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Hakugen's critical work finally bore fruit in 1997, when a scholar, anti-war activist, and Zen priest living in Japan, Brian Victoria, inspired and encouraged by Hakugen, published the explosive book *Zen at War.* The international response to Zen at War, particularly the dogged activism of Dutch Zen student Ina Buitendijk — finally forced the leadership of major Zen schools in Japan to issue formal apologies for their stances during the war and prior practices of social discrimination. Whether or not they will remain committed to this practice of historical self-reflection and social justice — much less advancing towards the practices of libertarian socialism advocated by Hakugen — is up to contemporary Buddhists to determine.

Sources

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The Problem of Buddhist Socialism in Japan Ichikawa Hakugen

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Ichikawa Hakugen (1902–1986) was an important but poorly-known contributor to the theory of Buddhist anarchism, particularly to anarchism in the Zen tradition. Following in the footsteps of anarchist Buddhist priests Uchiyama Gudo and Taixu, he drew on European and Asian philosophies to form a critique of capitalism, the state, and the religious hierarchies to which he was subordinated as an ordained Zen Buddhist and university professor. During his life he used this critique to highlight the "war responsibility" of Japan's Buddhist organizations for their actions during the 15 years war, the colonization of Korea, Manchuria and China, and the Pacific War of WWII, advocated for public education reform, and co-founded anti-war protest organizations which opposed Japanese support for American involvement in the Korean and Vietnam wars.

Ichikawa Hakugen was born in Gifu to a temple family in the Rinzai Myoshinji sect. His father was the local Zen priest of Keizouji temple. He was a lonely child who felt alienated from others by his weak constitution and by the climate of nationalist, military-style education and emperor worship he was raised in. He recalled being struck by the hollowness of nationalism when he witnessed the uneasy expression on faces of young conscripts as they left the village every year for military service. Hakugen grew up terrified of military rules, regimens, obedience, and violence. He was taught to worship the emperor as a god, but to him the emperor and his cult were nothing but a "symbol of death". He claimed that his depressive nature and weak, "cowardly" constitution made him naturally anti-war and anti-nationalist. He became more conscious of the class divides and injustice in Japanese society in middle school, and came to have doubts about the ways in which the Zen temple system exploited the poor for its own enrichment. Kawakami Hajime's book *Binbo monogatari ("Tales of Poverty")* made a great impact on his thinking as a young man, as did the humanistic literature of Dostoyevsky and other modern European writers.

Hakugen briefly worked as a schoolteacher in his hometown, a profession which he enjoyed, and also aspired to follow his father into the priesthood, so in 1920 Hakugen left for Kyoto to do Zen training at Myoshinji, and in 1923 entered Rinzaishu University[1]. There he studied with Hisamatsu Shin'ichi and Ogasawara Shujitsu, among others, both of whom held radical ideas about Buddhism and political activism, particularly Ogasawara, a philosopher of aesthetics and religion, who professed a kind of Buddhist anarchism which influenced Hakugen's thinking. During his studies he deepened his faith in the truth of Zen awakening through experience, while beginning to doubt the justice of mainstream Buddhist organizations. As a young man he corresponded frequently with Miyazawa Kenji, author of the famous *Haru to Shura ("Spring and Chaos")* and a fellow Buddhist who shared his interest in utopian social reforms. He also became immersed in socialist and anarchist thought, reading Marx, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Osugi Sakae, Tolstoy, and associating with many leftist activists, all of which drove him to develop a deep, "humanistic anger towards the evils of society and the state." During this period he was questioned several times by police over his anti-war writings and associations with leftist activists. His activities drew criticism from Zen higher-ups and university teachers. He became terrified of the prospect of arrest, torture, and death in prison at the hands of the secret police. Around this time Hakugen also married and had a son, Hiroshi (1931–2002), who later became a distinguished philosopher himself. I imagine that having a family to support only deepened his fear of repression for his political thought-crimes.

As the war climate deepened in the 1930's the domestic political climate became increasingly totalitarian, a move which

[1] See: https://www.wikipe.wiki/wiki/ja/%E5%B8%82%E5%B7%9D%E7%99%BD%E5%BC%A6 for bio timeline details

constituted the ontological basis of Mahayana Buddhism, as well as its phenomenological perspective of freedom, a non-dual state of mental peace which was simultaneously devoid of all experience or thought and paradoxically full, or generative, of all phenomena. In some treatments, it is more or less equivalent to *Nirvana*, or the ultimate cessation, or "quenching", of all mental defilements, and is the ultimate goal of all Buddhist soteriology. *Buddhist War Responsibility* is central to understanding Hakugen's argument, and contains the paradoxical tensions of Hakugen's own worldview, which simultaneously blames most of Zen's authoritarianism and warmongering on it's over-reliance on the perspective of *Sunya,* while trying to clarify an interpretation of emptiness which could ground an ethical social praxis for Buddhism. In this way, Hakugen hoped to free Zen (and himself) from the grip of emptiness and also to give it new life as the dynamic, developmental, religious-existential source of courage and free-thought for Buddhists who wished to fight for social justice.

Hakugen finally retired from Hanazono University in 1972, officially resigned as a priest, and returned to lay life, moving in with his son Hiroshi, who lived in Chiba. Though he sold most of his books upon moving[7], he continued to read, write, and publish independently, including a companion to his earlier work on war responsibility, titled *Japanese Religion under Fascism,* in 1975. He returned briefly to teaching at Hanazono as a professor emeritus while living in Chiba. He would struggle with the problems of Buddhist anti-fascism and liberation theology[8] until his eventual death from pneumonia in 1986.

[7] Ives notes that, according to Ichikawa Hiroshi, Hakugen kept his mentor Ogasawara's writings, particularly *The Philosophy of Experiential Understanding (Tainin no tetsugaku).* Further study and translation of Ogasawara's works is needed, particularly for studies of his political thought and influence on Hakugen.

[8] "Liberation Zen Studies," (*kaiho no zengaku).*

the Kyoto board of education from 1952 to 1957, where he focused on reforming (presumably historically revisionist and nationalist) high school curriculum.

As the conflict in Vietnam began to escalate, Hakugen was deeply moved by Vietnamese Zen priest Tich Quang Duc's act of self-immolation in protest of persecution of Buddhists by the Catholic Diem government in 1963. In 1965 he co-founded *Beheiren,* the Federation for Peace in Vietnam. Hakugen quickly became involved with protests against the Vietnam war, including the 1970 *Anpo* protests against the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty. It was noted by other participants that Hakugen, then in his 60's, was usually one of the oldest people present at anti-war demonstrations.

In 1970 Hakugen published one of his most well known works of anti-war criticism, *Buddhist War Responsibility*, in which he made his most comprehensive attack on the Zen ideologies which enabled its war-collaboration, as well as described his own way of thinking, a solution to Buddhist-fascism, capitalism and state socialism which he called at different points Buddhist anarchist communism (B.A.C.) and *Sunya* (emptiness) anarchist communalism[6] (S.A.C.). To Hakugen and many Zen philosophers of his time, *Sunya*

[6] S.A.C. uses ⊠⊠⊠⊠ (Kyodotai-ron, lit. "Community-theory") instead of ⊠⊠⊠⊠ (Kyosan-shugi) "Communism". You could perhaps translate Kyodotai-ron as "communalism", which, if accurate, indicates a parallel with Murray Bookchin's desire to distance from state communism and promote a non-state form of community self-governance, following Kropotkin's discussion of the medieval European communes in *Mutual Aid.* The direct translation of communalism, ⊠⊠⊠⊠ (Kyōdō shugi, lit. "cooperative body; cooperative system; collective; community") is almost identical to ⊠⊠⊠⊠. The distinction appears to be between communalism as a practice or history and communalism as a theory. However, in *The Problem of Buddhist Socialism in Japan,* Hakugen translates ⊠⊠⊠⊠ as "communism" so I wonder if his change of kanji was some form of wordplay, irony, or subtle criticism of Soviet Communism, rather than indicating a different ideological direction. His translation is not all that good, so it could also be his mistake. Communalism is not a particularly common English word. He may just not have known it.

was supported by the vast majority of Buddhist institutions, including Hakugen's own Rinzai sect. The reality of living under the domination of state and religious sectarian hierarchy lead him to further radicalization along religious lines, writing that "my social thought followed Kropotkin's lead", leading him to the conclusion that "if Buddhism is to possess social thought, it will have to take the form of B-A-C, Buddhism-Anarchism-Communism". Dissident writing was increasingly censored, leading to proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji being tortured to death by Tokyo police in 1933; Marxist anti-fascist philosopher Tosaka Jun, affiliated with the Kyoto School, was also incarcerated for his criticisms on several occasions, and died in prison in 1945. Hakugen was deeply disturbed by these incidents. He looked to his faith in Zen for courage, but found it frustratingly empty of ideas or practices which he could draw upon to resist the tides of history which threatened to overwhelm him. Throughout the rest of his life he would struggle to connect his interest in Zen freedom to his belief in social justice, claiming that during the war he lacked an "origin" or the theoretical-experiential intersection between religious and political praxis in which he could ground his actions. Because of this lack of faith and of intellectual coherence, he claimed that he was ultimately unable to resist the pro-war attitudes of the time; he ceased his critical writing, even publishing a few articles which opportunistically expressed vaguely pro-imperial stances, and at home adhered to national state Shinto practices, supposedly to protect his family from discrimination. He would later come to regret these decisions as an act of profound moral cowardice, a regret which became his primary motivation for activism and scholarship in his post-war years. To keep himself going, he formed a study group during the war with Ogasawara, his former teacher at Hanazono and mentor in Buddhist anarchism. This intellectual engagement, as well as small, personal acts of resistance (such as keeping track of Axis defeats on a map on a wall in his home), helped him to keep his faith in the liber-

atory potential of Zen and its compatibility with liberatarian socialist thought, while continuing to develop his criticism of religious institutions and meticulously document their collusion with imperial war crimes.

After the surrender and the US military occupation of Japan, society opened up. Surviving anarchists and communists were able to come out of hiding; the Japanese Communist party was legalized in 1945; the Japanese Anarchist Federation[2], which Hakugen promptly joined, was founded in 1946. This period also saw the rehabilitation of many of the major architects of Japanese fascism by US occupation authorities, who saw them as politically useful allies in stabilizing the country and establishing it as a permanent Cold War base for American operations in Asia[3]. Buddhist institutions were also able to regain face, quickly changing their tune from "holy war" to "anti-war". They began to proselytize abroad, promoting an ahistorical vision of modernized Zen Buddhism, a religion which, according to acclaimed scholar and missionary D.T. Suzuki, had never supported nor waged a war in its entire history[4]. This new Zen was wildly popular with the Euro-American counterculture, which desperately wanted a spiritual, experiential, egalitarian alternative to the Judeo-Christian traditions they had grown up with and been oppressed by. The rational, universal, peaceful, and relatively liberal version of Zen which Suzuki promoted was for many exactly what they were looking for. Zen "holy-war" rhetoric was successfully concealed for the most part, until much more recently, a situation which resulted in situations like anarcho-pacifist American Zen teachers like Robert Aitken becoming the disciples of the mostly unrepentant fascist, Zen master Hakuun Yasutani[5].

[2] Later named Hanazono University, a religious college affiliated with the Myoshinji Rinzai Zen organization.

[3] For an equally entertaining and horrifying treatment of Japanese fascism and its rehabilitation, see the *Behind the Bastards* podcast's three-part series on Nobusuke Kishi, "The Slavery-Loving Fascist Who Built Modern Japan".

[4] This new pacifist stance was mostly superficial. To establishment Buddhists, it meant not commenting or engaging in anti-establishment politics. See Brian Victoria: War, Zen Buddhism and Academia, and "Zen as a Cult of Death in the Wartime Writings of D.T. Suzuki"

In 1949, Hakugen, who worked as a middle school and vocational college professor during the war, became a full professor at Hanazono University, where he taught English, Zen, and socialist thought. Seeing the remilitarization of Japan as the Cold War ramped up and the subsequent rehabilitation of Japanese fascist leaders and nationalist ideology prompted Hakugen to finally launch his critique of Zen collaboration with Japanese fascism, beginning in 1950 with "On the solitary aloofness of Zen" and "Concerning Zen Praxis" in 1951. These essays, which criticized fundamental ontologies of Zen and pointed out the hypocrisy of Zen's peaceful image versus its very recent, very fascist past, infuriated his religious superiors at Myoshinji, who tried to force his resignation from Hanazono, where they held significant influence. Hakugen refused to step down, and, backed by university staff, faculty and students who supported Hakugen's intellectual freedom, was able to retain his job. He soon became much more politically active, no-doubt motivated by this attempt at repression, the explosive Cold War climate in occupied Japan, as well as the immense guilt he felt for his own silence during the war. He organized anti-war committees with fellow religious leaders in Kyoto, with his students at Hanazono University, and participated in demonstrations against the continued presence of American military bases in Japan during the Korean war. He also started a short-lived journal with Ogasawara, *The Era of Thought,* which printed three issues, and served on

[5] Yasutani was pretty quiet about his politics (which included anti-semitism and support for the Nazis) after the war once Brian Victoria published his research many of his students were forced to comment publicly. See: https://tricycle.org/magazine/yasutani-roshi-hardest-koan/ and http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Apology.html