the *jike* establishment with an effort to attain for itself a position in the governmental structure. Kuroda's hypothesis of a Mikkyō-based religious unification may have constituted an attempt to support in terms of intellectual history this notion of the independent emergence of the *jike*.

In reality, though, no such independent emergence took place, either ideologically or organizationally. The medieval *jike*, unlike the court nobles (*kuge* 公家) or warriors (*buke* 武家), were hampered by a decisive weakness: the lack of an independent coordinating organization. The so-called temple-shrine power complex was, in reality, a number of competing factions (Nanto 南都 [Nara], Hokurei 北嶺 [Tendai], Tōmitsu 東密 [Shingon]), with no internal system for mediating conflicts or consolidating a unified *jike* stance. The ninth and tenth centuries, where Kuroda situated the Mikkyō-based unification of the religious sects, marked the period when the Sōgōsho 僧綱所 (the self-regulatory organ of *kenmitsu* Buddhism) was disbanding and the Japanese Buddhist world was dividing into Tendai, Shingon, and Nanto (Nara) spheres of influence. No sort of self-generated, independent coordination was to be seen anywhere in the eight *kenmitsu* sects or the temple-shrine power complex. The integration of these disparate forces was in fact accomplished by the imperial court and the power of the retired emperors (*inkenryoku* 院權力). It was only because of government involvement that the eight *kenmitsu* sects and the temple-shrine power complex finally came together in the form of the *jike* establishment. Kuroda's intuition of this fact may have been one more factor prompting him to amplify his concept of the *kenmitsu taisei* into the two interpretations mentioned above.

The second problem I would like to consider concerns Kuroda's above-mentioned proposition that during the ninth to mid-tenth centuries there occurred a Mikkyō-based unification of the Japanese religious sects. I believe that several important points remain to be cleared up before this hypothesis can be fully accepted. These points



relate primarily to Kōfuku-ji 興福寺 and the Hossō sect 法相宗. Kuroda's hypothesis is generally applicable to the teachings of Enryaku-ji 延暦寺, Onjō-ji 園城寺, Tōdai-ji 東大寺, Tōmitsu, Onmyōdō 陰陽道, and the *shingi* (kami) cult 神祇信仰. One might also point to the Tendai idea of the *ichidai-enkyō* (一大円教, single great perfect teaching) and Kukai's concept of the *kuken jūmitsu* (九顯十密, nine exoteric teachings and tenth [and highest] esoteric teaching) as doctrines capable of encompassing the other Buddhist systems of thought. Can we, however, demonstrate the influence of such Mikkyō teachings in the Hossō sect and the Kōfuku-ji establishment?

In the mid-tenth century—when, according to Kuroda's model, the Mikkyō-based ideological unification of Japanese Buddhism was complete—there occurred an intersectarian debate known as the Ōwa no Shūron 応和の宗論 (963), during which Ryōgen 良源 (912–985) of the Tendai sect and Chūsan 仲算 (?–969) of the Hossō sect clashed on the meaning of the *ekayāna* (one vehicle) and the *triyāna* (three vehicles). Essentially a continuation of the early Heian-era *sanichi gonjitsu* dispute (三一権実論争) between the Japanese Tendai sect founder Saichō 最澄 (767–822) and the Hossō priest Tokuitsu 徳一 (n.d.), the debate revealed that the same concepts were still at issue a century and a half later.<sup>3</sup> This doctrinal controversy was not resolved until the Kamakura period, when figures like Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) and Ryōhen 良遍 (1194–1252) revised the doctrinal system of the Hossō sect. Facts like this leave one wondering whether Kuroda's hypothesized ideological unification had truly been realized in the mid-tenth century.

There were, of course, thinkers like Shinkō 真興 (934–1004) who attempted a synthesis between the Hossō and Mikkyō thought, but it is nevertheless quite significant that Mikkyō priests were absent from the Hossō sect headquarters of Kōfuku-ji during the medieval era. Given the weight of Kōfuku-ji in any consideration of *kenmitsu* Buddhism, it is important to assess quite carefully when and to what extent the thought of people like Shinkō influenced this central Hossō-sect institution. Pending this, Kuroda's hypothesis of a Mikkyō-based unification of Japanese religion remains just that—a hypothesis.

In this connection, SHIMAJI Daitō (1976, p. 225) points out that Jōkei preached the identity of the Mikkyō moon-ring meditation (*gachirin kan* 月輪観) and the Hossō consciousness-only meditation (*yuishiki kan* 法相唯識観), and that Ryōhen argued for the absolute affirmation of all teachings on the basis of Yogācāra thought (1976, p. 239). Ryōhen's thought, which borrows from the *kuken jūmitsu* doc-

<sup>3</sup> Saichō argued that the *ekayāna* is the real teaching and the *triyāna* the provisional teaching; Tokuitsu argued the opposite position.

trine of Kūkai, is particularly indicative of an esotericization of Hossō thought by the mid-Kamakura period. This is of little relevance to Kuroda's hypothesis, however, which remains unproven unless such an esotericization can be demonstrated for the period prior to the eleventh century.

Actually, I question whether it is truly essential to the *kenmitsu taisei* theory to posit a Mikkyō-based unification of Japanese religion prior to its inclusion in the state power structure. If one accepts the fact that *kenmitsu* Buddhism was always linked to the state power structure, and that the integration of the eight *kenmitsu* sects could not have occurred without government involvement, then it becomes unnecessary to argue for a ideological unification based on esoteric thought. From the point of view of the government it quite sufficed if the respective sects agreed on their role of praying for the peace and protection of the nation; further ideological integration would have been superfluous. And although the popular demand for thaumaturgic rites to bring peace to the dead might best have been fulfilled by Mikkyō, there was no particular reason why other forms of religion would not have been acceptable as well.

I am not, of course, arguing that there was no process on ideological unification among the respective *kenmitsu* sects. To do so would, in effect, constitute a denial of the concept of exo-exotericism. That such an integrative process did take place is evidenced by such developments as Ryōhen's revision of Hossō doctrine and the unanimous stance of the eight *kenmitsu* sects in demanding suppression of the *nenbutsu* followers. Unification of this type, however, came about as a result of intersectarian studies by the *kenmitsu* clergy and everyday contacts among the priests of the orthodox group, and not because of a state decision to sanction an ideologically united *kenmitsu* Buddhism.

That a process of esotericization took place in the Japanese religious world during the ninth and tenth centuries is similarly undeniable. This development, however, resembled the Kamakura-era attempts by the *kenmitsu* sects to find some way to internalize the teachings of Zen—both trends were motivated by the realization that any sect which delayed in adopting the ideology and ritual currently popular with the secular authorities put at risk its position in the state liturgical system. Thus the spread of Mikkyō was spurred by government involvement as the sects attempted to support and strengthen their position in the controlling orthodoxy.

The third problem to be considered is Kuroda's equation of the heterodox movements with the reform movements, and consequent failure to clarify the qualitative differences between the two. Kuroda can hardly be blamed for this oversight, however. The contemporary

scholarship he relied on in formulating his theories had yet to discern the fact that terms such as *senju* 專修, *senchaku* 選択, and *akunin shōki* 悪人正機 meant something quite different in *kenmitsu* Buddhism than they did in the thought of heterodox thinkers like Hōnen and Shinran. Unaware of this difference, Kuroda proposed the idea of heterodoxy largely on the basis of his own intuition, unable to provide the type of scholarly corroboration needed to establish it as an independent historical concept. Though it remained rather vague at the time, the notion of heterodoxy has been largely verified by subsequent research.

Vagueness is a problem in several of the other arguments advanced by Kuroda. He identifies Tendai *hongaku shisō* 本覚思想 (original enlightenment thought) as the most representative form of exo-esoteric thought, and at the same time characterizes the heterodox/reform movements as developments and outgrowths of certain aspects of this system of thought: “Tendai *hongaku shisō* provided New Buddhism’s most distinctive form of logic” (KURODA 1994, p. 123). Thus *hongaku shisō*, in Kuroda’s view, formed both the nucleus of *kenmitsu* Buddhism and the ideological womb of heterodox/reformist thought. This misconception was rooted in the fact that at the time heterodox thought had yet to be clarified. Heterodox thinkers such as the advocates of the exclusive calling of the Name must now be classified as opponents of *hongaku shisō*; to do otherwise would be to call the entire notion of heterodoxy into question.

I am also uncomfortable with Kuroda’s discussion of the concepts of war and peace as forces in the medieval era. Although he was quite right to react against the simplistic portrayal of the medieval era an age of war, his argument loses sight of the fact that the temples’ invocations for peace were not free of violence themselves. Many of these invocations took the form of curses, a form of religious aggression. It can therefore be said that the rites of *kenmitsu* Buddhism functioned as part of the medieval apparatus of violence, just as the militancy of the bakufu did. However, it should be remembered that it was in order to bring about peace that the warriors and the priests, in their respective ways, resorted to aggression.

In his description of the transition to medieval religion Kuroda sometimes shows a tendency to avoid meaningful discussion through a reliance on rhetoric, as when he characterizes earlier religious forms as “overmature” (*ranjuku* 爛熟) and “degenerate” (*taihai* 頹廢). Many issues pertaining to the transitional period remain to be explored, and our understanding of the development of the *kenmitsu taisei* from the time of the Kamakura period needs much fleshing out. The *kenmitsu taisei* theory in its narrower sense is far from complete.

### Conclusion

Frankly speaking, Kuroda's *kenmitsu taisei* theory is often quite hard to follow. One difficulty is that the historical evidence frequently fails to keep pace with Kuroda's inspirations, causing contradictions that sever the flow of his argument. Yet Kuroda forges on, less concerned with filling in the details of his theoretical system than with exercising his formidable powers of conception in the investigation of a wide range of unexplored issues, issues such as how to situate Japanese Buddhism and government in the context of East Asian history; how to understand the overall nature of thought and religion in early modern and modern Japan; and how to investigate Japanese intellectual history in a way that transcends the divisions of Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, and Confucianism. KURODA once wrote,

Historiology is the science of understanding historical trends and events as developments within the overall nature of things. No historiological awareness is shown by one who separates historical trends and events from the whole and attempts to treat them as discreet facts. (1995c, p. 329)

This was the approach to historiology that Kuroda followed with an honesty that was nearly excessive. Behind Kuroda's dedication was strong sense of responsibility and concern regarding the state of the modern world. Those of us attempting to succeed to his work must strive not only to further his historical research but also, and more importantly, to maintain his scholarly zeal and his sense of social obligation.

The increasing specialization and narrowness of the academic disciplines is in many ways a natural development, but it is one that can easily lead to becoming moribund. The scholarly vitality of historiology depends upon the continuing creation of new models to elucidate the overall workings of the historical process, a task that cannot be accomplished without an unceasing attention to the nature of everyday reality. This is the legacy that Kuroda has left to us.

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