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Kuroda Toshio (1926–1993) on Jōdo Shinshū Problems in Modern Historiography

Kuroda Toshio's revisionist history of medieval Japan is well known, but the historiography behind the revisions is not fully understood. This article first places Kuroda among other post-war Japanese intellectuals and then examines the particular significance of his work. Kuroda's contribution is not limited to medieval history, but has much broader implications for comparative studies in areas such as the relationship between religion and politics or religion and the modernization process. Because Kuroda viewed the Pure Land Buddhist Sect, Jōdo Shinshū, as the most progressive and politically independent sect in the medieval period, Shinshū plays a particularly important role in Kuroda's history of Japanese Buddhism.

KEYWORDS: Kuroda Toshio – Ishimoda Shō – Jōdo Shinshū – *Buppōryō* – modernization – Robert Bellah

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KURODA TOSHIO's scholarship on medieval history and religion has begun to receive greater attention among Western scholars in the last decade or so.¹ Although some of his arguments have been contested, overall his revisionist history has made an enormous impact in the ways medieval history is studied. For the students of religious history, Kuroda's insight into the interrelations between religious ideology and political economy is most intriguing. So far, however, his theories have been introduced only at a factual level as new and presumably more accurate portrayals of medieval society. This article explores the historiographical issues behind Kuroda's reformulation of medieval history focusing on his perceptions of the Buddhist sect Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 (True Pure Land School). Although Kuroda was not a Shinshū specialist, he was nonetheless profoundly interested in this sect. Approaching his scholarship from this subject offers us a unique insight into the nature of his work and thought.

Kuroda was born in a rural town of Toyama Prefecture in 1926. The Hokuriku region where Toyama is located has been a bastion of Jōdo Shinshū for the last several centuries. It was the area where the Shinshū uprisings of *Ikkō ikki* were fought most violently in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Even after the *Ikkō ikki*, Shinshū remained strong in this region. According to 1911 statistics, nearly eighty percent of the Buddhist temples of Toyama Prefecture were affiliated to Shinshū.² Kuroda described his family as sincere followers of Shinshū who would chant scriptures every morning at the altar (KURODA 1987c, KTC 4: 355, 383).

Kuroda graduated from the Fourth Senior High School in Kanazawa, the same high school Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) and D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) had attended earlier. In 1945, shortly after he entered Kyoto University to study Japanese history, Kuroda enlisted in the army. He narrowly escaped deployment due to the ending of the war. In 1948, he graduated from university having submitted a senior thesis on the medieval history of Shinshū. Kuroda proceeded to graduate school at Kyoto University, and upon completion of graduate work he

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1. For an overview of Kuroda's life and works, see DOBBINS 1996. For Kuroda's theory of medieval political structure, see ADOLPHSON 2000, 10–20, 353–55.

2. According to the 1911 statistics (which probably reflects the late Edo conditions), twenty-eight percent of all Buddhist temples consisted of Shinshū temples and were particularly concentrated in Hokuriku, Kinki, western Chugoku, and northern Kyushu areas. Kuroda Toshio's home prefecture Toyama had the highest concentration rate (78.8 percent) of Shinshū temples. From *Shūkyō seido chōsa shiryō* vol. 7, cited in ARIMOTO 1995, 176–79, 360.

began teaching at Kobe University in 1955. In 1961, he moved to Osaka University and taught there until 1989. Following his retirement from Osaka University, Kuroda taught briefly at Ōtani University, a Shinshū denominational college, until his death in 1993.

Despite a strong interest in Shinshū from his youth, Kuroda's chief target of inquiry was the dominant (or what he called "structural") religion of the medieval elites, which he construed as opposite to heterodox Shinshū. Thus, his discussion on Shinshū is mostly embedded in his study of the medieval politico-religious structure. With the exception of a few preliminary articles, short essays, and public lectures, Kuroda did not leave any systematic writings on Shinshū. However, in his major works written between the mid-1960s and 1990, Shinshū constantly appears as "the Other" of the mainstream religion. His frequent remarks on Shinshū give an impression that the history of this sect was Kuroda's hidden agenda. This peculiar twist in Kuroda's scholarship, as I discuss later, is linked with the historical and academic conditions of the postwar period.

Indeed, a key element in Kuroda's revision involved setting aside the so-called Kamakura new Buddhism and shedding light on the hitherto neglected aristocratic religion. Previous scholarship characterized the medieval period by the emergence of warrior governments and popular forms of Buddhism, Shinshū included. However, Kuroda pointed out the anachronism of this history and stressed the continued strength of the court and the older forms of Buddhism. His major theory, the *kenmon taisei* 権門体制 (gates of power structure), provided a new conceptual model of medieval polity. In place of a warrior-centered government, Kuroda proposed a power-sharing polity in which three power blocks ("gates of power")—warriors, aristocrats, and religious houses—competed and complimented each other, while the *tennō* at the center acted as an arbiter. Kuroda considered that this *kenmon* structure lasted approximately from the late eleventh to the late fifteenth centuries.

The dominant religion in this society, according to Kuroda, consisted of the already established schools of Buddhism such as Hossō, Kegon, Tendai, and Shingon, which he collectively termed *kenmitsu* 顕密 (exoteric-esoteric) Buddhism. Representing *kenmitsu* Buddhism were the large estate-owning temples such as Kōfukuji, Tōdaiji, Enryakuji, and Tōji, whose chief function was to perform esoteric rites for the peace and prosperity of the ruling elites and their realm. Since *kenmitsu* schools embraced kami cults through the doctrine of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹, which treated native gods as manifestations of Buddha, Shinto shrines were also incorporated into the political and economic network of the dominant *kenmitsu* Buddhism.

Kuroda's revisionist scholarship prompted the flourishing of studies on previously neglected subjects such as the nature of medieval kingship and the pre-Kamakura schools of Buddhism. However, some scholars, especially those

who study the new sects, have expressed reservations about Kuroda's interpretations. This is primarily because his socio-political emphasis seems to ignore the Kamakura sects' contributions to the religious and intellectual heritage of Japan. In response to such criticism, Kuroda's student, Taira Masayuki, avers that Kuroda, too, held the new Kamakura sects in high esteem, but that he contextualized them into overall medieval religious conditions (TAIRA 1996, 432–35). I agree with Taira on this point. As we shall see in this paper, although Kuroda was not a doctrinal scholar, he never slighted the significance of Shinshū teachings.

There are also those who critique the Marxist overtone in Kuroda's writings.³ Certainly, the Marxist mode of analysis dominated the postwar historical studies and Kuroda was not unaffected by the trend. Taken at face value, Kuroda's works may appear overly ideological and confusing. However, in fact, what makes his writings truly attractive and challenging is their very ideological nature. For Kuroda, history is not a simple assemblage of facts, but it necessarily reflects the historian's own values born out of his contemporary existence. In other words, he viewed ideology as a necessary impetus for writing a seriously engaged history. Therefore, to properly understand Kuroda's writings, it is crucial to know the historical and academic circumstances to which he was responding.

Perhaps the most important factor in postwar studies of religious history was the widespread resentment directed toward wartime imperialism and State Shinto. Many intellectuals felt that they had been "spellbound" by *tennōsei* (the emperor system), which had an aura of religion about it. Looking back on his academic life, Kuroda recalled in 1990 how religion became an unavoidable subject for his generation of scholars:

For the people of my generation, because of the educational environment and the social convention of the time, it was impossible to be totally indifferent to religion.... Religion was not simply an object of knowledge or interest, nor a specialized subject. Whether one liked it or not, religion literally dictated one's fate, one's life and death. In other words, religion was an issue that judged whether one was an apostate or a traitor. It was a serious subject that bound the conscience of ordinary people. The reason why I have been so attached to medieval religious history is because we had this situation where the history of our country was spellbound. (KURODA 1990C, KTC 8: 444)

3. For instance, from the perspective of Shinto studies, Mark TEEUWEN and Fabio RAMBELLI critique the "vulgar Marxist" elements in Kuroda's interpretations. They observe that in Kuroda's writings, "central institutions...are often presented as powerful, quasi-totalitarian domination mechanisms," while "[p]easants and commoners...are generally described as ignorant and superstitious folks who readily fall prey to the ruling bloc's propaganda ("spell")—largely based on religious doctrines and practices such as *honji suijaku*" (TEEUWEN and RAMBELLI 2003, 44).

Another defining issue for modern Japanese scholarship was anxiety raised by modernization and the urge to compare Japanese history to that of the West. The five-stage developmental theory of historical materialism provided the most common standard of comparison and was regarded as the “law of world history” (*sekaishi no kihon hōsoku*).⁴ Japanese historians were preoccupied by questions such as when feudalism started in Japan, and they studied modes of production and class relations to identify historical stages. The predominance of Marxist history continued until about the mid-1970s. In terms of religious history, the Weberian-style evolutionary view was also prevalent. In this view, as a traditional, patrimonial society proceeds to a modern, bureaucratic society, rationalism replaces magic. Some aspects of the Protestant Reformation, such as shifts of emphasis from ritual to faith and from priests to lay individuals, were also considered as standard facets of modernization.

In this intellectual milieu of the postwar Japan, Shinshū, and especially the teaching of its founder Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), had a particular appeal. Doctrinally Shinshū was akin to Protestant Christianity. It kept its distance from kami worship. Shinran’s faith community was egalitarian and was open to the lay populace. Politically, Shinshū in its initial stages was independent of the imperial court and the land-owning aristocrats. However, Kuroda realized the limits of the sect’s impact and discussed its history in a slightly different manner than did others. At a more fundamental level, while “modernization” was often accepted as an unproblematic, transparent concept, Kuroda asked if there were a universal law of history against which pre-modern Japanese society could be judged. Not willing to accept the European model of modernization as definitive, Kuroda struggled to characterize the unique qualities of medieval Japan. Since he regarded Shinshū as the most progressive religion in the medieval period, its history bore a particular significance for Kuroda’s analysis of Japanese religious history.

The remainder of this article consists of three main parts. The first section considers how Kuroda responded to the prevalent view of medieval religion, especially Pure Land Buddhism. To do so I situate Kuroda among his contemporaries—Ishimoda Shō 石母田正 (1912–1986), Hattori Shisō 服部之總 (1901–1956), and Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎 (1913–2002). For the sake of comparison, I will also mention Robert Bellah’s (b. 1927) observation concerning Jōdo Shinshū. The second section discusses Kuroda’s view of Shinshū history focusing especially on his concept of *Buppōryō* 仏法領 (Buddhist domain). In the third section, I reflect on Kuroda’s question about the modernization of religion, and its implications for historiography.

4. Marxists have argued that a society progresses in five stages—primitive society, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism.

Postwar Historiography on Medieval Japan and Jōdo Shinshū

Immediately after the World War II, a number of pivotal works on medieval history and religion were published. In this section, we will examine three of such works that are often mentioned by Kuroda. ISHIMODA Shō's *Chūseiteki sekai no keisei* [The formation of the medieval world, 1946] had a paradigmatic importance to medieval historians, Kuroda included. Ishimoda's book is about medieval social relations in general, not specifically Shinshū. The Pure Land Buddhism that Ishimoda discusses therein is the larger parental movement initiated by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212), Shinran's teacher. The other two works, HATTORI Shisō's *Shinran nōto* [Notes on Shinran, 1948] and IENAGA Saburō's *Chūsei Bukkyō shisōshi kenkyū* [Studies on medieval Buddhist thought, 1947], are more directly related to Shinshū.

ISHIMODA SHŌ

Ishimoda Shō's grand epic, *Chūseiteki sekai no keisei*, narrates a history of the people who lived on a temple estate in Iga Province (Mie Prefecture) from the eleventh to the sixteenth century. This estate belonged to the official Nara temple, Tōdaiji. Ishimoda's rather pessimistic tale tells how the residents of the estate remained submissive to its proprietor Tōdaiji for five centuries. Using the example of this medieval temple estate, Ishimoda metaphorically critiqued the wartime imperialist regime and lamented his people's inability to resist hegemonic authority. Ishimoda wrote this book in the fall of 1944 in only one month, anticipating the imminent bombardment of Tokyo. After fire destroyed the print shop that was to publish it, the book was finally published in 1946, and it had an immediate impact on historians.⁵

According to Ishimoda, the formation of a medieval society required the overcoming of an ancient society. Here, Tōdaiji represented the ancient aristocratic regime, while *ryōshu* 領主, the small land-owning warriors on the estate, epitomized the emerging medieval class. At this isolated estate, however, the "formation of the medieval world" was a slow, frustrating process, because the Tōdaiji always managed to contain warriors' challenge to the temple. Only in the sixteenth century—when outside this estate, the medieval world was already coming to an end—did external factors dismantle the remaining archaic elements. Anticipating the end of World War II, Ishimoda characterized his work as "a history of frustration and defeat" (*satetsu to haiboku no rekishi*). The final sentences of the book seem to suggest the backwardness of Japanese society, which required pressure from the West in order to modernize: "We must now

5. In the 1985 edition of *Chūseiteki sekai*, Ishii Susumu discusses the historical circumstances of Ishimoda's writing of this book. Citing Ishimoda's own comments on how central the issue of emperor system was to him, Ishii assumes that Tōdaiji in *Chūseiteki sekai* was a metaphor of *temmōsei* (ISHIMODA 1985, 457–60).

close the history of frustration and defeat. Outside, the medieval age was already over and European commercial capitals were arriving in the Western Provinces” (ISHIMODA 1985, 417). However, in his preface, Ishimoda also noted that, by showing how people in this old estate “lived, fought, and shaped history,” he wanted to let the young generation know that Japan’s past was not entirely fruitless (1985, 13–14).

Shinto and Pure Land Buddhism play limited but important roles in Ishimoda’s narrative. The land-owning elite temples such as Tōdaiji accommodated kami worship, enshrined deities like Hachiman on their estates, and oversaw management of the shrines. Marxist historians have interpreted this phenomenon as a two-tier control mechanism: cultivators and local warriors (*ryōshu*) were first controlled by their village shrines whose managers, *jinin* 神人, acted as estate administrators, and at a higher level they were controlled by capital area temples such as Tōdaiji, which were the ultimate proprietors of the land. It was almost unthinkable for locals to rebel against their own tutelary kami (ISHIMODA 1985, 294–307). But Hōnen’s Pure Land Buddhism provided momentum for social change because, according to Ishimoda, Pure Land believers were more concerned with their individual salvation than about the communal worship of kami.⁶ Independent-minded *ryōshu* were especially drawn to Pure Land Buddhism. Ishimoda reports cases in which the local warriors at other estates were converted to Pure Land Buddhism and revolted against their shrine managers. However, due to its geographical isolation and its relative proximity to Tōdaiji, changes were slow to come to this estate in Iga (ISHIMODA 1985, 373–75, 394–95).

Kuroda’s revision of medieval history was primarily a revision (but not a total negation) of Ishimoda’s view. Associating the Japanese medieval era with the European medieval era, Ishimoda identified warrior lords as the key players of Japan’s medieval period.⁷ His characterization of the medieval polity was summed up in the term *ryōshusei* 領主制, the local lord system. However, Kuroda noticed that warrior domination in the medieval period progressed slowly, and that the courtiers and religious establishment continued to wield their powers for centuries. In terms of religion, Ishimoda identified the new Kamakura Buddhist sects, especially those derived from Hōnen’s Pure Land movement, as the typical medieval religion favored by warriors. However, Kuroda pointed out that during the medieval period, the so-called Kamakura new Buddhism remained for the most part a scattering of minor heterodox teachings. What actually constituted medieval orthodoxy were the established *kenmitsu* schools, which incorporated kami worship into their syncretic form of

6. In this respect, Ishimoda likened the rise of Pure Land Buddhism to the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire rather than to the Protestant Reformation (ISHIMODA 1985, 350–51).

7. This relates to Ishimoda’s contrast of Chinese and Japanese histories. He characterized the emergence of warrior governments in Japan as a departure from the ancient Chinese style despotism (ISHIMODA 1985, 219–31).

Buddhism. Accordingly, Kuroda claimed that Shinto as an independent religion did not exist in the medieval period.⁸

HATTORI SHISŌ

Hattori Shisō was the son of a Shinshū minister, but he left his family temple to become a Marxist historian. The essays in his *Shinran nōto* first appeared between 1946 and 1948, and Hattori's passionate and flamboyant style of writing stirred postwar academia. This controversial work was filled with Hattori's anger toward Honganji (the central temple of Shinshū) which, in his opinion, adulterated Shinran's teaching and collaborated with the imperialist government. He also indicated a comparative interest in the Protestant Reformation, but was skeptical of using European philosophical terminology to explain Shinran's ideas. As a Marxist historian, first and foremost Hattori wanted to portray Shinran as a friend of peasants. He wrote in his preface to his *Shinran nōto*: "I wanted to take Shinran out of the [Japanese] temple, and out of Japanese philosophy shaped like a Western-style temple, and I wished to release him in the vicinity of peasants—the very place where Shinran was when he was alive" (HATTORI 1967, 9–10).

Hattori respected Shinran, but was critical of Shinshū as a religious organization. The architects of Shinshū institutions, such as Kakunyo 覚如 (1270–1351), who established the Honganji temple at Shinran's mausoleum, and Rennyō 蓮如 (1415–1499), the great proselytizer known as the Second Founder of Shinshū, were blamed for having corrupted Shinran's pure faith and having been co-opted by secular authority. The key issue here was Shinshū leaders' obedience to the existing political order as expressed in the phrase, "placing priority on the King's Law," or *ōbō ihon* 王法為本. Hattori wanted to demonstrate that Shinran, unlike later Honganji leaders, did not support the imperial house, and he reinterpreted a letter of Shinran to prove his point.

During the war, the following statement of Shinran in his letter was often quoted as evidence that he was indeed a loyal supporter of the imperial house: "If you and other nenbutsu practitioners say nenbutsu for the sake of the royal household (*chōka*) and for the sake of the people of the country (*kokumin*), it would be propitious" (cited in HATTORI 1967, 29, 101).⁹ Even the philosopher Miki Kiyoshi 三木清 (1897–1945), who was sympathetic to Marxism, accepted this official Honganji interpretation before he died in prison in 1945. When his

8. See "Nihon shūkyōshijō no Shintō" (KURODA 1983, KTC 4: 175–97). For translation of this article by James C. Dobbins and Suzanne Gay, see KURODA, "Shinto in the history of Japanese religion," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7: 1–21 (1981).

9. This statement of Shinran is found in his letter to his student Shōshin (1187–1275). Shōshin had been taken to Kamakura and was questioned about Pure Land faith at the shogun's court. The letter congratulates Shōshin's return to his home after the successful settlement of the case. Because of the political nature of this letter, it attracted much academic debate. For the letter, see SSS 1: 450.

unfinished manuscript *Shinran* was published in the following year, Hattori argued that Miki's reading of Shinran was compromised by the political pressure of wartime. In order to do so, Hattori interpreted the word "propitious" (*medetashi*) as "foolish," making the whole sentence a satire to ridicule the loyalists: "How foolish it would be, if..." (HATTORI 1967, 30). Even though Hattori's interpretation was a far-fetched one, it was welcomed by some liberal scholars such as Ienaga Saburō.¹⁰ Still other scholars responded, and this and some other claims of Hattori were soon discredited as misreading of the documents.

While Hattori's interpretation of Shinran's letter triggered a debate among many historians, Kuroda seems to have been more intrigued by Hattori's remarks on the Reformation. Hattori identified the denial of ecclesiastical order and the affirmation of secular life as the most important elements in a religious reformation. He wrote, "denial of monastic life and a concomitant acknowledgment of this worldly life and its secular occupations are closely linked to the essence of the Protestant type of reformation" (HATTORI 1967, 70). Furthermore, Hattori claimed that since Shinran lived in a simple agrarian society among peasants, in a fortuitous way his reform was even more thoroughgoing than Luther's or Calvin's. European reformers could not avoid political entanglement with the princes and the rising bourgeois class. In this sense, Hattori thought that Ren'nyo, rather than Shinran, was comparable to Luther:

Shinran's teaching had its basis in the recognition of human sinfulness, yet, unlike Luther, it did not particularly emphasize "obedience" to an earthly power. Placing priority on the King's Law [*ōhō ihon*] was not a part of Shinran's teaching, but was attributed to Shinran by Kakunyo and Ren'nyo. The priority of the King's Law was a key phrase of the Buddhists at Mt. Hiei and in Nara, who by such phrases guarded the earthly foundation of their temple estates. Shinran denied both temples and temple estates.

On the other hand, Shinran did not develop the concept of "individual citizen" as did Calvinism, nor the resultant demand for "supervising the ruler." For Shinran, the absolute equality of ordinary beings [*bonbu*] in the face of [Amida's] Primal Vow was all. With Shinran, the grace of God in Luther and Calvin [was manifested] more impartially and more thoroughly.

(HATTORI 1967, 68)

In a 1962 essay on methodology, Kuroda summarized *Shinran nōto* as follows: "Hattori's agenda was to grasp the core of Shinran's idea from the point of the subordinate class—which Hattori understood as peasants, and also to delineate a Japanese pattern of 'religious reformation,' thereby breaking down the founder myth created by Honganji" (KURODA 1962, KTC 2: 396). Despite its empirical weaknesses, Kuroda appreciated Hattori's book because it discussed

10. In his preface to the 1950 edition of *Shinran nōto*, Hattori cites Ienaga's comments at length (HATTORI 1967, 1–6).

Japanese development in the context of world history, and because it indicated the author's serious engagement in a topic of contemporary significance. In contrast, Kuroda held a low opinion on Tsuji Zennosuke's magnum opus, *Nihon Bukkyōshi* [A history of Japanese Buddhism] (1952–55), commenting that it is “a great accumulation of data, but it is unthinking and uncritical toward the problems of today's Japanese Buddhism, ideas, and culture” (KURODA 1962, 384).

To Kuroda's disappointment, Hattori's work had only a limited impact. It prompted, for instance, research on the social class of Shinran's followers—whether they were mainly warriors, peasants, or merchants—but it did not further studies on the interrelationship between religion and the social structure (KURODA 1962, 386–87). Thus, the “reformation debate” faded away. However, Kuroda himself continued to stress the concept of reformation as an important historical category, not so much to compare Japanese experience with that of the West, but rather to evaluate the internal dynamics of Japanese religious history. In 1990, Kuroda wrote: “With the decline of Euro-centered developmental stage theories, this [reformation] debate is now almost forgotten. However, this is a potentially significant issue that may reemerge in a new form to consider the historical characteristics, or ‘modernization’ of Japanese religions” (KURODA 1990a, KTC 2: 337).

IENAGA SABURŌ

While Hattori's perspective was that of a social historian, Ienaga Saburō approached medieval Buddhism from an intellectual historian's point of view. Nevertheless, IENAGA's *Chūsei Bukkyō shisōshi kenkyū* (1947) had much in common with HATTORI's *Shinran nōto*, the work Ienaga truly appreciated. Both praised Shinran as a great religious thinker as well as a populist leader, and they dissociated the master from the institution of Shinshū and ruling elites. Also, they claimed that they would avoid utilizing Western philosophy to discuss Shinran's thought, but both were mindful of Christianity (especially Protestantism) as a point of reference.

Ienaga's work broke the barriers between traditional sectarian histories and treated Hōnen, Shinran, Nichiren (1222–1282), and Dōgen (1200–1253) as exceptional thinkers to be plotted in the spectrum of Japanese intellectual history. Ienaga thought Nichiren's teaching was somewhat inferior because it retained an element of prayer religion (*kitōkyō*) and was not completely free from kami worship (IENAGA 1947, 106–107). On the other hand, because Zen was essentially an import from China, Ienaga concluded, “the true prototype of Kamakura new Buddhism was Hōnen's Pure Land Buddhism alone, and all others were its imitations or derivatives” (IENAGA 1947, 63).

Among above thinkers, Ienaga particularly admired Shinran for his reflections on human sinfulness. Ienaga singled out the concept of *akunin shōki* 悪人正機—a claim that Amida's compassion is extended most to the wicked—as the

core of Shinran's teaching: "The theory of *akunin shōki*... is a concept stemming from a deep religious insight that paradoxically solves the separation of wicked human beings from the absolute being of *tathāgata*" (IENAGA 1947, 5). Ienaga also highlighted the lay aspect of Shinran's movement: "for Shinran, salvation had to be a gospel for all, and could not be a privilege for the particular social group of monks" (1947, 24).

Like Hattori, Ienaga praised Shinran but thought poorly of the institutional development of Shinshū: "It is no exaggeration to say that pure form of Shinran's faith was lost with the emergence of Shinshū institution" (IENAGA 1947, 3). In more concrete terms this meant the sect's compromises with kami cults and with secular authority, both of which were advocated by Honganji leaders (1947, 62). To this common criticism, Ienaga added a unique argument about the historical limitation in Shinran's teaching. According to Ienaga, although Shinran stressed faith, he did not altogether abandon the conventional practice of nenbutsu, which resulted in the escapist attitudes of his followers (1947, 242–44). Here, Ienaga probably raised the issue of practice versus faith because he had Protestantism in mind. Consequently, he made this general comparison between Shinshū and Christian histories:

Shinran's religion was different from later Shinshū teachings. Later Shinshū altered the stern thoughts of Shinran, softened the founder's strict attitudes against secular power, and dared to compromise with the latter. Such were the fault of sect leaders, not of Shinran. One way or the other, it is important to note that the nenbutsu practice of Shinshū did not contribute at all to the historical progress of Japanese society. Certainly, *Ikkō ikki* did greatly affect social reformulation at the establishing phase of feudalism. Even so, most of the *Ikkō ikki* were economic rebellions of the peasants and had no essential connection to religion.... We should be careful not to over-estimate the role of Shinshū faith in Japanese history. Even the Christian, Uchimura Kanzō recognizes that Shinshū teaching closely resembles Christian faith. But when we consider how powerfully Christianity promoted history from within, we can not but admit how little Shinshū contributed to the progress of human society.... Could this be because the idea of the Patriarch Shinran already possessed a fatal defect? What was that fatal defect? It was his attachment to the nenbutsu practice.

(IENAGA 1947, 245).

Kuroda's comments on Ienaga's book were positive but general in nature. Kuroda thought the most important contribution of this work was to move beyond sectarian histories and to treat Shinran, Dōgen, and Nichiren as individual thinkers. Kuroda also appreciated Ienaga's categorization of Kamakura Buddhism: Hōnen's Pure Land Buddhism as a prototype of new Buddhism, Nichiren and others who added new elements to old schools, and Zen as a new import (KURODA 1962, KTC 2: 385; 1989, KTC 4: 395).

Later in 1982, Kuroda had occasion to comment on Ienaga's view of religious history at Tokyo High Court. Ienaga sued the Japanese government three times starting in 1965 over the censorship of high school history textbooks that he authored. Although the journalistic attention was mostly directed to Ienaga's description of Japanese aggression in Asia, some of his remarks on pre-modern Buddhist history were also contested in these lawsuits. For instance, about the introductory stage of Buddhism in the eighth century, Ienaga wrote: "Thus, Buddhism was espoused as magic for the protection of the nation; it was not spread as a teaching for personal spiritual salvation." Here, "a teaching for personal spiritual salvation" pointed at the new Kamakura sects Ienaga valued. The screening committee claimed that Ienaga's description was one-sided and that an expression such as "magic" (*jujutsu*) would confuse students (KURODA 1982, KTC 8: 332). To this, Kuroda responded in defense of Ienaga: "The screening committee clearly demonstrates an attitude that avoids and suppresses descriptions of the way religion was used ideologically by the ruling powers" (KTC 8: 334). Despite differences in their scholarly opinions, Kuroda was supportive of Ienaga during the textbook trials.

Although not mentioned by Kuroda, the following passage about Shinran in Ienaga's textbook came under attack by the screening committee:

What is more important is that the founders of the new Buddhist sects all reached a high spiritual state beyond this human world, and thereby fundamentally denied the position of the old Buddhism which had been serving state power and the ruling class through prayers for this-worldly benefits. [The founders of the new sects] clearly established the independence of religion from secular power. For this reason, they incited the resentment of the old schools which were linked with the ruling power. Hōnen, Shinran, and others were persecuted by the imperial court, but to this [persecution,] Shinran openly voiced his opposition and did not yield (cited in KINETSUKI 1996, 39).

This was the only pre-modern issue Ienaga brought to his last lawsuit, which went to court in 1984. The textbook committee had objected to the final sentence of this passage as historically ungrounded. The High Court's 1993 ruling endorsed the committee's opinion and thus Ienaga's claim of Shinran's open protest was dismissed.¹¹

Historically speaking, Ienaga's depiction of Shinran as a protestor was an overstatement. There is no documentary evidence that Shinran "openly voiced his opposition" at the time of persecution. Only in his old age did Shinran recall the incidents and express his feeling of bitterness toward the imperial court: "The

11. For the details of this deliberation, see KINETSUKI 1996. The Japanese original of the sentence in question reads as follows: そのために、かれらは権力と結びついていた旧仏教教団の憎しみをかい、法然・親鸞らは朝廷から弾圧をうけたが、親鸞はこれにたいし、堂々と抗議の言を発して屈しなかった。

sovereign and his ministers betrayed the Dharma, deviated from righteousness, and held anger and grudges.”¹² In fact, this statement of Shinran itself was once censored in modern times. In the 1930s, under increasing governmental pressure, Shinshū leaders were forced to “voluntarily” erase this statement from their scriptures (SHIGARAKI 1987, 42–44; ROGERS 1991, 325–31). Ienaga insisted on Shinran’s oppositional stance so strongly perhaps because he wanted to redress the wartime censorship.

Although it is customary to contrast Kuroda’s view on medieval Buddhism with those of earlier scholars such as Ienaga, the difference between them is only a matter of degree. They shared a certain image of an ideal religion and projected it onto the figure of Shinran. The most important criterion of this ideal religion was political independence. In his textbook, Ienaga portrayed the teachings of the Kamakura founders, especially that of Shinran, as individualistic and other-worldly, and contrasted it with religion of the ruling class which Ienaga described as magical prayers for this-worldly benefits. Ienaga’s image of Shinran was not entirely a product of modern imagination. As I will discuss in the concluding section, pre-modern Shinshū did possess some of the characteristics that Ienaga attributed to it. They were, however, exaggerated by modern intellectuals.

Among Western scholars, Robert Bellah was intrigued by Ienaga’s writings. He was struck by Ienaga’s close approximation of Shinran’s teaching with the Christian ideas of sin and salvation through faith. Bellah particularly appreciated what Ienaga called “the logic of negation,” or the recognition of human finitude in Shinran’s philosophy and subsequent search for salvation (BELLAH 2003, 90–94). Such logic contains a transformative potential for both individuals and societies by urging people to overcome the status quo and to seek a transcendental goal. Bellah’s intention was to confirm the universal significance of transcendence for social progress by locating the concept in Japan. Yet, because transcendence always seemed to disappear in the Japanese case, he ended up drawing a peculiarly negative history of Japan that is not unlike Ishimoda’s.

Bellah observes that Japanese society lacks a transcendental reference point (or “axial principle,” in his more recent terminology) from which universal ethics stem, and therefore the Japanese people have failed to cultivate a strong sense of individualism. This failure, in turn, prevents them from critiquing and transcending their own immediate social groups. In other words, Japan is a particularistic society that encourages in-group morality but rejects an ethical universalism that could threaten group harmony. Bellah acknowledges that there have been a number of instances in Japanese history when transcendental principles emerged—such as in the Kamakura Buddhist movements. However,

12. This is a comment Shinran made in his *Kyōgyōshinshō* [Teaching, practice, faith, and realization; abbr. of *Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōshō monrui*]. Quotation from SSS 1: 244.

those moments of transcendence were eclipsed by the tenacity of traditional, communal values which Bellah called “the ground bass” of Japanese tradition:

This historical process that the Japanese people went through culminated in Kamakura Buddhism, and above all with Shinran. In him there is absolute reliance on the power of Amida, which is the direct outcome of the absolute rejection of reliance on anything in the world, including of course one’s own power. This was the same time in Japanese history when Nichiren appeared....

So we have this great outpouring of the recognition of transcendence in Kamakura times.... However, the note of transcendence was soon lost. It was drowned out by the ground bass, so to speak, of the Japanese tradition of this-worldly affirmativeness, the opposite of denial. (BELLAH 1970, 119)

Bellah recognizes some socio-political initiatives in the late-medieval Shinshū and Nichirenshū, but he finds limitations in their overall impact: “In the end, the religious rebellions and movements all failed in their challenge to the feudal order and, more importantly, were themselves permeated by feudal forms” (BELLAH 2003, 69). To describe Japanese history as a continuous disavowal of axial principles by the resilient archaic elements is not unique to Bellah. The comparative sociologists S. N. Eisenstadt and Johann P. Arnason make similar arguments about the lack of a transcendental vision in Japan. Both Eisenstadt and Arnason recognize a certain momentum for social transformation in medieval Shinshū, but in the end they conclude that such potential was never fully developed (EISENSTADT 1996, 226–28; ARNASON 1997, 240–42).

Ishimoda Shō characterized the history of medieval Japan as “a history of frustration and defeat” by focusing on the inability of people to resist the ancient religious institution, Tōdaiji. This history of defeat was still not an unconditional surrender. As Hattori and Ienaga insisted, in pre-modern Japan there were ideas such as Shinran’s that could have promoted social transformation and progress. To their dismay, however, the institutionalization of Shinshū prevented this potential from being fully realized. Western modernization theorists have only confirmed and amplified the existing sense of failure among Japanese historians—this time, by pointing out the Japanese people’s failure to adopt an axial principle and Western style individualism. Together, these scholars make Japanese society look strangely unchanging. Their view is that despite the numerous instances of innovation and adaptation, no radical breakthrough in people’s mentality has ever occurred, and that the basic premises of Japanese society have remained rooted in an archaic garden of magic.

What I find problematic about these negative histories is that they only tell us what Japanese society or Jōdo Shinshū should have become, had it not failed to do so. The implicit goal in these evolutionary histories is the idealized image of the modern West. This mode of history superimposes a developmental meta-narrative on Japanese history and points out that Japan does not fulfill

the expected standard of progress. It refuses to acknowledge indigenous developments for what they are—the sectarian history of post-Shinran Shinshū, for instance—is never mentioned in any way as a positive achievement. As Raymond Grew puts it, “[modernization theory] favored comparison in a single direction, using an invented standard as the basis for questions about Japanese society but not using Japanese experience to ask fresh questions about societies elsewhere” (GREW 1998, 174). Although Kuroda shared the sense of failure with his contemporaries, he was nonetheless aware of the problems inherent in the Euro-centered developmental history.

Kuroda Toshio's View on Jōdo Shinshū

ACADEMIC SHIFT

Kuroda never had a chance to formulate a comprehensive history of Shinshū, but he wrote a number of articles outlining his thoughts on this topic. His works on Shinshū per se are concentrated in the early and late stages of his career. Kuroda's senior thesis submitted to University of Kyoto in 1948 was called “Shinshū kyōdanshi jokō” [Preliminary studies on the institutional history of Shinshū] and it discussed the development from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century of the Shinshū community. This essay points out the fundamental difference in the social and religious characters of Shinshū communities and those of earlier, established Buddhist schools: while the nature of religion was local and communal at an elite temple's estate, faith provided the primary source of unity for a Shinshū community.

Kuroda's 1953 essay, “Kamakura Bukkyō ni okeru ikkō senjū to honji suijaku” [Single-minded sole practice versus *honji suijaku* theory in Kamakura Buddhism] which he wrote while in graduate school, defines the medieval period as the time of the declining estate (*shōen*) system. In this work, Kuroda explained how the reactionary aristocrats who espoused old Buddhism utilized *honji suijaku* theory to meet the challenge of the upper-class peasants who converted to Pure Land Buddhism. Still following Ishimoda's *ryōshusei* model, this work probed the possible connection between economic domination and *honji suijaku* theory.

One notable contribution of young Kuroda was his introduction of the concept *Buppōryō* (Buddhist domain). As I explain below, this term was found in the documents related to Rennyō and it expressed an ideal faith community set apart from real politics. This concept was already mentioned in Kuroda's senior thesis and was discussed more fully in his 1959 article, “Ikkō ikki no seiji rinen: Buppōryō ni tsuite” [Political ideology of *Ikkō ikki*: On *Buppōryō*]. After about this time, however, Kuroda turned his attention away from Shinshū and began to concentrate on the studies of dominant, mainstream religion. What made him change his focus?

Kuroda was already impressed with Shinran, but he began to doubt the actual extent of the influence Shinshū exerted in the early medieval period. After all, Shinran in his own lifetime was only an obscure student of Hōnen. Even if Shinran was opposed to elites, it must have been difficult for him to express it openly. Kuroda knew how easy it was for a dominant ideology to creep into people's lives: at his Shinshū home, his father occasionally recited the Imperial Rescript on Education (*kyōiku chokugo*) in front of the Buddhist altar in addition to the Pure Land scriptures (KURODA 1987c, KTC 4: 383–84). Although Kuroda appreciated Shinran's teaching, he put the social significance of the Buddhist master in perspective. Instead of simply valorizing Shinran, Kuroda decided to analyze the structure of the dominant medieval religion which stood in the way of Shinshū. Kuroda himself explained his shift in his historical perspective as follows:

When I embarked on my academic career after college, I realized the fact that the religions of Shinran and Dōgen—which were regarded as the typical medieval thought or faith, in fact remained minor and did not become widespread in their society. I began to wonder if this fact indicates a deeply rooted problem in Japanese thought and society. I thus turned my attention to what was on the opposite side [of Shinran and Dōgen]: what weighed more was the idea of the “divine nation” represented by Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Jinnō shōtōki*, and this idea constituted the so-called “Shinto,” the *tennō* system, and Tendai and Shingon teachings. I recalled the unforgettable events [of the World War II]. So many young people died with slogans such as “Great Japan is a divine nation,” “The divine country is invincible,” “Divine wind,” and “For the sake of His Majesty the *tennō*.” I wanted to investigate the deep secret of Japanese thought and society and disclose its mechanism historically. No longer was I satisfied with the philosophical beauties of Shinran and Dōgen. I felt it necessary to study the difficult logic of the “old Buddhism” and to tap into the reality of Shinto and the *tennō* system. This realization led to the re-visioning of existing academic approaches to Japanese Buddhist history, religious history, and the history of the polity. (KURODA 1987c, KTC 4: 356–57)

Thus, starting from the same point as his contemporary historians, Kuroda corrected the overestimation of the “Kamakura new Buddhism” and turned his attention to the mechanism of domination utilized by the *kenmitsu* schools, closely associating religious ideology with political economy.

Much later, in the last decade of his life, Kuroda once again indicated a strong interest in Shinshū, and especially in the teaching of Rennyo. Although his failing health prevented him from conducting serious research, we can still discern Kuroda's mature view of Shinshū history in essays and lectures such as “Ten-kanki no shidōsha” [A Leader at a transitional period] (KURODA 1984) and “Rekishijō no Shinshū” [Shinshū in history] (KURODA 1987c). At this time,

Kuroda attempted to go beyond his medieval specialization and to write about Japanese Buddhist history in general focusing on topics such as the relationship between politics and religion, and the meaning of religious reformation (modernization). His articles such as “Ōhō Buppō sōiron no kiseki” [Trajectory of the theory of King’s Law and Buddha’s Law] (KURODA 1987a) and “Bukkyō kakushin undō no rekishiteki seikaku” [Historical characteristics of Buddhist reformation movements] (KURODA 1990b) demonstrate this tendency. In both of these articles, Shinshū plays a key role in Kuroda’s trajectory of Japanese Buddhism. Below, based mainly on these articles, I will outline Kuroda’s view on Shinshū history especially during the medieval period.

BUPPŌRYŌ

Kuroda’s portrayal of Shinran as a rational, progressive, and populist thinker did not differ much from that of Ienaga’s or Hattori’s. However, instead of idolizing Shinran, Kuroda stressed the continued strength of *kenmitsu* Buddhism as medieval orthodoxy. Kuroda described the nature of medieval power as a magico-religious entity where kingship was linked with *kenmitsu* Buddhism. These *kenmitsu* schools competed to perform efficacious rites for court and the nobles. *Kenmitsu* monks did so not just for patronage, but also for the peace and prosperity of the whole society (KURODA 1987a, KTC 2: 209). While *kenmitsu* Buddhism represented the dominant (or in Kuroda’s term, “structural”) religion, early Shinshū was a minor heterodox (*itan* 異端) sect which neither engaged in magical practices nor sought patronage from the ruling elites:

What I consider most significant about Shinran’s position is...that he refuted salvation through a structural authority. In the medieval epoch, all other Buddhist sects relied on the social structure or political authority and preached the efficacy of their own faith and salvation. Those dominant schools claimed that they were accredited by the state, had a royal backing, and told people repeatedly to pray for the *tennō*, pray to the Goddess of Ise and all other gods. However, Shinran clearly stated in his treatise *Kyōgyōshinshō* that a true Buddhist, a true nenbutsu practitioner, did not worship a king, nor did he believe in curse or divination. This must mean that a structural authority cannot offer a true salvation and people should not expect salvation from it either.

(KURODA 1987c, KTC 4: 374)

The difference between Kuroda and Ienaga is subtle. While Ienaga described Shinran as a courageous opposition leader with a firm individualistic faith, Kuroda observed that Shinran, without denouncing the beliefs and practices of others altogether, chose the way of nenbutsu and maintained critical attitudes toward his social environment:

Shinran did not abruptly and totally deny other doctrines or beliefs of his time. Instead, he chose [what he perceived as] the correct position of nenbutsu, preached and spread what [he deemed] correct, and maintained his [critical] position in society all his life. What I can say now as a historian about Shinran is that...[Shinran taught how to] place oneself in tension with the society, to have a religious awareness of such a position, [in short,] “awareness of tension with one’s social and religious environment.” (KTC 4: 385)

The difference between Kuroda and Ienaga becomes clearer in Kuroda’s discussion of Shinshū in the late medieval ages. While admiration of Shinran is almost unanimous among Japanese scholars, opinions on later Shinshū, especially Rennyō is divided as we have seen above. Hattori, for instance, characterized Rennyō as a shrewd strategist who utilized the energy of autonomous peasants to expand the Honganji power (HATTORI, 1974). Kuroda felt uneasy about the academic discourse which simply made Rennyō a scapegoat: “[These scholars] identify themselves with the spiritual greatness of Shinran while attributing all ills to Rennyō... But, first of all, the growth of the sect to its present magnitude is due to Rennyō” (KURODA 1984, KTC 4: 403).

Kuroda discounted a common description of Rennyō as an opportunist who took advantage of peasants’ uprisings or warlords’ power struggles to propagate his teaching. For Kuroda, those facts were only of secondary importance. The more crucial point was that Rennyō was attuned to the great social transformation of the late-fifteenth century. At this time, *kenmon* structure, the power-sharing medieval polity, was in decline. The estates of the aristocrats and the *kenmitsu* temples were taken over by warrior lords and the villagers stood up in self-defense. These social changes prompted a shift in commoners’ mentality, which Kuroda described as a transition “from the simple and old-fashioned time when crude, passionate, and pious [emotions] dominated, to the early modern and the modern periods when secular, diligent, and rational [attitudes] became dominant.” Rennyō’s teaching was welcome by this new generation of “sober and secular commoners” (KURODA 1984, KTC 4: 405–406).

Kuroda especially noted Rennyō’s advice on faith and politics, such as “outwardly keep the King’s Law and deep down in your heart, store the faith in other-power.”¹³ Kuroda interpreted statements like this as Rennyō’s desire to maintain spiritual independence from the territorial rulers. He located the term *Buppōryō* (Buddhist domain) in the Shinshū documents in the Sengoku Period (ca. 1467–1573) and made this term represent Rennyō’s ideal. According to Kuroda, *Buppōryō* was the most mature representation of the relationship between politics and religion in the medieval period. It was an imaginary realm for the faithful that was not subject to secular laws, and it was an ideological device for separating religion from politics. Kuroda saw the germination of this

13. From Rennyō’s letter of Bunmei 6 (1474)/2/17 (Fascicle 2–6, SSS 2: 188).

idea in Shinran's distancing from politics, but it was Rennyo who conceptualized it. Consequently, Kuroda's opinion of Rennyo was not as dismissive as that of others:

After the war, when people hotly debated the "feudalistic nature" of Japanese society, there were many who argued that Shinran was correct, while Rennyo was to be blamed for making Shinshū a feudalistic sect. However,...I think that Rennyo had an ideal, a new vision.... In Rennyo's pastoral letters and in his biography, the term *Buppōryō* appears four times. What the term refers to is this: while military lords such as *shugo* and *jitō* governed an ordinary secular society with their secular laws [*ōhō*, "king's law"], the Honganji sect was a faith community governed by Amida Buddha, thus it was the "domain of Buddhist law" [*Buppōryō*].... This [*Buppōryō*] existed on a completely different plane from the regular territory governed by secular relations and secular laws. Therefore, a Buddhist domain would not come into conflict with a secular domain with its secular laws. (KURODA 1987c, KTC 4: 377)

Ideally speaking, the Buddhist domain existed in people's hearts beyond the confines of secular territories. However, Kuroda regretfully admitted that before this idea was fully implemented, *Buppōryō* became a territory on earth as Shinshū itself acquired material power and struggled against the warlords. Indeed, the term *Buppōryō* disappeared in the sixteenth century. Kuroda identified three overlapping images of *Buppōryō* which explained the difficulty of keeping this ideal as an ideal. First, just as the lord in a secular domain offered protection to his subjects, the people who belonged to the *Buppōryō* were thought to be protected by Amida's grace. Second, people in the *Buppōryō* were ruled by Buddha's Law, which issues both protection and punishment. This law was still discussed in an abstract manner such as "You will be punished if you do not have faith." Third, sectarian rules of conduct were applied to Shinshū congregations. Since the rules regulated the lives of actual people in society, the other-worldly image of *Buppōryō* was brought down to the earth (KURODA 1959, KTC 4: 302–304).

Here, Kuroda rightly pointed out the dilemma of institutionalization. In principle, Shinran's absolute faith in other-power did not require any efforts on the part of believers. Birth in the Pure Land was unconditional. Yet, as social organizations, Shinshū communities developed rules of conduct (*gyōgi* 行儀) to maintain their discipline. These rules were always threatened with becoming hardened doctrines (*kyōgi* 教義) to bind Shinshū followers. Because Shinran did not spell out concrete behavioral guidelines for social life, Shinshū members accepted the secular laws such as the five Confucian virtues and respect for kami. Kuroda argued, "Rennyo attempted to keep the religious purity of *Buppōryō* by admitting the existence of secular ethics outside of the Buddhist domain, but Honganji eventually had to surrender and yield to the ruling power which was

armed with the rising tide of Confucian and Shinto ethics” (KTC 4: 312). This is to say, despite Rennyo’s desire to establish *Buppōryō* as an autonomous spiritual realm, the King’s Law could easily take over and govern the Buddhist domain. Subsequently, Kuroda thought that after Rennyo the idea of a Buddhist domain departed from its original purpose and that the tension against the dominant power was all lost (KURODA 1984, KTC 4: 415–16).

Kuroda’s impression of post-Sengoku history does not differ much from the standard “demise of Buddhism” thesis and can be briefly summarized as follows. In Tokugawa Japan, what replaced *kenmitsu* Buddhism as the dominant religion was the household religion (*ie no shūkyō*) which, in Kuroda’s view, lasted until the end of World War II. Shinshū and other Buddhist denominations were given an official place, secondary to Confucianism, in the *bakuhan* order as administrators of households. Because of this honorable but subjugated status (that is, Buddha’s Law under the King’s Law), when modern times came and State Shinto was installed—Buddhism forcefully separated from Shinto—Buddhists no longer possessed enough energy to resist. This explains the passive collaboration of Buddhists with modern nationalism (KURODA 1987a, KTC 2: 218–28; 1990b, 2: 257–78).

The idea of *Buppōryō* sparked some academic interest, but not exactly in the area Kuroda himself emphasized. Other historians have focused more on the earthly manifestations of *Buppōryō*, especially the Shinshū temple towns, or *jinaichō* 寺内町 (ENDŌ 1991, 127–29). In recent decades, prompted by new archeological findings and a heightened interest in urbanization processes, temple towns are attracting researchers from a variety of fields.¹⁴ Concrete studies of *jinaichō* do not weaken Kuroda’s thesis in any fundamental way, but they do make his characterization of *Buppōryō* sound overly idealistic. Kuroda repeatedly stressed that what Rennyo meant by *Buppōryō* was not an actual territory, but an inner world of faith. Kuroda thought that by advocating this idea, Rennyo tried to separate religion from politics (KURODA 1984, KTC 4: 408–11). However, Kuroda’s purely idealistic line of argument did not develop much further. The lack of academic discussion may be primarily due to the scantiness of documentary evidence—few documents have been found that contain the term *Buppōryō*. Further, although Kuroda attributed the concept to Rennyo’s political philosophy, Rennyo himself did not systematically explain what *Buppōryō* was all about. This also makes it difficult to theorize *Buppōryō* as a historical category.¹⁵

14. The three-volume collection of essays *Jinaichō no kenkyū* [Studies on temple towns] contains many relevant works. For a reference to Kuroda’s work in relation to temple town studies, see KUSANO 1998, 457–58.

15. Endō Hajime identifies only one instance in which Rennyo himself used this word. It is found in Rennyo’s letter of Bunmei 7 (1475)/4/28 (Extra Fascicle, SSS 2: 208–209). The context of the letter is to admonish his followers in Ōtsu who were about to join an uprising. Studies on *Buppōryō* are summarized in ENDŌ 1991, 129–33.

On the other hand, the strength of Kuroda's argument is in its long range comparative perspective, which is lacking in the empirical studies of *jinaichō*. For instance, in his 1959 essay, Kuroda briefly mentioned the similarity between *Buppōryō* and the Peace of God movement, a church-lead initiative in Southern France dating from about 980 to 1040 that called for a suspension of violence.¹⁶ No serious studies have appeared comparing the two cases. Kuroda himself, however, did not abandon the concept of *Buppōryō*. At the end of his academic life, it reappeared as he tried to summarize the history of Japanese Buddhism in terms of the modernization process.

Historiography, Modernization, and Religion

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Shinshū was an attractive subject for postwar liberal intellectuals who were overwhelmed by the feeling of defeat. Shinran's teaching sounded "modern" and the *Ikkō ikki* epitomized the rising energy of the peasants. However, the situation surrounding historians drastically changed by the mid-1970s. As the Japanese economy took off, interest in socialism faded and so did memories of the war. With newly gained confidence, many Japanese people no longer felt it necessary to measure their achievements against Western standards. There was also a sense of stalemate and dissatisfaction with the Marxist mode of analysis, which relied on estate documents to focus narrowly on the evolution of social structures and modes of production. More diverse subject matters and approaches began to appear just as the historical sources themselves expanded to incorporate visual and archeological data.

Amino Yoshihiko (1928–2004), one of the trendsetters of the new type of history, addressed the needs of studying non-agrarian population such as fishermen, merchants, craftsmen, and entertainers. He also suggested researchers pay more attention to the non-documentary factors such as people's attire or behavioral patterns (AMINO 1980). Fresh topics and approaches like these were welcomed by both specialists and a general audience. The pure faith of Shinran and the class struggle of peasants were no longer the center of attention.

Facing this major academic transition, Kuroda frequently voiced his opinions about the problems and possibilities of historical studies. In his 1978 essay, Kuroda raised three major issues confronting historians. The first was reactionary governmental policies such as textbook censorings which once again tried to promote *tennō*-centered nationalism. The second was the "peculiarly warped image of history produced by Japanese modernity." Japanese imperialist ideology not only emphasized *tennō*-centered history, but at the same time, it stressed

16. Kuroda thought that both of these movements were conceivable responses of religious organizations in feudal societies where lords fought each other. Kuroda's use of the word *ryō* (domain) thus has the connotation of a feudal domain. See KURODA 1959, KTC 4: 314–15.

how “modern” Japan was on a Euro-centric developmental scale, in comparison to other Asian nations. The third problem was stagnation in Marxist history. Not only had this mode of analysis reached such a level of complexity that only specialized scholars could comprehend it, but also, the narrow focus on social structure and mode of production was felt to be too rigid and unresponsive to the changing consciousness and interests of the new generation (KURODA 1978, KTC 8: 116–20).

Although Kuroda admitted to problems with Marxist history, he insisted that its structural and progressive perspectives were still important to fight the reactionary forces. However, the “law of world history” based solely on a European model was no longer viable, and it had to be re-constructed in response to pluralizing values. Kuroda suggested that historians reexamine their own methods at the most basic epistemological level: “For historical research or description, it may be necessary to doubt that there is a concept or category that expresses an unchanging and universally applicable value” (KTC 8: 132). Concepts such as “politics,” “economics,” “religion,” “art,” as well as “freedom and democracy” were all epistemological patterns (*ninshiki no kata*) that were subject to change according to time, place, and the researcher’s perspective (KTC 8: 133). And this was the same with the “medieval.” Kuroda thought that the time was ripe to identify the “uniquely Japanese medieval” (*Nihon nari no chūsei*). He hoped that studies of the Japanese medieval could “actively participate in the project of revising world history” (KURODA 1975, KTC 5: 343–44, 359). For this revision, pre-modern history acquired a special significance, because it possessed the real diversity of human cultures. Thus, Kuroda was moving toward a scholarship similar to post-colonialism:

Although this may sound contradictory, for one to grasp world history as objective and encompassing all humanity, the history of the pre-modern period when world history had not yet come into being can play a more active role, because unlike the uniformity of modern history, pre-modern history directly involves the issues of [plurality and] complexity. In this sense, [pre-modern historians] shoulder the genuine task of historical studies.... Studies of pre-modern history do not need to be the craftwork of antiquarians, or the hobby of amateur historians, or arguments on difficult and hardened concepts among a small group of specialists. We need to revitalize it as a new science which will bring us concrete yet high levels of insight about the human race and civilizations, about the achievements and futures of various peoples.

(KURODA 1974, KTC 8: 76–77)

MODERNIZATION AND RELIGION

Toward the end of his career, Kuroda wrote a number of essays attempting to elucidate the trajectory of Japanese Buddhism during its entire existence. While

modernization was no longer the main issue for historians, Kuroda seemed still deeply interested in the subject. Although he used terms such as “reformation” and “modernization,” he made minimal reference to the rise of capitalism. Rather, he was primarily concerned with the problem of religion and political domination, the issue he grappled with throughout his career.

In his 1990 article, “Historical characteristics of Buddhist reformation movements: Especially on the modernization of religion,” Kuroda asked, “What is the modernization of religion?” He mentioned four general agendas which modern Japanese people have debated under the rubric of “modernization of religion.” These are (1) the separation of politics and religion, (2) freedom of religion, (3) democratization of religious institutions, and (4) disappearance of magico-mythical characteristics in religion. (Kuroda anticipated some arguments over this last item.) Acknowledging that these criteria are derived from specific European experiences, Kuroda nevertheless argued that historians could make reference to them and productively demonstrate the historical transformation of Buddhism in Japan (KURODA 1990b, KTC 2: 237–38). For this purpose, Kuroda emphasized the history of Shinshū: “In the Japanese case, in regard to the question [of modernization], due to the actual historical facts as well as to the past accumulation of studies... it seems both necessary and productive to refer to the evolutionary stages of Shinshū as a ‘leading’ form [of religion]” (KTC 2: 232).

In this article, Kuroda described the history of Buddhist Japan in the following four major phases:

- 1) sixth to ninth centuries: Introduction of Buddhism.
- 2) tenth to sixteenth centuries: *Kenmitsu* Buddhism holds a position of orthodoxy, but various reform movements also occur. This is the time Buddhism most flourishes and maintains relative independence.
- 3) seventeenth to mid-twentieth centuries: Household Buddhism becomes the new form of the dominant religion. The absolutist state exercises power over religions.
- 4) present: Household Buddhism is in decline and religions are in a state of confusion. (KTC 2: 236–37)

In his narrative, “modern” and “pre-modern” aspects of religion did not appear in neat chronological succession. Kuroda identified a number of modern elements in medieval Shinshū: above all, Shinran’s faith which departed from mythical and magical thinking (KTC 2: 248–49), and Rennyō’s teaching which set apart the realms of religion and politics (KTC 2: 255). In Kuroda’s opinion, what happened in the Meiji Period was a “reactionary reformation.” The combination of the absolutist state and State Shinto was based on the “pre-modern principle of the unity of politics and religion” (KTC 2: 266). Then, after mentioning the regrettable collaboration of Buddhists with modern militarism and the declining significance of households as the social foundation for Buddhism,

Kuroda ended his history of the “unfinished Buddhist reformation” with a prediction/hope for the future. He hoped that dominant forms of religion in coming years would be “free” and without institutional or political backing, “like the spontaneously emerged religions of the medieval period, that existed in their plural, complex, and competitive conditions” (KTC 2: 278). Is this to say that religious conditions in medieval Japan were more “modern” than that in the modern period itself?

Elsewhere, Kuroda mentioned the Weberian thesis in passing, in the context of a general trend towards secularization that started in China as early as the tenth century and occurred in Japan from the late medieval period on. He identified the Japanese mentality in the early seventeenth century as secular, practical, urban, and money-centered; and then he argued that such a mentality fostered bureaucracy, secular education, and the work ethic. Without specifying any particular religion as a source for this shift, Kuroda compared what he called “early-modern secularism” (*kinseiteki sezokushugi*) in general to Protestant asceticism (KURODA 1987a, KTC 2: 216–18; 1987b, KTC 3: 328–29). In the transformation to the early modern period, the role of Shinshū teaching was passive. As discussed earlier, Kuroda thought that Rennyo won a large following because the rationalist outlook of his teaching matched the sober mentality of the late-medieval population.

The historical trajectory of Japanese Buddhism drawn by Kuroda disturbs the commonly held notion of religious modernization. None of the above four criteria of modern religions were known prior to the Meiji Period in the same way that they are known by present-day social scientists. Yet, the absence of these articulated concepts does not preclude the possibility that religious freedom or secularism existed in pre-modern Japan. On the contrary, there is even a possibility that with the introduction of the modern notion of religious freedom, conditions for Japanese religions in some way became more restricted. After all, state-sponsored Shinto, which many Japanese people still regard as the major obstacle to religious freedom, was a product of “reactionary reformation” in the Meiji Period. By artificially separating Shinto and Buddhism and by installing State Shinto as the supra-religion, the Meiji government on the one hand destroyed the syncretistic beliefs of the *kenmitsu* schools, and on the other, imposed Shinto practices on Shinshū which had traditionally avoided active worship of kami (KURODA 1987a, KTC 2: 223).¹⁷ Kuroda, however, did not develop an alternative history of religious modernization beyond this short sketch. Below, I will discuss some of the outstanding issues in this regard for future consideration.

17. Worship of Shinto deities posed a grave problem for some Shinshū adherents. From the late-1920s on, with the rising tide of fascism, the government promoted campaigns such as installation of Shinto altars and Ise Shrine amulets (*Jingū taima*) in schools and homes. On this issue, see TONOHIRA 1987.

SOME REFLECTIONS

Postwar liberal intellectuals over-determined some aspects of medieval Buddhist history and ignored others. They exaggerated the modern and subaltern nature of early Shinshū, while characterizing religions of the ruling class as hegemonic and reactionary. Marxist historians especially had a tendency to use loaded terms to emphasize the antagonistic relations between the old and the new Buddhism.¹⁸ What these scholars overlooked was the symbiotic coexistence between the two groups. Moreover, they dismissed Renno's efforts for social accord as unfortunate collaboration to the authority. Kuroda's observation of Shinshū history was more measured. The concept of *Buppōryō*, for instance, underscores the uniqueness of Kuroda's perspective. This concept expresses a sense of spiritual independence and political neutrality, advocating neither total compromise with external powers nor overt antagonism and confrontation.

On the other hand, persistent especially among Western observers is the uniform and unchanging image of pre-modern Japanese religions as represented by Bellah's "ground bass" theory. Very often we encounter assertions such as that separation of religion and politics is a uniquely modern, Western concept that was not known to pre-modern Japanese people (EARHART 1982, 16; KITAGAWA 1987, xvii; ADOLPHSON 2000, 346–47), or that pre-modern Japanese religions were magico-mythical in character, were centered on rituals for this-worldly gain and not on beliefs or doctrines (READER and TANABE 1998, 13; ITŌ 2000, 3, 159). These observations may reflect the dominant pre-modern religiosity, but do not represent Shinshū tenets well. The very existence of a large heterodox group like Shinshū attests to the fact that the religious world of pre-modern Japan was neither static nor homogeneous.

Perhaps the most distinct aspect of Shinshū which differentiated the sect from folk religiosity was its uni-directional view of Amida's grace. Normally, people enter into "exchange relations" with deities in search of benefits available only through supernatural means. The terms of these relations consist of what one must do to earn the divine blessings (STARK 2001, 12–15). In medieval Japan, too, this mode of understanding the supernatural was most common. The first warrior code, *Jōei shikimoku* (1232), precisely expresses the synergistic relations between humans and deities:

Article One: Repair shrines and have ceremonies performed diligently.
Gods increase their power by the respect of people and people's fortune is enhanced by gods' virtue. Therefore, do not slacken your practice of the regular ceremonies and be attentive about offerings for gods....

18. For example, Satō Hiroo interprets the *kenmitsu* temples' accommodation of kami worship as the estate owners' co-opting scheme or "religious spell casting" over the cultivators. He also claims that Pure Land Buddhism provided the masses with "an ideological weapon to fight against the estate rule" and "to break the spell" (SATŌ 1987, 116).

Article Two: Repair and build temples and stupas, and have Buddhist ceremonies performed. Although temples and shrines differ, they should be respected equally. (ISHII 1972, 8)

In contrast to this standard medieval view of religion, Hōnen emphasized faith over practice. Shinran carried his teacher's idea further and regarded faith as a gift of Amida, making it impossible for humans to achieve enlightenment by their own effort, be it by performing good deeds or by praying to the divine. Shinran's idea was too radical for his age and was slow to be accepted. Later, in the fifteenth century, Rennyo was able to state it more openly: "To recite the name of Buddha for his compassion, and to offer it up to Buddha is a [practice of] exchange [*kaemono*]. It is a self-effort [*jiriki*]. The chanting of Buddha's name is to say, 'How grateful I am for the salvation [*on-tasuke no arigata ya*]" (SSS 2: 419).¹⁹ This type of thinking eliminates the manipulative reciprocity in human-divine relations. If, strictly speaking, even the practice of nenbutsu is not for the sake of salvation, then, it would be futile to look for a strong religious or political cause in Shinshū faith.

On this point, opinions as disparate as Kuroda's and Bellah's seem to converge. As has often been pointed out, Shinran's idea of faith resembles the Pauline notion of faith.²⁰ In both cases, human relation to transcendence is unidirectional. Bellah was impressed with this similarity when it was mentioned by Ienaga (BELLAH 2003, 90–91). Bellah also thinks it arrogant to project human desire in transcendence and to ascribe sanctity to human purposes, especially to political causes. Like Kuroda, Bellah is primarily concerned with the collusion of political and religious powers. In Bellah's view, if religion plays any role at all in politics, the idea of transcendence ought to promote humble self-reflection rather than self-aggrandizement.²¹

Kuroda's disdain for magical practices and the worship of kami—tendencies, no doubt amplified by modern rationalism and abhorrence of State Shinto—perhaps had their deepest roots in his Shinshū upbringing. According to Shinran, enlightenment was made possible by the workings of Amida's other-power (*tariki*), and it was therefore selfish for ordinary human beings to seek it. Shinshū's avoidance of kami worship was not simply a matter of choosing Amida Buddha over local gods, but more fundamentally, it was the rejection of reward-seeking contrivances. The same principle applied to the practices of

19. This is found in a document called *Dai hasso onmonogatari Kūzen kikigaki* [Kūzen's records of the Eighth Patriarch's words] (SSS 2: 419–38).

20. The following words of Saint Paul are strikingly reminiscent of Shinran's: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2, 8–9).

21. BELLAH (1970, 168) conceived of the notion of American civil religion "not as a form of national self-worship but as the subordination of the nation to ethical principles that transcend it and in terms of which it should be judged."

supplication and thaumaturgy. This made Shinshū faith realistic. Hōnen taught his followers not to worry about divination and taboos; Shinran did likewise. In his will, Rennyo prohibited faith-healing, saying: “In our tradition, do not employ rituals and supplications [*kaji kitō*] for the sick. This is strictly prohibited” (sss 2: 595).²²

Despite all these distinct religious traits, however, pre-modern Shinshū leaders did not strongly oppose kami worship or local customs. Opinions varied, but in general, starting with Hōnen, tolerance toward others’ beliefs and practices was advocated side by side with affirmation of one’s own faith. Tolerance became especially important as the sect grew rapidly in the late medieval period. Rennyo repeatedly admonished his followers saying, “Do not discuss your faith with people of other persuasions;” “Respect the gods, even if you do not believe in them;” and so on.²³ This accommodative stance of Rennyo has been criticized by modern liberal scholars, but in pre-modern times when there was no state-imposed Shinto to obstruct Shinshū faith, Rennyo’s advice provided a pragmatic, workable guideline.

Meanwhile, as Kuroda noted, in the late medieval period, people’s mentality began to shift away from the supernatural to something more secular and practical. In the sixteenth century, Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) damaged Buddhism to a degree previously unthinkable. But Tokugawa writers justified the act on the ground that Buddhist monks were wicked and corrupt. Oze Hoan (1564–1640) wrote in *Taikōki* (1625), a biography of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), that warriors did not need to “rely on the power of the rosary.” Hoan said he learned the importance of “practicality” (*jitsuri*) from Nobunaga, and declared, “I [now] consider that everything in this world has to be done by my own effort. I no longer depend on the Buddha’s power much and am no longer deceived by the wicked monks” (HINOTANI and EMOTO 1996, 93). Hoan grew skeptical of the reciprocity between humans and the supernatural and opted for a more humanistic way of conducting his life. Thus, by this time, Shinshū’s refusal to rely on supernatural aid was not an oddity.

Increasing secularity in the sixteenth century and the lack of political will on the part of Honganji prompt us to reevaluate the historical significance of *Ikkō ikki* and its consequence. By the time the war was over in 1580, warlords decided to tolerate the sect as long as Shinshū members did not disturb the newly established peace. In 1591, Hideyoshi, who had earlier fought against the *Ikkō ikki*, donated a large piece of land in Kyoto to Honganji for rebuilding the temple. During the Edo Period, Shinshū claimed nearly thirty percent of the country’s population and the membership rate was higher in areas where the

22. From *Rennyo Shōnin goyuigon* [Master Rennyo’s will] in SSS 2: 594–96.

23. See for examples, Rennyo’s letters written in Bunmei 5 (1473) (Fascicle 2–1, 2–2 in SSS 2: 170–75).

Ikkō ikki were fought hardest.²⁴ Despite the textbook narrative of how Nobunaga and his men “rooted them out,” *Ikkō* rebels, as well as their descendants, were never eliminated. Even in Kaga (Ishikawa Prefecture) where the *ikki* had governed the province for a century, the ruling Maeda family openly accepted Shinshū. For example, the third *daimyō* lord, Maeda Toshitsune (1593–1658), recognized the strength of the sect and remarked: “Most of the governing of our country is done by the *monzeki* [Honganji head priest], and we have little left to do. *Ikkōshū* is precious indeed.”²⁵ Although Toshitsune himself did not convert to Shinshū faith, he realized that by collaborating with the sect he could benefit from its social network and edifying effect.

Buddhism in the Edo Period is usually described as submissive and stagnant. However, if we overemphasize the authoritarian character of Tokugawa religious policy, we miss the diversity and freedom people enjoyed within the given framework. Concrete studies of Tokugawa Shinshū communities indicate that the members participated in the religion with enthusiasm and dedication. For example, Nagura Tetsuzō’s case study of a late Tokugawa village in Echigo (Niigata) demonstrates the flexibility and multi-centeredness of this society. Many families in this fishing village were Shinshū affiliates who regularly attended sermons. The life in this village was punctuated by various religious events throughout the year. In addition, Shinshū members, both men and women, tried to make a pilgrimage to Honganji at least once in their lives (NAGURA 1999, 215–20). This indicates that the center of their mental universe was neither Nikkō nor Ise, but Honganji in Kyoto. Furthermore, Shinshū followers’ attitudes toward other religions were mild and amicable. They maintained cordial relations with the members of Nichirenshū (the archenemy of Pure Land Buddhists in the medieval period) and also assisted the administration of village Shinto shrine (NAGURA 1999, 6, 55–62, 158–59). Pre-modern society may not have been entirely bucolic, but it is yet misleading to project the image of the totalitarian modern Shinto onto the medieval *kenmitsu* Buddhism or to the Tokugawa ruling ideology.

We must, then, reconsider what constitutes religious freedom. Pre-modern Japanese rulers employed religion to foster the unity and prosperity of the community, but it was not that people were all forced to espouse the same religious view and to worship the same deities as their ruler. As long as a religious group did not develop fanaticism or disturb the civic order, it was acceptable for it to hold a worldview that was different from that of the ruler. If religious freedom is understood only in an adversarial and competitive fashion, or as individual rights, pluralism and coexistence seen in the Tokugawa village cannot be appropriately described. Galen Amstutz has addressed some of these interpretive

24. See note 2 above.

25. This is from *Ihon Mimyōkō yawa* [Episodes on Lord Mimyō], a record of Toshitsune’s words and deeds. Cited in ARIMOTO 1995, 128.

problems most explicitly. Amstutz notes the inadequacy of scholars to properly grasp the “dispersal of power” in Tokugawa society. He stresses the need to examine a “private” religious organization like Shinshū:

The inquiry into the dispersal of power in society does not have to run only to either socialism or individual rights theory; politically, the privatization of religious institutions is just as critical as secular social ideology or protection of individual rights by governments. When it polarizes views of Japan between an authoritarian single order and a failed individualism, social science fails to appreciate the real character of the society. (AMSTUTZ 1992, 293)²⁶

Meanwhile, Bellah, who has been criticizing the social embeddedness and failed individualism in Japanese society, now criticizes the excess of individualism in America. The leap of freedom set forth in the Reformation has reached the point in America where “the strengthening of the state [goes] hand-in-hand with an...illusory freeing of the individual” (BELLAH 2002, 273–74). Although Bellah is still convinced about the universal significance of transcendence which dictates a human *telos*, he now sees this *telos* to be pointing in a different direction: “Freedom must be embodied; the truth lies in reconciliation” (BELLAH 2002, 276).

Kuroda also spoke of reconciliation. Already in 1959, Kuroda identified the similarity between *Buppōryō* and the Peace of God movement in medieval France. In his speech entitled “Chūsei ni okeru buyū to annon” [Valor and peace in the medieval period, 1981], he brought up the subject of Buddhism and peace-making again. Although military valor is usually considered the typical medieval virtue, Kuroda claimed that for the majority of people including warriors, “peace and calm” (*annon* 安穩) were far more fundamental than valor. Kuroda argued that despite numerous instances of Buddhist involvement in violence, Buddhism still provided inspiration for peace. Raising Shinshū temple towns as an example, Kuroda observed that even in a most violent case like *Ikkō ikki*, what people ultimately desired was “a peaceful space of living.” In his opinion, the previous academic debate whether *Ikkō ikki* was a feudalizing or anti-feudalizing struggle was mostly irrelevant in the face of such desire (KURODA 1981, KTC 3: 404).

Peace was not a topic Kuroda arbitrarily proposed. Rather, the concept emerged in his criticism against the common historiographical bias. As was the case with Ishimoda Shō, postwar historians identified the medieval period with warriors, military valor, and new Buddhism, while ignoring topics such as the Buddhist contribution to peace. Kuroda believed that reexamination of concepts like valor and peace would lead to a fundamental revision of the way Japanese medieval society was understood (KURODA 1981, KTC 3: 385–87). Earlier, Kuroda

26. AMSTUTZ repeats the same point in his *Interpreting Amida* (1997, 114–15). His concluding chapter of this book is extremely suggestive for future comparative studies of religion.

completely revised the image of Kamakura Buddhism by de-emphasizing the oppositional potential of Shinshū. Had he lived longer, he may have also changed the impression of Sengoku Buddhism as fanatical and violent.

Postscript

The editors of this issue pointed out to me that my use of the word “salvation” sounds too Christian and suggested that it should be replaced by “liberation.” They are indeed right so long as “liberation” refers to Buddhist liberation (*gedatsu* 解脱) from the cycle of birth and death. However, “liberation” is also frequently used by Marxist historians to mean social liberation (*kaihō* 解放). Therefore, I opted for “enlightenment” when the context allowed. As for “salvation,” ISHIMODA (1985, 374) used the phrase “salvation of the individual soul” (*kojin no tamashii no kyūsai* 個人の魂の救済) to describe the tenet of the Kamakura new sects. While this phrase has been continuously used since then, it is extremely problematic from the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy which sees self as a mental construct. A dialogue between social scientists and Buddhologists is long overdue.

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- SSS *Shinshū shiryō shūsei* 真宗史料集成. Kashiwahara Yūsen 柏原裕泉, et al., eds., 13 vols. Kyoto: Dōbōsha Shuppan, 1983.

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