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Melissa Anne-Marie Curley. *Pure Land, Real World: Modern Buddhism, Japanese Leftists, and the Utopian Imagination.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017. xi + 241 pp. $65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-5775-2.

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Commissioned by Jessica Starling (Lewis & Clark College)

Pure Land, Real World is a significant contribution to the fields of modern Japanese and modern Buddhist studies. Curley sets up the argument in a remarkably effective introduction, which plays on the central trope of the Pure Land as a specifically Japanese/East Asian "utopia"—understood here as the simple but provocative assertion that "things could be different; things could be better" (p. 1). As the author notes, the very idea of a "Pure Land of Bliss" existing in some distant realm is in fact a double provocation: to modern sensibilities and—as students in any Introduction to Buddhism course will quickly notice—to classical Buddhist formulations as well. But this book is ***not*** about the modernization of the Pure Land within the Japanese sects of that lineage; rather, it is about the way that those on the margins of the tradition appropriated and creatively reimagined the Pure Land (often inspired by sectarian reformers) "as a source of inspiration for their own utopian dreams" (p. 2). More specifically, ***Pure Land, Real World*** investigates the confluence of Pure Land ideas in the work of three highly influential "secular progressive" thinkers of twentieth-century Japan: Kawakami Hajime (1879–1946), Miki Kiyoshi (1897–1945), and Ienaga Saburō (1913–2002). The burden of the book, as Curley puts it, is to show that these thinkers thereby "tap into a deeply traditional spirit of resistance, making them valuable interlocutors for the contemporary reader interested in the Pure Land"—and, I would add, the contemporary reader interested in resources for progressive (or "prophetic") Buddhism today.

As someone who has written extensively on utopia as a concept as it relates to modern Buddhism and East Asian thought, this reader is particularly appreciative of Curley's nuanced theoretical treatment of utopia—a concept that seems to be as out of fashion in scholarly circles as it is in everyday usage (at least as a positive program). Hearkening back to Frankfurt School thinkers Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno, the author limns the political core to the modern utopian imaginary, thereby avoiding the trap of reading utopia purely through the lens of literary studies (as Steven Collins does in his nonetheless fascinating argument that at least classical Buddhism contains no real space for utopia[1]). Curley also sidesteps the orthodox Marxist dismissal of utopia as a form of bourgeois idealism, citing Adorno's perceptive remarks about the "blocked consciousness"—rooted in a discourse of "pragmatics" and "realism"—that inhibits the utopian imagination in twentieth-century capitalist society, turning well-meaning liberals into philistines. My only

criticism here is that she may be relying too heavily on Adorno, whose conception might be usefully nuanced with that of Karl Mannheim, whose ***Ideology and Utopia*** (1922) set a standard in Western social theory for the evaluation of utopia.

The first chapter seeks to complicate the oft-assumed dichotomy of transcendence-immanence, arguing that traditional visions of the Pure Land were liminal in both space and time: "neither identical with this world nor located far beyond this world" (pp. 12–13). In the context of her counterdiscursive arguments about Honen and Shinran, Curley suggests that rather than being against "ritual" ***per se*** (i.e., Protestants ***avant-la-lettre***) these two "reformers" maintained "an interest in the resonance between the phenomenal world and the transcendent Pure Land that [earlier] ritual forms were designed to produce" (p. 25). Indeed, the practice of chanting the ***nenbutsu*** is an example of such, as is Shinran's notion of "cutting crosswise" (***ōchō***): both effect a "seamless doubling of the phenomenal and the transcendent" (p. 24). At the same time, Curley makes a strong case for seeing both Honen's and Shinran's understandings of the Pure Land and Amida's promise of salvation as a bold rejection the purity codes—and by extension the social and political norms—of the day. Even Rennyo, often understood as a hugely significant but "conservative" figure in the establishment of Shin institutional orthodoxy, is re-read by Curley along lines that suggest that the Honganji he created shares important features with the "radical" Amidism of the day. Especially intriguing here is the argument that Rennyo's ***anjin*** is properly understood not as a retreat to interiority but rather as an expression of "a desire for one form of associative life over another" (pp. 38–39). All told, this chapter succeeds in making the one side of the case that "what we take to be traditional orthodoxy [i.e., of a strictly transcendent Pure Land] is in fact a modern invention" (p. 46).

In chapter 2, Curley takes up the "invention of modern orthodoxy" in the works of Abbot Kōnyo (1798–1871) and Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903). Here the discussion of the former—much less-well-known—figure, is particularly insightful, as Curley presents Kōnyo as "anticipating the dominant sense of what it will mean to be religious in the modern period: a devout Buddhist in terms of belief and a loyal Japanese citizen in terms of behavior" (p. 53). She makes an excellent point in concluding—as I have in my own work on many figures of the same period—that "characterizing Kōnyo's interpretation as conservative rather than progressive is not the same as characterizing it as traditional rather than modern" (p. 55). The following short section on Shimaji Mokurai and the birth of modernist understandings of religion vis-à-vis politics in the 1870s is somewhat less effective, mainly because it has been said many times before, but Curley's counterdiscursive reading of Kiyozawa's work—as implying "a trajectory toward an anarchic form of associative life in which every member enjoys total self-sovereignty" (p. 72)—provides valuable insights on the legacy of this key figure and his immediate successors, who "riffed" on his major themes.

The third chapter introduces the reader to the life and work of Kawakami Hajime, the Marxist economist who "converted" to a highly particular vision of Pure Land Buddhism that retained his anticapitalist spirit. The discussion of Kawakami's relations to both Marxism and Buddhism (as a perennial "convert," he was constantly developing both, eventually in relation to one another) is excellent, though I offer as a mild point of critique that, while Curley is quite right to note that Kawakami's Buddhist-Marxist conflation was unusual, it is less unique than he (or others) have argued; indeed, many of the New Buddhist figures of the previous generation had similarly struggled with the problems and possibilities of Buddhist socialism and anarchism—albeit at a time when progressive and radical thought in Japan was much more open to religious aspects. Like

Kawakami, the New Buddhists sought a form of "religious truth" that was beyond "religion" in the institutional sense, which in their eyes often if not always played the role of "opiate of the people" (pp. 95, 100). At the risk of sounding horribly self-serving, I suggest that this chapter—and indeed, the entire book—be usefully read in tandem with my *Against Harmony* (2017), as each book serves as a complement to the other. Having said that, it is certainly true that Kawakami's insistence on the separation of the "two truths" of Buddhism and Marxism moves his thought in a direction rarely extended by his New Buddhist predecessors.

Chapter 4 examines the writings of Miki Kiyoshi, characterized here as "a charismatic philosopher who was drummed out of the academy for being too radical and drummed out of Marxist circles for being too bourgeois" (p. 14), contrasting his own "associative" appropriation of the Pure Land to that of Kawakami's more individualistic version. Of particular note here is Miki's insistence on keeping a place for the possibility of a "proletarian religion," one that (like proletarian literature) might in fact support the work of liberation (***kaihō***) (p. 130). It is not clear whether Miki realizes that Marx makes a similar claim in his ***Thesis on Feuerbach***, where Marx criticized Feuerbach's emphasis on religion as ***the*** primary source of delusion. Granted, Miki goes well beyond Marx (and veers towards Durkheim) in asserting the positive (perhaps evolutionary) link between the "intrinsic" religious desire and human sociality. Miki's existential and Hegelian reading of Shinran's understanding of history via the "Three Dharma Ages" (***shōzōmatsu***) is perhaps the most fertile of all his ideas, and is explicated well by the author here. I must admit that after reading this chapter, I have a newfound respect for Miki's philosophical project, particularly his efforts to think through "a form of Gemeinschaft that is at once organic and cosmopolitan: A community within which the category of humanity can be actualized as a concrete universal" (p. 151).

Finally, Curley discusses selected writings of the youngest of these three figures—and the only one to survive into the postwar period—historian Ienaga Saburo, an "anti-anti-Marxist" who, in anticipation of Adorno, placed particular emphasis on (Shinran's) Pure Land as a utopian—and transcendent—"negation" of the status quo. After a detailed and careful review of Ienaga's understanding of the role and promise of the "logic of negation" in Japanese (and Japanese Buddhist) history, Curley turns to the scholar's postwar work, in which Ienaga takes up as a task of locating the "negating" religious individual "in relation to the people," while simultaneously orienting religion "toward the liberation of the people." (p. 179). The chapter ends with a masterful analysis of Ienaga's logic of resistance in relation not only to Shinran and modern Pure Land doctrine but framed by his own struggles as a "tragic patriot" in the postwar era.

The epilogue provides a nice summation of the narrative arc of the book, including its principal theses. I wondered at first why it was called an "epilogue" rather than a "conclusion," since it serves the second purpose admirably well. But it becomes apparent that Curley wants to extemporize on some of the broader implications of the work of the figures she has analyzed in the book itself. Particularly insightful are her comments on the Buddha-Marx nexus in terms of relationality, which helped me think about this relation in a new and fruitful way.

In short, ***Pure Land, Real World*** is well organized and impeccably researched, even if it reads, at times, somewhat like a doctoral dissertation (e.g., in the heavy use of direct quotes from the usual suspects Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, and slight tendency to overcitation). The book is essential reading for anyone interested in modern Japanese Buddhism, comparative

religion and politics, and modern Japanese intellectual history. It is highly recommended.

Note

[1]. Steven Collins, "Monasticism, Utopias, and Comparative Social Theory," in *Self & Society: Essays on Pali Literature and Social Theory, 1988–2010* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2013).