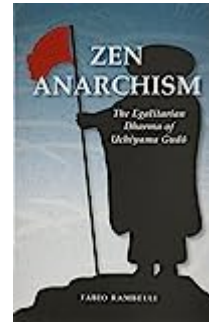


Fabio Rambelli. *Zen Anarchism: The Egalitarian Dharma of Uchiyama Gudō.* Contemporary Issues in Buddhist Studies Series. Berkeley: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2014. 116 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-886439-51-1.



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In view of the silence and even complicity of Buddhist individuals and institutions with regard to the injustices and cruelties that took and are still taking place in many Buddhist societies, one is relieved to find Buddhists who fight against these evils. The Japanese Sôtô Zen priest Uchiyama Gudō (1874-1911) was such a person. He publicly denounced the exploitation of tenant farmers, growing militarism, and the arrogance of the political elite in Japan during the first decade of the twentieth century. A socialist and an anarchist sympathizer, Gudō paid the ultimate price for his convictions as he was trailed and executed by the authorities in 1911.

Gudō's heroic life could easily lead contemporary interpreters to misrepresent his position in Buddhist and Japanese intellectual history in several respects. However, we should keep in mind, first, that Gudō was not a *theoretician* who synthesized the Buddhist tradition with Western thought, nor did he systematically reinterpret basic Buddhist notions to show their affinity with egalitarian and socialist ideals. In fact, Gudō only left a very small oeuvre consisting of three short articles, two of them being only fragmentary. In none of these texts did he try to relate his socialist and anarchist conceptions of justice to his Buddhist faith. Moreover, Gudō regarded the Buddhist teaching according to which one's present

economic and social fate is the outcome of past lives and actions as a superstition, promoted by those in power to defend against reasonable claims made by those underprivileged. Second, Gudō did not defend any established teaching. In this sense, he was neither a doctrinal thinker of Buddhism nor a clear-cut anarchist. Although he considered himself to be a member of the Japanese socialist-anarchist movement of the day, in his writings he also defended institutions that seem to be compatible with representative democracy or with social market economy. Third, Gudō cannot be seen as an immaculate model for peaceful Buddhist revolt against injustice and oppression. He sympathized with terrorist action against the state and claimed that "the hand that holds the rosary should also always hold a bomb" (p. 24).

In his book *Zen Anarchism: The Egalitarian Dharma of Uchiyama Gudō*, Fabio Rambelli is very careful to avoid all of these interpretative traps; only the book's title is somewhat misleading in this regard. It is Rambelli's great achievement to present us Gudō as the fascinating personality that he was, in all his facets and contradictions. The book consists of three parts. The first introductory part contains a foreword by Richard Payne, a preface by Rambelli, and an introduction to Gudō and Engaged Buddhism by Sallie King. The second part introduces the

reader to Gud  s life and work and summarizes his ideas and their intellectual sources. The third part contains English translations of Gud  s three extant papers as well as two texts that were published but not written by Gud  . Of these three parts of Rambelli  s book, the last part is the most innovative and valuable. Concise information in English about Gud  s life, work, and ideas are already available in Brian A. Victoria  s *Zen at War* (1997) and in Ishikawa Rikizan  s article   The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan   (1998).[1] But Rambelli  s very readable translations of Gud  s writings are a welcome opportunity for readers of English to deal directly with Gud   and his thought.

In his writings we meet Gud   as a multifarious author. His only complete publication,   Anarchist Communist Revolution   (  Museifu ky  san kakumei  ), is a carefully composed speech designed to agitate tenant farmers to fight for social justice and to revolt against landowners, the state, and the army. In his fragment   Common Consciousness   (  Heibon no jikaku  ), on the other hand, Gud   argued in an almost philosophical manner for a teleological understanding of the human condition. According to this image, human beings are born with a mysterious holy spirit (*fukashigi no seirei*) that urges them to strive for freedom, first from the bonds of nature, and ultimately from the bonds of society. Departing from this metaphysical framework, Gud   proposed several concrete institutions and political measures that lie on the road toward ultimate freedom. Among other things, he defended gender equality, the prohibition of alcohol and tobacco, and a stepwise abolition of private property, and promoted public education and free health care. In his last writing, the   Fragment from a Prison Manuscript   (  Gokuch     shuki  ), finally, we encounter a Gud   who pondered about society  s condition and about his own role as a social activist. He expressed some pride to die as a martyr and put himself in a line with Sakura S  gor  ,   shio Heihachir  ,   akyamuni, Diogenes, and Jesus Christ.

As this list of exemplary figures shows, Gud  s thought was not only influenced by Buddhism and anarchism. Rambelli therefore analyzes Gud  s sources of inspiration at some length and he convincingly points to, for example, the Edo-period discourse about justice. Although we have no evidence for any direct influence, the similarity of Gud  s thought and And   Sh  eki  s (1703-62) egalitarianism is striking. Both claimed that every member of society must labor physically to secure his or her living and that an ideal society would have no need

for government. In mentioning S  gor   and Heihachir  , Gud   furthermore identified with the Edo-period  s tradition of civil resistance. Finally, besides the reference to Jesus, Gud  s teleological description of the human kind also contains Christian vocabulary, such as the term   heaven   (*tengoku*) (pp. 31, 63). This Christian undertone is typical for Japanese socialist authors, but Gud   was, to be sure, striving for heaven *on earth* and not for a transcendent paradise.

Rambelli  s book is a valuable contribution to Japanese social and intellectual history as it deepens our acquaintance with Gud   and his published work. Rambelli generally arrives at balanced judgments about Gud  s character, his work, and his intellectual sources. He makes it very clear, in particular, that Gud   must not be misappropriated as some kind of Buddhist saint. At some points, Rambelli  s presentation is repetitive and it is not always easy to follow his line of argument. Much of the information and topics from the first section reappear without much change in the second section; for example, in his chapter on Buddhist Anarchism, Rambelli compares Gud  s thought to many different authors and intellectual movements and repeats most of these names in another chapter,   Gud  s Intellectual Bricolage  . It would, moreover, be desirable to find some more systematic analysis of Gud  s texts and to have a clearer view about the relationship of Gud  s writings with the texts of the other authors that he published. Rambelli  s book is, finally, very focused on the person of Gud   and does not localize him more generally within the intellectual landscape of his time. It is therefore helpful to read the book together with James Shields  s recently published article   Zen and the Art of Treason: Radical Buddhism in Meiji Era Japan   (2014) that characterizes Gud  s thought in comparison to other Meiji-era Buddhist thinkers.[2] *Zen Anarchism*, nevertheless, precisely through the fascinating figure of Gud  , provides new insights into an important period of Japan  s religious and political thought.

Notes

[1]. Brian A. Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997); and Ishikawa Rikizan,   The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan,   *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25, nos. 1-2 (1998): 87-115.

[2]. James Shields,   Zen and the Art of Treason: Radical Buddhism in Meiji Era Japan,   *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 15, no. 2 (2014): 205-223.

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