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*Honens Buddhismus des Reinen Landes: Reform, Reformation oder Heresie?*  
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Christoph Kleine's exploration of Hōnen's (1133-1212) life and thought is a valuable contribution to the study of Kamakura Buddhism. Based on a comprehensive and detailed investigation of primary and secondary sources, *Honens Buddhismus des Reinen Landes* offers an instructive and inspiring analysis. Kleine's mastery of Chinese and Japanese is impressive. Also, contrary to those still influential German scholars who write in mystifying language about the "otherness" of Japan, and Japanese Buddhism in particular, he presents his ideas in a rational manner and in very readable German. His bibliography and index are extremely helpful, comprising a huge number of relevant titles and technical terms respectively.

Kleine convincingly argues against still widespread clichés such as that Kamakura Buddhism was (1) a more or less homogenous Buddhist movement and (2) fundamentally different from earlier Japanese Buddhism. For instance, he points to the differences between Hōnen's *Jōdo-shū*, Nichiren's (1222-1282) *Hokke-shū*, and Dōgen's (1200-1253) *Sōtō-shū*, and calls attention to pre-Kamakura traditions of *nembutsu* thought and practice, and to pre-Kamakura *hijiri* movements. As Kleine shows, only some of those principles which are often considered general characteristics of Kamakura Buddhism characterize the particular Kamakura schools. Further, most principles were already influential in Heian times; for example, whereas the principles of reductionism or selectionism (*senchaku*), exclusiveness of practice (*senju*) and especially simplification of practice (*igyō*) may indeed be characteristic of the *Sōtō-shū*, the principles of independence from traditional ordination rules and Buddhist prescriptions (*han-karitsu*), and popularism (*minshū-sei*) certainly are not. Also, the first three principles were characteristic of pre-Kamakura Buddhist movements too (pp. 13-23). According to Kleine, it follows from this that Kamakura Buddhism is by no means "more Japanese" than Heian or even Nara Buddhism (p. 19).

In his analysis of Hōnen's role as a religious leader, Kleine arrives at the conclusion that Hōnen was neither a reformer nor a "Reformer" in the German sense, but rather a heretic. By the term "reformer" Kleine means a renewer who achieves his aim *within* a given "orthodox" framework; by "Reformer" he refers to a renewer aiming at a reform but ultimately forced to realize his goal *outside* the given "orthodox" framework (like Luther); and by "heretic" Kleine understands a man who does not consciously aim at a renewal at all and who does not want to deviate from "orthodoxy" but — especially by his selectivism and reductionism (p. 327)— actually departs from the established tradition, and is then regarded by his "orthodox" contemporaries as a dangerous deviator (p. 347).

Kleine takes pains to develop his definitions of “reformation” (p. 316) and “heresy” (p. 328). Also, he tries to show that his notion of heresy is by no means alien to Japan. According to Kleine, words such as *jaken* (wrong or heterodox view) and *itan* (deviating faction or side) provide respective evidence (p. 329). Further, he points out that *jaken* is a traditional translation of the Buddhist Sanskrit term which means “wrong view(s).”

In his attempt to prove that his notion of heresy is applicable to Buddhism, Kleine must also criticize the prejudice that Buddhism is “a religion of tolerance and openness.” In doing so, he is of course right. Kleine quotes Dobbins who pointed out that “the idea of ‘assailing heresy and revealing truth’ (*haja kenshō*) is [attributed to the Buddha himself] and traceable to numerous Buddhist classics” (p. 320).

Apparently, Kleine regards his “critical appraisal of Hōnen” (pp. 309-349) as his most important contribution to an understanding of Kamakura Buddhism from the viewpoint of a science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*). This may be true in certain respects but seems doubtful with regard to his classification of Hōnen as a heretic. It is because Kleine’s arguments are based on a critical research of primary sources and are carefully construed that his “appraisal” inspires and deserves a more detailed discussion.

Kleine is certainly right when he emphasizes that Hōnen did not found a new religious organization — that is, an independent institution with its own initiation rites and temples — and that he did not aim at founding such an institution. Especially, Hōnen never sought an official (governmental) permit for establishing such an organization. Hence Kleine rightly concludes that Hōnen cannot be regarded as the founder of the *Jōdo-shū*. Also, since Hōnen did not aim at a reform of Buddhism, and, in his notion of *nembutsu* as the single most important means of salvation, significantly deviated from earlier, more modest concepts and practices of *nembutsu*, he cannot appropriately be called a reformer.

In my opinion, Kleine even underestimates the significance of Hōnen’s deviation in regarding the recitation of *namu Amida butsu* as the most efficient means for salvation (that is, for being born into the Pure Land of Amida) and in implying *logically* that this practice is soteriologically superior to all other Buddhist ways to salvation. Given the universally valid rule that, if possible, one should employ the most efficient means to reach one’s goal, and also given that, in principle, everybody is able to recite the *nembutsu*, it logically follows that one ought to recite *namu Amida butsu* before using any other means. Kleine emphasizes that Hōnen himself did not want to devaluate, or depreciate, other Buddhist teachings. But in fact that is exactly what he did. None of his conciliatory remarks could do away

with the logical implications of his notion of *nembutsu*. Actually, only a religion that maintains that the goals *and* the forms and methods of other religions are of the same value as its own particular goals, forms and methods does not claim superiority and does not invite inhumanity in the name of “truth” and “benevolence.”

In this context, one word about Kleine’s understanding of *shū* may also be appropriate. Kleine (pp. 151ff.) overlooks that a *shū*, in the sense of “school,” as, for example, in Tendai-*shū* (Tendai school), and not only in the sense of “sect,” can also be, and often was, “sectarian,” that is, conceiving of itself as significantly different from other schools. In particular, Kleine underestimates Saichō’s sectarian spirit as it is recognizable in Saichō’s attacks against the Nara schools which he criticized as no real Mahāyāna, and in his vehement attempts to establish his own ordination platform. In contrast to Kleine, I am of the opinion that sectarianism was already a characteristic of Heian Buddhism. It was only in Nara Buddhism that sectarianism did not play a significant role. Early Nara Buddhists themselves did not even call their groupings *shū* (schools), but just groups (*shu*). For more details, one may consult Ishida Mōsaku (*Shakyō yori mitaru Nara-chō bukkyō no kenkyū*, Tōkyō: Tōyō bunko, 1930), Paul Groner (*Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai Sect*, Berkeley, 1984), or my *Philosophie in Japan* (Munich: Iudicium, 1993, especially pp. 159 and 278-285).

To recapitulate and provisionally sum up, while I find Kleine’s conclusions that Hōnen cannot adequately be regarded as the founder of the *Jōdo-shū* and as a reformer convincing, I hold that to characterize him just as a dangerous heretic and heterodox is unsatisfactory. To say that he was a heretic actually does not mean very much, especially if one— as Kleine himself does— wants to understand the classification “heretic” as an evaluation by a respective orthodoxy (p. 347). Almost all religious people who in a significant way deviate from established teachings and practices are viewed as heretics by their orthodox contemporaries. Unlike most of them, however, Hōnen and his teachings proved very influential, ultimately leading to the establishment of the powerful *Jōdo-shū*. Though perhaps willy nilly, Hōnen was the founder of a lasting religious *doctrine*, which must be distinguished from an religious *institution*. Kleine is of course aware of this. The significant feature of Hōnen’s doctrine was not its deviation from, or “negation” of, traditional teachings but its as it were character as a positive teaching. At least, one must consider the second aspect too when characterizing Hōnen’s historical position, not to mention the task of a systematic categorization of new religious forms. If one wants to avoid the term “reformation,” (because one believes that this term should be applied only

if reforms are intended) one perhaps has to speak of a “soft revolution,” or to look for another term.

Actually, the choice of terms is often unimportant. Sometimes, however, inappropriate terminology causes misunderstandings, and even covers up grave problems. Whether this is case when one calls Hōnen a heretic without also calling him a *Reformer* or soft revolutionary, must be left to further discussion.

In expressing some doubts about the main results of Kleine’s “critical appraisal of Hōnen,” I do not want to qualify my initial recommendation. Kleine’s book offers much detailed information, it includes many translations of important passages of Hōnen’s work into a Western language for the first time, it is well argued, stimulating, written in a very readable German, and it provides the Western scholar with a wealth of bibliographical and terminological knowledge. Because of its competent scholarship it is also a very reliable source for further scholarly research and discussion.