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◇ Note 2

Research Report
An Assessment of the Role of Manuscripts in the Study of Japanese
Hossō Thought:
The Example of the *Rongi* “Daihi Sendai”

Florian SAILE

My recent research, which will ultimately form the basis of my Ph.D. dissertation, analyzes the evolution of a doctrine known as the “distinction between the five predispositions” (*goshō kakubetsu* 五性各別) in the thought of the Japanese Hossō School 法相宗 during the Heian (794-1185 CE) and Kamakura (1185-1333 CE) Periods. The Hossō School (along with schools such as the Sanron, Kegon, and Ritsu) has been virtually ignored in Western scholarship on Japanese Buddhism, which is heavily skewed towards the Zen and Pure Land traditions. As a result, the received understanding of Japanese Hossō thought is based on a few short passages and chapters scattered throughout works on other topics, as well as on a single Ph.D. dissertation submitted in 1965, most of which rely on outdated Japanese scholarship heavily informed by certain sectarian biases. If one examines various introductions to Japanese Buddhism used to teach undergraduate courses in the West, for example, one again and again encounters descriptions of the Hossō School as a conservative scholastic tradition that flourished briefly during the Nara Period before its inability (or unwillingness) to evolve and adapt to the changing conditions of the times caused it to lose its place at the head of Japanese

Buddhism, and fade quickly into historical obscurity and doctrinal irrelevance. It was a lingering suspicion that there had to be more to the Japanese Hossō tradition than such accounts suggest that triggered my decision to focus my dissertation on Japanese Hossō, and specifically on the question of how and why Hossō thought changed and evolved over time.

Although my present research is very much a work in progress, my studies over the past two years as a visiting researcher at Ryukoku University have led me to the conclusion that the received view of the Japanese Hossō School is not merely incorrect, but also completely unsupported by the primary sources available to us today. This conclusion raises a simple question, of course: Why does my own view of the Japanese Hossō tradition differ so drastically from that of previous scholars? Although there are doubtlessly many factors contributing to this shift in perspective, one key issue concerns the primary texts upon which my research is based, namely manuscripts related to the practice of *rongi* 論義, or oral doctrinal debate.

My recent research has led me to the conclusion that it is impossible to do justice to the breadth and complexity of the Japanese Hossō tradition without resorting to the study of manuscripts. The reason for this is twofold. First, the number of Hossō-related texts contained in modern printed (or digitized) compendia such as *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 or *Dai nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本佛教全書 is actually quite limited. In the case of those Buddhist sects that maintain a major presence in the modern era, this is not a significant problem, since each of these sects has published one or more compendia (some typical examples being *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 弘法大師全集 and *Tendaishū zensho* 天台宗全書) of primary texts relevant to the study of its history and doctrines. In the case of those traditions that lack a strong sectarian presence in modern-day Japan (such as Hossō and Kegon, for example), however, such compendia are unavailable, meaning that when primary texts do survive at all, they do so only in the form of manuscripts. Second, even in cases where an adequate amount of primary sources might appear to be available, the type (or genre) of the works that have been published does not adequately represent the Hossō tradition. What I mean by this is that the editors of major compendia and canons displayed a natural predisposition towards free-standing and internally coherent compositions attributed to a single identifiable individual. In fact, however, such texts constitute but a tiny fraction of the mass of documents related to Hossō doctrine. The reason for this is that Hossō doctrine evolved primarily via the intense, rigorous, and prolonged oral debates known as *rongi*. Hence, *rongi*, and the various genres of texts associated with them, constitute what one may legitimately term the cutting edge of Hossō doctrine at any given moment in time. Yet, when one observes the texts that have been published, it quickly becomes apparent that the percentage of material related to *rongi* is relatively small. The reason, I would argue, is that because *rongi* is quintessentially an *oral* tradition, the texts most closely associated with it tend to be comparatively short,

fragmented, and incomplete. In other words, most of the texts under discussion are research notes, outlines, or rough drafts rather than polished compositions. For this reason, they have been practically ignored, and not been judged worthy of editing and publication until fairly recently. Hence, it should come as no surprise that the single *rongi* compendium (*rongishō* 論義鈔) included in the *Taishō daizōkyō* is the *Compendium of Group Studies of the Treatise Establishing ‘Nothing but Cognitive Construction’* (*Jōyuishikiron dōgaku shō* 成唯識論同學鈔. Compiled by Ryōzan 良算 et al. T2263.66), which aside from being the most influential *rongi* compendium, is also by far the most polished, having been compiled over a period of almost twenty years by multiple editors. While the *Compendium of Group Studies* is extremely useful as a starting point for delving into Hossō debate, however, it is not sufficient for gaining a sense of the manner in which Hossō doctrines evolved over time. In order to attain this level of insight into Japanese Hossō as a living, constantly changing, and multi-vocal tradition, texts such as the *Compendium of Group Studies* must be augmented by and placed in dialogue with other texts that are currently available only as manuscripts. It is only when the raw data contained in these manuscript sources is combined with *rongi* compendia, as well as with free-standing works such as Ryōhen’s 良遍 *Compendium on Awakening from Dreams by Contemplating the Mind* (*Kanjin kakumu shō* 觀心覺夢鈔), (the structure of which, incidentally, was recently discovered to be based almost solely on *rongi*!) that the full breadth of Japanese Hossō thought becomes apparent.

My own recent research provides several examples of how such an approach might work in practice. I shall therefore conclude this research report by giving a short summary of a paper entitled “Innovation, Authority, and the Question of Conservatism in Japanese Hossō Thought: The Curious Debate as to Whether Bodhisattvas Can Attain Buddhahood or Not” that I presented at an international conference on Munich in May 2012. The paper examines one aspect of the doctrine of the ‘distinction between the five predispositions’ in Japanese Hossō thought, namely the debate about whether greatly compassionate icchantikas (*daihi sendai* 大悲闍提), that is to say bodhisattvas who have taken a vow to forego the attainment of Buddhahood until they have saved all sentient beings, can, in fact, attain Buddhahood or not. After briefly summarizing the origins of the doctrine of greatly compassionate icchantikas in the works of the Chinese patriarchs of the Faxiang-Hossō School, I examine the way in which it evolved in Japan by focusing primarily on texts related to the practice of oral doctrinal debate. Through a close reading of these texts, I show that Japanese Hossō was neither moribund, nor even particularly conservative, but rather a rigorous scholastic tradition that respected the teachings it inherited without being overly constrained by them. Indeed, although the position that greatly compassionate bodhisattvas do not attain Buddhahood (*fujōbutsugi* 不成佛義) constituted a “definitive ruling by the three patriarchs” (*sanzo no jōhan* 三祖定判), which is to say that it represented the highest possible level of orthodoxy within Hossō thought,

an alternate position that opposed this orthodoxy (known as the “interpretation that they will attain Buddhahood” *jōbutsugi* 成佛義) emerged extremely early in the history of Japanese Hossō thought. Moreover, both positions continued to evolve parallel to each other for centuries, causing new interpretations, some of them quite radical, to appear on a regular basis. Not only this, but opposite positions were held by scholar monks in the same lineage, including masters and disciples.

For these reasons, major *rongi* compendia such as *Compendium of Group Studies* took the existence of multiple interpretations for granted, and presented their arguments without attempting to arrive at a normative conclusion. Indeed, the entry on the topic of greatly compassionate *icchantikas* is one of the longest and most detailed among the more than one-thousand entries in the *Compendium of Group Studies*. Hence, it might appear at first as if this is a topic that can be studied and understood by relying solely on published source materials. As my paper demonstrates, however, such an assumption would be incorrect. The reason is that the entry in the *Compendium of Group Studies* is, in fact, both greatly abbreviated and incomplete. Thus, the *Compendium of Group Studies* does not include any reference to the most important figure in the history of this debate, Jōkei 貞慶 (1155-1213). The theories of this monk, who not only examines the strengths and weaknesses of all the preceding interpretations, but also advances a brilliant new theory known as the “simultaneous attainment and non-attainment position” (*jōfujōbutsugi* 成不成佛義), are to be found only in Jōkei’s own *rongi* compendium, the *Jōyūshikiron jinshi shō* 成唯識論尋思鈔, or *Compendium of Reflections Upon the Treatise Establishing ‘Nothing but Cognitive Construction’*. This work, whose importance to the history of Hossō *rongi* ranks second only to the *Compendium of Group Studies*, is currently available only in the form of manuscripts. Moreover, although the *Compendium of Group Studies* became the basic textbook for all Hossō scholar-monks following its completion in the second decade of the thirteenth century, the various positions vis-à-vis the problem on greatly compassionate *icchantikas* continued to be debated and refined until the tradition of Hossō doctrinal study died out in the Meiji Period. Since none of the plethora of *rongi* manuals, debate records, and private exegetical notes that were composed on this topic after the *Compendium of Group Studies* have been published, however, the only way to trace the evolution of Hossō thought on this particular issue between the early thirteenth century and the present day is to rely on manuscripts copies of works such as Kenpan’s 顯範 “On the Topic of Greatly Compassionate *icchantikas*” *Daihi sendai no koto* 大悲闡提事, Enken’s 縁憲 “Greatly Compassionate *icchantikas*” *Daihi sendai* 大悲闡提, and Ryōzan’s “Foolish Jottings on Greatly Compassionate *icchantikas*” *Daihi sendai -Gusō* 大悲闡提一愚草.

As this brief summary of one of my current research projects demonstrates, both the full complexity and the continual (and often quite drastic) evolution of Japanese Hossō thought can only be understood if one is willing to incorporate the study of manuscripts

into ones approach. That such sources are difficult to acquire and work with goes without saying. Nevertheless, any attempt to accurately assess either the history of the Japanese Hossō tradition, or indeed the role that Hossō (as well as other schools whose primary texts have yet to be published) played within the larger context of Japanese Buddhist intellectual history that does not take manuscript sources into account is bound to result in a skewed, biased, and ultimately inadequate understanding of the Japanese Buddhist tradition.

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