



The Young East: Buddhism, Colonialism, and Asian Modernity in the Japanese Empire

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A brief introduction to new research on pan-Asian Buddhist reform in the early twentieth century, focussing on the Young East Society (formed in Tokyo in 1925) and its contribution to the various movements of Buddhist led social reform and Asian modernity that were under way in Asia at this time. Donald Lopez's groundbreaking study of modern (global) Buddhism encompassed Asian movements, but its emphasis was on Western initiatives. While these are undeniably an important aspect of the history, my recent study of the Young East Society (Snodgrass, 2009) shows a very strong intra-Asian activity in the formation of modern Buddhism. Its founders, Sakurai Gicho, Takakusu Junjiro, and Watanabe Kaigyoku, all had well established and long standing links with academics and nationalist leaders in India and other parts of Asia (and the West). The very name of the association is intriguingly resonant with the journal founded by Mohandas K. Gandhi to air his political thought (Young India, 1919-1932). The Tokyo based organization's journal, Young East, similarly provided a forum for the discussion and dissemination of the ideals of this new, socially engaged and humanitarian Buddhist movement. It brought leaders of various the Buddhist reform movements that had begun in various parts of Asia to Tokyo, then the model of Asian modernity. It was instrumental in the formation of the Tokyo World's Buddhist League which aimed to 'serve as a connecting link between the various Buddhist movements of the world', a forerunner of current global Buddhist movements. However, the years of the Young East's publication coincided with the expansion of Japan's colonial empire. How were these interactions that began through shared ideals of social reform and Asian heritage inflected by Japanese imperial expansion? To what extent and in what ways was Buddhism implicated in Japan's military expansion into these areas?