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Buddhism 3.0

A Philosophical Investigation

Fujita Isshō
Nagai Hitoshi
Yamashita Ryōdō

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with
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CHISOKUDŌ

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Translator's Introduction

Jamie Hubbard

I am delighted and honored to make available this discussion between two Buddhist priests, Fujita Isshō and Yamashita Ryōdō, and Nagai Hitoshi, a well-known Japanese philosopher. In his preface, Fujita explains the origins of this project, as well as the discussants' backgrounds, so I won't say anything more here. I will simply explain my role in, and understanding of, the project. I have known the two priests, Isshō-san and Ryōdō-san, for nearly thirty-five years. It was the mid–1980s when they both arrived in Charlemont, Massachusetts, from Antai-ji (a temple in the lineage of Sawaki Kōdō and Uchiyama Kōshō) to direct Valley Zendo. Slightly earlier I had arrived to teach Buddhist Studies nearby at Smith College. Both Isshō-san and Ryōdō-san served as official Buddhist Community Spiritual Advisors at Smith College, and together with the late Professor Taitetsu Unno (Smith College professor of Buddhist Studies and thirteenth-generation Shin Buddhist priest) and myself, they helped to lead our Monday evening meditation/discussion group. In addition, they participated in many gatherings, public talks, and other events at Smith and at the numerous Buddhist organizations in the area. Isshō-san returned to Japan in 2005. After leaving Valley Zendo, Ryōdō-san spent time in Italy and Japan before moving to Myanmar for a number of years to take the full Theravada ordination as Bhikku Sudhammacara. He also undertook

Tibetan training in Nepal and returned to Japan right after Isshō-san in 2006. Despite the distance, we have always remained in touch. In addition to their teaching and meditation groups in Japan, both have also continued various international projects: Isshō-san has served as the director of the Soto Zen International Center in San Francisco; Ryōdō-san has led many retreats in India and elsewhere around the world. Both Zen priests have also developed their own, somewhat experimental, ideas, known as Buddhism 3.0. Although I have not met Professor Nagai, I have come to know his ideas over the course of this translation project, both from the conversations translated here as well as from his other writings. I feel an affinity for someone who traveled to Aizu as an elementary school student and, unlike his classmates, preferred Ohara Shōsuke's song to the Byakkotai Monument.[1] It is indeed an interesting and diverse group that came together to have these public talks from 2014 through 2016.[2]

The urge to "do philosophy" with Buddhism 3.0 is very typical of Isshō-san's intellectual curiosity. Ryōdō-san, in contrast, is more concerned with the practice side of Buddhism 3.0. In another sense, Buddhism 3.0 itself is part of the Japanese Buddhist world's ongoing attempts to reinvigorate itself and make Buddhism relevant to today's busy, hyper-technological world. Although grossly oversimplified, one standard view is that Japanese Buddhism has been moribund since the beginning of the Edo period in the seventeenth century. The govern-

1. In the middle of the famous Aizu Bandai folk song there is a verse, "How did Ohara Shōsuke totally blow his fortune? Naps in the morning, booze in the morning, and the baths in the morning—that's how Ohara Shōsuke totally blew his fortune!" On the other hand, the iconic symbol of Aizu is the memorial to the Byakkotai, a regiment of 16- and 17-year-olds who committed ritual suicide on a hill overlooking their lord's castle engulfed in flames—"As the castle falls, so shall we for our lord." The memorial is a popular spot, inspirational to young students for the story of loyalty and tragedy—but Nagai preferred the Ohara Shōsuke song.

2. They continued their discussions, with three more talks running through 2019. These later talks resulted in *Philosophically Examining Buddhism 3.0 II* [〈仏教 3.0〉を哲学するバージョンII] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2020).

ment forced Buddhist temples to create a *danka* (檀家) system, a sort of "parish" structure, and required every citizen to belong to a temple. Part of this "belonging" included tithing to the temple as well as family and domicile registration, information made available to the authorities, thus turning local Buddhist temples into sort of government intel organizations and giving them a bad name. Despite various disruptions and divergences, the reputation of Japanese Buddhist priests to this day is often that they are "money-grubbing monks" (坊主丸儲け) or "monks that stink of raw flesh" (生臭坊主), that is, eat meat, keep women, and drink alcohol. Buddhism in general is seen as stale and fossilized—fit for the funeral business, but not much more. As Isshō-san describes part of the motivation for their panels with Prof. Nagai, "[Perhaps] we would be able to give a nice jolt to the present-day Buddhist world, which has coagulated into a rather staid and dull form." The State Shinto of the Meiji-Taisho eras complicated this further by attempting to marginalize Buddhism, which pushed some members of the Buddhist establishment to climb into bed with the ultra-nationalists. I cannot overemphasize how simplified this view is, and scholars have torn it apart again and again. One easy example of the complexities of the situation is the temple school (寺子屋) system of Edo Japan, which on the one hand forced the priests to promulgate Confucian values, especially loyalty to the state, but on the other hand was responsible for the relatively high literacy rate in early modern Japan that had a huge impact on Japanese modernization efforts. However "moribund" Buddhism might have been, there were many brilliant monks, lay followers, reformers, artists, and the like during the Edo period, and there were Buddhist priests and laypeople who resisted the "Imperial Way" during the war years.

Nonetheless, many committed Buddhists feel the need for change, *updating* Buddhism, as Ryōdō-san puts it. This has taken many forms in modern and contemporary Japan, from institutional reform (such as the Dōbōkai 同朋会) movement in the Shin school) to vigorous doctrinal debate to social/doctrinal critique (see Brian Victo-

ria's work on Japanese Buddhist militarism, or the discussions of the Kyoto School and ultra-nationalism in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*,[3] the Critical Buddhism of Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsunaga Shirō,[4] the "New Mahayana" of Akizuki Ryōmin[5] and many, many other critiques). The positive Buddhist response to the triple-disaster of 2011 has been well documented, and the recent introduction of vipassana traditions, Tibetan Buddhist practices, *Naikan* practice, and other contemporary exercises and ideas are also noteworthy. There are also the Buddhist bars, robots, Amida drones, monastic robe fashion shows, and Buddhist-themed discos that regularly make the news in Japan. From Zen Buddhists to Shin Buddhism to new Buddhist movements and organizations, the Buddhist community has been trying to meet people's spiritual needs in innovative ways.

And so these two priests, both members of the somewhat radical Antai-ji lineage of Uchiyama Kōshō and Sawaki Kōdō, have likewise reinterpreted their teachers' teachings, giving us Buddhism 3.0. Interestingly, and somewhat contrary to the usual view of Zen as anti-intellectual and oriented toward practice and experience, an important element of Buddhism 3.0 is the practitioner's worldview, the frame of mind with which one practices. Far from a mystical "no-mind" or "non-conceptual" direct-experience-of-things-as-they-are, this worldview is an informed understanding of the way things work and is a prerequisite for practice. As Isshō-san states, the Eightfold Correct Practices begin with Correct View and Correct Thought. Without that foundation, mindfulness or zazen practice is little more than training a puppy dog to sit still in one place—useful, perhaps, but not particularly awakened. All three of the panelists are quite adamant that

3. James W. Heisig, ed. (University of Hawai'i Press, 1995).

4. Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

5. Akizuki Ryōmin, *New Mahāyāna: Buddhism for a Post-Modern World*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul L. Swanson (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1990).

"philosophy helps meditation" rather than the other way around. They posit that the reason Nagai took to meditation so readily was that his philosophy-infused starting point had perfectly prepared him for contemplative practice.

That Isshō-san and Ryōdō-san have teamed up with the philosopher Nagai, whose lifework has been concerned with the philosophy of "the singular 'self'" or the "uniquely me" (比類なき私), is an interesting story in itself. These panel discussions occurred more because of Isshō-san's interest in Nagai's philosophy than Nagai's interest in Buddhist ideas. Indeed, although he is attracted to Buddhist practice, Nagai calls Buddhist ideas of no-self and impermanence boring, and in his Afterword he writes that Buddhist doctrines are "primitive," so primitive that he "couldn't believe that they were intended for readers with any intelligence or ability to think." He also has a particular scorn for Zen paradox, saying, "Using paradox without explanation, just being happy with a contradiction—it's so pretentious and is one of Zen's biggest problems. You really should be able to explain this stuff and clearly tell us what you mean." So rather than Buddhist ideas, Nagai was initially attracted to vipassana and Zen practice because it helped him sleep better, and that led him to the ideas of Uchiyama Roshi. Interestingly, it was Uchiyama's "deep philosophical insight," not his Zen practice, that captivated Nagai. As he puts it, "Zen is boring" (*Enjoyable Philosophy*, 92). Still, Nagai attended several of Isshō-san's lectures and they became friends—an absolutely and karmically inevitable encounter, as Isshō-san puts it.

One of the most interesting aspects of this discussion is how Nagai's idea of the "singular self," a contemporary form of solipsism and framed in terms of his unique approach to the problem of other minds, is similar (or not) to Uchiyama's notion of the "self that is wholly self" (自己ぎりの自己), "the self that is all-encompassing" (尽一切自己), original Self (本来の自己), and other ideas of the self/Self.[6]

6. See the list of "commonplace expressions" that Uchiyama used to express the idea

Nagai's questions about self were with him from childhood, and later, as a philosopher, he developed his "philosophy of the I!" 〈私〉[7] and the question of "Why, among all other beings, am I the only one who is me?" in opposition to notions of intersubjectivity and the "common subjectivity" of philosophers such as Hiromatsu Wataru.[8] Nagai's questions about self, his insistence on the "singular self," his opposition to intersubjectivity and common subjectivity, and the like seem to be elements contrary to his personal disposition, which is described as empathetic in the extreme, whether dealing with the needs of infants, children's naive intuitions, the philosophical wonderings and wanderings of grad students, even dogs, and, as is the case here, itinerant and curious Buddhists. Nagai's "singular I" also seems to run counter to the standard Buddhist doctrines of no-self and the interconnectedness of all things. As he puts it, "I believe that solipsism and no-self are in fact

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of the universal self (Uchiyama Kōshō, *Opening the Hand of Thought* [Wisdom Publications, 2004], 189 n. 49), including "*Shinnyo* (Skt., *tathatā*; Eng., suchness); *hosshō* (Skt., *dharmata*; Eng., dharma-nature); *hosshin* (Skt., *dharmakāya*; Eng., dharma body); *hokkai* (Skt., *dharmadhātu*; Eng., dharma world); *busshō* (Skt., *buddhatā*; Eng., buddha-nature); *Nyoraizō* (Skt., *tathāgata-garbha*; Eng., matrix, womb, or embryo of *tathāgata*)" and a slew of other terms, all equated by Uchiyama to a universal self, "the self that is all-encompassing."

7. In their discussions, the use of terms that correspond to notions of self-identity, both in terms of the unique characteristics of an individual, such as facial features and personal history, as well as Uchiyama's more transcendent sense of self ("the self that is wholly self," etc.) is slippery and somewhat hard to follow and, befitting a panel discussion, not necessarily rigorously consistent. However, there does seem to be a difference between Nagai's use of the singular self 〈私〉 and the same Japanese term when it is used by Yamashita or Fujita who use it more in Uchiyama's sense of the "self that is wholly self" (自己ぎりの自己). Hence, in our translation we have opted for the awkward English "I!" when translating Nagai's use of 〈私〉 to distinguish it from other uses of 〈私〉 as seen in Uchiyama, Fujita, and Yamashita. Nagai has used "I!" as a translation for 〈私〉 in the past, e.g., the title of his very first book, 『〈私〉のメタフィジックス』 (Keisō Shobō, 1986) is translated in English as *A Metaphysics of I!*. See also *Enjoyable Philosophy Magazine*, vol. 6 (2014), devoted entirely to Nagai's ideas and his philosophy of I!.

8. *Enjoyable Philosophy Magazine*, 35: "I said that his [Hiromatsu's] idea of Intersubjectivity, in which the minds of others are connected, is totally wrong, as the real issue is why one of these people is me and it has nothing to do with whether another's mind is connected to me or not."

the same thing, but this is a unique interpretation." Probably many would agree that it is a "unique interpretation," and it is in these discussions around self and interconnectedness that I think we find the meat of this philosophical look at Buddhism 3.0.

Uchiyama Roshi had many disciples and followers, and this discussion between two monks in his lineage (albeit each with his own developed ideas about doctrine and practice) and a fairly hard-core philosopher adept in logic, cognitive philosophy, psychology and more, provides fertile ground for thought. More recently, a fourth member has joined their discussions, Muhō Nölke, former abbot of Antai-ji. Together they have produced another volume of discussions, *Philosophically Examining Buddhism: On the Ideas of Uchiyama Kōshō Roshi*.[9] We hope that this translation of the earlier symposia will add to the understanding of contemporary movements in Japanese Zen.

About the translation

Because the original format was a three-person panel with an audience, the discussion was not technical, either philosophically or in terms of Buddhist doctrine. Many terms were used loosely, and meanings overlapped, as you might expect in a panel discussion. For example, "compassion (*karuṇā*) practice" (慈悲瞑想) is used interchangeably with metta (メッタ) practice, whereas in the Theravada *brahmavihārā* (the locus of metta practice) the practices of metta and *karuṇā* are distinct. Readers should keep in mind the informal setting as they enjoy the back-and-forth.

I am forever indebted to my wife, Maki Hirano Hubbard (Professor Emerita, Department of East Asian Languages and Culture, Smith College), who graciously and painstakingly checked all my transla-

9. Nagai Hiroshi, Fujita Isshō, Yamashita Ryōdō, and Muhō Nölke,『哲学する仏教・内山興正老師の思索をめぐって』[*Philosophically Examining Buddhism: On the Ideas of Uchiyama Kōshō Roshi*] (Sendai: Sanga, 2019). See also Muhō's videos re Buddhism 3.0 at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLHc3lR360zoxZsImxlv4M5pypmXbocltO.

tions for accuracy (and often corrected my English grammar, style, and punctuation as well as my translations). Finally kudos to my dear friend Professor Elizabeth Kenney (formerly of Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka), who stepped in toward the end to copy-edit and offer suggestions on the entire translation. Professor Kenney's sharp eye and insightful comments provided hours of delightful and thought-provoking discussion. Without their assistance, this work would never have been completed. Finally, my gratitude to Father Jim Heisig (Professor Emeritus, Nanzan University), editor at Chisokudō Publishing, who took this manuscript and, in his usual and inimitable fashion, proceeded from receiving and reviewing the manuscript to having it placed in bookstores in less than several months—it is always a delight to work with somebody so talented. This book was intended to be a collaboration with "the boys," as I have come to refer to the three panelists whose conversations I have translated and whose English is nearly native in fluency, with them correcting and editing my translation as I went along, pushing me faster in the process. Alas, the boys were too busy teaching and preaching, spreading the message of Buddhism 3.0 to actively participate in the translation. Although they had constant access to our shared manuscript and received daily updates on the progress of the translation, they were thus not able to participate in the collaboration as planned. This was a labor of friendship and so, too, while I am grateful to have this opportunity to introduce their ideas to the English-reading world, all errors and mistranslations that remain are their responsibility.

Shimogamo Byōin
November 2021