The answer to the question "What is Buddhism?" is intimately connected with the understanding of what it means to be Buddha (the awakened or enlightened one). The history of Buddhist thought then can be mapped out with the history of the development of modes of understanding of what it means to be an (or the) enlightened one as a vector. Thus, the view of the the mode of being of a/the Buddha, or Buddha-body view (busshin-kan) is seen as a key factor in understanding the different ways Buddhism developed through the ages. (See Habito 1978, 1986)

In this paper we will consider aspects of Buddha-body views presented in writings that expound Tendai Hongaku-shisō or the theory of innate enlightenment, a thought-development said to be particular to Japanese Buddhism that shows a stance which cuts through various dualistic elements in ordinary existence, such as birth vs. death, suffering vs. pleasure, ordinary being vs./. Buddha, delusive passions vs. wisdom of detachment, etc., and makes affirmations about the phenomenal world as absolute (Tada et. al. 1973). Whether it is indeed unique to Japanese Buddhism, and whether it is Buddhism at all, has been challenged by some scholars in recent academic and non-academic discussions. (See Swanson 1990)

Without presuming to side in one way or another in these ongoing debates, this paper simply aims at giving an objective picture on a theme frequently cited in Tendai Hongaku writings which is central to Buddhism itself, i.e. the understanding of the mode of being of Buddha, or the Buddha-body views, revealed in these writings. An examination of the Buddha-body views in these writings will also provide insights into the character and import of this thought-movement that reached a flowering in
the late Heian period and went on to influence various developments in Japanese thought and culture for ages to come. (Tamura 1987)

It deserves note that the writings refer mainly to the three-body (trikāya) theory developed in Indian commentarial treatises and given further systematic elaboration by the Chinese Buddhist masters. But then they go on to present a distinctive standpoint taking off from the traditional trikāya theory, revealing facets of the particular character of Tendai Hongaku-shisō. There are five notable features in the literature expounding the theory of innate enlightenment as regards the treatment of the trikāya, which we can summarize in the following manner:

1. Three (bodies) equals one, one equals three.
   (san soku ichi, ichi soku san 三即一・一即三)
2. Three bodies always in action expounding dharma.
   (san-shin seppo 三身説法)
3. Three bodies no other than the mind of sentient beings.
   (san-shin soku shujō no isshin 三身即衆生の一心)
4. Three bodies no other than all things in the universe.
   (san-shin soku issai hō 三身即一切法)
5. Ordinary beings as such precisely as the three bodies.
   (bonpu koso san-shin= musa no san-shin 凡夫こそ三身= 無作の三身)

The following are passages which illustrate the features in the treatment of the trikāya summarized above (pages acc. to Tada et. al 1973), in order.

1. (On the difference of the superior teaching of the Lotus Sutra vis-à-vis the other sutras that preceded it:) “The teaching of the Lotus (Sutra) is that it does not talk about the distinction of essence and function in the three bodies, but only that one equals three, and three equals one. Also, since three bodies are in the very same locus as one body, it is not the same as the teaching of the previous sutras at all. And since the three bodies interpenetrate and are interchangeable, this is also in accord with the teaching of the Lotus (Sutra). This is because it locates the three bodies in one place at the same time.” Sanjūshika-kotogaki. (pp. 152-153)

“Question: what does it mean to say that in the teaching of the provi-
sional gate (of the Lotus Sutra) there is an overt and a covert aspect?

Answer: In the provisional gate, there is inevitably an overt and a covert side. This is to be understood by the following simile. For example, say one looks at the moon reflected in the water without looking at the moon in the sky. Although it is the one and same moon in the sky, because it is reflected in different bodies of water, even though it is one, it resides in a long-shaped body of water, a short-shaped body of water, a square body of water, a round body of water. In this case, in knowing the particular aspect of each, as one thinks that there are many (different kinds of moon), there is the overt and the covert aspect (i.e. the reflections and the moon in the sky.) In the true gate (of the Lotus), one does not consider the reflection in the water at all, but right from the start sees the one moon in the sky. Thus, one knows the essence, sees the essence. One knows that there is only one moon residing in many bodies of water. The essence is the one moon in the sky. The essence is the one body (of Buddha). One knows there are only three names. Keep this a secret” Sanjashika-kotogaki. (pp. 164-165)

2. “Question: On the three bodies always active and expounding the dharma, what is the form of the dharma-body always active and expounding the dharma? (Translator’s note: the dharma-body is considered to be the essence of truth itself without form and shape—and hence the question of its possibility of being active in expounding the dharma has been problematic in Buddhist tradition. Sutra-based teaching or ken-gyō holds to non-activity, while Esoteric teaching or mikkyō stresses the perennial activity of the dharma-body in expounding dharma throughout the universe-hosshin-seppo). Answer: if one considers the dharma-body of the tathāgata, since it does not come nor go, it has no beginning and has no end. Responding to each situation, it expounds the dharma to all. ’To all’ means human beings and heavenly beings and others in the realm of universal truth. The reason is that humans and heavenly beings and others possess the purity of the one mind, as it manifests the eighth level of consciousness coming from the store of suchness. In considering the act of expounding the dharma
Buddha-body Views in *Tendai Hongaku* Writings (L.F. Habito)

by the enjoyment and transformation bodies, these transform every word of chatter of the dharma-body. Therefore the three bodies altogether expound the dharma. "Honri-daikōshō. (p. 12)

3. “The three bodies is the Mind that is in one thought by us sentient beings. Thus the different kinds of consciousness are nothing other than the one Mind; the one mind is nothing other than the different kinds of consciousness. In the same way, the three bodies (of Buddha) are no other than the one Mind. “Sanjūshika-kotogaki. (p. 162)

4. “All things in the universe are originally the three bodies (of Buddha) and dwell in the Land of Tranquil Light. As there is not even one thing (dharma) that is separate from the three bodies, the fruit of the three bodies is the essence of the Lotus. “Shōzenjiketsu. (p. 92)

“Śākyamuni Tathagata is endowed with the three bodies. Vairocana is the dharma-body. The dharma-body is all-pervading in the dharma-realm. The two bodies of enjoyment and the transformation are also all-pervading in the dharma-realm... The three bodies of Śākyamuni are all-pervading in the dharma-realm. And therefore in every little particle of dust before my eye there reside all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the worlds of the ten directions... “Shinnyo-kan. (p. 134)

“From the beginningless time, originally, all things are the essence of the three bodies. This is not according to the work of Buddha, nor the work of āsuras or heavenly beings. Naturally from the way things are, there is nothing that is not the three bodies. Thus, even every illusory thought of ours is the total essence of the enjoyment body of wisdom, the four states (of action, standing, sitting or lying down) are the essence of the body of transformation, and the heavy burdens of this way of suffering (in the world of birth and death) are the essence of the myriad virtues of the dharma-body.” Sanjūshika-kotogaki. (p. 173)

“It is said: every dharma and every particle of dust is the three bodies of the original self-nature. The unborn self-nature is the dharma-body. The wisdom of enlightening discernment is the enjoyment body. That which is endowed with form and shape is the transformation body. Since
all dharmas, though they be distinct from one another, all are the three bodies, it is said: “all dharmas are originally Buddha-dharmas. “Kankō-ruishu. (p. 200)

5. “It is said, in considering the self-nature of all things, that is in appreciating the original essence of everything, if one realizes the non-acting three bodies (musa no san-shin), then there is no thing at all that is not the non-acting three bodies. That is why it is called Lotus. Shōzenjiketsu. (p. 90)

“As it is said in the (Lotus) sutra: 'Since I attained enlightenment a long period of time has elapsed. The length of my lifetime is equivalent to immeasurable kalpas, and I am always abiding and deathless.' This points to the truth of the nature of the self, and 'self' means that the self-nature of all things is originally always abiding, and is the non-acting three bodies of perfection. At this time there is no distinction between the real (Buddha) and the phenomenal (sentient beings), and everything is but the inner enlightenment of Buddha.” Shōzenjiketsu. (p. 84)

The above are simply random passages taken from the different writings expounding Tendai Hongaku-shisō on the three bodies of Buddha manifesting the five given features in order. It must be borne in mind that these writings are expanded versions of what were originally notes circulated in secrecy based on oral transmission, and/or commentaries upon these. Based on the above readings, we can glean that the treatment of the three bodies of the Buddha departs from the traditional ways these have been developed in sutras and commentarial literature in India and China.

The theory of the three bodies arose in the light of speculation concerning the relationship between the historical Buddha Śākyamuni and the dharma which he grasped and embodied and expounded to all hearers, and further, in the context of speculation on the relationship between the historical and the trans-historical as understood in the Buddhist tradition, as well as the relationship between wisdom and compassion, between self-oriented and other-oriented action, etc. The authors of the different sutras and commen-
tarian literature through the ages thus came up with different theories concerning the modes of relationship of the elements mentioned, and so we have the two-body, three-body, four-body, ten-body theories, etc., presenting ways of understanding the relationship of the historical and the transhistorical, etc., in the mode of being of the/an enlightened one.

The *Tendai Hongaku* writings take a short cut, as it were, departing from the kind of questioning and prescinding from the context that gave rise to the different Buddha-body theories, and simply take the 'pre-packed' notion of the three bodies of the Buddha and other related notions, 'cooking' them and dealing them out in line with a particular menu, that is the affirmation of all phenomenal reality as absolute and abiding, the affirmation not only of the potential Buddhahood (as in Tathāgatagarbha thought) but the actual Buddhahood of all beings. In other words, the notion of the three bodies of the Buddha is taken from its historical context and made to fit the *Tendai Hongaku* doctrines, or better, is used in the exposition of these doctrines, about the underlying as well as virtual unity and abiding nature of all phenomena, the non-duality of sentient beings and Buddha, the innate as well as actual Buddhahood not only of sentient beings but also of inanimate beings as mountains and rivers, stones and rocks, etc.

The status of *Tendai Hongaku-shisō* within Buddhism has been problematic since the time of Hochibō-shōshin (twelfth century) and Dōgen (1200–1253), who brought serious criticisms against this thought-movement as it tended to the neglect and even denigration of practice, and thus to lax and irresponsible behavior on the part of its proponents. (Tamura 1984)

The above examination of the buddha-body views, particularly the *trikāya theory* as treated in the writings of *Tendai Hongaku-shisō*, on the one hand, supports the evaluation that, in addition to what its traditional critics point out, that it has the tendency to neglect practice and to give in to a lax attitude and lax behavior in ordinary life, (i.e. in the assumption, or presumption, that one is already Buddha), it also manifests the tendency to neglect rigorous thinking in favor of facile generalizations and easy equa-
tions that simply ignore the historical context of traditional Buddhist notions and their import, using them in its own arbitrary way. But on the other hand, this is where one must also admit the freshness and originality in the way the writings deal with these notions to bring home their own message. The orthodoxy or heterodoxy of the message in the Buddhist tradition, as well as its alleged uniquely Japanese character, however, remain points under question.

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