Seeking Śākyamuni: South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism. By Richard M. Jaffe. University of Chicago Press, 2019. 320 pages. $32.50 (paperback). ISBN 9780226391151.

Hillary Langberg
Bard College

For readers familiar with the turmoil associated with the transition to modernity for both Japanese Buddhism and Japan as a nation-state, Richard Jaffe's recent monograph provides a wealth of richly-detailed and carefully-mined information on these densely interwoven historical processes. Jaffe's book centers explicitly on Japanese Buddhists' travel to the heartland of Buddhism, South Asia, as well their concerted attention to the texts and teachings of the historical Buddha himself. These foci facilitated sweeping changes beginning in the late nineteenth century in one of the few Asian countries to escape European colonization.

Jaffe begins by shedding light on the first Japanese scholars to travel to Europe to study Sanskrit alongside Max Müller at Oxford. They in turn dreamed of making the then extremely treacherous trip to South Asia to witness firsthand the sites associated with the Buddha's biography. In a particularly marvelous passage in chapter 1, Jaffe describes the visit of the cleric Kitabatake Dōryū to the Mahābodhi temple at Bodhgaya. As the first Japanese individual to do so, he commissioned a stele to mark the experience, convinced by the pious Indians he found there that he had indeed come upon the site of Śākyamuni's tomb. Jaffe provides a cogent visual analysis of the woodblock prints that immortalized the event in the first of Kitabatake's widely popular travelogues (1884). It is here that Jaffe touches on an important point for the scholar of transnational and postcolonial history. He states that Kitabatake and others remarked on the level of social and economic disenfranchisement that the Indian people had experienced at the hands of the British colonizers, and in this sense stood in solidarity

with them. Nonetheless, Kitabatake—like the authors of much imperial travel literature—places himself in a class above the Indian inhabitants (and *dhoti*-dressed laborers in particular), describing them as "*kokudo/koronbo* (blacks)" (p. 27).

Not long after Kitabatake's first publication, a surge of Japanese clerics traveled to Sri Lanka (then the British colony Ceylon) and Southeast Asia to seek out what is now known as Theravāda Buddhism. These monks, including Shaku Sōen and Shoaku Kōzen of the Zen and esoteric Shingon traditions respectively, completed partial or full reordination in the monasteries there. They were at points led by Sumaṅgala, the same monk who worked closely with American Theosophist Henry Steel Olcott and E.R. Gooneratne, who in turn worked alongside T.W. Rhys Davids of the Pāli Text Society. Japanese Buddhists, themselves in the midst of a period of bitter persecution at the outset of the Meiji Restoration, now joined forces with the Ceylonese and other South Asians against the onslaught of religious colonization by Christian missionaries with agendas of conversion. Particularly fascinating here is the role that Olcott played, along with Zen master Sōen, in the formation of a self-conscious and Śākyamuni-centric Japanese Buddhism in the late nineteenth century (pp. 44–49). In chapter 1, Jaffe therefore provides a series of detailed accounts into how these Japanese clerics, through their travels southward, began to understand Theravāda (or so-called Hīnayāna) Buddhism as a piece of the larger framework of Buddhist doctrine and philosophy. Most, but not all, left these regions with the view that the Mahāyānist beliefs of the various Japanese Buddhist denominations were nonetheless paramount.

Chapter two then focuses on the remarkable figure Kawaguchi Ekai, who spent considerable time in South and Southeast Asia. In response to the writings of European scholars (e.g., Müller), who charged that the Sinitic translations of Indic texts often varied to a great extent, Kawaguchi became the first Japanese citizen to visit Tibet—mastering both the language and intensive ritual praxis of the region's Buddhism. Kawaguchi also studied extensively with pundits in Benares and elsewhere in India. Along the way, he befriended the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama, and Rabindranath Tagore, amassing a priceless collection of scholarly materials and scriptures from these regions. After settling in Japan decades later, Kawaguchi ardently advocated for a tradition of widespread lay practice, and precepts for both monks and the laity. Like the monk Kōzen before him, Kawaguchi aimed to educate

Japanese Buddhists in a "pure Buddhism" focused on Śākyamuni and his teachings (pp. 58, 92). Through a broad collection of archival material, Jaffe shows Kawaguchi to be a truly prolific scholar of remarkable erudition and breadth.

While both Kōzen and Kawaguchi were highly learned, devout clerics who traversed territories unknown to prior members of their culture, their individual reformist theologies failed to have a lasting impact on Japanese Buddhism. That said, the historical narrative Jaffe painstakingly reconstructs shows us the ways in which they contributed to a larger zeitgeist of Japanese Buddhists who began to view their religion as possessing a common core that "transcends...regional differences and, therefore, is foundational to the tradition" (p. 50). Buddhists in Japan thus became self-reflexive, and in the process, many felt the need to defend or critique Japanese Buddhism in a manner not unlike the turn toward monotheistic philosophy by major Hindu intellectuals of the Bengali Renaissance. In response to charges by European scholars (such as Eugène Burnouf) that Mahāyāna Buddhism was not the actual word of the Buddha or his original teachings, Japanese practitioners quickly shored up their knowledge of the full breadth of Buddhist scriptures and the biographical landscape of South Asia itself (p. 108).

In chapter 3, Jaffe discusses the interconnectivity of Japan's burgeoning cotton trade with India in the early twentieth century and an increase in pilgrimage to South Asia, further developing the nation's newly self-conscious Buddhist identity. For example, one pilgrim—Akegarasu Haya—traveling on one of the many post-World War I steamship expeditions to the Buddha's biographical sites, describes his "realiz[ation] that Amitābha was not separate from the World Honored One [Śākyamuni], but instead was 'within the heart (*kokoro*) of the World Honored One'" (pp. 140–141). Such apologetics, and particularly those of Kawaguchi's publications prior, continue to be echoed in the work of later reformist groups. Jaffe draws clear parallels between followers of both South and East Asian religious traditions during this time, as those who reconstituted their identities in response to the colonial and/or imperialist pressures of Christianity, scholarly "rationalism," and monotheism. Particularly striking is Jaffe's discussion of conflicting strands of doctrine that led Japanese cleric-travelers to India and Sri Lanka to wrestle with central aspects of Mahāyāna doctrine, decrying Japanese conceptions of the "noumenal" *dharmakāya* as an obvious corruption by the Upanishadic *brahman/ātman* (pp. 94–95).

Jaffe then assesses the material aspects of Japanese encounters with South and Southeast Asia in chapter 4. Notable discussions here include clearly Indic and Southeast Asian elements of twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist architecture (erected both in and outside of Japan). We see, for example, that *stūpas* rather than East Asian *pagodas* begin to be built at sites such as Hokekyōji (Ichikawa, Chiba prefecture) and Kasuisai (Fukuroi, Shizuoka prefecture). Further, the temple spires of the Itō-commissioned Tsukiji Honganji mirror the striking medieval Burmese style of the Pagan Empire (p. 192). Above its entranceway, as well as that of Nishi Honganji Shanghai Betsuin, we see the unmistakable shape of the rounded *caitya* hall portals of Ajanta (pp. 175, 192). At Myōshōji in Dalian, China, furthermore, we see the *caitya* halls of the rock-cut cave temples of India's western Deccan mirrored in the structure's roof—the long, arched ceiling here punctuated with finials and Islamicate domes. Jaffe explains this imperialist building program as a "grand pan-Asianist architectural style," through which "Japanese Buddhist leaders were able to imply a connection between current practices and a venerable Indian-South Asian past that was the focus of much of European and American orientalist scholarship" (pp. 194, 208).

Chapter 5 rounds out Jaffe's volume through a discussion of Indian-trained scholars who returned to Japan to take up major posts at quickly flourishing universities, both in the 1920s and prior. These scholars, Jaffe writes, brought a much-needed balance to Buddhological scholarship of the time. They enriched collective knowledge of Sinitic sources and bridged a gap in philological study between Sanskrit texts and their Chinese translations through a "Japanese Mahayana perspective" (p. 235).

In this largely varied and valuable work, Jaffe assumes a reader already familiar with the broader strokes of this period. Specialists of both Buddhism and Japan studies across disciplines will find multiple points of immense historical value here, including lost traces of Buddhist intellectual history. That said, non-specialists will likely find this work to be quite inaccessible. Uninitiated readers will require preliminary reading on Japanese Buddhism during the Meiji Restoration in order to fully grasp what is at stake in the wealth of historical material Jaffe lays out. That said, a frontloaded discussion of the crucial necessity of the modernization and "revival" of Buddhism in Japan would clarify the significance of Jaffe's central arguments to a wider breadth

of readers, including graduate students. Overall, Jaffe's book expertly demonstrates the inseparability of religious identity, imperialist power, and the academy. It details the myriad ways in which Japan's Buddhist values consciously shift as the nation strives to reconstitute its once solitary, feudal identity into one of transnational diplomacy.