

Nature's Jeweled Net: Kūkai's Ecological Buddhism

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Most significant and profound is the teaching of the ultimate path of Mahayana.
It teaches salvation of oneself and of others.
It does not exclude even animals or birds
The flowers in the spring fall beneath its branches;
Dew in autumn vanishes before the withered grass.

Sangō shiki (Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings)¹

Contemporary ecological research makes it plain that we are enfolded in a living, terrestrial environment in which all things are mutually implicated and implied. This conclusion is also a claim about the nature of reality.² Consequently, ecology necessarily alters our understanding of ourselves, individually, and of human nature, generally. In this essay I abstract several metaphysical implications from contemporary ecological research in order to show how, in J. Baird Callicott's words, "ecology and contemporary physics complement one another conceptually and converge toward the same metaphysical notions."³

What follows is based on four assumptions: (1) there now exists an ecological crisis that threatens the planet-wide extinction of all species of life; (2) engineering and technology alone cannot prevent the extinction of life on this planet; (3) neither mainstream Christian views of nature nor modern Western secularism provides relevant responses to the ecological crisis; and (4) only a major paradigm shift toward an organic world view is capable of providing resources for resolving the biological, ethical, and religious issues posed by the contemporary ecological crisis. Accordingly, since environmental destruction is planet-wide, my thesis is that Eastern religious traditions, so rich in metaphor and symbol, can help the West transform the untraditional scientific-philosophical abstractions of its own emerg-

ing organic paradigm shift into a world view applicable to both Eastern and Western experience of environmental damage and destruction.

It is necessary to begin with a typological characterization of the central elements of mainstream Christian and classical scientific views of nature, showing how both views coalesce in modern secularism and why neither is a competent response to the ecological crisis. This will be followed by a descriptive analysis of what I call the "ecological" Buddhist world view of Kūkai, the ninth century establisher of Japanese Shingon ("True Word") Buddhism. Here, I will summarize the differences between mainstream Christian and Western secular views of nature and Kūkai's, showing also the similarities between Kūkai's Buddhist world view and that emerging in contemporary Western ecological studies. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of the major religious-philosophical issues brought to light by this essay.

MAINSTREAM CHRISTIANITY, MODERN SECULARISM, AND NATURE

In 1967, Lynn White, Jr.'s controversial essay, "The Modern Roots of our Ecological Crisis,"⁴ started a debate that raged through the 70's among theologians, philosophers, and scientists. At the time, Christian theologians and scientists and philosophers hostile to Christian tradition

read his essay as a wholesale indictment of Christianity as the primary cause of the ecological crisis. However, in his conclusion, "An Alternative Christian View,"⁵ White recommended a way to reform the Christian Way so that it can lead humanity out of the ecological shadow of death which it originally created. Specifically, he recommended that "mainstream Christianity" endorse a "Franciscan world view" and "panpsychism" in order to deliberately reconstruct a modern, and *a fortiori*, Western environmental ethic. In arguing for this recommendation, he raised the possibility — and rejected it — of appropriating Eastern views upon which to reconstruct an environmental ethic. He says:

More science and technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink the old one. The beatniks, who are the revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view. Zen, however, is as deeply conditioned by Asian history as Christianity is by the experience of the West, and I am dubious of its viability among us.⁶

While these sentences may seem harmless now, they had a powerful effect on Western intellectuals concerned with the historical, religious, and philosophical sources of the environmental crisis. White's assertion is an either/or: we must *either* "find a new religion" or "rethink the old one." He rejected the first alternative.

The initial reaction to White's essay — mostly by intellectual historians, philosophers, and process theologians⁷ — focused specifically on "mainstream Christianity's world view." Surprisingly enough, there was little "Christian bashing;" even more surprising, most Christian discussions agreed with White's characterization of the mainstream Christian world view. But there was

little agreement about how to reconstruct a distinctively Christian view of nature, or indeed whether an authentically Christian view of nature could or should be reconstructed.

Recently, the structure of this "mainstream" Christian view of nature roughly described by White was formulated into a typology by Callicott and Ames:⁸ (1) God — the locus of the Sacred — transcends nature; (2) nature is a creation, an artifact, of a divine craftsman-like male creator; (3) human beings are exclusively created in the image of God, and therefore segregated, essentially, from the rest of nature; (4) human beings are given dominion by God over nature; (5) God commands humanity to subdue nature and multiply the human species; (6) nature is viewed politically and hierarchically — God over humanity, humanity over nature, male over female — which establishes an exploitive ethical-political pecking order and power structure; (7) the biblical image-of-God in humanity is the ground of humanity's *intrinsic* value, but nonhuman entities lack the divine image and are religiously and morally disenfranchised and have at best instrumental value for God and human beings; (8) the biblical grounding of nature's instrumentality is compounded in mainline Christian theology by an Aristotelian-Thomistic teleology that represents nature as a support system for rational human beings.

The upshot of this seems clear. The great monotheistic traditions of the West are the major sources of Western moral and political attitudes. Christianity especially has doctrinally focused on humanity's uniqueness as a species. But the problem is the Biblical creation myth — as read and applied by mainstream Christian teaching — corresponds to neither scientific description nor human experience. Not only that, its insistence upon human domination and subjection of nature has encouraged centuries of destructive exploitation of the environment. Indeed, if one wants a theological license to increase radioactivity without constraint, to consent to the bulldozer mental-

ity of urban developers, or to encourage unbridled harvest of old growth forests, historically there has been no better scriptural source than Genesis 1-2. The mythological sanctions and injunctions to conquer nature, the enemy of Yahweh, are here.

However, placing the blame for the environmental crisis solely upon the altar of Christian tradition is far too simple and easy. Historically, biblical tradition was read through the sensitivities of Greco-Roman philosophy; in fact, the legacy of Greco-Roman contributions to the ecological crisis may be more powerfully influential, if less understood, than distinctively biblical contributions. Once more, Genesis 1-2 is capable of other more organic Christian interpretations.

The first Greek philosophers taught natural philosophy, and many included ecologically adaptable and environmentally useful ideas. But the natural philosophy that has survived from the Greeks to bequeath its imprint on modern Western culture is atomism. Atomism pictures nature as particulate, reductive, material, inert, quantitative, and mechanical. It became institutionalized in early modern science and philosophy with Descartes, and still remains the fundamental model of nature assumed by Western technology.

Greek philosophical anthropology also assumed an atomistic view of nature. This was paradigmatically expressed by Plato and given its modern version by Descartes. Human nature is dualistic, composed of body and soul. The body, especially in Descartes' version, was like any natural entity, exhaustively describable in atomistic-mechanistic terms. However, the human soul resides temporarily in the body — the ghost in the machine — and is otherworldly in nature and destiny. Thus human beings are both essentially and morally segregated from God, nature, and from each other. Accordingly, the natural environment can and should be engineered to human specifications, no matter what the environmental consequences, without either human responsibility or penalty.

Here we have it in a nutshell. The contemporary ecological crisis represents a failure of prevailing Western ideas and attitudes: a male-oriented culture in which it is believed that reality exists only because human beings perceive it (Berkeley); whose structure is a hierarchy erected to support humanity at its apex (Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes); to whom God has given exclusive dominance over all life forms and inorganic entities (Genesis 1-2); and in which God has been transformed into humanity's image by modern secularism (Genesis inverted). It seems unlikely that mainstream Christian tradition, married as it is to the traditions of Greco-Roman philosophy that constitute modern secularism, is capable of resolving the ecological crisis. Christian reading of Genesis 1-2 through the eyes Greco-Roman philosophy in large part created.

THE ECOLOGICAL VISION OF KŪKAI

Much important literature in the philosophy and history of science seems to point to the gradual emergence among scientists themselves of theoretical organic explanations of the interconnectedness of humanity with nature.⁹ Recent theological discussion, most notably in process theology, has also focused on the same organic scientific paradigms in recognition of the inadequacies of mainstream Christian and secular views of nature.¹⁰ Finally, a number of working scientists have attempted to link the metaphysical implications of contemporary ecology with the ontologies of East Asian religions traditions, especially Buddhism and Taoism.¹¹ Of course, there are a number of Western versions of this organic paradigm, and in fact no two of them seem to be alike in their technical details and explanatory categories. However, it is possible to abstract three principles these paradigms share.

The first principle is holistic unity. That is, nature is a system whose constituent elements exist

in constantly changing interdependent casual relationships. Whatever an entity is or becomes is a direct function of how it interrelates with every other entity in the universe at every moment of space-time.

Second is the principle of internal life movements. By this I mean that all living entities possess a life force intrinsic to their own natures that is not imposed from other things or from God, but derived from life itself. Life is the energizing force supporting the networks of interrelationship and interdependency ceaselessly occurring in all things in the universe. Or to invert traditional Christian images, God does not impose or give life; God is the chief exemplar of life.

Finally, the third principle, that of organic balance, means that all things and events at every moment of space-time are interrelated bipolar processes that proceed toward balance and harmony between opposites.

Similar principles have always been structural elements of the Buddhist world view; the Shingon (Ch., *chen-yen* or "True Word") "esoteric" (Jpn., *mikkyō* or "secret teaching") transmission established by Kūkai in Japan in the ninth century¹² particularly embraces these elements. Since Kūkai's Buddhist teachings are an "esoteric" version of the Mahayana Buddhist Way, a preliminary description of the meaning of this term is necessary.

Kūkai's Buddhism is rooted in forms of Tantric Buddhism¹³ that originated in Northern India in the second century B.C.E., spread to China by the fourth century, and later into Tibet in the seventh century. Tantric Buddhism underwent decline in China shortly after Kūkai returned from his studies there with Hui-kuo, the seventh patriarch, in the early part of the ninth century. Accordingly, Shingon Buddhism represents a different tradition of Buddhist tantra than that found in Tibet and Nepal, even though both evolved from shared "esoteric" beginnings.

The term "esoteric" has three meanings in Shingon thought. First, it denotes the "secret" oral

instruction of the practice of Shingon rituals and forms of meditation transmitted from teacher to disciple only after the disciple has undergone the proper stages of ritual initiation. Such teachings and practices are not meant for public consumption by untrained persons. The specific doctrines of Shingon Buddhism, however, are not regarded as esoteric, but exoteric "skillful means" (Skt., *upāya*) that gradually lead seekers at their own level of development into esoteric disciplines that lead to enlightenment. My description of Kūkai's view of nature will be based on his public "exoteric" teachings.

Second, Shingon classifies esoteric Buddhist teachings as "pure" (*shōjun*) and "miscellaneous" (*zōbu*) Mikkyō. The "pure" teachings are those based on the *Dainichi-kyō* (Skt., *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* or "Great Luminous One Sutra") and the *Kongō-chō-gyō* (Skt., *Sarvathāgatattvasaṃgraha-sūtra* or "Diamond Wisdom Sutra").¹⁴ "Miscellaneous teachings" comprise esoteric Buddhist texts and practices predating these two sutras.

Third, Shingon teachings and practices are categorized this way to avoid misunderstanding by noninitiates. Shingon esoteric practices simply cannot be exoterically revealed, as can ordinary secrets, because the greatest mysteries, said to be direct manifestations of Buddhahood, can be known only by enlightened minds.

A two-stanza Chinese poem in *Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence* (*Sokushin jōbutsu gi*), conveniently summarizes all of Kūkai's teachings. In the first stanza, Kūkai condensed the essential features of his exoteric Buddhist thought, and in the second stanza his views of esoteric practice. The remainder of this section will focus on the first stanza, since it provides the essentials of his world view, and therefore, his conception of nature. Yoshito S. Hakeda translates the entire poem as follows:

The Six Great Elements are interfused
and are in a state of eternal harmony;

The Four Mandalas are inseparably related
to one another.

When the grace of the Three Mysteries
is retained, (our inborn three mysteries will)
quickly be manifested.

Infinitely interrelated like the meshes of
Indra's net are those which we call
existences.

There is the One who is naturally equipped
with all-embracing wisdom.

More numerous than particles of sand
are those who have the King of Mind
and the consciousnesses;

Each of them is endowed with
the Fivefold Wisdom, with infinite wisdom.

All beings can truly attain enlightenment
because of the force of mirrorlike wisdom.¹⁵

In the first line of stanza one, "The Six Great Elements are fused and in a state of eternal harmony," Kūkai stated the two propositions upon which the teachings rest: (1) the Buddha Dainichi Nyorai ("Great Sun"; Skt., *Mahāvairocana Tathāgata*) and the Six Great Elements are inter-fused, and (2) Dainichi exists in a state of eternal harmony with the universe.

Kūkai's conception of Dainichi, and subsequent Shingon doctrinal formulation, is based on standard Mahayana "three-body theory" Buddhology (Skt., *trikaya*; Jpn., *sanshin*). Prior to Kūkai's teacher, Hui-kuo, Dainichi was regarded as one of a number of *sambhogakāya* ("body of bliss") forms of the eternal reality called *Dharmakāya* ("Dharma" or "Teaching Body") that all Buddhas comprehend when they become "enlightened ones." But in exoteric Buddhist teaching and esoteric Buddhist tantra prior to Hui-kuo and Kūkai, the *Dharmakāya* is ultimate reality, beyond names and forms, utterly beyond verbal capture by doctrines and teachings, while yet the foundation of all Buddhist thought and practice. *Sambhogakāya* forms of Buddhas are not "historical Buddhas" (*nirmāṇakāya*), of whom the histori-

cal Shakyamuni is an example; they exist in nonhistorical realms of existence, forever enjoying their enlightened existence, as objects of human veneration and devotion. Normally, all Bodhisattvas and nonhistorical Buddhas, including Dainichi, were represented as *Sambhogakāya* forms of the eternal *Dharmakāya*.

It was probably Hui-kuo who first identified Dainichi as the *Dharmakāya* Buddha and who taught that the *Dainichi-kyō* and the *Kongōchō-kyō* were not preached by the historical Shakyamuni, as Buddhists had always believed and exoteric schools still maintain, but by Dainichi.¹⁶ By following Hui-kuo's teachings, Kūkai transformed Dainichi into a personified, un-created, imperishable, beginningless and endless personified Ultimate Reality. He reasoned that as the sun is the source of light and warmth, Dainichi is the "Great Luminous One" at the source of enlightenment and the unity underlying the diversity of the phenomenal world. And since the Buddha Nature is within all things and events in space-time, a traditional Mahayana notion Kūkai accepted, the implication is that Dainichi is the Ultimate Reality "originally" within all sentient beings and nonsentient natural phenomena. As Kūkai explained it:

Where is the *Dharmakāya*? It is not far away;
it is in our own bodies. The source of wisdom?
In our mind. Indeed, it is close to us.¹⁷

In other words, not only is Dainichi the *Dharmakāya* immanent within all phenomena; every thing, entity, and event is a manifestation of Dainichi. Kūkai described the interconnectedness of Dainichi and natural phenomena according to his theory of the Six Great Elements.

As a Buddhist, Kūkai accepted the doctrine of "interdependent co-origination" (Skt., *pratītyasamutpāda*), but he interpreted this teaching according to his notion that reality is constituted by Six Great Elements in ceaselessly interdependent and interpenetrating interaction: earth,

water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness or "mind" (Skt., *citta*; Jpn., *shin*). The adjective "great" signifies the universality of each element. The first five elements stand for all material realities, and the last, "consciousness," for the Body and Mind of Dainichi.

All Buddhas and unenlightened beings, all sentient and nonsentient beings, all material worlds are "created" by the ceaseless interaction of the Six Great Elements. Thus as Ultimate Reality, Dainichi too must embody the Six Great Elements and therefore the totality of all existences and moments of time in the universe. This means that all phenomena are identical in their constituent self-identity; all are in a state of constant transformation; and there are no absolute differences between human nature and the natural order, body and mind, male and female, enlightenment and ignorance. In short, reality — the way things really are — is nondual. In Kūkai's words:

Differences exist between matter and mind, but in their essential nature they remain the same. Matter is no other than mind; mind no other than matter. Without any obstruction, they are interrelated. The subject is the object; the object the subject. The seeing is the seen; the seen the seeing. Nothing differentiates them. Although we speak of the creating and the created, there is in reality neither the creating nor the created.¹⁸

Since Dainichi is in a state of "eternal harmony" with the universe, it followed for Kūkai that any microcosmic entity homogeneous in its embodiment of the six elements — human beings as well as other entities — is not outside the harmony of the macrocosm, that is, Dainichi. The problem for human beings, then, is *how* to become aware of this eternal cosmic harmony and attune ourselves to it as it occurs.

This "how" is expressed in the second line of the first stanza, "The Four Mandalas are inseparably related to one another." Involved here is the

practice of meditation, which in Shingon tradition is regarded as a method of reintegrating one's body, speech, and mind (the "three mysteries" or *sanmitsu*) with the eternal harmony of Dainichi's Body, Speech, and Mind. Consequently, Shingon meditative practice is a process of imitation of Dainichi's harmony with nature through ritual performance of mudras (Body), mantras (speech) and meditative visualization techniques involving mandalas (mind).

Shingon religious training involves a number of mandalas, but Kūkai's poem specifically mentions four.¹⁹ The first is the "Mahā-mandala" (Jpn., *daimandara*), meaning "Great Mandala." Representations of Great Mandalas are circular portrayals of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities as anthropomorphic figures painted in the five Buddhist colors: yellow, white, red, black, and blue or blue-green. The colors correspond to five of the Six Great Elements: earth is yellow; water is white; fire is red; wind is black; space is blue. Because consciousness is nonmaterial, it is colorless and cannot be depicted in the mandala. But since, as Kūkai taught, there is perfect interpenetration of the Six Great Elements, consciousness is present in each of the five colors and prevades the painting.²⁰ Thus the Mahā-mandalas symbolize the universe as the physical extension of Dainichi.

The second mandala, the Samaya-mandala, represents the universe as viewed from the omnipresence of Dainichi Nyorai's "intention" (*samaya*). All things and events in the universe interpenetrate in their suchness, and therefore constitute the Dharma Body (Skt., *dharmakāya*; Jpn., *hosshin*) of Dainichi Nyorai. "*Samaya*" is a Sanskrit word meaning "a coming together, and agreement," and expresses the ontological unity underlying the diversity of all things in space-time as forms of Dainichi's "dharma body." Accordingly, every thing and event in the universe is a *samaya* or "symbol" that signifies this ontological unity — all things and events are forms of Dainichi Nyorai — experienced from the perspective of Dainichi, as well as all Buddhas.

Representations of Samaya Mandalas portray each of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities in some *samaya* or symbolic form, such as a sword, a lotus, or jewel, that embodies the special virtue or quality of the individual Buddha or Bodhisattva portrayed.²¹

The third mandala, the Dharma Mandala, is the same circle as the Maha-mandala and the Samaya Mandala, but viewed as the sphere where revelation of absolute truth (Dharma) continually takes place. Thus Dharma Mandalas portray Dainichi Nyorai's continual communication of absolute truth. More specifically, since according to Kūkai, all forms of the universe interpenetrate the Dharma Body of Dainichi Nyorai, every sound in the universe is the "sound-Body" of Dainichi Nyorai. Dharma Mandalas represent the totality of the sound of the Dharma as Dainichi Nyorai continually discloses or "preaches" it throughout the universe. Representations of Dharma Mandalas symbolize the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities in the form of "seed syllables" (Skt., *bīṣa*; Jpn., *shuji*) written with Sanskrit letters.²²

Finally, the Karma Mandala is the same circle viewed from the perspective of action in the realm of samsara. Since the action of all things and events, all actions of the body and mind, all the transformations and flux of nature, interpenetrate the actions of the Dainichi's Dharma Body, every change in any form or entity in the universe is simultaneously an action of Dainichi Nyorai. Conversely, every action of Dainichi Nyorai is simultaneously an action of all things and events in the universe.

Representations of Karma Mandalas portray the "actions of awe-inspiring deportment" (*rijiḡyō*) of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, each of which embodies the qualities and virtues of Dainichi Nyorai. This "action" is depicted in the form of three-dimensional figures representing each particular Buddha or Bodhisattva painted in the five colors of the Great Mandala.²³

To summarize, the Four Mandalas symbolize Dainichi Nyorai's "extension, intention, com-

munication, and action."²⁴ His "extension" is compassionate wisdom; his "communication" is the "revelation" of himself as the "preaching of Dharmakāya" in all things and events in space-time; and his "action" is all movement in the universe.

The third line of the first stanza, "When the grace of the Three Mysteries is retained (our inborn three mysteries will) quickly be manifested," summarizes Kūkai's conception of esoteric Buddhist practice. In relation to Dainichi Nyorai, the Three Mysteries stand for the suprarational activities or macrocosmic functions of Dainichi's Body, Speech, and Mind at work in all things. Through the Mystery of Body, Dainichi Nyorai's suchness is incarnate within the physical forms and patterns of natural phenomena; the Mystery of Speech refers to Dainichi Nyorai's continual "preaching" or "revelation" of the Dharma through every thing and event in space-time; the Mystery of Mind is Dainichi Nyorai's own enlightened experience of the "suchness" of all natural phenomena as interdependent forms of the Dharmakāya.²⁵ In this way, Kūkai personified the Three Mysteries as interrelated forms of Dainichi Nyorai's enlightened compassion toward all sentient and nonsentient beings. In his words:

The Three Mysteries of the Dharmakāya Buddha are so profound and subtle that the Bodhisattvas who are in the Ten Stages of Bodhisattvahood, or even those who are nearly equal to the Buddha, fail to see or hear them; this is the reason the term "mystery" is used. Each of His manifestations is equally endowed with the boundless Three Mysteries and is related and interfused with others so that they embrace and sustain each other. It is the same with respect to the three mysteries of all sentient beings.²⁶

Accordingly, Kūkai held the achievement of enlightenment requires "faith" or "trust" in the Three Mysteries as mental attitudes undergirding

the seeker's practice. However, Kūkai also taught that "faith" is not an act of an individual's will to believe, but a disposition or attitude of trust in the Dharmakāya that is established in the mind of the individual through Dainichi Nyorai's "grace" (*kaji*). So to the question of how an individual is capable of having faith, Kūkai answered that the Three Mysteries are inborn (*honnu sammitsu*) in all sentient and nonsentient beings — his way of reinterpreting the Mahayana notion that the Buddha Nature is omnipresent in all things. In other words, "faith" preexists in all things and events as finite expressions of Dainichi Nyorai's Three Mysteries. Or stated in terms of the human quest for enlightenment, the fundamental homogeneity between human beings and the Three Mysteries originates faith in persons, not an individual's effort to believe. Because of Kūkai's emphasis upon grace, his Buddhism is frequently referred to as a religion of "the three mysteries and grace" (*sammitsu kaji*).²⁷

Finally, the fourth line of the first stanza, "Infinitely interrelated like the meshes of Indra's net are those which we call existences," means that existence *is* Dainichi Nyorai, that seemingly discrete entities are forms of Dainichi Nyorai, the one ultimate reality unifying the real diversity of all phenomena. Kūkai employed the well-known simile of Indra's net to illustrate this aspect of his conception of nature.²⁸

In the heavenly abode of the great Indian god, Indra, there is a wonderful net hung in such a manner that it stretches out in all directions. The clever weaver of the net has hung a single jewel in each eye, and since the net is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. If we look closely at a single jewel, we discover that its polished surface reflects all the other jewels in the net. Not only that, each of the jewels reflected in the one we are looking at is simultaneously reflecting all the other jewels, so that there occurs an infinite reflecting process. Kūkai was particularly fond of this image for the way it symbolizes the cosmos as an infinitely repeating series of interrelationships

simultaneously occurring among all particular entities. It illustrates, in other words, his interpretation of "interdependent causation:" the relationship between all things and events in the universe at every moment of space-time is one of simultaneously mutual identity and intercausality.²⁹ In his words:

Existence is my existence, the existence of the Buddhas, and the existence of all sentient beings. . . . All these existences are related horizontally and vertically without end, like images in mirrors, or like the rays of lamps. This existence is in that one, and that one in this. The existence of the Buddha (Mahāvairocana) is the existences of sentient beings and *viceversa*. They are not identical; they are not different but are nevertheless different.³⁰

That Kūkai's Buddhist world view, indeed, asserts an ecological conception of nature unfamiliar to most Western people is quite evident. Mainstream Judaeo-Christian tradition as mated to Greek philosophical tradition has bequeathed modernity a view of existence profoundly different from his — in several respects. First, the universe must be understood and explained in terms of a divine plan with respect to its creation and final end. Kūkai's universe is completely nonteleological. For him, there is no theory of a beginning time, no concept of a creator, no question of purpose in nature. The universe just is, to be taken as a given, a marvelous fact which can be understood only in terms of its own inner dynamism.

Second, mainstream Christian teaching and our Greek philosophical heritage have taught the West that our familiar world is one in which relationships are limited and special. We have family relationships, marital relationships, relationships with a limited number of animal species, occasional relationships with inanimate objects.

But it is hard for us to imagine how anything is related to everything. How, for example, are we related to a star in Orion? How are we who are Caucasian related to Eskimos in Alaska? How are plants and animals related to us, other than as objects of exploitation? How are men related to women, and women to men? In short, Westerners generally find it much easier to think of isolated beings and insulated minds, rather than of one Reality ontologically interconnecting all things. For us, being is just that, a unity of existence in which numerically separated entities are autonomous, isolated within their own skins, independent from other entities. Kūkai's universe, by contrast, is a universe of identity in difference in which there is total intercausality: what affects one item in the cosmos affects every other individual, whether it is death, ignorance, enlightenment, or sin.

Finally, the main stream Christian view of existence is one of rigid hierarchy, in which a male creator-god occupies the top link in the chain of being, human beings in middle, and nature — animals, plants, and rocks — the bottom. Even with the steady erosion of interest in traditional Christianity (and Judaism) in the West, where the top link has for many become empty, the explicit assumption still exists that humanity is the measure of all things, that somehow the history of the universe is human history. In contrast, Kūkai's universe has no hierarchy. Nor does it have a center, or if it does, it is everywhere. In short, Kūkai's universe leaves no room for the anthropocentric bias endemic to Hebraic and Christian tradition, as well as to those modern movements of philosophy having roots in a Cartesian affirmation of human consciousness divorced from dead nature.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The work of earlier physicists such as Faraday and Maxwell, and later physicists such as Einstein and Bohr, as well as Whitehead in his process philosophy, has laid significant ground-

work for an entirely new Western ecological paradigm shift that views nature more as an "aesthetic order" than a "logical order." In common with South and East Asian religious traditions generally, Kūkai's Esoteric Buddhist world view also represents nature as an "aesthetic order" that cognitively resonates with contemporary Western ecological and environmental ideas.

An "aesthetic order," according to Roger Ames, is a paradigm that: (1) proposes plurality to be prior to unity and disjunction to conjunction, so that all particulars possess real and unique individuality; (2) focuses on the unique perspective of concrete particulars as the source of emergent harmony and unity in all interrelationships; (3) entails movement away from any universal characteristic to concrete particular detail; (4) apprehends movement and change in the natural order as an act of "disclosure" — the achieved coordination of concrete details in novel patterns that are unique — and hence describable in qualitative language; (5) perceives that nothing is predetermined by preassigned principles, so that creativity is apprehended in the natural order, in contrast to being determined by God or chance; and (6) understands "rightness" to mean the degree to which a thing or event expresses, in its emergence toward novelty as this is in tension with the unity of nature, an aesthetically pleasing order.³¹

In contrast to the aesthetic order implicit in Kūkai's view of nature and contemporary ecology, the "logical order" of mainline Christianity and contemporary secularism characterized by Ames assumes: (1) preassigned patterns of relatedness, a "blueprint" wherein unity is prior to plurality, and plurality is a "fall" from unity; (2) values concrete particularity only to the degree it mirrors this preassigned pattern of relatedness; (3) reduces particulars to only those aspects needed to illustrate the given pattern, which necessarily entails moving away from the concrete particular toward the universal; (4) interprets nature as a closed system of predetermined specifications, and therefore describable in quantitative terminology; (5)

characterizes being as necessity, creativity as conformity, and novelty as defect; and (6) views "rightness" as the degree of conformity to preassigned patterns.³²

A number of examples of logical order come to mind. Plato's realm of Ideas, for instance, constitutes a preassigned pattern that charts particular things and events as "real" or "good" only to the extent they conform to these preexistent Ideas. In his philosophy, movement is away from concrete particulars to abstract universals, and novelty is defect because it is a deviation from the preestablished perfection of "real" Ideas.

But an aesthetic order such as Kūkai's view of nature is easily distinguishable from a logical order. There are no preassigned patterns in things and events in nature. Organization and order work themselves out through the spontaneous arrangement and relationships of the particular constituents in the natural order. Nature is a "work of art," in which its "rightness" is defined by the comprehension of the particular details that constitute it as a work of art.

But the question is, "So what?" The answer is, because what people *do* to the natural environment corresponds to what they *think* about themselves in relation to things around them. The way people actually live in their environment is deeply conditioned by perceptions and beliefs about human nature and destiny. This may seem obvious to philosophers, scientists, and theologians. But it is not so obvious if we shift from theoretical issues to empirical confirmation of our world views in actual human practice. Three facts require brief consideration.

First, the brute fact of world wide environmental degradation seems to imply that what people think *does not* substantially affect what they do and how they live in relation to the environment. Second, in a world reduced to a global village by communication and transportation technologies, multinational corporations, and nuclear weapons, appeals to Asian views of nature as possible sources for resolving the ecological

crisis may not even be an option for any but the most geographically isolated people. As the world now exists, "development" and "progress" mean industrialization; and industrialization, even if pursued in a climate of anti-Western ideology, means Westernization nevertheless. Third, technology is neither culture-neutral nor value-neutral. To adopt modern technology is simultaneously to adopt the value presuppositions in which that technology is immersed, as the modernization experience of the Japanese amply demonstrates. Modern technology is embedded in the Bacon-Newton complex of ideas — science as manipulative power over inert, material, lumps of dead matter — and mainline Christianity is the religious foundation of this view.

But as brutish as these facts are, we must also note that the present environmental crisis is also less a unique, unprecedented Western-Christian event than the continuation of events as old as Occidental and Oriental civilization. All forms of life, plants as well as animals, modify the environment. Human beings are not exceptional in this regard. What is exceptional about the human species is that its stratagem for survival and adaptation — culture — has not only amplified the environmental impact of our species in extent and intensity, it has to a large degree placed us in charge of our own evolution.

Therefore even at the level of empirical confirmation of theory, it seems evident that "the ruination of the natural world is directly related to the psychological health of the human race since our practices follow from our perceptions."³³ Culture and world view merge in language and indicate perceptions whether in a person or in a society. When we refer to processes as things, we state our separation from these processes. This is a sign of illness. The ecological nightmare which we are now living is the direct result of the greed and avarice that such separation engenders. The Christian term for this is "original sin," the Buddhist word "desire" (*taṇha*).

The environmental destructiveness of Western rationalism's hyper-*yang* world view of its own culture has to a large degree been delayed. But the ecological limits of the Earth are now stretched and, in some cases, broken. Dialogue with Kūkai's view of nature is one of a number of alternatives from Asia that can foster the process of Western self-critical "consciousness-raising" by providing an alternative place to stand and imagine new possibilities. In doing so, we might discern deeper organic strata within our own inherited cultural biases and assumptions, and apprehend that we neither stand against nor dominate nature.

Therefore, quite apart from the problems of cultural redirection, our immediate goal should be to preserve whatever biological diversity we can. It is not necessary for the human community to be a burden on other life forms. On the contrary, as Kūkai's teachings show and modern ecology confirms, human beings can actually enhance the diversity, integrity, stability, and beauty of life on this planet. An irresponsible, technologically exploitive civilization informed by a scientifically obsolete, rationalist, mechanistic world view is not the only one possible, provided we give this planet a chance and cease rushing headlong towards global destruction.

AN AESTHETIC POSTSCRIPT

According to both the logical order of Western rationalism and materialism and the traditional view of nature in mainline Christian teaching, reality is a system of objects separated by space. Thus we may have mansions of petroleum companies' wealth in Dallas and killing oil spills on the Gulf of Alaska. But in an aesthetic world view of interdependent and interpenetrating relationships grounded in awareness of the Buddha Nature in, with, and under all things, reality leaves no dualistic space for anthropocentric samsaric delusions. If we are all involved in the originally

co-dependent origins of our life together, then we can no longer afford the luxurious illusions of mainline Christian and Western secular views of nature. For to experience nature dualistically as an external object "out there" which humanity must subdue is to create an artificial barrier that obstructs our vision and undermines our ability to confront the ecological dangers facing all life on this planet.

Until we train ourselves to apprehend nature as our nature and cooperate with this apprehension, until our ecological consciousness is raised to religious depths rarely found in Westernized secular societies, there is little hope of heading off planet-wide death. We need, in Kūkai's words, to collectively "achieve enlightenment in this very body." Our future is not closed — yet. Human decisions are still extremely important, and these can be influenced by new thought processes and forms of consciousness.

The meaning of Kūkai's understanding of nature was experientially confirmed for me while hiking alone on the northern coast of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. I followed a game trail through opaque, self-concealing forest that broke onto a boulder and driftwood covered beach. It was an old trail, mostly taken over by deer on their way to a near-by creek that emptied onto the beach. Hemlock and red cedar loomed overhead from a floor matted with feathery moss, as if pulled up by invisible wires into the coast fog. In this rain forest it is always dark and wet, even in summer.

I walked onto the beach into a setting sun that painted everything orange — waves breaking hard on the rocks, forest crowding the beach in an unbroken line running northwest to southeast, fog covering the three tops like a shroud, light rain dimpling the creek losing itself in the breakers. Sharp sounds popped across the rocks on my left, and I saw two elk — a bull and cow — run as if on cue over a small tree-lined hill.

My thoughts drifted away from the forest, the earth, the sea, the light, the elk, and focused inside myself. I became sharply conscious of my

own breathing — a cool, fresh sensation of energy rushing from the life of the forest into my chest, and then warm, moist air brushing against my face soft as a kiss as I exhaled. And suddenly I knew: Every breath I take draws the flesh of the earth into myself. I breathe in soft, saturated exhalations of red cedar and salmon berry bush, fire weed and wood fern, osprey and black bear, marten and black tail deer, salmon and raven. I breathe the same particles of air that form songs in the territorial calls of thrushes and give voice to humpback whales, lift the wings of bald eagles, and buzz in the hum of insects. I breathe in the earth, pass it on, share it in equal measure with billions of other living things. I drink from the creek, and it becomes me; and like the elk and the gulls hovering in the westerly wind, I bring the earth inside myself as food.

The croaking of a raven brought me out of myself. I looked around and knew: The earth *is* us; We *are* this earth — looking at itself. To damage the earth is to damage ourselves; to damage ourselves is to damage the earth.

FOOTNOTES

1. Yoshihito S. Hakeda, trans. *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 139. All citations from Kūkai's works in this essay are from Hakeda's translation, although I have checked them against the original Chinese texts in Yoshitake Inage, ed., *Kōbō Daishi Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Kōbō Daishi), 3rd edition revised (Tokyo: Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyū-sho, 1965). Although Hakeda's work is not a translation of Kūkai's complete works, it is the best English translation of the most influential of Kūkai's writings in print. Since I cannot improve on his translations, I have used his with gratitude.

2. See J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, "Introduction: The Asian Traditions as a Conceptual Resource for Environmental Philosophy," *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, edited by

J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 1-21.

3. J. Brian Callicott. "The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology." *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, p. 51.

4. Lynn White, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *Science*, (155): 1203 - 1207.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 1206-1207.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 1206.

7. See John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is It Too Late?: Toward A Theology of Ecology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972). Cobb argues that engineering and technology alone will not solve the environmental crisis, and, citing Lynn White, that Christianity is largely responsible for the crisis as it developed in the West. He contends that Eastern world views have limited possibilities for solving the environmental crisis. Although he is more open to Eastern contributions for developing an environmental ethic than Cobb, Holms Tolston, III agrees that environmental ethics is not fundamentally a technological issue, but a matter of how human beings understand and feel their place in the natural order. See "Is There An Environmental Ethic?," *Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*, 85 (1975): 93-109.

8. "Introduction: The Asian Traditions as a Conceptual Resource for Environmental Philosophy," *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, pp. 3-4.

9. See E. A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1954). Also see Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) and two more recent studies by Kenneth E. Boulding, *The World As A Total System* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985) and *Ecodynamics: A New Theory of Social Evolution* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981).

10. I have already cited John Cobb's *Is It Too Late?: Toward A Theology of Ecology* in this

regard in note 7. Also see Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Richard H. Overman, *Evolution and the Christian Doctrine of Creation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967); W. H. Thorpe, *Animal Nature and Human Nature* (New York: Doubleday, 1974); and a series of wonderful essays in Ian G. Barbour, ed., *Earth Might be Fair: Reflections on Ethics, Religion, and Ecology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), especially Huston Smith's essay, "Tao Now: An Ecological Testament," pp. 66-69.

11. See Harold Morowitz, "Biology as a Cosmological Science," *Main Currents in Modern Thought*, 28 (1972): 151-157, cited by Callicott and Ames, "Introduction," pp. 2-3; Nolan P. Jacobson, *Buddhism and the Contemporary World: Change and Self-correction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 151-163; David Edward Shaner, "The Body-Mind Experience in Dogen's *Shōbōgenzō*: A Phenomenological Perspective," *Philosophy East and West* 35 (1985): 17-35 and *The Bodymind Experience of Japanese Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985); Yuasa, Yasuo, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, trans. T. P. Kasulis and Shigenori Nagatomo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Roger T. Ames, "Putting the Tao Back into Taoism," *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, pp. 113-144; William R. La Fleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," *ibid.*, pp. 183-209; and Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1975).

12. Kūkai (774-835), "Empty Sea," is commonly known as Kōbō Daishi, an honorific title posthumously awarded to him by the Heian Court. Kōbō means "to widely spread the Buddhist teachings," and daishi "great teacher." Widely revered in his own time, Kūkai remains a figure of profound reverence in Japan today, both as a Buddhist master and a culture hero. In 804 Kūkai

traveled to China to study Buddhism, and while there he visited many eminent teachers, among whom was the esoteric master Hui-kuo (746-805). He became Hui-kuo's favorite disciple. Presumably, Kūkai's understanding of Hui-kuo's teachings was so impressive that Hui-kuo declared Kūkai his dharma-heir shortly before he died. Kūkai's study in China lasted thirty months, and he returned to Japan at age thirty-three as the eighth patriarch of the Shingon School. For a short biography of Kūkai, see Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 1-75.

13. From Sanskrit *tantra*, meaning "warp." In Buddhist literature, this term refers to texts dealing primarily with ritual practice. See Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), pp. 10-15.

14. For Kūkai's classification of the Buddhist Canon and the teachings of other schools of Buddhism that existed in his day as preparatory to Shingon esoteric teachings and practices, which he regarded as the final development of Buddhist Dharma, see *Benkenmitsu nikyō ron* (The Difference Between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism), Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 151-157. However, in a recent essay Charles D. Orzech has conclusively demonstrated that orthodox Shingon distinctions between "pure" and "miscellaneous teachings" are Shingon misrepresentations of the historical facts of the instruction Kūkai received from Hui-kuo and of the historical realities of Chinese Chen-yen. See "Seeing Chen-yen Buddhism: Traditional Scholarship and the Vajrayana in China," *History of Religions*, 29: 87-101.

15. Hakeda, *Kūkai*, p. 227.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82. Also see Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 62-64.

17. Quoted by Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, p. 82.

18. See *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* (Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence), Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 229-230.

19. For pictures and a descriptive account of these four mandalas, plus the "Womb" and "Dia-

mond Mandalas," see Hisatoyo Ishida, *Esoteric Buddhist Painting* (Tokyo: Kōdansha International, 1978), pp. 33-63.

20. Snodgrass, "The Shingon Buddhist Doctrine of Interpenetration," p. 63.

21. *Ibid.* pp. 63-64

22. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

24. See Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, p. 91.

25. See Snodgrass, "The Shingon Buddhist Doctrine of Interpenetration," pp. 66-68. Also see Yamasaki, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, p. 106.

26. *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, p. 230.

27. Hakeda, "Thought of Kūkai", *ibid.*, p. 92.

28. This image is found in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* (Jpn., *Kegon-kyō*; Ch., *Hua-yench'ing*) or "Flower Wreath Sutra." This text was especially emphasized by the Japanese version Yogacara ("Way of Yoga") known as the Hossō School. Kūkai regarded *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* as the highest development of exoteric Buddhist tradition, second in importance to his own Esoteric Shingon teachings. See *Hizō hōyaku* (The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury), Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, pp. 211-217.

29. For an interesting discussion of Hui-yen cosmology, essentially the cosmology of Kūkai, see Francis H. Cook, "The Jewel Net of Indra," *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, pp. 213-229.

30. *Hizō hōyaku*, Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*, p. 232.

31. Roger Ames, "Putting the Tao Back Into Taoism," *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, p. 117.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

33. Jay C. Rochelle, "Letting Go: Buddhism and Christian Models," *The Eastern Buddhist*, (Autumn 1989): 45.

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