

# PACIFIC WORLD

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Special Issue:  
Buddhisms in Japan



FRONT COVER

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*Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*



Presentation of Doctorate Honoris Causa to Rev. Toshihide Numata at Mitutoyo Sosensai service, Aurora, Illinois, 14 July 2011. Left to right: Rev. Toshihide Numata, President of Mitutoyo Corporation, and of Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, Rev. Koshin Ogui, Socho of the Buddhist Churches of America and President of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, and Dr. Richard K. Payne, Dean of the Institute of Buddhist Studies and Yehan Numata Professor of Japanese Buddhist Studies.

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## **“Japanese Buddhism”: Essence, Construct, or Skillful Means?**

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THE CATEGORY “JAPANESE BUDDHISM” (*nihon bukkyō*, 日本仏教), commonly used in the field of Japanese religious studies, is seemingly innocuous but actually has interesting and far reaching implications. It is often used by academics to describe a specific subfield of Buddhist studies; by textbooks to identify one particular form of Buddhism, whose major characteristics, ironically, is its division into a multiplicity of schools<sup>1</sup> and movements; and by ideologues to enter identity politics. On first sight, our term seems to be synonymous with “Buddhism in Japan” but an examination of its history and use quickly shows that it has connotations that are not implied by this phrase. However, while it is common sense that the phrase “Japanese Buddhism” can be useful in certain contexts since it expresses common patterns, the phrase “Buddhism in Japan” cannot, and its use is not without problems. What does it mean, for example, to identify “Japanese Buddhism” as “funeral Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō*, 葬式佛教)<sup>2</sup>? Does this claim highlight institutional structures that a majority of Buddhist schools in Japan share at certain times in history or does it designate an inherent essence characteristic of all phenomena that fall under the rubric “Buddhism in Japan”? The key to these questions is the usage and meaning of the term “Japanese Buddhism.”

Philosophically speaking, the term “Japanese Buddhism” suggests an essence that all forms of “Japanese Buddhism” share and that differentiates them from the various forms of Buddhism in other parts of Asia, on the one side, as well as from other religious traditions in Japan, on the other.<sup>3</sup> The rhetoric of the proponents who use the term “Japanese Buddhism” as a clearly identifiable discrete entity betrays the difficulty of this very concept. Some ideologues imply that only the schools of Buddhism that were imported to or founded in Japan

in the Heian 平安 (794–1185) and Kamakura 鎌倉 (1185–1333) periods qualify as “real” “Japanese Buddhism.” Such a rhetoric, of course, raises the question as to the identity of the six schools of Nara 奈良 Buddhism.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein the Buddhist movements and groups established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are referred to primarily as “new religions” (*shinshūkyō*, 新宗教)<sup>5</sup> and only secondarily as “schools of Buddhism.” Second, some thinkers cite as one typical feature of “Japanese Buddhism” its ability to engage in certain forms of what is usually called syncretism,<sup>6</sup> such as the slogan evoking the “unity of *kami* and buddhas” (*shinbutsu shūgō*, 神仏習合);<sup>7</sup> the doctrine that the three religions, Shintō, Buddhism, and Confucianism, are one (*sankyō itchi*, 三教一致); and religious practices that mix elements from Buddhism with elements from folk religion, Shintō, and Daoism. Besides the fact that syncretic or symbiotic forms of Buddhism are not unique to Japan, the rhetoric of syncretism seems to favor the term “Japanese religion”<sup>8</sup> over “Japanese Buddhism” as a workable category to describe Buddhism in Japan.

The term “Japanese Buddhism” itself gained currency as a phrase during the Meiji 明治 period (1868–1912) both by Buddhists in Japan to refer to their own tradition as well as by outsiders whether they were Buddhists of a different cultural background or scholars who placed themselves outside the Buddhist tradition altogether. In the Meiji, Taishō 大正 (1912–1926), and early Shōwa 昭和 (1926–1988) periods, when Buddhists in Japan identified themselves and were identified by Buddhists in China and Korea as “Japanese Buddhists,” this phrase was not only used to suggest the uniqueness<sup>9</sup> of Japanese Buddhism vis-à-vis other forms of Buddhism but also implied a hierarchy of values, albeit for differing purposes. A significant number of Buddhist thinkers and practitioners in China and Korea interpreted the perceived difference of Japanese Buddhism from other forms of Buddhism, especially the violation of the three monastic regulations of celibacy, vegetarianism, and abstinence since the Meiji period, as well as what they took to be the “disintegration” of the Buddhist sangha into a multiplicity of schools,<sup>10</sup> as a clear case of corruption and debauchery. Japanese Buddhists, on the other hand, embraced the idea of three nations (*sangoku*, 三国),<sup>11</sup> that is, India, China, and Japan, to argue that Japanese Buddhism constituted the highest and most developed form of Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> Under the surface of this obvious ideological rhetoric and the concomitant identity politics lie two central questions. First,

is there an essence that unites all of Japanese Buddhism and distinguishes it from other forms of Buddhism? And second, is there such a thing as authentic Buddhism? Since the advent of postmodernism, scholars of Buddhism tend to agree that the answer to both questions is a resounding "no." Despite this, the discourses of Japanese uniqueness and the quest for authentic Buddhism seem to survive today not only in tourist guidebooks and pamphlets but also in textbooks and in the work of some scholars. Takeshi UMEHARA 梅原猛, for example, continues to use the term "Japanese Buddhism" to evoke the "Japanese spirit" (*nihon seishin*, 日本精神) as the essence of Buddhism in Japan. On the other end of the political spectrum, Noriaki HAKAMAYA 袴屋憲昭, one of the co-founders of "critical Buddhism" (*hihan bukkyō*, 批判佛教), implies that "Japanese Buddhism" is characterized by an adherence to the doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku shisō*, 本學思想). His inquiry into the possible complicity of Sōtō Zen Buddhist 曹洞宗 institutions in discrimination and militarism concludes with the quest for authentic Buddhism and a rejection of "Japanese Buddhism" as corrupt.<sup>13</sup> All these examples suggest that the term "Japanese Buddhism" seems to have a certain appeal over the phrase "Buddhism in Japan" and has the power to seduce those who use the term to an unapologetic essentialism.

Then, the central question is: What meanings does the term "Japanese Buddhism" evoke? To be clear, this essay will not attempt a definition of "Japanese Buddhism," but rather its goal is to examine what connotation the term "Japanese Buddhism" has that the phrase "Buddhism in Japan" does not possess. To this effect, I will explore discourses suggesting the uniqueness of "Japanese Buddhism," the relationship between Japanese Buddhism and the Japanese state, and the sense of a separate reality and essence that is implied by the term "Japanese Buddhism." The goal of this essay will be not so much a historical study of these themes but rather a philosophical reflection on the term "Japanese Buddhism" itself. Such a reflection on the ambiguity evoked by the most pervasive category in the literature on Buddhism in Japan aims to better our understanding of the phenomena this category is used to denote.

#### JAPANESE BUDDHISM

Any exploration of the term "Japanese Buddhism" has to start in the Meiji period, a time of intellectual vibrancy in which Japan struggled

to find an identity in the global community and Japanese intellectuals strove to find the place of Japanese culture in world history. It was during this time that Buddhism in Japan was understood as “Japanese Buddhism.” When Japanese thinkers encountered European and American philosophy, they generally responded in one of three ways. First, they adopted the Orientalist sentiment that so-called “Western philosophy” (*seiyō tetsugaku*, 西洋哲学) was superior to “Eastern” and in particular “Japanese” “thought” (*shisō*, 思想).<sup>14</sup> Second, they attempted a reconciliation between both “traditions,” which in the political area led to the slogan that became the hallmark of the Meiji period: “Japanese soul—Western know-how” (*wakon yōsai*, 和魂洋才). Or, third, they rejected any intellectual outside influences. The most famous of the apologetics characteristic of this third group were Enryō INOUE 井上円了 (1858–1919) and Keiki YABUKI 矢吹慶輝 (1879–1939), whose thought I will discuss in this essay. Nowadays, both the Orientalism of the first approach as well as the “reverse Orientalism”<sup>15</sup> of the third one have been shown to be intellectually and academically problematic, and even the seemingly reconciliatory second approach has been rethought and refined so that it does not presuppose cultural monoliths and insurmountable “glass curtains”<sup>16</sup> between cultures anymore. To understand the connotation of the term “Japanese Buddhism” and the mechanics of the discourses that employ it, however, it will be helpful to explore how the thinkers of the Meiji period and pre-war Japan constructed the notion of “Japanese Buddhism.”

The argumentative strategy that thinkers such as Yabuki and Inoue employed was twofold. They either explicitly identified or simply implied an essence of what it means to be Japanese, the “Japanese spirit” (*nihon seishin*, 日本精神), and then proceeded to argue that Japanese Buddhism reflected this Japanese spirit perfectly. Second, they traced the entanglement of Buddhism in Japan and the Japanese state from Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (574–622)<sup>17</sup> to the Edo period. While many Japanese intellectuals during the Meiji period claimed or, at least, suggested the uniqueness of the Japanese,<sup>18</sup> Yabuki identified “Japanese Buddhism” explicitly with the “Japanese spirit.” In his book *Japanese Spirit and Japanese Buddhism* (*Nihon seishin to nihon bukkyō*, 日本精神と日本佛教) in 1934,<sup>19</sup> he explicated four arguments in support of his belief that Japanese Buddhism embodies Japanese spirit. First, despite its foreign origin, Buddhism possesses an inherent affinity with the Japanese spirit. Second, Buddhism is a “religion designed for the

protection of the state" (*chingo kokka no shūkyō*, 鎮護国家の宗教).<sup>20</sup> Third, Buddhism allows for the "unity of religion and politics" (*seikyō itchi*, 政教一致).<sup>21</sup> And fourth, Buddhism was able to harmonize with the other religions of Japan, Shintō, and Confucianism, even after the *shinbutsu bunri* ("separation of gods and the buddhas," 神仏分離) policies of the Meiji government officially and legally put an end to it.

The very idea that Buddhism in Japan possesses an inherent affinity with the Japanese spirit is as problematic as it is central to Yabuki's and Inoue's project. In order for Buddhism in Japan to become Japanese Buddhism, there has to be some specific characteristic that identifies Buddhism as inherently Japanese. However, this claim is exceedingly difficult since Buddhism originated outside of Japan and is secondary, historically speaking, to the cultural and religious landscape of Japan. It speaks in their favor that both thinkers were keenly aware of this conundrum and addressed it in their writings. Yabuki acknowledges that Buddhism is of "foreign" origin but then proceeds to call Buddhism "the largest religion of Japan"<sup>22</sup> and to refer it as "inside teaching" (*naikyō*, 内教).<sup>23</sup> According to Yabuki, the reason for this is that Buddhism shares with the Japanese culture a "spirit of independence" (*jishuteki seishin*, 自主的精神) and is "appropriate for the Japanese lands."<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, however, Yabuki claims that the proof for the affinity between Buddhism and the Japanese spirit lies in the long history Buddhism has in Japan—a history he traces carefully from Shōtoku Taishi through the Buddhism of the Edo 江戸 period (1603–1867). According to Yabuki, Shōtoku Taishi not only included Buddhism in his *Seventeen-Article Constitution* but also in his heart. Japanese Buddhism, that is, a form of Buddhism that uniquely embodies the Japanese spirit, constitutes the "unity of outer and inner thought" (*naigai shisō tōitsu*, 内外思想統一).<sup>25</sup> In other words, to Yabuki, Buddhism becomes Japanese Buddhism because it united with the Japanese spirit in the *Seventeen-Article Constitution* and the faith of Shōtoku Taishi, Saichō's Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the doctrine of the unity between *kami* and the buddhas (*shinbutsu shūgō*, 神仏習合) that developed in the context of the esoteric Buddhism founded by Kūkai 空海 (774–835).

Inoue's argument, which he lays out in his *Compass of the Truth* (*Shinri kinshin*, 真理金針),<sup>26</sup> is philosophically more sophisticated than Yabuki's. To Inoue, Christianity constitutes a danger to the Japanese state while Buddhism is inherently nationalistic. This particular

statement is of course a bit simplistic and highly problematic. So how does Inoue arrive at this startling claim? Fumihiko SUEKI suggests that “Inoue’s criticism of Christianity and defense of Buddhism” rests on two pillars, his understanding of the categories of philosophy and religion and his belief that Buddhism serves “the protection of the dharma and the love of the country.”<sup>27</sup> Inoue commences his argument by distinguishing between religion and philosophy: the former, he argues, is driven by emotion (*jōkan*, 情感), the later by intellect (*chiryoku*, 知力). While Christianity functions as religion, albeit in its modern version as a “rationalized” religion, Buddhism constitutes neither a religion nor a philosophy in some sense,<sup>28</sup> while it is both in another sense,<sup>29</sup> that is, insofar as it constitutes a “religion that combines both emotion and intellect.”<sup>30</sup> As problematic as this distinction of course is, Inoue is not really interested in an in-depth exploration of the categories of “religion” and “philosophy,” nor does he examine whether they are ethnocentric and thus not applicable to traditions outside of Europe. His argument in *The Compass of Truth* is strictly political: Christianity, which he actually refers to as “the religion of Jesus” or “Jesusism” (*yasukyō*, ヤス教), constitutes a threat to Japan and has to be considered its enemy. Buddhism, on the other hand, even though it is originally a foreign tradition, has always supported the Japanese government as it “pacifies the country and protects its citizens” (*chinkoku gomin*, 鎮国護民)<sup>31</sup> and is inherently Japanese. Contrary to Christianity, Buddhism “protects the welfare of the people and advances the benefit of the country. On a microcosmic level it preserves the safety of the household; on the macrocosmic level, it aids the welfare and strength of the country.”<sup>32</sup> This is what Inoue means by “protecting the dharma and loving the country” (*gohō aikoku*, 護法愛国).<sup>33</sup> Fumihiko SUEKI summarizes Inoue’s position aptly as follows: To Inoue, “The claim that Buddhism is a Japanese religion is the ideological basis that Buddhism is swallowed up by the nationalist system.”<sup>34</sup> Like Yabuki, Inoue traces the history of Buddhism in Japan from its inception in the sixth century through the life and work of Shōtoku Taishi, Saichō 最澄 (767–822), and Kūkai up to the Edo period to demonstrate that Buddhism in Japan functions to support and reinforce the state, while he admits that the soteriological function of Buddhism and its role to provide “guidance in the world” (*sedō*, 世道)<sup>35</sup> cannot be completely disregarded.

The third proponent of the belief that “Japanese Buddhism” constitutes an identifiable essence whom I will discuss here is Takeshi

UMEHARA. Even though his argument and agenda differs from those of Yabuki and Inoue significantly due to their dissimilar historical contexts, I think it is important to remind ourselves that this essentialized conception of "Japanese Buddhism," while no longer as prevalent as in the pre-war period, still continues today. Whereas Yabuki and Inoue developed the notion of "Japanese Buddhism" in the Meiji and early Shōwa periods, when Japanese thinkers were exploring the place of Japanese culture in the world, Umehara is the main representative of a group of thinkers who responded to Japan's defeat in the Second World War and an increasingly globalized world culture by emphasizing the uniqueness of the Japanese tradition.

Like Yabuki and Inoue before him, Umehara invokes Shōtoku Taishi as the prototype of "Japanese Buddhism." In short, Umehara maintains that Shōtoku Taishi "made Japan a Buddhist nation" (*bukkyō kokka*, 仏教国家)<sup>36</sup> and "Buddhism the state religion of Japan."<sup>37</sup> Shōtoku Taishi based the constitution of Japan on the three jewels (*sanpō*, 三宝)<sup>38</sup> and selected the Buddhist Four Heavenly Kings (*shitennō*, 四天王)<sup>39</sup> as the guardian deities of the nation. The scriptural basis of "Japanese Buddhism," to Umehara, is the *Lotus Sutra* (*Hokkekyō*, 法華經).<sup>40</sup> What is more, however, according to Umehara, Shōtoku Taishi gave Japanese Buddhism its basic form, the moral teaching that is expressed by the famous phrase from the *Dhammapada* "avoid evil, do good"<sup>41</sup> and advocates the six perfections (*rokuharamitsu*, 六波羅蜜) as well as the ten wholesome precepts (*jūzenkai*, 十善戒) as moral guidelines.<sup>42</sup> In order to argue his claim that "Japanese Buddhism" constitutes a moral religion,<sup>43</sup> and ultimately, the moral backbone of Japan, Umehara distinguishes between a corrupt Buddhism<sup>44</sup> that has abandoned the moral teaching of Buddha and the belief in the efficacy of the law of karma, on the one side, and the authentic Buddhism that upholds the moral law of Buddha, on the other.<sup>45</sup> Umehara suggests that, throughout history, whenever Buddhism in Japan was threatened by corruption, it was rescued by a return to its moral teaching. For example, monks like Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232) and Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213) managed to curb the potential leanings towards immorality exhibited by the Kamakura schools of Buddhism with an emphasis on the precepts and monastic rules (*kairitsu*, 戒律), while Hakuin 白隠 (1685–1768) and Jiun 慈雲 (1718–1804) countered the corruption of Buddhism by the *danka* system (*danka seido*, 檀家制度)<sup>46</sup> with a return to the six perfections and the ten wholesome precepts respectively.<sup>47</sup> However, this moral teaching

of Buddhism has been destroyed, says Umehara, by the anti-Buddhist policies of the Meiji period as well as the Westernization of Japan<sup>48</sup> and can only be recovered by a traditionalism that unearths the “traditional spirit” (*dentō seishin*, 伝統精神) of the Japanese prior to the Meiji period and a return to pre-Meiji, that is, authentic, Buddhism. Umehara believes that the model of this authentic “Japanese Buddhism” can be found in the life and work of Shōtoku Taishi.

This brief excursion into Umehara’s thought has shown that he shares with Inoue and Yabuki the belief that “Japanese Buddhism” possesses an identifiable essence, is historically linked to the Japanese state, and reflects the Japanese spirit. Before I proceed to discuss the connotations of the term “Japanese Buddhism,” it will be beneficial for the present project to briefly examine some of the historical entanglement of Buddhist institutions in Japan with the Japanese state and to revisit the figureheads of Japanese Buddhism that were evoked by Buddhist thinkers in the Meiji period and thereafter.

#### JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND THE JAPANESE STATE

Of course the Meiji period was not the first time that Buddhism in Japan was given a national or nationalistic dress. It is no secret that from the very beginning, Buddhism in Japan has been closely tied to the idea of the Japanese nation or, before the notion of nationhood took hold, the Japanese community and state. This is the historical basis for the arguments advanced by the three thinkers discussed in the previous section. Among the promoters of Buddhism and the founders of Buddhist schools in Japan, Shōtoku Taishi, Saichō, and Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215) stand out for their emphasis on how Buddhism in general or their brand of Buddhism in particular, Tendai Buddhism 天台宗 in the case of Saichō and Rinzai Zen 臨濟宗 in the case of Eisai, would benefit the Japanese government and people.

After Buddhism entered Japan in the sixth century, Shōtoku Taishi anchored Buddhism in the *Seventeen-Article Constitution* (*Kempōjūshichijō*, 憲法十七條) and, thus, the vision of what was to become the Japanese state, at the same time as he was writing a commentary on three sutras, the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* (*Yuimagyō*, 維摩經), the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Queen Śrīmālā Sutra* (*Shōmangyō*, 勝鬘經). The second article of Shōtoku Taishi’s *Seventeen-Article Constitution* reads as follows: “Respect the three jewels which are the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. They are the final refuge of all living beings. People in all worlds can keep



the dharma and follow the teaching."<sup>49</sup> While only the second article mentions Buddhism explicitly, the tenth article emphasizes the moral fallibility of all human beings.<sup>50</sup> This point is especially interesting, given that the constitution as a whole emphasizes the reward of goodness and the punishment of evil, and thus implicitly points towards a transcendent moral authority. Finally, Shōtoku Taishi "appropriated" "the honorific title 'Dharma King' (*hō'ō*, 法王)."<sup>51</sup>

This entanglement of Buddhism and the Japanese state that started with Shōtoku Taishi continued throughout the centuries until the dawn of the Meiji period in 1868. Here, I will mention only a few examples. In the eighth century, Emperor Shōmu 聖武天皇 (701–756) released an imperial rescript by the name of "Kokubunji" 国分寺 to promote the establishment of temples designed to protect the state in every part of Japan.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, as Christopher Ives observes, "In the Muromachi [室町] period (1336–1573), the 'five mountain' system of Rinzai monasteries flourished under the auspices of the Ashikaga military dictators, who used . . . regional 'temples for the peace in the realm' (*ankokuji*, 安国寺) and 'pagodas of the Buddha's favor' (*rishōtō*, 利生塔)"<sup>53</sup> to assert "control over Kyoto" and pacify "the rest of the country."<sup>54</sup> At the same time accomplished Zen masters of both the five mountain (*gozan*, 五山) and the *rinka* 林下 systems were honored with the title "National Teacher" (*kokushi*, 国師). The Tokugawa shogunate institutionalized the *danka* system (*danka seido*, 檀家制度), which required every family in Japan to be registered at a local temple.<sup>55</sup> Of course there are many more illustrations of the entanglement of Buddhism and the Japanese state, but for the purpose of the present essay these will suffice.

While it was Shōtoku Taishi who in the twelfth article of his constitution declared that "in a country there cannot be two lords"<sup>56</sup> and thus laid the foundation for a "unified nation" (*kokka no tōitsu*, 国家の統一),<sup>57</sup> the "idea of the national entity" (*kokutai kannen*, 国体観念), and, as Umehara emphasizes, a "Buddhist nation,"<sup>58</sup> it was the thinkers in the Kamakura period that conceptualized the unity of Buddhism and the state. Ives traces the notion that the purpose of Buddhism was to "pacify and protect the nation" (*chingo kokka*, 鎮護国家) to early Tendai Buddhism and the phrase "the oneness of the sovereign's law and the *buddhadharma*" (*ōbō buppō ichinyō*, 王法仏法一如) to early Kamakura Zen Buddhism.<sup>59</sup> Saichō referred to the head temple of Tendai Buddhism, Enryakuji, as the "place for [practicing] the way and [thereby] pacifying and protecting the nation"<sup>60</sup> (*chingo kokka dōjō*, 鎮

護国家道場) and proposed that Buddhism served the “protection of the national domain” (*shugokokkai*, 守護国界). In the treatise with the same name, Saichō argues the unity of the three realms (*sangai*, 三界), the three bodies of Buddha (*sanjin*, 三身), the three vehicles (*sanjō*, 三乘), and the three virtues (*sandoku*, 三徳),<sup>61</sup> thus establishing that the “law of the sovereign” and the *buddhadharma* are not separate.

Not unlike Saichō, Eisai felt the need to show that Zen Buddhism, though it was seen to be a new import from China, not only supported but, in fact, was not different from the law of the Kamakura shogunate. Not only did he title his main work *Treatise on the Promotion of Zen Buddhism for the Protection of the Nation* (*Kōzen gokoku ron*, 興禪護国論), he also suggested that “the construction of Zen temples . . . protects the nation and benefits all sentient beings”<sup>62</sup> and, as Ives observes, that “the sovereign’s law is the lord Buddha’s law and the Buddha’s law is the treasure of the sovereign’s law.”<sup>63</sup> In his *Vow to Restore the Buddhadharma to Japan* (*Nihon buppō chūkō ganmon*, 日本仏法中興願文), Eisai further suggests that the bodhisattva vow (*bosatsu kairitsu*, 菩薩戒律) and the law of the sovereign (*ōbō*, 王法) ultimately serve the same purpose insofar as both are based on the principle that what benefits the self benefits the other (*jiri rita*, 自利利他).<sup>64</sup> This rhetoric that was developed by the founders (*shisōsha*, 始祖者) of newly imported schools of Buddhism in Japan was utilized by Buddhist thinkers<sup>65</sup> in pre-war Japan to justify militarism and the war effort of Japan, as Ives and, to a lesser degree, Brian Victoria<sup>66</sup> have shown. Further, as in the Kamakura and Muromachi 室町 periods, it was thinkers of the Zen tradition that excelled in the martial rhetoric and developed a rhetoric that is referred to as Imperial-Way Buddhism (*kōdō bukkyō*, 皇道佛教) and Imperial-Way Zen (*kōdō zen*, 皇道禪).

Victoria and Ives have discussed the historical context of Imperial-Way Buddhism and the militarism and imperialism it supported at length.<sup>67</sup> One could argue that this position constituted a response to the anti-Buddhist policies of the Meiji government and the perceived intellectual threat posed by modernism and Euro-American culture in general. For example, similar to the founders of the Buddhist schools in the pre-modern periods, who contended that their respective “new forms”<sup>68</sup> of Buddhism were essential to the protection of the country and welfare of its people or, at least, government, some of the pre-war Buddhist ideologues responded to the loss of influence Buddhism suffered in the political arena with an all-out effort to regain some

measure of political importance. The anti-modernistic sentiments quite a number of Buddhist thinkers in the pre-war period adopted is best illustrated by Inoue's use of Buddhism to support traditionalism, and the discussions on overcoming modernity (*kindai no chōkoku*, 近代の超克), which are referred to in *Essays on Overcoming Modernity (Kindai no chōkoku ron*, 近代の超克論).<sup>69</sup> The positions of the Buddhist responses to modernity were built on a threefold strategy. First, they presented Buddhism as a rational religion and transcended and included the scientific paradigm. This argument was supposed to evidence the superiority of Buddhism over Christianity, which was seen as anti-scientific. At the same time, these thinkers argued that Buddhism was trans-rational and, thus, superior to "Western" philosophy. As I have shown earlier, Inoue provided the paradigm for this thought when he argued that Buddhism included and, at the same time, transcended intellect.<sup>70</sup> Second, Japanese Buddhism was interpreted to be an indispensable element and resource of Japanese culture. Third, these thinkers suggested that Japanese Buddhist ideology was interpreted to be uniquely predisposed to overcome the various conceptual fault lines that separate the state from religion.<sup>71</sup>

While it is apparent that some of these positions can be explained as a product of the search for an identity in a world characterized by conflict and difference, it seems to me that the pervasiveness of themes like the "oneness of the law of the sovereign and the *buddhadharma*" lies in the attraction this concept has for thinkers steeped in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. Thinkers like Inoue and D. T. SUZUKI 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) argue that Buddhist ideology is particularly suited to overcome the binaries characteristic of the modernistic rhetoric. In the case of Inoue, it was the juxtaposition of religion and philosophy, emotion and rational thought. While Christianity was steeped in an emotive logic and thus exclusively qualified to be a religion, Buddhism, Inoue argued, included both emotional and rational thought, religion and philosophy, and thus transcended the distinction between them. According to Inoue, this is made possible only by the middle way of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which integrates the "emotional religion" of Pure Land Buddhism and the rationality of what he calls the "way of saintliness" (*seidō*, 聖道) to form a system that is equally inclusive of idealism and materialism, emotion and rationality, and religion and philosophy.<sup>72</sup> This way, Inoue argues, Buddhism is not only compatible with the state; it also includes Christianity as one of its parts.<sup>73</sup> But

Inoue does not stop here. In “good Buddhist fashion,” he proclaims the “oneness” (*dōitsu*, 同一) of the absolute and the relative,<sup>74</sup> the truth and the phenomena,<sup>75</sup> the “totality and one drop of water,”<sup>76</sup> nirvana and samsara,<sup>77</sup> and “equality and discrimination.”<sup>78</sup> While the first four phrases sound like some esoteric metaphysical formulas, the last one, while possibly in line with Mahāyāna philosophy, is ethically as well as politically highly problematic and, as Ives has pointed out, has been used to justify war and discrimination.<sup>79</sup> The problem here is that, in the Japanese Buddhist context, the term “discrimination” (*sabetsu*, 差別) is used to denote the cognitive function of “discernment”<sup>80</sup> as well as political and social discrimination.<sup>81</sup> The basis for this reasoning Inoue finds in the non-dualism of the *Heart Sutra* (*Shingyō*, 心經)<sup>82</sup> in particular, and Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy in general. Similarly, D. T. SUZUKI, who, as Victoria has shown, used Zen Buddhist rhetoric to justify militarism in the pre-war period,<sup>83</sup> claimed that the teaching of *Diamond Sutra* (*Kongōkyō*, 金剛經), which he referred to as the “logic of *sokuhi*” (*sokuhi no ronri*, 即非の論理), can be summarized in the phrase “when we say A is A we mean that A is not A, therefore it is A.”<sup>84</sup> Inoue summarizes this reasoning in the formulas “neither one nor two” (*fuichi funi*, 不一不二)<sup>85</sup> and the two are “identically one, not separated” (*dōtai furi*, 同体不離)<sup>86</sup> as well. These phrases sound all too familiar to anyone who had some exposure to Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy or rhetoric. The question in this context is, however, if this formula, which the ideologues of “Japanese Buddhism” identified as the essence of “Japanese Buddhism” and utilized to justify nationalism and militarism, can provide the philosophical basis for an Imperial-Way Buddhism or if the nationalist rhetoric reduced it to a political trope.

#### JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND “BEING JAPANESE”

The philosopher who provides a heuristic key to how the rhetoric of “Japanese Buddhism” worked in pre-war Japan, however, is D. T. SUZUKI’s life-long friend Kitarō NISHIDA 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945). Nishida, a practitioner of both Rinzai Zen and True Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdo Shinshū*, 浄土真宗), does not necessarily qualify as a Buddhist thinker. Rather he was a philosopher who proposed his own philosophical paradigm as a response to German idealism and early phenomenology. While he identifies his philosophical standpoint as “Japanese” or even “Buddhist” in his diaries, letters, and in his writing after 1938, the

discourse he engages in is that of Euro-American and, later in his life, as Rolf Elberfeld has argued, "intercultural philosophy."<sup>87</sup> His life-long goal was to stratify a philosophical paradigm that could overcome the dualism of Cartesian and Kantian philosophy, and thus he developed an increasingly complex philosophical non-dualism throughout his career. In the last seven years of his life, he began to indicate and later acknowledge that the inspiration for this non-dual paradigm came from Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy. After his retirement from Kyoto University in 1929 and his second marriage in 1932, he became increasingly interested in the social dimension of human existence and began to apply his non-dual paradigm to a philosophy of history. This application resulted in the claim that Japan constitutes the highest form of culture in the world<sup>88</sup> because it embodies the Mahāyāna Buddhist "logic of *sokuhī*" and constitutes a "self-identity of the absolute contradictions" (*zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu*, 絶対矛盾的自己同一).

To understand this rather astonishing and highly indigestible phrase, one needs to read Nishida's political philosophy in the context of his overall philosophical project. As I have shown elsewhere, Nishida operated on the fundamental belief that traditionally Euro-American philosophy always provided two extreme alternatives to every specific philosophical problem, subjectivism and objectivism, neither of which, however, was sufficient to solve the philosophical problem in question.<sup>89</sup> So whenever Nishida approaches a specific philosophical problem, he posits two counterfactual alternatives only to reject both and to suggest a third and more inclusive position. The goal of his method is twofold: to subvert dualism and, not unlike Inoue, to propose a position that takes the famous formula of the *Heart Sutra*, "form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form"<sup>90</sup> as its philosophical basis. Accordingly, when he approaches the topic of history in the second part of his *The Fundamental Problem of Philosophy* (*Tetsugaku no kihon mondai*, 哲学の基本問題),<sup>91</sup> Nishida juxtaposes the pre-modern *Gemeinschaft* as the embodiment of subjectivism with the modern *Gesellschaft* as the expression of objectivism.<sup>92</sup> The society that is capable of including and expressing both the subjective and objective dimensions of human experience and is able to embrace the ambiguity of human existence without dissolving its tension Nishida calls the "culture of nothing" (*mu no bunka*, 無の文化).<sup>93</sup> The "nothing" of this dialectical culture, however, is not the "nothing" (*mu*, 無) that opposes "being" (*yū*, 有) but one that expresses "true nothing" insofar as

it embodies “affirmation-and-yet-negation” (*kōtei soku hitei*, 肯定即否定).<sup>94</sup> This ambiguity Nishida refers to as the “self-identity of the absolute contradictories.” Here Nishida continues a line of thought developed by Inoue, one of his teachers at Tokyo Imperial University,<sup>95</sup> who had already suggested that Buddhism included and transcended materialism and idealism.<sup>96</sup>

In his essays *The Problem of Japanese Culture* (*Nihon bunka no mondai*, 日本文化の問題)<sup>97</sup> and *The Principles of the New World Order* (*Sekai shinchitsujo no genri*, 世界新秩序の原理),<sup>98</sup> Nishida applies his historical philosophy to the particular historical situation of the pre-war period. Using his dialectical model, he suggests that “Eastern culture” is subjectivistic, active, and totalistic,<sup>99</sup> while “Western culture” is objectivistic, intellectual,<sup>100</sup> and individualistic.<sup>101</sup> However, despite their differences, Nishida believes that these two cultures inhabit “one world” (*hitotsu no sekai*, 一つの世界).<sup>102</sup> To fulfill their potential, however, the mutually exclusivity has to be overcome by a “mutual determination” (*sōgo gentei*, 相互限定),<sup>103</sup> and they have to be reconciled by the “culture of nothingness,” which transcends the cultures of non-being and being respectively. The culture that is uniquely qualified to do this is Japan<sup>104</sup> as it transcends the difference and boundaries that were erected and essentialized by binary thinking.

Nishida explains that “Within the Japanese spirit, which moves towards the truth of things at the bottom of the subject by transcending the subject, the Spirit of Eastern culture is always and everywhere brought to life. At the same time, it is always something that is directly united with the spirit of Western culture, which emerges from its environment.”<sup>105</sup> Here, Nishida makes two far-reaching statements. First, Japan discloses the structure of the “self-identity of the absolute contradictories East and West.” And second, Nishida further suggests that as the “self-identity of the absolute contradictories East and West” Japan embraces the whole world. Borrowing the insight and terminology from classical Tiantai and Huayan philosophy, especially the phrase of the “one-and-yet-the-many” (*issokuta*, 一即), Nishida believes that every individual (*kotai*, 个体)<sup>106</sup> expresses the totality of the historical world (*rekishiteki sekai*, 歴史的世界) in the sense that every individual is determined (*gentei sareta*, 限定された) by his/her spatial and temporal context. In a relative sense the context of an individual is made up by the family, the culture, the epoch into which a person is born. In an “absolute” sense, the context of each individual is the

totality of the world. Consequently, the activity of each individual expresses the historical world in some sense. While there are differences between individual persons and cultures, they are not essential but only a matter of degree. To Nishida, the culture that expresses the historical world in its totality most perfectly is Japan as the "unifying pivot of Eastern and Western culture."<sup>107</sup>

Nishida suggests that as the embodiment of the "self-identity of absolute contradictories" and the "true nothing," which transcends the juxtaposition of being and non-being, Japan is not only the supreme culture that has the task to overcome cultural differences, it also embodies the non-dualism characteristic of most of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy in general and the logic (*ronri*, 論理) of the *Heart Sutra* in particular. Furthermore, and this is where we return to the topic of "Japanese Buddhism," while Buddhism originated in India and developed in China, Nishida believes that Japanese Buddhism constitutes Buddhism developed to its fullest potential.<sup>108</sup> It is of course not without some irony that Nishida cites the *Heart Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, as well as the key phrases representative of Tiantai and Huayan Buddhism, such as "the unimpeded penetration of the universal"<sup>109</sup> and the individual" (*shiliwuai*, 事理無碍)<sup>110</sup> and "unimpeded penetration of two individuals" (*shishiwuai*, 事事無碍),<sup>111</sup> as the expressions of Japanese Buddhism. Inoue had similarly suggested that Tiantai Buddhism proposed the "middle way" (*chūdō*, 中道), which included the religiosity of Pure Land Buddhism and the philosophy of Kusha 俱舍宗, Sanron 三論宗, and Kegon 華嚴宗 Buddhism.<sup>112</sup> Be that as it may, Nishida's conceptualization of Japanese culture can be summarized in three main points. First, Japanese Buddhism constitutes the highest form of Buddhism; second, Japanese culture expresses Japanese Buddhism; and third, Japanese culture overcomes the distinctions between what seem to be irreconcilable opposites of "East" and "West," buddhas and sentient beings, and, to return to Inoue's ideology, equality and difference. With this conceptual sleight of hand, Nishida suggests that Japan is inherently Buddhist and Buddhism inherently Japanese. The key to his argument is what he calls, following Suzuki, "the logic of *sokuhi*."

#### THE CATEGORY "JAPANESE BUDDHISM" AS SKILLFUL MEANS

The investigation of the connotations the phrase "Japanese Buddhism" evokes has uncovered a set of Buddhist phrases Suzuki subsumes under the "logic of *sokuhi*." Tying the rhetoric of "Japanese

Buddhism” to the so-called “logic of *sokuhi*,” however, raises some obvious questions. Most of all, it is this kind of rhetoric that drove Noriaki HAKAMAYA to lambast both Japanese Buddhist thinkers and the philosophers of the Kyoto school for their “neglect of words” (*kotoba keishi*, 言葉軽視) and “departure from philosophical thought” (*tetsugakuteki shisō o shirizokeru*, 哲学的思索を斥ける).<sup>113</sup> Hakamaya’s overall project of critical Buddhism has received rather mixed responses and has been controversial at best.<sup>114</sup> However, his claim that opaque formulas like the ones I have discussed in the present essay have prevented some of the Kyoto school thinkers as well as Buddhist monastics and thinkers in pre-war Japan from critically evaluating indigenous and nativist ideologies, which are based on a rhetoric of harmony (*wa*, 和) and oneness seems,<sup>115</sup> to be not only right on target but is also supported by the critics of Imperial-Way Buddhism such as, among others, Brian Victoria and Hakugen ICHIKAWA 市川白弦 (1902–1986). Phrases such as “equality is not different from discrimination” and “life is not different from death”<sup>116</sup> not only have been misused in the past but are also ethically and logically problematic. However, the rhetoric used by Inoue, Suzuki, and Nishida raises questions in addition to this obvious misuse of Mahāyāna Buddhist dialectics to justify militarism and discrimination: Insofar as it collapses the difference between seeming opposites, this “logic” allows Inoue to describe Buddhism as all-inclusive. In Nishida’s terminology, because Japanese Buddhism, and Japan for that matter, embraces the “unity of the opposites,” it constitutes the individual expression of the totality and thus embraces the whole world. Thus, Hakamaya’s criticism raises two fundamental questions: How are we supposed to deal with formulas such as “A is not different from not-A”? And, how does the interpretation of these slogans affect the understanding of Buddhism in Japan as Japanese Buddhism?

From its inception, Mahāyāna Buddhist dialectics has given rise to two possible interpretations: one that reified emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as an ineffable essence, buddha-nature (*foxing*, 佛性) or otherwise, and one that advocates an ever self-emptying process based on the notion of the emptiness of emptiness (*śūnyatā-śūnyatā*).<sup>117</sup> The former interpretation tends towards an explicit or, at least, implicit monism and is susceptible to Hakamaya’s criticism as it make it impossible to distinguish between equality and discrimination and, as David Loy observes, good and evil.<sup>118</sup> As much as D. T. SUZUKI resists the monistic position and the mechanics of reification, his interpretation of what he calls



the "logic of *sokuhi*" and his general rhetoric can be read as a rejection of difference. It seems to me that the majority of Buddhist philosophers as well as scholars of Buddhism read the *Heart Sutra*, which serves Inoue as the basis for his argument that Buddhism has an inherent affinity with Japan, as well as the *Diamond Sutra*, which serves Suzuki and Nishida as the prototype of their "logic of *sokuhi*," as a rejection of essentialism and linguistic positivism. Rein Raud<sup>119</sup> and I<sup>120</sup> have argued independently that the main goal of the *Diamond Sutra* is to critique the reification of conceptual language even if—or especially if—it is the doctrinal language of Buddhism. In some sense, one can find this resistance to reification throughout the history of Buddhist philosophy from Gautama's famous refusal to answer metaphysical questions to the iconoclastic rhetoric of Zen Buddhist thinkers. In addition, recently, there has been an increasing number of Nishida scholars who have argued that Nishida's later philosophy and especially his usage of the term *soku*, such as "affirmation-and-yet-negation" (*kotei soku hitei*, 肯定即否定), has to be understood as a subversion, if not deconstruction, and not as mysticism or monism.<sup>121</sup> If one recognizes the subversive potential of these phraseologies, it is hard to accuse them of the "departure from philosophical thought." To the contrary, they exhibit the potential to be critical in Hakamaya's sense insofar as they question "prevailing modes of thought and uncritically adopted presuppositions" and thus undercut nativism and nationalism. Then it is no longer possible to interpret the philosophy of the *Heart Sutra* as a monism à la Inoue's "the two are identically one, not separated" that collapses the distinction between equality and difference.

And this is where our discussion of the category "Japanese Buddhism" comes full circle. The Meiji ideologues and their successors justified the nationalization of Buddhism as "Japanese Buddhism" not only with the long history of Buddhism's entanglement with the Japanese state but also with the belief that the Japanese spirit and especially "Japanese Buddhism" expresses the "logic" of the *Prajñāparamitā* sutras (*Hannya haramitsu kyō*, 般若波羅蜜經) and thus the totality of the historical world, the "worldly world" (*sekaiteki sekai*, 世界的世界),<sup>122</sup> fully and completely. While the non-dualistic philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism may not been foremost on the minds of the Buddhists in pre-war Japan, it did provide an ideological basis for phrases such as "for the protection of the dharma and the love of the country" and helped alleviate the cognitive dissonance a Buddhist who

vowed to uphold the first precept of non-injury may have felt in the face of militarism and war. The irony of this rhetoric is, however, that the very rhetoric that was designed to discourage essentialism and the reification of conceptual language ended up being instrumental in essentializing and reifying Japanese Buddhism, the Japanese spirit, and the national entity. And this is where the crux lies. When Risaku MUTAI 務合理作 (1890–1974), a disciple of Nishida and of the second head of the Kyoto school Hajime TANABE 田辺元 (1885–1962), reflected on the nationalistic tendencies of his teachers after the war, he came to the conclusion that the explicit or implicit nationalism of some of the pre-war philosophers of the Kyoto school lay in the absolutization of a relative and changing entity, the Japanese state.<sup>123</sup> To use Nishida's language: Japan is not the expression of the totality but one among many. The same reasoning can be applied to Japanese Buddhism: it is not the expression of the *dharmakāya* (*hōshin*, 法身) but one of many. If one reads Nishida's philosophy as de-essentialism, it gives rise to a pluralism rather than chauvinism and nationalism and functions as a critical philosophy<sup>124</sup> or, as Tanabe concedes after the war, "absolute criticism" (*zettai hihan*, 絶対批判).<sup>125</sup>

In this sense, the category "Japanese Buddhism" can function as "skillful means" (*hōben*, 方便) that identifies common patterns rather than an essence. In some sense, this is common sense. However, as the use of the category "Japanese Buddhism" and in fact all categories illustrate, the term creates the illusion of essential differences and thus gives rise to axiologies such as "Japanese Buddhism is corrupt" or "Japanese Buddhism is the most developed form of Buddhism." In some sense, the category of Japanese Buddhism creates a reality as much as it reflects it. It reflects the identity discourses in the context of which it was created at the same time as it reinforces it. On the other hand, it helps us identify structures characteristic of Buddhism in Japan, such as "funeral Buddhism" and a married priesthood, as long as we are aware of the multiple contexts, temporal, linguistic, cultural, and otherwise, that give rise to these patterns. To say "Japanese Buddhism is funeral Buddhism" is helpful insofar as this claim highlights common patterns most Buddhist schools in Japan share since the Edo period. At the same time, however, it is not applicable to pre-Edo and contemporary Buddhism nor to Buddhism in other cultures. This characterization also obscures the fact that Buddhism has had other functions and deals with changing political and social realities today. So

the lesson Buddhist studies can learn from Buddhist philosophy is that as a category, the term "Japanese Buddhism" is only as helpful as the scholar who applies it is aware of its limitations. It highlights the similarities between one set of phenomena, Buddhist schools and practices in Japan, and their difference from other sets of phenomena.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, a meaningful application needs to be clear about its context and limitations. Only then can the category "Japanese Buddhism" serve as useful tool that aids our understanding of Buddhism in Japan.

#### NOTES

1. The other side of this rhetoric is, of course, the claim that, for example, Chinese Buddhism is unified. This assumption is problematic as well. Any rhetoric that essentializes cultures and traditions often overlooks not the only the obvious political and historical factors that led up to the various institutional landscapes in, for example, the PRC and Japan, but also the fact that the genealogical and institutional structures characteristics of "Chinese Buddhism" are not altogether alien to especially Japanese Rinzai Zen Buddhism. In short, this rhetoric simplifies and thus obscures the complexity of Buddhist lineages, institutions, and schools.
2. As Duncan Williams has pointed out, Taijō TAMAMURO coined this term "in the title of his classic work on the subject." Duncan Williams, *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Sōtō Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 39. Taijō TAMAMURO, *Sōshiki bukkyō* (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1963).
3. The same issue applies, of course, to "American Buddhism," even though the majority of American Buddhist centers and institutions identify with, for example, Japanese, Korean, or Tibetan lineages of Buddhism.
4. The Sanron 三論宗, Hossō 法相宗, Kegon 華嚴宗, Kusha 俱舍宗, Jōjitsu 成実宗, and Ritsu 律宗 schools were the main schools of Buddhism in Japan during the Nara period (710–784). Besides ignoring these six schools, this rhetoric also overlooks the fact that at least five of the six schools of Heian and Kamakura Buddhism were imported from China.
5. Interestingly enough, it is especially the Buddhist groups among the new religions in Japan that deliberately break with the structures of "funeral Buddhism."
6. I am hesitant to use this term since the phenomena described in the text do not seem to coincide with all the connotations of the term "syncretism." Personally, I would prefer terms such as "symbiosis," but this is not the opportune place for such a discussion.
7. This phrase is sometimes translated as "the unity of Shintō and Buddhism."

8. A similar reasoning motivates the decision to present Buddhism in Japan in the context of textbooks and courses on “Japanese religion” rather than on “Buddhism.” See, for example H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* (Belmont, MA: Dickenson Publisher, 1969).
9. The discourse that emphasizes the uniqueness of Japanese culture is usually referred as *nihonjinron* 日本人論 and has been severely critiqued by scholarship in the past thirty years. For example, see Yasuharu ISHIZAWA, *Nihonjinron, nihonron no keifu* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1997). The related myth of the homogeneity of Japan is critiqued by works such as Eiji OGUMA, *Tanitsu Minzoku Shinwa no Kigen* (Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 1995).
10. The focus on schools, and their plurality in Japan, is problematic since throughout the Buddhist world there has not been a variety of schools but of institutions and lineages as well.
11. For a discussion of how this trope was used in Kamakura Buddhism, see Mark Blum, “The Sangoku-Mappō Construct: Buddhism, Nationalism, and History in Medieval Japan,” in *Discourse and Ideology in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, ed. Richard Payne and Taigen Dan Leighton (London: Routledge, 2006), 31–51. More interestingly, however, this rhetoric of the “three nations” was picked up not only by Japanese Buddhist ideologues in the Meiji period but also by scholars of Japanese Buddhism in Japan and the USA until about the middle of the twentieth century, who created a narrative of a progressive development of Buddhism from India via China to Japan.
12. The trope of the “three nations” is highly problematic for three reasons: (1) Buddhism developed in more than just these three countries. (2) Buddhism continued to develop in India after it had migrated to China about eighteen hundred years ago and in China after it taken roots in Japan some fourteen hundred years ago. (3) The relationship between the Buddhist institutions in China and Japan is more complex than the rhetoric of a unidirectional “migration” would indicate.
13. Noriaki HAKAMAYA, *Hihan bukkuyō* (Tokyo: Daizō shuppan, 1990).
14. In 1963, Gino Piovesana called Amane NISHI 西周 and Mamichi TSUDA 津田真道 “pioneers of Western knowledge.” Gino K. Piovesana, *Recent Japanese Philosophical Thought 1862–1996*, 3rd rev. ed. (Richmond: Japan Library, 1997), 5.
15. Bernard Faure, “The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism,” in *Japan in Tradition and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 248–251, 255.
16. J. J. Clarke, *Jung and the East: A Dialogue with the Orient* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 17.
17. While Buddhism entered Japan prior to Shōtoku Taishi in the first half of the sixth century, Meiji thinkers identified the *Seventeen-Article Constitution* of

Shōtoku Taishi as the beginning of “Japanese Buddhism.”

18. See note 9.

19. Keiki YABUKI, *Nihon seishin to nihon bukkyō* (Tokyo: Bukkyō rengō kai, 1934).

20. *Ibid.*, 215.

21. *Ibid.*, 217.

22. *Ibid.*, 185.

23. *Ibid.*, 187.

24. *Ibid.*, 185.

25. *Ibid.*, 205.

26. Enryō INOUE, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan* (Tokyo: Tōyō daigaku, 1987).

27. Fumihiko SUEKI, *Meiji shisōka ron* (Tokyo: Toransubyū, 2004), 54.

28. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 250–251.

29. *Ibid.*, 253.

30. *Ibid.*, 250.

31. *Ibid.*, 195.

32. Sueki, *Meiji shisōka ron*, 57.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, 59.

35. *Ibid.*, 195.

36. Takeshi UMEHARA, *Nihon bukkyō o yuku* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2004), 12.

37. Takeshi UMEHARA, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon: hanjidaiteki mitsugo* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2006), 46.

38. Umehara, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon*, 14.

39. *Ibid.*, 13.

40. Umehara, *Nihon bukkyō o yuku*, 16. This claim is rather interesting since, like Yabuki, Umehara does recognize Shōtoku Taishi’s fondness of the above-mentioned three sutras. The underlying assumption here is that “Japanese Buddhism” is, in one sense or another, shaped by the Tendai Buddhism of Mt. Hiei.

41. Umehara, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon*, 46. *Dhammapada* 14, 5. *Taishō Taizōkyō* 大正大藏經, ed. Junjirō TAKAKUSU and Kaigyoku WATANABE (Tokyo: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Kankōkai, 1961) [hereafter abbreviated as “T.”], 4.210.567.

42. Umehara, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon*, 42.

43. Richard Gombrich similarly argues that the basic teaching of Siddhārtha

Gautama is a morality based on the belief in the law of karma. Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought* (London: Equinox, 2009).

44. To Umehara, nothing illustrates this corruption more than the permission of Japanese clerics since the Meiji period to “eat meat and marry” (*nikushoku saikai*, 肉書妻帯). Umehara, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon*, 48.

45. *Ibid.*, 47.

46. This system of registering the population at local temples through genealogical records was first used in 1613 as a tool to expel Christians from Kyoto and was institutionalized by Iemitsu TOKUGAWA 徳川家光 (1604–1651) in 1637. Tamamuro, *Sōshiki bukkyō*, 262.

47. Umehara, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon*, 47.

48. In *Japan after the Murder of God: A Mysterious Message against the Trend of Our Times* (*Kamigoroshi no Nihon: hanjidaiteki mitsugo*, 神殺しの日本 — 反時代的密語), Umehara suggests that in Japan “god” died twice: the movement to abolish Buddhism, also known as the *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 movement, which led to the “separation of buddhas and kami” (*shinbutsu bunri*, 神仏分離) in 1968 and the Imperial Rescript of Education (*kyōiku chikugo*, 教育筑後) of 1890, killed “god” in the Japanese sense of “kami and buddhas” (*shinbutsu*, 神仏) the first time. God died the second time in 1945 when the emperor, who to Umehara is the “god manifested in human form” (*arahitogami*, 現人神), renounced his divinity in 1945. In Umehara’s words, “Because of the West, Japan destroyed its buddhas and gods completely.” What remained was a moral void and the loss of the Japanese spirit. “A return the beauty of spirit the Japanese people possessed requires that we recapture the morality of the Japanese people prior to the first death of god.” Umehara, *Kamigoroshi no Nihon*, 16–19. Already in 1983, Daisaburō ARIKI had called Umehara’s ideology “hidden imperial fascism.” Daisaburō ARIKI, *Umehara Nihongaku o warau: kakusareta tennōsei fashizumu*. Shohan (Tokyo: Kōyō Shuppan, 1983).

49. Shōtoku Taishi, “Kempōjūshichijō,” *Shotoku taishi shū*, *Nihon shisōdaikei 2* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), 11–23, 13.

50. *Ibid.*, 19.

51. Christopher Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen: Ichikawa Hakugen’s Critique and Lingering Questions for Buddhist Ethics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 109.

52. In this prescript, Emperor Shōmu dictated “that for every country a seven layer pagoda be built which reflects in part each the *Suvarṇa prabhāsōttama sūtra* 金光明最勝王經 and the *Lotus Sutra*.” Emperor Shōmu as quoted by Susumu Narita, *Kokubunji nitsuite* (Hachiōji: Musashino shobō, 2008), 38. Kantō Kogawara KENKYŪKAI, ed., *Shōmu Tennō to kokubunji: zaichi kara mita kantō kokubunji no zōei* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1998).

53. Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, 110.

54. Martin Collcutt, *The Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institutions in Medieval Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 106–107.
55. See note 46.
56. Shōtoku Taishi, "Kempōjūshichijō," 19.
57. Yabuki, *Nihon seishin to nihon bukkyō*, 195.
58. Umehara, *Nihon bukkyō o yuku*, 12. It has to be emphasized, though, that Yabuki and most scholars today agree that while Shōtoku Taishi embraced Buddhism, his vision of government was mostly influenced by Confucian principles.
59. Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, 109.
60. Ibid.
61. In *Treatises for the Protection of National Domain (Shugo kokkai shō, 守護国界章)*, Saichō presents the lists of threes only to suggest that "in one there are three, and in three there is one" (*ichi ni isokushite san, san ni sokushite ichi*). Saichō, "Shugo kokkai shō," Saichō, *Genten nihon bukkyō no shisō 2* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1991), 208–250, 214.
62. Eisai, "Kōzen gokoku ron," *Nihon no zengoroku daiikkan: Eisai*, ed. Shōkin Furuta (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1977), 34–84, 350.
63. Eisai, "Nihon buppō chūkō gammon," *Dainihon bukkyō zensho dai 125 satsu* (Tokyo: Bussho kankō kai, 1914), 371–373, 372. Translation of Toshio KURODA as quoted by Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, 110.
64. Ibid.
65. Inoue borrows Eisai's formula "what benefits the self benefits the other," Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 314.
66. Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).
67. See Victoria, *Zen at War*, and Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*.
68. I write this phrase in quotation marks since the Buddhist schools imported to or founded in Japan during the Heian and Kamakura periods did not so much invent new forms of Buddhism but reinterpreted already existing elements from the Buddhist tradition. However, reinterpretation and reform of traditional themes can be found in "old schools" as well. The novelty of the "new schools" thus lay in the creation of new institutional structures rather than in Buddhological innovation.
69. Toru KAWAKAMI, Teruko TAKEUCHI, et al., *Kindai no chōkoku* (Tokyo: Fuzanbō, 1979).
70. He also argued that Buddhism transcended and included Christianity. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 296–297.

71. After the end of the Second World War, most Japanese Buddhist thinkers accepted the separation between religion and state, at least on a practical and political level. Only a minority like Umehara attempted to return to the pre-war rhetoric of the unity of the country and the dharma.
72. Here Inoue is paraphrasing the Pure Land rhetoric of “other-power” (*jiriki*, 自力) and “self-power” (*tariki*, 他力).
73. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 296–297.
74. *Ibid.*, 304.
75. *Ibid.*, 306.
76. *Ibid.*, 308.
77. *Ibid.*, 307.
78. *Ibid.*, 306, 314–315.
79. Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, 86.
80. Hajime NAKAMURA, *Bukkyōgodaijiten* (Tokyo: Tōkyō shoseki, 1912), 604.
81. Shunpaku NAKAO, *Bukkyō to sabetsu* (Kyoto: Nagata bunshōdō, 1985).
82. To strengthen his argument, Inoue quotes the famous “form is emptiness, emptiness is form” (*shiki sokuze kū, kū sokuze shiki*, 色即是空空即是色). Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 305.
83. Victoria, *Zen at War*, 105–112.
84. Daisetsu SUZUKI, *Suzuki daisetsu zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968), 5:381.
85. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 304. The phrase can be traced back to the *Sutra of Great Wisdom* (*Dai hannya kyō*, 大般若經), T. 7.220.865b11.
86. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 315. Here Inoue claims that “equality and differentiation are identical” and constitute an inseparable oneness.
87. Rolf Elberfeld, *Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945): moderne japanische Philosophie und die Frage nach der Interkulturalität* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).
88. While this is of course a highly problematic claim, to say the least, I would like to add that, as Lawrence Kohlberg readily admits in his theory of moral development, most thinkers who propose a developmental theory imply if not admit that they inhabit the highest place on the developmental ladder.
89. Gereon Kopf, “The Self-Identity of the Absolute Contradictory What: Reflections on How to Teach the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō,” *Teaching Texts and Contexts: The Art of Infusing Asian Philosophies and Religions*, ed. David Jones and Ellen Klein (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 129–148.
90. *Hannya haramitta shingyō*, T. 8.255.850c4.
91. Kitarō NISHIDA, *Nishida kitarō zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1988), vol. 7.



92. Ibid., 7:387–389.
93. Ibid., 7:441.
94. Ibid., 7:207, 7:377.
95. In her section on Nishida's time at the Imperial University of Tokyo, Michiko Y<sub>USA</sub> suggests that during his time in Tokyo, Nishida "must have seen and heard the leading thinkers of the Meiji intellectual world such as . . . Inoue Enryō." Michiko Y<sub>USA</sub>, *Zen & Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 32.
96. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 300–302.
97. Nishida wrote two versions of this essay: a shorter one in 1938 (Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū*, 14:387–418) and a more extensive one in 1940 (Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū*, 12:274–384).
98. Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū*, 12:426–434.
99. Ibid., 12:339.
100. Ibid., 12:339.
101. Ibid., 12:334.
102. Ibid., 12:337.
103. Ibid., 12:275.
104. Ibid., 12:286–290.
105. Ibid., 12:360.
106. Ibid., 12:297.
107. Ibid., 12:280 and 12:360.
108. Ibid., 12:356–359.
109. I chose to translate *li* as "universal" rather than as "principle" or "noumenon" since this rendition comes closest to Nishida's use of this term.
110. Nishida's notation *jirimuge* inverts the traditional Huayan phrase *rijimuge*.
111. Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū*, 10:381; Ibid., 12:367.
112. Inoue, *Inoue Enryō senshū daisankan*, 301–302.
113. Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, 51.
114. For the controversy about critical Buddhism, see Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
115. In his *Hihan bukkyō*, Hakamaya argues repeatedly that Chinese and Japanese Buddhism failed to critique nativistic ideologies the way Gautama, Confucius, and Descartes have done. Hakamaya, *Hihan bukkyō*, 11–17, 24–31,

and 70–81.

116. Ives discusses the moral danger and trappings of non-dualist rhetoric at length. Ives, *Imperial-Way Zen*, 67–82.

117. *Large Sutra of Perfected Wisdom*, T. 5.220.13b23. See Charles Muller, “空空,” *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, accessed 08/31/2011, <http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=空空>.

118. David Loy, “Evil as Good? A Reply to Brook Ziporyn,” *Philosophy East and West* 55, no. 2 (2005): 348–352.

119. Rein Raud, “Genesis of the Logic of Immediacy,” *Asian Philosophy* 13, nos. 2–3 (2003): 131–143.

120. Gereon Kopf, “Critical Comments on Nishida’s Use of Chinese Buddhism,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (2005): 313–329.

121. Masakatsu FUJITA, *Gendai tetsugaku toshite no Nishida Kitarō* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1998), 73 and 76. John C. Maraldo, “Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945),” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 13r. Gereon Kopf, “Language Games, Selflessness, and the Death of God: A/Theology in Contemporary Zen Philosophy and Deconstruction,” *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 160–178, 162–163.

122. Nishida, *Nishida kitarō zenshū*, 12:428.

123. Risaku MUTAI, *Mutai risaku chosakushu daiyonkan* (Tokyo: Kobushi shobō, 2001), 95–96.

124. Nishida refers to his philosophy as “pervasive criticism” (*tetteiteki hiyōshugi*, 徹底的批評主義). *Nishida kitarō zenshū*, 5:185.

125. Hajime TANABE, *Tanabe hajime zenshū* 9 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1963), 46–63.

126. The Chinese philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 300–230 BCE) suggested in the work named after him that the function of language is to include what is similar and to exclude what is dissimilar.

## Identity in Difference: Reading Nishida's Philosophy through the Lens of Shin Buddhism

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### INTRODUCTION: THE NEED TO (RE)CONSIDER NISHIDA'S PHILOSOPHY THROUGH JŌDO SHINSHŪ THOUGHT

*[Nishida's] friends have recorded his remarks that if all other books were to disappear, one could get by with only the Rinzaï-roku and the Tannishō, and that there are sections in the Tannishō that show the thrust of a master swordsman.*

—NISHITANI Keiji<sup>1</sup>

NISHIDA Kitarō (西田幾多郎, 1870–1945) is often described as Japan's first philosopher.<sup>2</sup> As Japan's "first philosopher" Nishida is also—more appropriately—considered the founder of the Kyoto school of philosophy (Kyoto *gakuha*, 京都学派).<sup>3</sup> Concerning Nishida's relationship with other thinkers in the Kyoto school, James W. Heisig notes, "Nishida was without a doubt the most creative and, not surprisingly, the one about whom the most has been written."<sup>4</sup>

Although Nishida's thought is typically described as being a Zen philosophy, this essay seeks to reappraise Nishida's philosophy by examining possible influences from his own Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land Buddhism, 浄土真宗) background and Jōdo Shinshū thought in general. In particular, this essay will argue that Nishida's concept of the "self-identity of absolute contradiction" (*zettai mujunteki jiko dōitsu*, 絶対矛盾的自己同一) may be better understood through Jōdo Shinshū doctrinal concepts rather than Zen concepts. Examining Jōdo Shinshū ideas of self and other through Jōdo Shinshū doctrinal formulations will shed new light on Nishida's idea of the "self-identity of absolute contradiction."

I start with some general background for discussing how Nishida has generally been studied as Zen philosophy. Then I go on to discuss Jōdo Shinshū influences in Nishida's life and in his philosophic project. I will show that throughout his life Nishida on both personal and professional levels was influenced by contacts with Shin Buddhists in Kyoto and his reading of Shin Buddhist texts such as the *Tannishō*.

*Problems in Understanding Nishida's Thought as Zen Philosophy*

One of the most common, albeit controversial, ways Nishida's philosophy has been studied in the West is as *the* philosophy of Zen Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and/or Eastern philosophy. Bernard Faure and Robert H. Sharf, among others, have argued that descriptions of Nishida's philosophical project as being representative of Zen Buddhism have dangerous implications.<sup>5</sup> Given that there are a number of similarities between Faure and Sharf's arguments, and Sharf's concession that Faure's work has rendered his arguments in this area "superfluous," the following paragraphs will present Faure's argument as well as some of the responses it has elicited.<sup>6</sup> While the following paragraphs are critical of Faure's reading of Nishida's philosophy, I agree with Faure that Nishida's philosophy is not an example of a Zen philosophy, although for different reasons. Whereas Faure questions the very existence of what is described as the Chan/Zen tradition, this essay limits its questions to the description of Nishida as a Zen philosopher.

Faure begins by questioning the notion that Nishida's philosophical project had the goal of elucidating a Zen philosophy. Faure traces this idea to SUZUKI Daisetsu's introduction in Nishida's first book, *Zen no kenkyū* (*An Inquiry into the Good*, 善の研究),<sup>7</sup> in which Suzuki claimed Nishida's philosophic mission was to introduce Zen Buddhism to the West.<sup>8</sup> More recently, introducing his 1990 translation of *Zen no Kenkyū*, ABE Masao states, "As both a philosopher and a Zen Buddhist, Nishida transformed Zen into philosophy for the first time in the history of this religious tradition and, also for the first time, transformed Western philosophy into a Zen-oriented philosophy."<sup>9</sup> Faure notes that it was not until late in Nishida's career, after he retired from teaching, that Nishida explicitly identified "his standpoint with Zen (and Pure Land)."<sup>10</sup> The question, as asked by Faure, is "whether Nishida actually set out to 'explain Zen to the West' and compare it with Western spirituality or whether he was merely perceived as doing so?"<sup>11</sup>

It is of interest here to note that Nishida does not explicitly refer to Zen in *An Inquiry into the Good*. In spite of this, both Suzuki and Abe introduce *An Inquiry into the Good* as having a mission of introducing Zen to the West. The closest Nishida comes to directly referencing Zen in *An Inquiry into the Good* is in the final paragraph when he states, “Vedantic teachings in India, Neo-Platonism, and the Gateway of the Holy path-type of Buddhism [*shōdōmon*, 聖道門] refer to knowing God, whereas Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism refer to loving and relying on God.”<sup>12</sup> Nishida’s use of the term *shōdōmon* complicates the idea that Nishida wrote *An Inquiry into the Good* with the intention of introducing a Zen philosophy. *Shōdōmon* is a term that in the Japanese Buddhist context is used predominantly in the Pure Land discourse of Hōnen (法然, 1133–1212) and Shinran (親鸞, 1173–1262) in conjunction with the terms self-power/other-power (*jiriki/tariki*, 自力/他力) to contrast Pure Land Buddhism from other schools of Buddhism, but rarely vice versa.<sup>13</sup> In short, there is no reference to Zen Buddhism in *An Inquiry into the Good*. Rather, Nishida uses Pure Land Buddhist terminology. Thus even in this work, we see some influence from Jōdo Shinshū that needs to be explored further.

Responding to Faure’s questions as to whether Nishida actually set out to provide Zen with a philosophic basis or if he is merely perceived as having such a goal, as well as the claim that nowhere in *An Inquiry into the Good* is Zen Buddhism explicitly referenced, Heisig surprisingly argues, “Ironically it is the lack of references to Zen in his [Nishida’s] writings that shows their importance.”<sup>14</sup> Heisig speculates that although Nishida gave up practicing *zazen* (seated meditation, 坐禪) at the age of thirty-five, he continued to see his philosophic project as being an “unfolding of Zen within himself.”<sup>15</sup>

While conceding Heisig’s argument that Nishida’s understanding of “pure experience” (a term Nishida borrows from American philosopher William James) was in fact influenced by Nishida’s understanding of Zen, this does not require that one accept Nishida’s philosophy as a philosophic expression of Zen Buddhism. Heisig himself presents two contradictory arguments concerning the idea that Nishida saw himself as a Zen philosopher. On one hand, Heisig says that Nishida had an implicit goal of elucidating a “rational foundation to Zen from outside of Zen.”<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Heisig argues that Nishida’s use of Buddhist terms does not necessarily imply that Nishida was giving a philosophic explanation of Zen. Heisig states: “Even where the occasional Buddhist

term appears . . . it is reading too much into it to think that Nishida had accomplished any kind of Buddhist-philosophical synthesis by using it. It was his disciples, beginning with Nishitani, who developed Nishida's intimations into philosophical ideas and related them to Buddhist ideas."<sup>17</sup> In this brief quotation Heisig—perhaps inadvertently—leads us to consider to what extent Nishitani's development of Nishida's ideas has influenced the study of Nishida. In other words, at present, is Nishida's thought being understood through the lens of Nishitani's ideas? Heisig notes that Nishida was diligent in his efforts to ensure that Zen was not a "grist for his scholarly career."<sup>18</sup>

More recently, another of Nishida's commentators, Robert J.J. Wargo, makes clear that Nishida, although influenced by Zen, was not seeking to provide a philosophic account of Zen experience. Wargo explains: "Nishida's aims are different. He is not out to translate the content of 'enlightenment' in academic terms or anything of the sort. While it seems clear that he regards the religious experience as the deepest and most meaningful of experiences, he is not attempting to lead the reader to such an experience nor to relate accounts of the experience to others. What he does try to do is give a precise formulation of the structure of the world that takes into account this kind of experience."<sup>19</sup> Wargo's understanding of Nishida's goals provides a useful point from which to begin a reexamination of Nishida. One can acknowledge that Zen Buddhism influenced Nishida's philosophic project without claiming Nishida's philosophy is a Zen Buddhist philosophy. This allows for and acknowledges the need to explore other areas of influence on Nishida's philosophic project.

While not the focus of this essay, given the tremendous impact Nishida's philosophy had at the time of the Japanese imperial campaign, it is imperative that studies of Nishida's work consider what if any role Nishida's philosophy had in these efforts. In this vein, Faure argues that the rhetoric of the Kyoto school, including that of Nishida, has remained "trapped in Orientalist and nativist structures."<sup>20</sup> Nishida often refers to the emperor and the imperial throne as being central to the *kokutai* (national polity, 国体) of Japan. However, as Agustín Jacinto Zavala claims, the imperial throne that Nishida locates at the center of his philosophical project is mythical rather than historical.<sup>21</sup> Nishida's language, however, when talking about the role of the emperor, is at best ambiguous. Consider the following passage from a lecture Nishida

presented to Emperor Hirohito in January 1941, in celebration of the New Year:

In the history of our country, the whole and the individual usually did not stand in opposition. Rather, [history] has unfolded with the imperial family (*kōshitsu* [皇室]) as its center, while the individual and the whole mutually self-negated. Certainly, there were times when the power of the “whole” overshadowed that of the individual, but each time we returned to the founding spirit of Japan (*chōkoku no seishin* [彫刻の精神]), and by maintaining the central presence of the imperial family, we took a step forward into the new era and created a new epoch. I said earlier that history moves on from the present, which contains within itself the past and future, to another present, which contains the past and the future. In the case of our country, I think that the imperial family has been playing the role of the “present” that encompasses within itself the past and the future. For this reason, I think that for us to return to the original founding spirit of Japan is not just to go back to ancient times but to take a step forward into an ever-new era. I humbly submit that “restoration of the old ways” (*fukko* [復古]) ought to mean “thoroughgoing renewal” (*ishin* [維新]).<sup>22</sup>

In this passage, Nishida makes clear that he sees the imperial family as being central to the identity of Japanese people. What is not so clear is that the imperial family Nishida describes is not based in history but rather in myth. Nishida’s ambiguous word choice may also have a more practical reason: many in the Japanese Army considered Nishida and other members of the Kyoto school subversive. Nishida, aware of the rather precarious position he was in, was thus perhaps deliberately ambiguous. Nishida, as Y<sub>USA</sub> Michiko notes, questioned if Emperor Hirohito was able to understand the aforementioned speech.<sup>23</sup>

Such comments are particularly troubling when read in light of the escalation of the Pacific War in 1941, Japan’s continued efforts to colonize East Asia, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. While we cannot blame Nishida for events he could not possibly have predicted, it is important to acknowledge how this passage may be interpreted at present. In this style, Faure notes that while Nishida’s philosophy may not be intrinsically nationalistic, he does “question the readiness with which this rhetoric [Nishida’s use of Zen and other Buddhist sources] can lend itself to appropriation by nationalistic ideologies.”<sup>24</sup> The ease with which this appropriation occurs combined with Nishida’s simplistic reductions, for example East versus West, lead Faure to conclude

the ideological function of Nishida's work "undermines the validity of 'Nishida philosophy' (*Nishida tetsugaku* [西田哲学])."<sup>25</sup>

Heisig concedes that Nishida's philosophy "lent validity to the question of the identity of the Japanese spirit."<sup>26</sup> Heisig further concedes that Nishida's "idea of the nation shared with the ideological propaganda of the day important assumptions about the imperial household and the special mission of the Japanese people vis-à-vis the other peoples of Asia."<sup>27</sup> Heisig, unlike Faure, sees Nishida's political philosophy as an aberration from his larger philosophical project, which was not well attuned to historical realities. In Heisig's interpretation, therefore, Nishida is faulted for failing to realize or even ignoring his own limitations.<sup>28</sup>

While questions concerning Nishida's (and other members of the Kyoto school's) nationalism and support of the Japanese imperial campaign are intriguing, they tend only to focus on Nishida's political philosophy, which as previously noted was not well attuned to historical realities.<sup>29</sup> This article is concerned with Nishida's philosophy as it pertains to the relationship of self and other and the possibility that Jōdo Shinshū thought influenced Nishida's thought in this area.

#### *Jōdo Shinshū Themes and Influences in Nishida's Life and Philosophy*

Shortly after the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida published a short essay, "Gutoku Shinran" 愚禿親鸞, in which he expressed his admiration for Shinran.<sup>30</sup> The importance of this brief work, as Dennis Hirota points out, is that in relation to the corpus of Nishida writings this essay "provides evidence of Nishida's lifelong interest in Shinran and the importance of Shinran to his philosophy of religion."<sup>31</sup> However, after the publication of this essay Nishida does not mention Shinran again in his writings for nearly three decades (with the exception of brief mentions of Shinran and the Pure Land Buddhist tradition in his diaries and letters). Hirota, following HASE Shōtō, speculates that this silence is due to "Nishida's awareness of his inability to treat Shinran's thought within the logic he developed in his middle period based on the context of absolute nothingness."<sup>32</sup>

After nearly three decades of not mentioning Shinran in his philosophical writings, it is striking that Shinran occupies a central role in Nishida's final completed essay, "Basho-teki ronri to shūkyō teki sekai-kan" ("The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview," 場所の論理と宗教の世界観).<sup>33</sup> TAKEMURA Makio notes that in this essay, Nishida



discusses with ease Zen, Jōdo Shinshū, and Christianity. Takemura explains that upon closer examination he came to believe that the roots of this essay were not found in Zen, but rather in Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>34</sup>

That Nishida would devote considerable energies to Pure Land Buddhism when detailing his philosophy of religion shows the influence that Pure Land Buddhism had on his life. Nishida's family, as Takemura points out, were followers of Pure Land Buddhism. The house where Nishida was born was near Chōraku Temple, a temple of the Ōtani sect of Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>35</sup> In the very first sentence of his "Gutoku Shinran," Nishida notes that his mother was a devout Pure Land Buddhist.<sup>36</sup> Yusa, in her biography of Nishida, describes his mother, Tosa, as "a woman of iron will, a devout Pure Land Buddhist, with a heart of gold." Nishida, according to Yusa, "as a young child grew up imbibing his mother's generosity and religious devotion through her milk (which he did not give up until the age of three or four)."<sup>37</sup> Yusa's use of language is more than poetic waxing, as Takemura details: "When Nishida would pester his mother to breastfeed him, his mother usually would say, 'If you can recite Rennyō's *Letters*, I will feed you.' Then Nishida would easily recite one of Rennyō's letters, rub his mother's bosom, and then his mother, satisfied, would breastfeed him."<sup>38</sup> While this is highly anecdotal, and other similar stories substitute *Tannishō* for Rennyō's *Letters*, the point is that from a young age Nishida was aware of, and on a basic level influenced by, Jōdo Shinshū teachings.

That *Tannishō* is often substituted for Rennyō's *Letters* in the above stories is not surprising, given that in his later years Nishida would express great interest in the *Tannishō*. Takemura notes that there is a genuine lack of consensus as to when Nishida first read *Tannishō*: some claim Nishida encountered it for the first time while enrolled as a special student in the philosophy department of Tokyo University; others claim he read it on his own. However, it is known that when Nishida was teaching at the Fourth Higher School he would on occasion skim through its pages.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of his family background and early exposure to Shin thought, scholars have tended to focus on Nishida's philosophic project almost exclusively as a philosophy of Zen. Jōdo Shinshū, we have already seen, was a salient presence in his childhood home. Contrast this with Nishida's experience with Zen—he began serious practice in 1897, was given the lay Buddhist name Sunshin 寸心 in

1901, and in 1905 ceased practicing Zen; from 1907 there is no mention of Zen in Nishida's diary.<sup>40</sup> In 1910, Nishida and his family moved to Kyoto as Nishida had been appointed assistant professor of ethics at Kyoto Imperial University (present-day Kyoto University). During his first week in Kyoto Nishida and his family spent some time sightseeing. Notable on the list of places Nishida and his family visited was the Higashi-honganji 東本願寺, head temple of the Shinshu Ōtani-ha sect 真宗大谷派 of Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>41</sup> Absent from this list are the famous Zen temples of Kyoto. Finally, after Nishida's death, his ashes and bones were divided into thirds and buried at three sites: his family's temple in Unoke (Jōdo Shinshū), Tōkeiji in Kamakura (Rinzai Zen), and Myōshinji in Kyoto (Rinzai Zen).<sup>42</sup>

From this we can conclude that Zen and Pure Land Buddhism both occupied prominent roles in Nishida's life. The near exclusive focus on the influence of Zen on Nishida's philosophy, or the idea that Nishida had as his goal elucidating a Zen philosophy, thus ignores the impact and influence that Jōdo Shinshū thought and practice had on his life.

While acknowledging the influence of Zen on Nishida's thought, particularly his early philosophic thought, there is an increasing recognition of a need to understand how Nishida uses Shinran's conceptions of Pure Land Buddhist thought in his philosophic project. At the same time it is not the case that Nishida's thought is an example of a Shin philosophy, any more than it is of a Zen philosophy. Rather, Nishida's philosophy was influenced by his experiences of growing up in a Pure Land Buddhist household, and Jōdo Shinshū doctrinal concepts provide a useful hermeneutic lens for understanding Nishida's philosophy because he himself made use of Shin concepts to understand Zen.

Shin Buddhist scholars, according to Heisig, have historically dismissed Nishida's thought for "having disagreed with traditional interpretations of Shinran."<sup>43</sup> In the rare instances when scholars have documented a connection between Pure Land thought and Nishida's philosophy, it has become all too common to simply note the connection in passing without further development. For example, Hirota, explaining the dualism of self-power and other-power in Pure Land Buddhism, states, "Nishida Kitarō sketches a broad vision of the advance of human knowledge as an overcoming of 'subjective delusions' and a move toward true knowledge that is also love, employing the dichotomy of self-power and other-power."<sup>44</sup> After noting the connection

in this one sentence Hirota returns to his discussion of Shinran without probing further Nishida's understanding of Shinran's thought or even explaining why the inclusion of Nishida's thought was necessary in the scheme of Hirota's paper.

One final reason that may lead many scholars to avoid a sustained discussion of Nishida's thought is the difficulty of reading Nishida. UEDA Shizuteru has suggested that "it is as if the 5,000 pages of Nishida's writings were a single essay which took him a lifetime to write, so that the conclusion of any particular published unit is a mere fiction, soon to turn into the starting point for the next step in the argument."<sup>45</sup>

*The Relationship of Self and Other as a Concept for Understanding Nishida*

Nishida's philosophic project was influenced by a number of sources, including Pure Land and Zen. Recognizing that there are few works that have explored the influence of Jōdo Shinshū thought on Nishida's philosophy, this essay attempts to explore the relationship of self (religious practitioner) and other (Amida Buddha) as it relates to Nishida's concept of the "self-identity of absolute contradiction."

The self-identity of absolute contradiction, according to Gereon Kopf, is the key to understanding Nishida's philosophy.<sup>46</sup> Nishida explains the self-identity of absolute contradiction as follows:

The self is that which acts. Action arises in, and from, a mutual relationship between things. Action presupposes a relationship of mutual negation, wherein one negates the other and the other negates the first. This mutual negation is simultaneously a mutual affirmation. Each thing realizes its own uniqueness. That is, each thing becomes itself. That two things stand opposed to each other and negate each other means that they are mutually conjoined and compose one form.<sup>47</sup>

Scholars have already noted the compatibility of this idea with general Mahāyāna theories of non-duality. For example, Kopf explains the self-identity of absolute contradiction means that "the absolute is defined by and expresses itself in its opposite the relative, and the transcendence in immanence."<sup>48</sup> In other words, that which is absolute does not exist apart from the relative, and the relative does not exist apart from the absolute. This description seems to be rooted in and echoing the well-known theory of the two truths.<sup>49</sup>

Although conforming to general Mahāyāna descriptions of Buddhism, Nishida often refers to Pure Land doctrine and concepts

when explaining the self-identity of absolute contradiction. It is therefore necessary to examine how Shin Buddhism explains the relationship between the absolute and the relative.

The Shin Buddhist tradition seems to have understood the relationship between religious practitioner and buddha in two radically different ways.<sup>50</sup> First, Shinran believes that a person of *shinjin* 信心 is equal to the buddhas.<sup>51</sup> Shinran makes this clear in a letter to Jōshin when he states: “the person of true *shinjin* is said to be equal to the Buddhas. He is also regarded as being the same as Maitreya, who is in [the rank of] succession to Buddhahood.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Rennyō (蓮如, 1415–1499), the eighth head priest of Jōdo Shinshū, describes the relationship between religious practitioners and buddha using the cryptic phrase *butsu-bon ittai* (仏凡一体, the oneness of Buddha’s mind and foolish beings).

However, Yuien-bo, the author of the *Tannishō*, records that Shinran “gives himself as an example in order to make us realize that we are in delusion, knowing nothing at all of the depths of our karmic evil or the vastness of Amida’s benevolence.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly in the “Postscript” of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証, Shinran, quoting Daochuo, describes a process in which “those who have been born first [in the Pure Land] guide those who come later.”<sup>54</sup> Shinran throughout his writings argues, “Nirvana is attained without severing blind passions.”<sup>55</sup> In these statements, it becomes clear that within the Pure Land Buddhist tradition we find two seemingly contradictory conceptions concerning the relationship of sentient beings with Amida, the Pure Land, and nirvana; the first statement is that of equality, the second is one of inequality.

These contradictory understandings of the relationship between sentient beings and buddha can be used to illuminate Nishida’s explanation of the self-identity of absolute contradiction. For example, Nishida states, “That two things stand opposed to each other and negate each other means that they are mutually conjoined and compose one form.” Shinran maintains that sentient beings are both equal and not equal to the buddhas. Nishida similarly argues that through a process of mutual negation and affirmation, a unity between the absolute and the relative is achieved and the uniqueness of both self and other are maintained. The goal of this essay is to show in greater detail how Jōdo Shinshū doctrinal concepts are useful in elucidating the meaning of Nishida’s philosophy.

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*Overview*

The following sections expand on and seek to substantiate the claims outlined above. The next section explores how Nishida conceived of the relationship of self and other by examining Nishida's thought and the Shin Buddhist influences on his thought. Recognizing that philosophic work does not occur in a vacuum—that there is no Archimedean point from which philosophizing occurs—Nishida's works will be read in light of certain events in his life. Reading Nishida's philosophy in this way will point to possible influences of Shinran's thought and Jōdo Shinshū religious experiences in Nishida's life.

In order to understand the significance of this aspect of Nishida's philosophy more fully, we next focus on Shinran and Jōdo Shinshū thought concerning the relationship of self and other. The notion that sentient beings are both equal to and different from buddhas will be explored further. Additionally, a discussion of the metaphors Shinran uses when describing Amida and the Pure Land path will be explored. Special consideration will be given to the idea that the Pure Land path is an intersubjective path. Intersubjectivity in this context is understood as the recognition that the individual grows in and through relationships with others. Furthermore, intersubjectivity maintains that in recognizing the other, we need to see the other as both "different and alike."<sup>56</sup> This theory will be especially useful in elucidating the concept of *butsu-bon ittai* in that the oneness is not a mystical union between sentient beings and buddha, but rather a non-dual one in which differences are maintained. Up until now, Shin Buddhist scholars have largely ignored this concept, in part because the necessary hermeneutic tools have not been available. Thus, in this section the concept of *butsu-bon ittai* will be read in light of feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity, and doing so will help to clarify the idea of oneness between sentient beings and buddha.

In the last section these two—Shin thought and intersubjectivity—are brought together, allowing us to reread Nishida in light of Jōdo Shinshū thought. This rereading and reconsideration of Nishida's thought fills a lacuna present in both studies of Nishida's philosophy and Shin Buddhist studies, giving sustained attention to Nishida's understanding and use of Pure Land Buddhist sources. This study also contributes to the field of Buddhist studies more generally, exploring the dynamics of the intersubjective relationship between religious practitioner and buddha.<sup>57</sup> Even more broadly, this study contributes

to what James Heisig has described as a “broadening of the map” of philosophy by exploring the understanding of a person in a philosophy of non-being.<sup>58</sup>

#### SHIN BUDDHIST INFLUENCES ON NISHIDA’S THOUGHT

It has been well documented that Nishida practiced Zen Buddhism for a number of years. Nishida’s relationship with Pure Land Buddhism, however, has not been as well documented, particularly in English-language publications. Within Japanese publications, as Kopf reports, recent years have seen renewed interest in how Nishida’s thought can be applied to post-modern issues, such as environmentalism.<sup>59</sup> This shift marks particularly exciting times for Nishida scholars as it comes after decades of focus on the role of Nishida philosophy in Japanese nationalism and militarism in the period leading up to and including World War II.<sup>60</sup> An additional part of this shift has been to reexamine influences on Nishida’s philosophy based on close readings of Nishida’s writings, both philosophic and personal correspondence. Of particular interest to this essay has been the examination of Nishida’s use of Shin Buddhist sources.

Shin Buddhism was a constant presence during Nishida’s formative years, and both Shin and Zen were present in Nishida’s adult life as well. While a number of works have examined the role of Zen in Nishida’s philosophic project, with the exception of recent Japanese scholarship, an examination of the influence Shin Buddhism had on Nishida’s philosophy remains for the most part unexplored. Thus, while acknowledging the role of Zen in Nishida’s philosophy we will focus here almost exclusively on Nishida’s use of Shin Buddhism in his writing and on possible Shin influences in Nishida’s thought, drawing largely on the work of TAKEMURA Makio, professor of modern Buddhist studies at Tōyō University, and FUJITA Masakatsu, chair of the Department of Japanese Philosophy at Kyoto University.

The following sections will show that Shin Buddhism had a larger role than previous English-language studies have acknowledged. Doing so will make clear not only the necessity of this reconsideration, but also why Shin Buddhist thought is a better way to understand the key concepts of Nishida philosophy, particularly the self-identity of absolute contradiction. We begin by exploring Nishida’s early work, as represented by *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911) and “Gutoku Shinran” (1911). This is followed by an examination of Nishida’s later work,

as represented by “The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview” (1945). This allows us to understand Nishida’s non-duality, particularly as it relates to the relationship between the religious practitioner and buddha.

#### *Shin Buddhist Influences on Nishida’s Early Works*

Nishida’s first book, *An Inquiry into the Good*, was published on February 6, 1911. *An Inquiry into the Good*, as Yusa explains, was greeted with enthusiasm among philosophical circles. For example, TAKAHASHI Satomi (高橋里美, 1886–1964), then a graduate student at Tokyo Imperial University, stated in a review that *An Inquiry into the Good* “marked the first time since the Meiji Restoration that a Japanese thinker had offered the fruit of serious philosophical reflection.”<sup>61</sup> The staying power and popularity of this work, however, came in 1921 when popular author KURATA Hyakuzō (倉田百三, 1891–1943) described Nishida’s work as one that brings “pure joy.”<sup>60</sup>

Nishida wrote *An Inquiry into the Good* during a period of his life when he was devoting much of his energy to Zen practice. In spite of being devoted to Zen practice while writing it, Nishida does not refer to Zen in this book. UEDA Shizuteru attempts an apology for Nishida, explaining that, given the nature of Nishida’s philosophical project in *An Inquiry into the Good*, he had to leave Zen behind if his philosophy was to be truly a philosophy of Zen: “The fact that Zen is able to become non-Zen and engage in philosophy is a self-development of ‘Zen which is not-Zen, and therefore Zen.’ It is in the original nature of Zen to empty itself and manifest various forms, engaging in all the activities of daily life.”<sup>63</sup>

Ueda argues that Nishida’s philosophy is not a philosophy of Zen Buddhism. It is, however, an expression of Zen containing the full force of Nishida’s enlightenment experience. Ueda further explains that Zen is not philosophy in that the goal of Zen practice is engagement with the world. Zen is not a philosophical discourse, and yet Nishida’s philosophy, according to Ueda, bears the traces of Nishida’s enlightenment. In Nishida’s thought, Zen has been transformed into philosophy. “Nishida philosophy neither signifies the philosophical understanding of Zen nor the entry of Zen thought into the realm of philosophy. Zen has left itself behind to engage in philosophy while opening up the field of philosophical inquiry within itself. Zen which demands that thought be left behind has embarked on a creative task; not as Zen,

but as thought.”<sup>64</sup> Nishida had thus successfully abandoned himself to *mu* (nothingness, 無), and realized the truth that all Zen practitioners must realize, “that one must leave behind all doctrines, even those of Zen Buddhism.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Ueda, Zen provided Nishida with the space to question philosophy. However, Zen could not provide the answer to Nishida’s questions. Nishida’s philosophy therefore became the embodiment of his Zen experience.<sup>66</sup> That is, Nishida’s philosophy was not a manual for how to achieve awakening, but rather Nishida’s philosophy was an expression of Zen awakening. It is for this reason that Nishida acknowledged that there was something of Zen “in the background” of his thinking.<sup>67</sup> Given this, there is no reason to question whether or not Zen thought and experiences shaped Nishida’s philosophy.

Nevertheless, it is also possible to raise the issue of Jōdo Shinshū thought and practice in both Nishida’s philosophy and in Nishida’s experience of Zen. Even during the period of his life in which Nishida was most devout in his Zen practice, Nishida remained interested in the happenings within Jōdo Shinshū intellectual circles. For example, in January 1898, Nishida went to Kyoto to take part in the New Year *sesshin* (intensive meditation retreat, 接心) at the Zen temple Myōshinji. On January 5, while still in Kyoto, Nishida visited a bookstore where he purchased three books: *Taikōroku* 退耕録, which dealt with issues of education; *Mujintō* 無尽燈, the academic journal of the Ōtani school of Shin Buddhism; and a book containing autobiographies of Zen monks, of which the title is unknown.<sup>68</sup> Writing about Nishida’s experiences at this *sesshin* Yusa notes that Nishida was beginning to question himself and his capabilities as a Zen practitioner. However, he quickly reaffirmed his commitment to Zen practice, to the extent that he “took a few extra days in Kyoto, thus missing the school ceremony that marked the beginning of a new term.”<sup>69</sup>

Nishida’s reason for buying *Mujintō*, however, may not have been an interest Pure Land Buddhism itself. YAMAMOTO Annosuke 山本安之助, who Nishida knew from his days as a student at Tokyo Imperial University, had published an article entitled “Shūkyō to risei” (Religion and Reason, 宗教と理性), and Nishida would publish his response to this article in the June issue of *Mujintō*. In his response Nishida criticizes Yamamoto for failing to consider religious experience in his article.<sup>70</sup> This biographical detail is worth noting: while Yamamoto’s article does not explicitly address Shin Buddhism, Nishida was aware



of—and on occasion participated in—the discussions occurring in Shin Buddhist academic circles.

Nishida's connections with Zen and Pure Land, however, were not limited to an awareness of what was occurring in Shin Buddhist circles. Nishida came to understand Zen's foundational concepts, such as *mu*, through Shinran's thought. In a letter to WATSUJI Tetsuro, Nishida writes: "Although I have a deep-seated longing for a religious life, a merely formal religious life that denies humanity is not something that I would embrace. I don't even think that such is the ideal of human existence. What I mean by 'nothingness' (*mu*) is closer to the warm heart that Shinran possessed, which acknowledges everyone's freedom and embraces every sinner (although I don't know whether Shinran actually put it into words this way)."<sup>71</sup> Based on this letter, Takemura argues, "Nishida, in this passage, clearly explained *mu* through Shinran. *Mu* is usually thought to originate in Zen; [however] for Nishida, in reality, this was not always so."<sup>72</sup> Although this letter was written in 1930, it shows that Shin Buddhism was more than an academic interest for Nishida. Shin Buddhism was a hermeneutic device Nishida used to make sense of his Zen practice.

In the fourth and final section of *An Inquiry into the Good* Nishida discusses his ideas concerning religion. Here we find that Nishida's basic philosophy of religion also shows the influence of Jōdo Shinshū thought. Earlier it was pointed out that Nishida describes two types of Buddhism, the *shōdōmon* (gate of the path of sages) and the Pure Land path, in this section of *An Inquiry into the Good*. It was noted that these terms are used almost exclusively in Pure Land discourse to distinguish Pure Land paths of awakening from other Buddhist paths. Takemura notes that subtly imbedded within this paragraph is another phrase that indicates Jōdo Shinshū influence on Nishida's thought:<sup>73</sup> "In distinct individual phenomena, learning and morality are bathed in the glorious light of other-power, and religion touches the limitless buddha itself [*mugen no Butsuda sono mono*, 絶対無限の佛陀其者] extending throughout the universe."<sup>74</sup> Takemura argues that the phrase "the limitless buddha itself" corresponds with the religious thought of KIYOZAWA Manshi (清沢満之, 1863–1903), a leading Shin Buddhist scholar during the late nineteenth century. For example, Kiyozawa described religion as being the "limitless working of the inconceivable (*zettai mugen no miyōyō*, 絶対無限の妙用)."<sup>75</sup> Nishida does not cite Kiyozawa's work in *An Inquiry to the Good*. However, Fujita explains, Nishida was familiar

with Kiyozawa's work and in his dairies had expressed a basic agreement with Kiyozawa's understanding of religion.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Nishida references Shinran twice in *An Inquiry into the Good*, in conjunction with quotes from the *Tannishō*.<sup>77</sup> While this number is not striking on its own, combined with the fact that Nishida, as mentioned above, does not reference Dōgen, Rinzai, or Zen thought in *An Inquiry into the Good*, we once again see that at this stage in his life, although practicing Zen Nishida was familiar with and continued to be influenced by Shin Buddhism.

Nishida closes the fourth section of *An Inquiry into the Good* with a chapter titled "Knowledge and Love" ("Chi to ai," 知と愛), which was originally published as an independent article in the August 1907 issue of *Seishinkai* 精神界, a journal founded by Kiyozawa in 1901.<sup>78</sup> The goal of *Seishinkai* was promoting Kiyozawa's religious ideals, namely the need for spiritual reform.<sup>79</sup> Yusa notes that Nishida wrote this chapter while grieving the death of his second daughter, Yūko, from bronchitis. She was five years old, and her "death shook Nishida profoundly."<sup>80</sup> Further, Yusa asserts that Nishida realized that by means of philosophy alone he could not find a reason for Yūko's death, and that it was Nishida's mother, sustained by her faith in Amida Buddha, who consoled Nishida. As a result, "Nishida threw himself into the ocean of divine compassion."<sup>81</sup> That Nishida would find solace in Shin Buddhism suggests that Shin Buddhism, although not satisfying him intellectually—as is evidenced by the fact that Nishida does not credit Shin as functioning in his philosophic project—was a pneumatic force, that is a vital energy, in Nishida's life.

Shortly after the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida published "Gutoku Shinran" (Foolish Stubble-Haired Shinran, 愚禿親鸞) in April 1911 as part of collection of essays compiled by the alumni of Ōtani University in commemoration of the six hundred fiftieth anniversary of Shinran's death—further indication that Nishida was actively involved in Shin intellectual circles at this time. Coincidentally, 1911 also marked the year Nishida began teaching part time at Ōtani, in addition to his position at Kyoto University.<sup>82</sup>

In "Gutoku Shinran," Nishida places great emphasis on the role of religious transformation. For example, Nishida writes: "Every person, no matter who he is, must return to the original body of his own naked self; he must let go from the cliff's ledge and come back to life after perishing, or he cannot know them [wisdom and virtue]. In other words,

only the person who has been able to experience deeply what it is to be 'foolish/stubble-haired' can know wisdom and virtue."<sup>83</sup> There are a number of ways in which to interpret this paragraph. Those familiar with Zen may find similar concepts within Nishida's writing, particularly the phrase "let go from the cliff's ledge and come back to life after perishing" with the concept of *shinjin datsuraku* (身心脱落, casting off of body and mind).<sup>84</sup> Shin Buddhists, on the other hand, may find this phrase echoing the transformation that occurs upon the abandoning of one's own efforts at enlightenment and entrusting in the workings of Amida Buddha's primal vow.

This Nishida article gives two examples to explain his point, one from Zen used to introduce the problem, and one from Shinran's writing to explain the effect and meaning of religious transformation. Nishida's citation of Shinran is the oft-quoted passage from *Tannishō*, in which Shinran says: "When I consider deeply the Vow of Amida, which arose from five kalpas of profound thought, I realize that it was entirely for the sake of myself alone! Then how I am filled with the gratitude for the Primal Vow, in which Amida resolved to save me, though I am burdened with such heavy karma."<sup>85</sup> Nishida argues in this quote one finds the fundamental significance of Shin Buddhism. That is, no matter how evil a person is, he or she can be saved by the workings of Amida Buddha, and that at the moment of religious transformation one realizes that Amida's vow was made specifically for one's self alone.<sup>86</sup>

One final consideration of "Gutoku Shinran" shows Nishida was interested in and influenced by Shin thought and scholarship. As Fujita points out, Nishida's writing style in "Gutoku Shinran" is similar to Kiyozawa's style of writing in the *Seishinkai*.<sup>87</sup>

From the above, it is clear that Nishida was familiar with both Zen and Pure Land texts. We also see that Nishida was influenced by his contemporaries with ties to both Zen and Pure Land thinkers. Based on this it is possible to conclude that Nishida was familiar with both Zen and Pure Land religiosity. As Nishida's philosophic project progressed, following the publication of *An Inquiry into the Good* and "Gutoku Shinran," Nishida would not make any explicit reference to Shin Buddhism in his writing for thirty-four years, until "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview" (1945).

*Shin Buddhism and “The Logic of Topos”*

“The Logic of Topos” is one of Nishida’s most difficult works. Heisig explains that in this essay Nishida sets out to summarize his philosophy for himself.<sup>88</sup> Heisig points out that Nishida’s summary is not done for the benefit of his readers. He elaborates: “Rather than tie up the loose ends of his thinking, as he may have intended to do, it [“The Logic of Topos”] wraps up everything in a *furoshiki*—the way he must have each day for years when he set off for the university, tossing pencils and papers and books in and joining the corners of the cloth into a knot for carrying. The *furoshiki* is religion.”<sup>89</sup> What Heisig is saying here is that Nishida came to see religion as the unifying force of his philosophy. That Nishida would engage in an explicit discussion of religion is not at all surprising when we consider that Nishida’s goal from the very beginning was to provide an explanation of the world that allowed for religious experience. Nishida’s writings, particularly his early and late writings, reveal that Nishida often refers to Buddhism to explain key philosophical concepts. Kopf’s analysis of Nishida’s use of Buddhist sources reveals that Nishida refers to Tendai 天台, Kegon 華嚴, Zen, Pure Land, and general Mahāyāna texts such as the *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* (Jpn. *Daijōkishinron*, 大乘起信論). Kopf explains further that Nishida’s “usage of the *Tannishō* reflects a greater familiarity with the text, he confines references to other text [sic] to occasional quotations to well-known passages such as Linji Yixuan’s (Japanese *Rinzai Gigen* [臨濟義玄]) (810/15–866/7) ‘have a shit/take a piss [*ashisōnyō*, 糞屎送尿]’ and Dōgen’s (1200–1253 [道元]) ‘to know the self is to forget the self [*jiko o narafu toifu wa, jiko o wa surrunari*, 自己をならふといふは、自己をわする >なり].”<sup>90</sup> Regarding Nishida’s use and familiarity with the *Tannishō*, we have already noted that Nishida found solace in it when mourning the death of his daughter, and it is the only Buddhist text Nishida refers to in *An Inquiry into the Good*. Kopf concludes, “Nishida does not cite Buddhist ideas or texts to analyze, interpret, or apply them, but to illustrate his own philosophy and to claim the Buddhist tradition as his heritage.”<sup>91</sup>

In “The Logic of Topos,” Nishida refers to Pure Land, Zen, general Mahāyāna, and Christianity. In a letter to HISAMATSU Shin’ichi 久松真一, one of his first students at Kyoto University and a well-known Zen Buddhist thinker, Nishida explained that in “The Logic of Topos,” “he had grappled with ‘the roots of life and death’ . . . had spent some time delineating ‘the uniqueness of Buddhism as distinguished from

Christianity,' and had 'touched on the excellent points of Buddhism.'"<sup>92</sup> What is striking about Nishida's use of Buddhist sources when read in conjunction with Kopf's description is not only that they highlight the excellent points of Buddhism, but also reinforce Nishida's ideals regarding the philosophy of religion.

While there is at present a growing consensus among scholars that Nishida's thought in "The Logic of Topos" was influenced by Shin Buddhism, there remains debate concerning how much influence. Additionally, the claim that Nishida's interest in Pure Land was lifelong has been questioned. Central to this debate are two terms, *gyakutaiō* (inverse correspondence, 逆対応) and *byōjōtei* (everyday awareness, 平常底), which as Kopf notes "are characteristic of, and central to, Nishida's very late philosophy, which he develops in the second half of his *Logic of Bassho* [Topos]."<sup>93</sup> Kopf explains that these terms "constitute the most radical expressions of Nishida's non-dualism; the former term [*gyakutaiō*] referring to the non-dualism between the absolute and the relative, the latter [*byōjōtei*] the non-dualism between transcendence and immanence."<sup>94</sup> In other words, *gyakutaiō* refers to the relationship between religious practitioner and the absolute. *Byōjōtei* refers to the fact that religious truths are not external from the world, but rather found in the mundane reality of life. While Nishida himself equates *byōjōtei* with a number of well-known passages from the Zen tradition, such as Rinzai's "have a shit/take a piss," a number of scholars have argued that this term has roots in Shin Buddhism as well. Although these two terms both seem to have similarities with both Pure Land and Zen teaching, it is important to remember that these ideas represent Nishida's glossing of Pure Land and Zen texts, and not traditional interpretations of either tradition. In short, *byōjōtei* and *gyakutaiō* are Nishida's own ideas.<sup>95</sup>

Regarding the connection of *byōjōtei* and Shin Buddhist thought, Takemura explains that "of course *byōjōtei* is connected with Zen, but it is also connected with Pure Land as well."<sup>96</sup> Fujita's argument echoes Takemura's argument; when Fujita first explains *byōjōtei* through Rinzai's remarks concerning relieving oneself, he notes that the idea of *byōjōtei* is found in the Jōdo Shinshū concept of *jinen hōni* (natural working of the dharma, 自然法爾).<sup>97</sup> A connection has also been made between Shinran's thought and *gyakutaiō*. Surprisingly, this connection is not made by Fujita or Takemura, but rather by KOSAKA Kunitsugu, who is usually reluctant to note a connection between Pure Land thought

and Nishida philosophy. For example, Kosaka argues that Nishida was not aware that his thought bore any resemblance to Pure Land thought until it was pointed out to him by D. T. Suzuki and MUDAI Risaku, another of Nishida's students.<sup>98</sup> It thus comes as a surprise to see that Kosaka writes that the inspiration for "*gyakutaiō* is found in the *Tannishō*."<sup>99</sup> Kosaka believes that the inspiration for this idea comes from Shinran's oft-quoted phrase, "Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will."<sup>97</sup> Kosaka argues that this phrase shows "there is no limit to the Buddha's compassion."<sup>100</sup> Thus, Kosaka suggests a correspondence between Nishida's non-dualism of absolute and relative (*gyakutaiō*) and the idea that Amida's vow is made for the evil person.

Nishida's thought here resembles the well-known Shin Buddhist concept of *nishu jinshin* (two aspects of [the] deep mind, 二種深心). *Nishu jinshin* is the description of the realization that one's own person is unable to awaken the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land due to one's karmic evilness. Simultaneous with this realization is total entrusting and rejoicing in the fact that one has attained birth in the Pure Land, brought about by the activity of Amida Buddha's primal vow. Simply put, at the very moment one rejoices in the assurance of birth in the Pure Land through the activity of Amida Buddha, one also realizes that one's existence is controlled by samsaric delusions and passions.<sup>101</sup>

Turning our attention to "The Logic of Topos" itself we see that, not counting the sections devoted to Pure Land and Zen Buddhism, the number of times Nishida explicitly refers to Pure Land and Zen are nearly equal (17 Pure Land, and 18 Zen). What is most striking is the language Nishida uses when discussing Pure Land and Zen. For example, when Nishida begins describing the logic of Zen Buddhism he states, "Regarding Zen Buddhism, which has exerted a great deal of influence on Japanese culture, I must defer to specialists."<sup>100</sup> Later in this same section Nishida attempts to use Shinran's teaching to explain his understanding of Zen. Nishida writes, "The logic of paradox is not irrationality. It is, in Shinran's words, to take as the discriminating principal that which goes beyond discrimination."<sup>103</sup> As shown above regarding the concept *mu*, Nishida understood Zen through Shinran's teaching. Perhaps realizing that he did not understand Zen in the terms of Zen, Nishida defers to experts regarding Zen.

When discussing Pure Land Buddhism, however, Nishida appears more confident. For example, describing what he believed to be authentic religion Nishida wrote, “In authentic religion, one reaches faith by way of a sharply honed will, not out of mere sentiment. One embraces faith only after having completely exhausted one’s resources. As the Pure Land parable of ‘the white path between two rivers’ teaches, sooner or later one has to choose between faith and non-faith.”<sup>105</sup> Another example of Nishida’s confidence can be found when he states: “Truly other-reliant religion can be explained by the logic of *topos* alone; and once properly understood, this other-reliant religion which centers on the compassionate vow of Amida can become vitally relevant to contemporary scientific culture.”<sup>106</sup> From these two quotes, we see that Nishida was confident when describing Pure Land tradition. Nishida seems to understand the experience of *shinjin* as being a complete entrusting that is brought about when one realizes the failure of one’s own power to bring about enlightenment. In the first quote, Nishida refers to the well-known Pure Land parable of the river of fire and the river of water, put forth by Shan-tao and quoted by both Shinran and Hōnen.

One also wonders if Nishida’s statement that “one embraces faith only after having completely exhausted one’s resources” expressed how Nishida felt while writing this essay. Yusa explains that in the years preceding this essay Nishida mourned the death of many close friends.<sup>107</sup> Nishida began writing “The Logic of Topos” in 1945 as the allied bombings of Japan were rapidly increasing. In fact, while Nishida was writing this last essay, with the assistance of a hired laborer his wife was digging a bomb shelter.<sup>108</sup> No doubt more stressful than the allied bombings was the death of Yayoi, Nishida’s oldest daughter, on February 14, a mere ten days after he began writing “The Logic of Topos.” With all of this occurring, perhaps Nishida felt that not only his own resources had been exhausted but the resources of those near to him as well.

#### *Nishida’s Non-Duality: Identity and Difference*

It is clear that there were a variety of influences on Nishida’s thought. We have seen that while Zen was influential on Nishida’s thought he often deferred to scholars when describing Zen, and that he understood such foundational Zen concepts as *mu* through the lens of jōdo Shinshū. In addition, terms central to Nishida’s understanding

of non-duality may have been inspired by Pure Land Buddhist sources. This section offers a brief overview of Nishida's non-duality as it relates to his understanding of identity and difference. It is not a comprehensive understanding of Nishida's non-duality, but seeks to provide the foundation for rereading Nishida's non-duality through the lens of Jōdo Shinshū thought.

Earlier it was argued that the key to understanding Nishida's philosophic project is understanding the self-identity of absolute contradiction, the idea that the absolute is defined and expressed by its opposite, the relative. The self-identity of absolute contradiction represents a late (1930) development of Nishida's philosophy, which reached its fulfillment in "The Logic of Topos." Kopf notes, "Nowhere does Nishida use this concept to maintain the balance between identity and difference as forcefully as in his last completed work."<sup>109</sup>

Although the self-identity of absolute contradiction was not put forth in *An Inquiry into the Good*, it is possible to see the early roots of this idea in this work. For example, when discussing the relationship between God and the world, Nishida argues that "individuality is an offshoot of divinity and each person's development completes God's development."<sup>110</sup> Nishida here does not say that at any moment in time God is not fully developed, but rather, that though fully developed God continues to develop from one moment to the next.<sup>111</sup> In other words, were it possible to freeze everything for a moment and examine both God and the world, God would be seen as being fully developed, yet if we froze another moment, God would be fully developed in that moment as well. God for Nishida is never not fully developed and yet always continuing to change.

Nishida makes clear that one enters into a relationship with the absolute through mutually negating activities. It is for this reason that Nishida describes the relationship as being one of inverse correspondence. As Heisig explains, this means that the more strongly two things are opposed, the more closely they are related.<sup>112</sup> It is through this opposition that one discovers the relationship with the absolute. According to Nishida, this action of the self-identity of absolute contradiction is found in the *nenbutsu*. He argues further that this relationship "culminates in a state of existence described as 'being artless and one with the working of the dharma.'"<sup>113</sup> Through the negation of one's own self-power and Amida's negation of absolute being—that is, Amida Buddha taking form—sentient beings are able to enter into relationship



with Amida or become one with the working of the dharma. To “be one” here does not mean that one’s individuality is lost, but rather that one’s individuality is an expression of the dharma.

For Nishida the absolute is only absolute insofar as it can negate itself. The negation of the absolute is what allows the relative to be the expression and activity of the absolute. The absolute then does not stand apart from the relative, as it is reflected in the relative, nor does the absolute stand apart from the relative. Rather, they are inversely correlated and are thus mutually defining, determining, and negating.

Throughout Nishida’s life, even when he was devoting himself to his Zen practice, Nishida was still aware of and participated in Shin Buddhist intellectual circles. In addition, on more than one occasion Nishida interpreted Zen Buddhism through Shinran’s thought. Most important for our purposes here is how Nishida conceived of the relationship between the absolute and the relative, as it regards God/Amida/Buddha and the religious practitioner. In the following, it will become clear that although using different terms, Nishida’s explanation of this relationship is structurally similar to Pure Land Buddhist discourse as regards self and other.

#### THE OTHER IN SHIN BUDDHISM

Addressing the role of the other in Shin Buddhism, or for that matter in any school of Buddhism, may strike the reader as being odd or even misguided. The Buddhist doctrine of no-self (Skt. *anātman*; Jpn. *muga*, 無我), it seems, would imply that there is no other as well. However, in recent years both Kopf and Ziporyn have published a number of articles and books in which they argue two points. First, the role of the other is generally underdeveloped in both academic studies of Buddhism and the tradition itself; second, the role of the other—at least at the level of provisional truth—is central to Mahāyāna Buddhist paths of awakening.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, Varghese J. Manimala argues the Buddhist sangha (community) as Śākyamuni Buddha defined it was “an example of intersubjective existence.” Manimala also suggests that in the bodhisattva ideal we find the “true nature of the intersubjective person.”<sup>115</sup>

Although Kopf, Manimala, and Ziporyn have all shown that intersubjectivity is an integral part of Buddhist paths of awakening, at present there are few if any works that have dealt with the role of the relation between the individual and others. Thus our next step is to explore

the role of the other in Shin Buddhism, both philosophically and psychologically. Following Kopf, Manimala, and Ziporyn, this discussion of otherness will be grounded in philosophic and psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity.

Following a general overview of the theory of intersubjectivity—the recognition that an individual grows in and through relationships with others—we will then briefly look at the role of the self and other in Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly as developed in *The Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* and the Huayan school (Kegon, 華嚴宗).<sup>116</sup> This will establish a basis for a detailed examination of intersubjectivity in Shin Buddhism. Particular attention will be paid to the Shin Buddhist path as presented by Shinran and Rennyo. In addition, traditional Shin Buddhist scholarship concerning the role of self and other will be analyzed.

#### *Recognizing the Need for Multiple Subjects: Intersubjectivity*

Intersubjectivity, simply put, is the philosophical and psychological theory that individuals are affected by other individuals (subjects). Theories of intersubjectivity are rooted in the existential philosophies of the twentieth century. The philosophic position generally referred to as existentialism was first postulated by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who emphasized the role of the individual in their critiques of G. W. F. Hegel's (1770–1881) rationalism. Existentialism reached its apex as a movement with Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), who transformed the phenomenological methods of Martin Heidegger in such a way that it was no longer reclusive, but rather became a starting point for activism.<sup>117</sup>

“Existentialism” has been used to describe the philosophies of Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger (although he himself renounced this label), Martin Buber, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gabriel Marcel, among others. Traces of existentialism can also be found in the post-structuralism and deconstruction movements led by such notable figures as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. At present, the influence of existentialism is found in a number of diverse areas. For example, American philosopher Judith Butler's work has been foundational in number of diverse areas, including literary criticism, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory. Butler's work, as we see below, has been instrumental in shaping Benjamin's understanding of intersubjectivity. Existentialism has also long been influential in the

fields of literary studies, philosophical anthropology, psychology, and theology.

The breadth of existentialism is perhaps best understood in its blurring of traditional academic and scholarly lines. For example, in addition to citing Freud and other well-known psychoanalysts, Jessica Benjamin, whose work on intersubjectivity we will be using to uncover the meaning of the other in Buddhism, often cites philosophers such as Butler, Derrida, Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas.<sup>118</sup> Existentialism, with its call for engagement with the world, in many ways can be understood as a return to Socratic ideas concerning what philosophy is. Philosophy for Socrates' disciples, as Pierre Hadot explains, "was conceived both as a specific discourse linked to a way of life, and as a way of life linked to a specific discourse."<sup>119</sup> In other words, philosophic discourses are informed by the world we live in while simultaneously seeking to better understand or even transform the world.

Benjamin's understanding of intersubjectivity fits this understanding as it is grounded in her experiences as a practicing psychoanalyst, while simultaneously being informed by philosophical understandings of self and other. This understanding of intersubjectivity as having roots in both philosophy and psychology will become important later in this essay, when discussing both the philosophical and psychological necessity of conceiving of the relationship of buddha and practitioner as being both equal and not equal.

Benjamin explains that the intersubjective view "maintains that the individual grows in and through relationships with other subjects. Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. It assumes that we are able to recognize the other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing mental experience."<sup>120</sup> Elaborating on the meaning of intersubjectivity in a later work Benjamin explains "the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence."<sup>121</sup>

Describing the encounter between self and other as a relationship of two subjects rather than a relationship between a subject (self) and object (other) is not merely a matter of semantics. Benjamin explains that when the other is seen as an object the other is an internalized representation that does not exist in reality.<sup>122</sup> When the other is described in terms of an object, the reality of other subjects is denied. The other as an object is not capable of sharing an experience of recognizing

one's self as both different and alike, since the other as object is wholly other. Within this brief explanation of intersubjectivity, it is possible to identify two fundamental characteristics of the intersubjective encounter: recognition and subjectivity.

Regarding the fundamental need for recognition, Benjamin explains, "A person comes to feel that 'I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts,' by being with a person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her independence."<sup>123</sup> Based on this need for recognition it becomes clear that one's sense of self grows out of one's relationship with an other. As Butler explains, "the self never returns to itself free of the Other . . . 'relationality' becomes constitutive of who the self is."<sup>124</sup> In other words, relationships with others are internalized in that relationships not only connect us to others but also define who we are or what we will become. Relationships are, therefore, constitutive, that is, they are essential to one's very being.

That recognition from another subject is necessary in establishing one's understanding of self as subject leads to what Benjamin describes as the paradox of recognition. Benjamin explains, "at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of 'I, myself,' we are forced to see the limitations of that self. At the moment we realize that separate minds can share the same state, we also realize these minds can disagree."<sup>125</sup> In other words, the very awareness that we are individuals is dependent upon an awareness of our limitations. Throughout her work Benjamin provides a number of examples showing that even in relationships of domination, where one seeks control of the other, recognition and a sense of otherness must be maintained, for if one subsumes the other into one's self, both self and other cease to exist.

The intersubjective relationship does not seek to collapse the relationship of self and other into a unified understanding of self and other, where the self is all that exists and the other is wholly other or an object of the self's psyche. Rather, "intersubjective theory sees the relationship between self and other, with its tension between sameness and difference, as a continual exchange of influence. It focuses, not on a linear movement from oneness to separateness, but on the paradoxical balance between them."<sup>126</sup> In other words, self and other do not exist in two wholly separate worlds, as self and other are not wholly different. Nor are self and other undifferentiated; differences remain.

The boundary that separates self and other is, at best, fuzzy. While we may have shared experiences with the other, that the other remains an other is what makes these experiences so powerful. Benjamin explains, “The fact that self and other are not merged is precisely what makes experiences of merging have such high emotional impact. The externality of the other makes one feel one is truly being ‘fed,’ getting nourishment from the outside, rather than supplying everything for oneself.”

In her later work Benjamin clarifies that in shared experience the other, by necessity, remains an other. When self denies the externality of the other through forced assimilation of the other, one is plunged “into unbearable aloneness . . . creating an identity that demands the destructive denial of the different.”<sup>127</sup> Benjamin repeatedly shows how the denial of difference can lead to abusive situations. Yet, even in relationships of domination, which seek to destroy the other, Benjamin finds that the need for other subjects remains primary. Relationships of domination, as Benjamin explains, depend on the other subject recognizing the power the self wields through submission.<sup>128</sup>

Intersubjectivity, as presented by Benjamin, makes clear the necessity of other consciousness in forming identity. It is through our relationships with others that we come to understand what it means to be. Relationships not only affirm who we think we are but also by necessity negate conceptions of who we are as well. One’s identity as a unique individual occurs not in realization of sameness, nor in recognition that the other is different from one’s self, but rather in the other recognizing and confirming that the self is, the self does.

There are, therefore, both philosophic and psychological necessities for understanding the other as both similar to and different from the self. This discussion, grounded in the feminist psychoanalytic project of Benjamin, will be the heuristic lens used in the following to explore the relationship of self and other in Mahāyāna Buddhism, with particular emphasis on the Jōdo Shinshū tradition.

#### *Intersubjectivity in Early Mahāyāna Buddhist Thought*

In the American context, Buddhist practice is often understood and presented as a solitary endeavor. The impact and importance of other subjects has often been downplayed or denied when describing Buddhist paths towards awakening (*satori*, 悟). For example, in recent years Jeff Shore, a longtime Rinzai Zen practitioner and professor of

international Zen at Hanazono University, has spent his breaks from teaching by traveling throughout Europe and North America teaching what he claims to be the basic principles of Zen practice. Shore explains that at its most basic Buddhist practice is “getting to the very bottom of who and what we are.”<sup>129</sup> According to Shore, this process is a solitary one: “This does not require going somewhere else, nor does it involve entering transcendent or blissful states of mind. Each of you, right here and now has all you need. A teacher is not necessary for this, nor are books. According to the records, Gotama Buddha sat under a Bodhi tree and got to the bottom of himself. He did it on his own. And that—not some doctrine or dogma—is the basis of Buddhist practice.”<sup>130</sup> This way of talking about the Buddha’s experience as solitary is very common in Buddhist teachings in the West and perhaps represents a conflation with the concept of the *pratyekabuddha*, who attains buddhahood during a time when no buddha or dharma exists and also significantly does not teach others the path to buddhahood. However, when we remember that the Buddha also visited a number of teachers prior to sitting under the Bodhi tree, and that the Buddha’s consumption of milk gruel offered by Sujāta signified the Buddha’s rejection of ascetic practices and discovery of the Middle Way, we may want to rethink such presentations of the Buddhist path. The Buddha’s rejection of asceticism and discovery of the Middle Way, as HAJIME Nakamura points out, are commonly associated with the Buddha’s enlightenment.<sup>131</sup> However, the statement that the Buddha “did it on his own” loses some of its thrust upon considering the role of the Buddha’s teachers and Sujāta’s offering of milk in his enlightenment experience.

Shore’s argument that Gotama “did it on his own,” and that all people can do the same, does seem to echo the teaching of the Buddha before entering *parinirvāṇa*. In the Buddha’s final teaching, recorded in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, the Buddha encourages his followers to rely on themselves in order to determine the true teaching of the dharma.<sup>132</sup> However, Roger J. Corless argues the Buddha is not encouraging solitary practice, but rather, that in the time of the Buddha’s absence from the world the “sangha” is charged with preserving the dharma. Corless explains, “the monks and nuns are *collectively* their own lights and refuges.”<sup>133</sup> It does not come as a surprise then that one of the few practices shared by all Buddhists is the act of taking the triple refuge (*sankie*, 三歸依).<sup>134</sup> From this brief example and counter example, we can first conclude that from the time of the historical Buddha to the

present others have been an integral part of Buddhist paths of awakening. Second, we again see that with a few notable exceptions, Buddhist scholars and teachers have had a tendency to downplay the role of self and other.

However, things are not as nearly as neat as the above indicates. Brook Ziporyn explains: “[C]urrent reconstructions of the early (Pali) Buddhist doctrine, especially as found in Abhidharmic dharma analysis, reveal an approach to consciousness that can be described as atomistic and empiricist, if not almost solipsistic. . . . The same can be said for Indian Mahāyāna doctrine . . . in one way or another, most Indian Mahāyāna schools deny the ultimate existence of other minds, either because all minds are really manifestations of one essence (Tathāgata-garbha, Suchness, and the like), or because the category of ‘otherness’ (like “sameness”) belongs to the realm of those delusions dispelled by an insight into Emptiness.”<sup>135</sup> Alterity, that is, a state of being other, in Abhidharmic thought is thus understood as being an example of the conventional truth of this world. Any sense of alterity, like a sense of self, thus fades away when one realizes the ultimate truth of emptiness (Skt. *sūnyatā*; Jpn. *kū*, 空).<sup>136</sup>

Both Kopf and Ziporyn argue that in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, with the introduction of the bodhisattva ideal, we find the beginnings of Buddhist theories of intersubjectivity.<sup>137</sup> Simply put, the bodhisattva ideal is rejection of individual enlightenment in favor of universal enlightenment. The denial of individual enlightenment usually occurs through a series of vows often taking the form of “If X occurs and Y does not follow, then I will not attain universal enlightenment.” Perhaps one of the most well-known vows is the that of Amida Buddha (Amida Butsu, 阿彌陀仏), then Dharmākara Bodhisattva (Hōzō Bosatsu, 法藏菩薩), who vowed: “If, when I attain Buddhahood, sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions who sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desire to be born in my land, and think of me even ten times should not be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment. Excluded, however are those who commit the grave offenses and abuse the Right Dharma.”<sup>138</sup> The bodhisattva vows are thus an act of great compassion. However, they also seem to introduce a binary understanding of self and other into the Buddhist discourse. Early Mahāyāna Buddhist discourse, as Ziporyn argues above, is somewhat solipsistic when it comes to understandings self and other. In order to better understand the role of self and other, consideration must be

given to the meaning of identity in Mahāyāna discourse. For this we turn our attention to Chinese Buddhism, as Ziporyn claims it was in this context that understandings of provisional truth came to be seen as equal with ultimate.<sup>139</sup>

Issues of identity and difference in many ways took center stage in Chinese Buddhist discourse. Leading monks in both the Tiantai and Huayan schools devoted considerable amounts of energy to elucidating and explaining the nature of identity and difference. These understandings of identity and difference not only represent the sinification of Buddhism, but also became foundations for nearly all understandings of Buddhism that developed in China, Korea, and Japan.<sup>140</sup>

*The Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* is a seminal text for Chinese and Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. Reading the names of individuals who have written commentaries on the *Awakening of Faith* is in many ways a who's who of early East Asian forms of Buddhism. For example, Hui-yüan (懷苑, 523–592), an early Chinese Pure Land Buddhist thinker, wrote a commentary on *The Awakening of Faith* that would inspire commentaries by such leading figures as Wōnhyo (元曉, 617–686), a prolific writer and popularizer of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Korea, and Fa-tsang (法藏, 643–712), the third patriarch of the Chinese Huayan school.<sup>141</sup> Jacqueline I. Stone, in her landmark study of original enlightenment (*hongaku*, 本覺), notes that *The Awakening of Faith* is “the most influential early source for the term original enlightenment.”<sup>142</sup>

*The Awakening of Faith* explains that original enlightenment means “the essence of Mind is grounded on the Dharmakāya.”<sup>143</sup> In other words, from the very beginning, sentient beings have the essential seeds for enlightenment, and through practice, this knowledge is made manifest. Enlightenment, as conceived in *The Awakening of Faith*, is paired with delusion. The author of *The Awakening of Faith* makes this clear by stating, “Independent of the unenlightened mind, there are no independent marks of true enlightenment itself that can be discussed.”<sup>144</sup> Stone explains that in *The Awakening of Faith*, “‘original enlightenment’ is posited in distinction to ‘actualized enlightenment’; it represents the inherence of suchness in the deluded mind and thus the ever-present possibility of transforming that mind into the mind of awakening.”<sup>145</sup> Original enlightenment as inherent potential for actualized enlightenment can thus be seen as maintaining a tension between identity and difference, between original enlightenment and actualized enlightenment.



The tension between the inherent potential for enlightenment and actualized enlightenment was in no way static. Stone notes that the *hongaku* thought that shaped the medieval Japanese Tendai experience was radically different from the *hongaku* thought found in *The Awakening of Faith*. She explains that in medieval Japan “*hongaku* is equated with suchness itself and assigned an absolute meaning; it is no longer merely an abstract principal but the actual, true aspect of all things (*ji jissō* [事实相]).”<sup>146</sup> This conflation of potential enlightenment to suchness itself raises a whole host of questions, including: why is practice necessary if all sentient beings are already inherently enlightened, and what differentiates a sentient being from a buddha? In order to answer these questions we must examine the Huayan and T’ian-t’ai thought in regards to understandings of identity and difference.<sup>147</sup>

#### *Identity and Difference in Huayan Buddhism*

Huayan thought, as Paul Williams notes, is “less philosophy than the systematic explanation of the *dharmadhātu* [*hōkkai*, 法界], the world of visionary experience and magic.”<sup>148</sup> Williams’s description of the *dharmadhātu* as being a world of visionary experience and magic seems to point towards the recognition that humans’ spatial and temporal understandings of the world are not adequate when attempts are made at understanding the *dharmadhātu*. However, before examining the systematic explanation of the *dharmadhātu* it is necessary to first make clear what is meant by the term *dharmadhātu*. Edward Conze explains that in Mahāyāna discourses, *dharmadhātu* is defined as being the absolute dharma. Conze then goes on to list definitions for dharma in Buddhist contexts: (1) transcendental reality that is the absolute truth; (2) the order of the law of the universe; (3) a truly real event; (4) “objective data whether true or untrue”; (5) characteristic, quality, or attribute; (6) moral law; and (7) Buddha’s teachings of the above. *Dhātu*, as Conze explains, means “the realm of, essence of, [and] source of.”<sup>149</sup> With the above explanation, it is apt to say that by studying the *dharmadhātu*, we are studying reality itself.

The image of reality, as presented in the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (Ch. *Huayan ching*; Jpn. *Kegon-kyō*, 華嚴經), is filled with exceedingly rich imagery. As David L. McMahan explains, “the ordinary world seems but a colorless after-image of the lustrous mythical worlds [the sutra] presents.”<sup>150</sup> This overwhelming imagery, according to McMahan, is a variation of emptiness discourse while further implying that although

“the pure lands may be far away, to one with a pure mind even the ordinary defiled world is itself a pure land.”<sup>151</sup> In the final section of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, upon entering Vairocana Buddha’s (Birushana Butsu, 毘盧遮那仏) Tower, Sudhana, the pilgrim, is confronted with a series of visually overwhelming images. The narrator of the sutra explains, “[Sudhana] also looked inside, [and he saw] numerous, hundreds and thousands of beautiful, fabulous towers. Each tower was similarly ornamented, very vast and very beautiful. Each tower was vast as all of space, containing all other towers, yet each tower was distinct. All towers were inside one tower.”<sup>152</sup> Attempting to understand this imagery can be a very frustrating and humbling experience. One quickly finds that everyday spatial and temporal understandings of the world are simply not equipped to aid in comprehending a world containing multiple towers of infinity. However, what is perhaps the most surprising attribute about the world of these towers is that it is the very world in which we find ourselves.

Given the above, one quickly sees why Huayan thinkers focused on the systematic explanation of the *dharmadhātu*. One example of this explanation is Tu-shun’s (杜順, 557–640) *Meditation on the Dharmadhātu* (Ch. *I fa-chieh*; Jpn. *Ikkān hōkai*, 一觀法界). Tu-shun’s *Meditation* is helpful in that it begins by explaining the world of our everyday consciousness and then methodologically advances in four steps to an understanding of the world as the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* presents it. Tu-shun’s four meditations are the *dharmadhātu* of (1) *shih* (Jpn. *ji*, 事), (2) *li* (Jpn. *ri*, 理),<sup>153</sup> (3) non-obstruction of *li* against *shih* (Ch. *li-shih wu-ai*; Jpn. *ji ri muge*, 理事無礙), and (4) non-obstruction of *shih* against *shih* (Ch. *shih-shih wu-ai*; Jpn. *ji ji muge*, 事事無礙).<sup>154</sup>

The first *dharmadhātu*, *shih*, is the *dharmadhātu* of particulars or events. This understanding, one that is ultimately rendered untenable, creates distinctions and distance between particulars. Individual particulars are seen as being wholly other from all other particulars. All particulars in this understanding are rendered as individual things—devoid of any similarity and therefore alienated from one another in an autistic state of existence.

The second *dharmadhātu*, *li*, is the realm of suchness, or as Chang translates it, “immanent reality (*tathatā*).”<sup>155</sup> *Li*, according to Chang, is the “invisible controller of all events.” He goes on to describe *li* as “the all-inclusive and many-sided principal for all existence.”<sup>156</sup> However, as Peter N. Gregory points out, understandings of *li* as immanent

reality, although accurate, reflect a shift to a more ontological nature in Huayan doctrine that Tu-shun had not anticipated. For Tu-shun, *li* pointed towards the inherent emptiness of all dharmas, not an underlying nature of all things. It was with Ch'eng-kuang (澄觀, 738–839) that *li* was understood as an underlying principle for all existence.<sup>157</sup> Whether one understands *li* as signifying the emptiness of all dharmas or as an underlying principle, that *li* and *shih* are connected becomes clear. This connection leads to the third meditation.

The third *dharmadhātu*, the non-obstruction of *li* against *shih*, makes clear the relationship of the one expressed in the many, thereby expanding upon the realization that *li* and *shih* are linked. In this meditation, the dynamic relationship between *li* and *shih* is made clear. *Li* is the formational basis for all particulars (*shih*). One also finds there is a certain amount of tension between *li* and *shih*, given that “*shih* can hide *li*.”<sup>158</sup> For Tsung-mi (宗密, 781–841), the fifth patriarch of the Huayan tradition, the non-obstruction of *li* against *shih* is central in that it makes clear that *li* brings *shih* to completion.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps the best way to understand this principal is to place it in the context of dependent origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*; Jpn. *engi*, 緣起). In that, *li* and *shih* are distinct and not-distinct, interdependent and separate. While these statements describing *li* and *shih* appear to be contradictory, they make sense when understood in the context of the non-obstruction of *li* against *shih*, where any *li* is an expression of *shih* and vice versa, and yet *shih* is not *li*.

The fourth *dharmadhātu*, that of the non-obstruction of *shih* against *shih*, is often described as the *dharmadhātu* of “all in one.” Within every particular are all other particulars. As Chang explains this is the only *dharmadhātu* that really exists, the previous three are all teaching methods leading up to and culminating in this final meditation. However, as Gregory makes clear, from the time of Tsung-mi meditation on the third *dharmadhātu* was central, thus signaling a shift in the Huayan metaphysical understanding of the world.<sup>160</sup> This fourth *dharmadhātu* is perhaps the most difficult of all the meditations on the *dharmadhātu* to understand. That within one phenomenon all other phenomena are present and complete seems to be simply impossible. Within the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, this *dharmadhātu* is presented using descriptive language that simply overwhelms the senses. The mutual interpenetration of all phenomena as presented in this meditation is the worldview of an advanced bodhisattva. It is the world as illustrated by

Indra's net (a net with a jewel tied in at every knot, each jewel reflecting all the other jewels in the net), where each and every *shih* reflects all other *shih ad infinitum*.

Tu-shun's *Meditation* is one of many attempts by Huayan thinkers to explicate the meaning of the *dharmadhātu*. Perhaps the most well-known attempt is Fa-tsang's *Treatise on the Golden Lion* (Ch. *Chin-Shih-Tzu Chang*; Jpn. *Kin Shishi Shō*, 金獅子章), delivered at the request of Empress Wu (武則天, 625–705). Williams's summary of Fa-tsang's teachings is especially illuminating regarding how Huayan thinkers approached issues of identity and difference. Williams writes,

[P]henomena are nothing more than noumenon in a particular form, and form does not in itself exist, so all phenomena are identical. Moreover, noumenon cannot in itself be divided. One piece of gold and another piece of gold, as gold, are not different. The difference lies in spatial separation, and that is something to do with shape or form, not gold *qua* gold. Since a phenomenon is only a noumenon, and since between any two "instantiations" of noumenon there is, as noumenon, no difference, so each phenomenon is in fact the same as any other phenomena. Furthermore, since each instantiation of noumenon is noumenon itself (noumenon cannot be divided), so each phenomenon is also all phenomena. Hence there is mutual identity and interpenetration. Second, since the *dharmadhātu* is a totality of interdependent elements, and according to Mādhyamika teaching each entity lacks inherent existence and only *is* in terms of an infinite network of casual interrelationships so, if any entity were taken away, the entire Universe would collapse. This means that each entity is a cause for the totality. Moreover the totality is, of course, a cause for each entity.<sup>161</sup>

From this we can surmise that for Fa-tsang, and likely the larger Huayan tradition as a whole, self and other are not inherently different, nor are they entirely the same. Self and other are different as a result of not only spatial separation, but also as a result of causes and conditions that bring self and other into existence through cycles of birth and death. The reality of otherness is important in that if otherness is subsumed into the self, the entire universe collapses, including the self.

All too often lost amid the complex philosophy of the Huayan school is the emphasis on teachers on the Buddhist paths of awakening. McMahan's work is a notable exception to this, given that his focus is not on how Huayan Buddhism developed in China, but rather on how

the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* itself functions. McMahan describes Sudhana's encounter with teachers, fifty-two in all, as being "a dramatization or symbolically charged visionary representation of a specific Buddhist teaching."<sup>162</sup> The variety of teachers whom Sudhana meets is simply outstanding. Twenty of the teachers Sudhana meets are women, all of whom have vastly different lifestyles and social classes: a prostitute, healer, nun, even the Buddha's mother is a teacher of Buddhist practices for Sudhana. Other teachers Sudhana meets include mathematicians, ascetics, kings, perfumers, goldsmiths, children, and bodhisattvas.

Sudhana's meeting with these teachers is quite formulaic, as Sudhana first asks each teacher to explain his or her practice. Following Sudhana's inquiry, each teacher explains his or her practice and then, with the exception of the final two teachers, "plead[s] ignorance regarding the most profound way and send[s] him on to the next teacher."<sup>163</sup> The *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* thus emphasizes not only the need for teachers (others), but also the fact that teachers may be those whom we least expect them to be.

Both philosophically and textually others are central to the Huayan tradition. Philosophically, given that a myriad of causes and conditions are responsible for shaping all existence, others are both the same as and different from the self. Textually, the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* emphasizes the role of teachers as an integral part of Buddhist paths of awakening. Williams's observation that according to Huayan thought when an entity is destroyed the entire universe collapses can be seen as applying analogously to the relation between self and other, thus highlighting the importance of others to Huayan thought and practice. Within the context of medieval Japanese Buddhism, Huayan thought, that of the Tiantai school, and the teachings of *The Awakening of Faith* were the dominant intellectual milieu from which Shin Buddhism arose. Therefore if we are to explore how the role of others has been understood by Shin Buddhists we must explore possible sources our authors were drawing upon.

#### *The Necessity of Others in Shin Buddhist Paths of Awakening*

Not only are others important for psychological well-being, they are also central to Buddhist paths of awakening. Yet others are not wholly other, given that our relationships are constitutive of who we are and what we will become. Thus, it is the relationship of sameness and difference between self and other that is necessary both for

psychological well-being and for Buddhist paths of awakening. This section begins the process of reconsidering the role of concrete others on the Shin Buddhist path. It argues that the relationship between Amida Buddha and sentient beings is one of both duality and non-duality, in that sentient beings are seen as both equal and not equal to the *tathāgatas*. As we shall see, the doctrine of equality and inequality is inextricably linked with Shinran's conceptions of both Amida Buddha and the Pure Land, which are characterized by philosophies of duality and non-duality. This examination will first explore how Shinran conceived of equality and inequality. It will then conclude with a discussion of Rennyo's concept of the unity of the individual and Amida Buddha.

Before entering into Shinran's and Rennyo's ideas, we must note that discussing the relationship between religious practitioner and Amida Buddha in terms of self and other presents a number of difficulties. First, there is a well-developed discourse of otherness within Shin Buddhism, but it is not the kind of otherness we have discussed to this point. Notably, although Shinran often encourages Jōdo Shinshū adherents to trust in the other-power (*tariki*, 他力) of Amida's vow, this understanding of other-power differs from an other as opposed to self. As Stone explains, "The 'Other' on whom Shinran taught his followers to rely is not 'Other' as opposed to 'self' but an Other in which self/other distinctions are dissolved. At the moment of relinquishing utterly all self-calculation, one is seized by the compassionate working of Amida's vow, never to be let go; such a person has in that moment become one with Amida, 'equal to Tathāgatas.'"<sup>164</sup> Through entrusting in Amida's vow, the dichotomy of self and other is overcome. While this understanding of Shin Buddhism seems to characterize many presentations of Shin Buddhism in English, it will be shown to be quite limited and divorced from the medieval context in which it was written.

First, let us examine typical understandings of the other in Shin Buddhist scholarship. Generally, a sense of otherness is rendered as being an immature understanding of Shinran's teaching. For example, Hirota often describes the Shin Buddhist path as beginning with a duality that ultimately reaches a state of maturity and fulfillment in non-duality. Hirota argues that the Pure Land path begins with an initial engagement characterized by a dualistic understanding of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land.<sup>165</sup> As one's faith matures and *shinjin* is realized, the

dualisms of this initial engagement dissolve as one comes to understand the non-duality of the Pure Land path.<sup>166</sup>

However, some scholars have recently acknowledged the role of concrete others as a form of dualism that is part of the Shin Buddhist path to awakening. James Dobbins, a leading Shin Buddhist historian, has noted that while Shinran does present a non-dual understanding of the relationship between religious practitioner and Amida Buddha or the Pure Land, Shinran also teaches a dualistic understanding of the Pure Land path: “There is indisputable evidence that Shinran himself never actually abrogated this dualistic understanding. At the level of day-to-day interchanges with his companions he frequently treated the Pure Land as an otherworldly place where one would be born after death. For instance, in one of his letters Shinran wrote to a disciple that, because he himself was advanced in years, he would pass away first, be born in the Pure Land, and be waiting for his disciple there.”<sup>167</sup> Shinran’s explanation of the Pure Land path as dualistic, as Dobbins goes on to explain, was “fundamental to Pure Land discourse at the practiced level of religion no matter how important nondualism was at the idealized level of doctrine.”<sup>168</sup> That Shinran continued to teach ideas of dualism suggests that dualistic understandings of the Pure Land path are far more than immature understandings of the Pure Land path. Recognizing Shinran’s emphasis on the Pure Land as being otherworldly and Amida as other prompts a reconsideration of issues of identity and difference in Shin Buddhist thought. This reconsideration must also address arguments that understandings of duality on the Shin Buddhist path are signs of an immature faith.<sup>169</sup>

Statements in Shinran’s writings demonstrate his idea of the Pure Land path as one of both duality and non-duality. Of particular interest to us here is how Shinran describes the relationship between religious practitioner and Amida Buddha. An examination of Rennyo’s writings also reveals a conception of Pure Land Buddhism as both dual and non-dual.

*Shinran on the Relationship between  
Religious Practitioner and Amida Buddha*

Shinran’s conception of the Shin Buddhist path of awakening describes the relationship between religious practitioner and Amida Buddha in two fundamentally different ways—both in terms of duality and in terms of non-duality. Shin Buddhist scholarship has tended

to place emphasis on the non-dual aspects of this relationship. However, Shinran used various ideas to explain the relationship of religious practitioner and Amida Buddha. That scholars have tended to focus on the aspect of non-duality has led to a distorted understanding of Shin Buddhist paths of awakening. Using the lens of intersubjectivity will help to highlight the need for others, without denying the role and importance of non-duality, on Shin Buddhist paths of awakening. Shinran's conception of the relationship of practitioner and Amida Buddha becomes clear when viewed through the lens of intersubjectivity.

Let us look at some examples of Shinran's statements regarding identity and non-identity of religious practitioner and Amida Buddha. Reading the *Lamp for the Latter Ages* (*Mattōshō*, 末燈鈔), a collection of letters written towards the end of Shinran's life (1251 and 1262), one often finds Shinran explaining that practitioners who have attained *shinjin* are equal to the *tathāgatas* (*shobutsu to hitoshi*, 諸仏とひとし) or equal to Maitreya (Miroku Bosatsu, 弥勒菩薩). For example, Shinran writes in a letter to Jōshin 淨信: "The Buddhas in the ten quarters rejoice in the settling of this mind and praise it as being equal to the hearts and minds of all Buddhas. Thus, the person of true *shinjin* is said to be equal to the Buddhas. He is also regarded as being the same as Maitreya, who is in [the rank of] succession to Buddhahood."<sup>170</sup>

In another letter to Jōshin, written approximately three months later, Shinran begins with a statement that is almost identical to the one quoted above. "The *Garland Sutra* [*Avatamsaka-sūtra*] states that those who attained true *shinjin* are already certain to become Buddhas and therefore are equal to the Tathagatas. Although Maitreya has not yet attained Buddhahood, it is certain that he will, so he is already known as Maitreya Buddha. In this manner, the person who has attained true *shinjin* is taught to be equal to the Tathagatas."<sup>171</sup> "Equal" (*hitoshi*, ひとし) in these passages means that one is assured of enlightenment that comes with rebirth in the Pure Land. Equal here does not mean "the same as" (*onaji*, 同じ). In other words, it is not the case that religious practitioner + *shinjin* = buddha. Rather, "equal" means that one is assured of enlightenment at some point in the future. Sentient beings must experience death and rebirth in Amida's Pure Land where, freed from delusions, they can attain supreme enlightenment.<sup>172</sup> Equality with the buddhas changes and is transformed over time. Sentient beings are the same as Maitreya in that both must go through the cycle



of birth and death once more. To say sentient beings are the same as Maitreya means that it is certain that both will attain buddhahood. Maitreya and sentient beings must transmigrate through the cycles of birth and death once more before attaining buddhahood.

However, at the end of the second letter above, Shinran makes clear that one should *not* think of one's self-power as being equal to the *tathāgatas*. Shinran writes, "To think in self-power that one is equal to the Tathagatas is a great error. But it is because of the shinjin of Other Power that you rejoice; how can self-power enter into it? Please consider this fully."<sup>173</sup> Shinran believes that blind passions and delusions are so strong that it is impossible to entrust in the activity of the vow through one's own calculation (*hakarai*, はからひ). It is only through the calculation (*onhakarai*, 御はからひ) of Amida Buddha that *shinjin* is attained and enlightenment is ensured. One is fundamentally different from buddhas in that blind passions still shape the way one acts and views the world.

Shinran's understanding of identity as being one of change where the religious practitioner is transformed from a state of delusion to a state of buddhahood is centered in Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, particularly the thought of Chih-i (智顛, 538–597), the founder and systematizer of the Tiantai school in China, who put forth the doctrine of the six identities. The doctrine of the six identities clarifies not only the relationship of identity and difference, but that of doctrine and practice as well. The six identities, as explained by Neil Donner, are:

1. Identity in principle. This affirms inherent Buddhahood.
2. Verbal identity. Here intellectual understanding that we are Buddhas is gained.
3. Identity of religious practice. Here behavior and mental state are brought into correspondence with the prior verbal formulations. The *Mo-ho chi-kuan* [Jpn. *Maka shikan*, 摩訶止觀] compares this to the practice of archery, in which one begins by aiming at large targets, then gradually reduces the target size until finally one can hit the hundredth part of a hair.
4. Identity of resemblance. One's "thoughts and evaluations approach what has been expounded in the sūtras of previous Buddhas."
5. Identity of partial truth. "Ignorance weakens and wisdom becomes increasingly prominent."
6. Ultimate identity. Buddhahood, the final fruit.<sup>174</sup>

Chih-i's six stages suggest a number of different kinds of identity and that identity with the buddhas is dynamic rather than static.<sup>175</sup> While Shinran does not describe the six identities in his writing, he would have been influenced by—if not aware of—the six identities given the role of the *Mo-ho chi-kuan* in medieval Tendai thought and practice.<sup>176</sup>

For Shinran, the issue of fundamental difference remains as long as one is a sentient being. Yet, Shinran also finds truth in the present life as well. Truth for Shinran represents the formless taking form at various points throughout history. This becomes clear in Shinran's construction of the Pure Land lineage. For example in the *Tannishō* (A Record in Lament of Divergences, 歎異抄), Shinran is recorded as having said: "If Amida's Primal Vow is true, Śākyamuni's teachings cannot be false. If the Buddha's teaching is true, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be false. If Shan-tao's commentaries are true, can Hōnen's words be lies? If Hōnen's words are true, then surely what I say cannot be empty."<sup>177</sup> Shinran's teachings in this paragraph are true not because Shinran himself utters them, but rather their truth is found in that they are in accordance with the teachings of those who came before Shinran.

Although textual analysis of Shinran's teachings with those of Shan-tao and Hōnen reveals a number of differences and non-traditional readings of texts, Eisho Nasu has argued that Shinran's methodology and reading of texts would not have been disputed or unusual in the context of medieval Japanese Buddhism.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, Corless, in his examination of the Pure Land lineage, argues that unlike Zen, which places a great deal of importance on the student-teacher relationship of its lineage, Shin Buddhism emphasizes a textual lineage. Corless explains further, "Shinran's texts do not really support or transmit anything; they are marshaled as evidence in support of one point, the supreme efficacy of Amida's Hongan [primal vow]—and although that point is, from a Buddhological standpoint, peripheral or even mistaken, it is both central and clear for Shinran."<sup>179</sup> The truth of Amida's vow for Shinran is expressed in various ways at different times in history; issues of historicity are really non-issues for Shinran. While there are significant differences between Shinran's, Hōnen's, and Shan-tao's teachings, these differences are historical. Amida's vow is trans-historical and thus provides the necessary link for one to be equal with the buddhas. This uniting is the activity of the vow, not the calculation of the religious practitioner.

That the unifying experience of *shinjin* is so powerful is due to the fact that it brings one into relationship with that which is other. The power of the unifying experience of *shinjin* is that one comes to feel that the primal vow, to use Shinran's words quoted previously, was made "for myself alone." That Amida's vows are made for all sentient beings means that potentially all sentient beings are equal to the buddhas. Shinran makes clear, however, that this equality is not brought about by one's own doing, but is rather the working of Amida's primal vow.

The Shin Buddhist path as put forth by Shinran comes out of the realization that sentient beings and Amida Buddha are fundamentally different. Sentient beings' existence in the world is characterized by blind passions and delusions that are so strong one is unable to escape the cyclic nature of life and death. Shinran clearly believed that the only way one could awaken *shinjin* and become equal to the buddhas was through the working of the buddhas. Equality for Shinran is found in inequality. That is, through the working of Amida Buddha's vow one is made to be equal to the buddhas. For Shinran, Amida Buddha is fundamentally other in that Amida Buddha and the primal vow are alone true and real. Sentient beings are made to be one with the buddhas only through the working of the buddhas.

As we have seen, Shinran conceives of the relationship between Amida Buddha and religious practitioner as both equal and not equal. Equality within Shin Buddhism refers to the fact that the practitioner is assured of enlightenment, and in that respect is equal with the *tathāgatas*. The practitioner, however, is also at the same time fundamentally apart from Amida Buddha because the practitioner still has to go through another cycle of birth and death before attaining buddhahood.

The religious practitioner and Amida Buddha are therefore separate. Amida Buddha is beyond form, yet Amida is capable of manifesting form so that Amida Buddha becomes "present to all living beings of the world—wherever they are, whatever point in history at which they exist, and whatever their capacities for religious practice—and to dispel their ignorance and awaken them to what is true and real."<sup>180</sup> Yet, in meeting sentient beings precisely wherever they are, Amida is fundamentally part of this world; there is nowhere Amida is not present. As OKA Ryoji explains: "Amida Buddha is not somewhere outside of this universe manifesting his limitless light of wisdom. Shinran saw the

entire universe as consisting of Amida Buddha's light of wisdom. It is not a question of where the light of wisdom originates. Shinran's view is that because the entire universe is Amida's light of wisdom, everything in the universe is grasped by this light of wisdom and is made to live because of this fundamental unity with this light."<sup>181</sup> Amida Buddha is thus simultaneously formless, as Amida is suchness, in that all forms are Amida's light which surrounds all forms and brings them into unity with Amida Buddha. In this way there is not a single form that is apart Amida Buddha, which in this formulation is suchness itself.

However, although Shinran saw the entire universe as being the manifestation of Amida's form, he also believed that one is apart from Amida Buddha as well. It is, perhaps, for this very reason that Shinran emphasizes the otherness of Amida Buddha. Given that forms are by their very nature filled with delusion, the entire universe is also filled with delusion. The reality of Amida, for Shinran, is not in the form Amida takes but rather the formless. Shinran in the *Jōdo wasan* explains:

The majestic light, transcending form, is beyond description;  
Thus Amida is called "Buddha of Inexpressible Light."  
All the Buddhas praise this light—  
The cause by which Amida's Buddhahood was fulfilled.<sup>182</sup>

Within this hymn, we see that Amida Buddha has gone beyond form and is beyond sentient beings' capabilities for expression, thus all the buddhas praise the light of Amida Buddha. However, sentient beings can only realize Amida Buddha as form, given the delusions that characterize sentient beings' existence. Shinran explains that Amida by necessity has to take form. In a *Kōsō wasan* written in praise of Hōnen, Shinran writes:

Amida Tathagata, manifesting form in this world,  
Appeared as our teacher Genkū;  
The conditions for teaching having run their course,  
He returned to the Pure Land.<sup>183</sup>

Shinran here clearly believes that Amida Buddha, realizing the necessity of taking form in the world, appeared as Hōnen. The form that was made manifest ceased to be in the world, but the teaching remained, and perhaps even for some of those who were to follow the Pure Land path at present Shinran has come to be seen as Amida.

In Shinran's thought the absolute, that is, suchness, takes form. In taking form, the absolute is able to encounter sentient beings in the midst of their delusions. Shinran and many other Buddhist thinkers

felt that the age of *mappō* (end of the dharma, 末法) was at hand. Thus it was no longer possible to realize awakening through practice; one had to rely on the power of a buddha to bring about awakening. Hōnen's appearing in the world as Amida was the formless taking form as a concrete other that Shinran and others could identify with suchness and thus attain *shinjin*, assuring birth in the Pure Land. In other words, for Shinran, Pure Land soteriology is characterized by the formless manifesting form, enlightenment in the midst of delusion.

#### *Rennyō and the Unity of Buddha and Foolish Beings*

As the Shin Buddhist tradition developed in Japan, new doctrines and new hermeneutic devices were used in order to better understand the relationship between Amida Buddha and sentient beings. Among Hōnen's disciples, Shinran was not the only one to put pen to paper as a means of preserving Hōnen's teachings.<sup>184</sup> Also, in the centuries following Shinran's death new leaders of the fledgling Jōdo Shin movement read and incorporated ideas from Hōnen's disciples as a means of understanding Shin Buddhism. One example of this is the doctrine of *kihō ittai* (unity of individual and dharma [i.e., buddha], 機法一体) which was influential for Rennyō's teaching. Rennyō was fond of reading the *Anjin ketsujōshō* (Notes on Firm Faith, 安心決定鈔), a text of unknown authorship that has its origins in the Seizan Branch 西山 of the Jōdo-shū 浄土宗, in which the doctrine of *kihō ittai* is put forth. Rennyō often alluded to the *Anjin ketsujōshō* in his teachings and described it as being a fundamental text for the Shin tradition.<sup>185</sup>

Although Rennyō never mentions *kihō ittai* specifically in his letters, many scholars have noted a connection between *kihō ittai* and Rennyō's understanding of the relationship between the person of *shinjin* and Amida Buddha, particularly when Rennyō writes, "the Buddha's mind and the mind of the ordinary being become one (*busshin to bonshin to hitotsu ni naru* 仏心と凡心とひとつになる)."<sup>186</sup>

Rennyō's doctrine, commonly referred to as *butsubon ittai* (unity of buddha and foolish beings, 仏凡一体), although inspired by the doctrine of *kihō ittai* found in the *Anjin ketsujōshō*, is as NAITŌ Chikō points out fundamentally different from *kihō ittai*. Naito explains, *kihō ittai* represents a fundamental state of unity between the religious practitioner and the dharma. *Ki* 機 and *hō* 法, the practitioner and the dharma, cannot be separated from one another: although they seem different they are the same. Naito explains this as the difference

between steam and ice; visually we see them as being different, yet fundamentally ice and steam are the same.<sup>187</sup> In contrast, *butsubon ittai* understands the relationship between practitioner and buddha as fundamentally distinct.<sup>188</sup> Naito elaborates on this by explaining each character in this phrase individually. *Butsu* 仏 refers to the mind of the *tathāgatas*, which is true, clear, and real.<sup>189</sup> *Bon* 凡 describes the mind of sentient beings, which is controlled by the delusions of worldly desires.<sup>190</sup> *Ittai* 一体 refers to a state of unity where sentient beings are in a continual process of becoming buddha. In this world, although *butsu* and *bon* appear to be one they are fundamentally different, and yet *butsu* and *bon* are not two. Naito explains: “The salvational power (*chikara* 力) and working of Amida Tathagata cannot be distinguished from ourselves. We ourselves are the locus (*ba* 場) for the operating of Amida Tathagata’s salvational power and working.”<sup>191</sup> In other words, Naito argues, the working of Amida Buddha in the world cannot be separated from sentient beings. Sentient beings, however, are not the same as Amida Buddha, nor do they cease being sentient beings in this relationship. Particularly important is that this understanding does not deny the reality of sentient beings in the world. Although sentient beings are the locus of Amida’s work, sentient beings still suffer in the world of samsara. This understanding of unity is representative of East Asian understandings. Consider for example Ziporyn’s explication of the meaning of “one” in early Chinese thought: “[A] ‘one’ or a ‘unity’ is conceived not as a homogenous or abstract mathematical unit but, rather, as an indivisible harmony of diverse elements. . . . [I]t signifies a holistic harmony between two identifiably different elements that nonetheless are virtually present in one another due to the inseparability and reciprocal determination that follows from their foundational holistic relation.”<sup>192</sup>

Read in this way, the doctrine of *butsubon ittai* implies that the relationship between sentient beings and Amida Buddha can be characterized as “not one, not two, but both one and two.” In other words, sentient beings are the locus of Amida Buddha’s work in the world and exist in a relationship of mutual determination that is *shinjin*. From the perspective of the religious practitioner, Amida Buddha is wholly other, true and real; sentient beings suffer due to the fact our very being is characterized by innumerable passions and cravings. From the perspective of Amida Buddha, sentient beings are not separate from

Amida Buddha as they are the locus for the operating of Amida Buddha in this world.

Using the lens of intersubjectivity opens up for us the issues of otherness within Shin Buddhism. Shin Buddhist thought conceives of the relationship of religious practitioner and Amida Buddha as being fundamentally different. Due to blind passions and delusions, the religious practitioner is destined to a life of samsaric wanderings. However, as an other Amida Buddha vows to save all sentient beings, thereby assuring that through entrusting in Amida's primal vow sentient beings will attain buddhahood. Because of this assurance, sentient beings are equal to the buddhas. However, as long as sentient beings' existence remains characterized by the wanderings and delusions of samsara they are fundamentally different from the buddhas. This relationship is intersubjective in that upon realizing the difference between their present states of existence and enlightenment, sentient beings also realize what it means that enlightenment is assured by Amida Buddha's primal vow.

#### (RE-)READING NISHIDA'S PHILOSOPHY THROUGH SHIN THOUGHT

Nishida's philosophy was influenced by both traditional and contemporaneous Shin thought, and, as exemplified by Shinran and Rennyō, Shin thought conceives of the relationship between Amida Buddha and the religious practitioner as being both equal and not equal. For these reasons Shin thought provides a useful hermeneutic for understanding Nishida's non-dualism, allowing us to bring into dialogue Shin ideas of the relation between Amida and religious practitioner and Nishida's understanding of the relationship between absolute and relative.

#### (Re-)Reading<sup>193</sup>

As discussed previously, Nishida conceives of the relationship between absolute and relative through the phrase "the self-identity of absolute contradiction." Nishida uses this term to explain that the absolute is included in and expressed by its opposite, the relative. For Nishida this relationship is dynamic in that absolute and relative are, as we have already seen, mutually defining and determining. From the very beginning of his philosophic writings to his final completed work, Nishida sought to show that all phenomena/forms exist in a unity with God,<sup>194</sup> while simultaneously arguing that at times, "when seen from

one angle, God's spirit is unknowable."<sup>195</sup> In other words, although sentient beings are one with the absolute (God, Amida Buddha, etc.), they are differentiated from the absolute in that sentient beings' view of reality is askew and truth is hidden.

Given this difference and the compassionate desire of that which is absolute to enter into relationship with all that is relative, Nishida argues, the absolute is only absolute insofar as it contains its own negation.<sup>196</sup> Nishida explains this *qua* Shin Buddhist soteriology. The formless that is suchness, through self-negation, takes on form; Amida Buddha, arising out of suchness, itself takes form in this world. Amida Buddha's self-negation is so strong that Amida "saves sentient beings even by manifesting himself as a devil."<sup>197</sup> Sentient beings, or that which is relative, although existing in a unity with the absolute, are incapable of self-negation; they therefore must rely on the activity of the absolute in order to enter fully into relationship with the absolute.

Nishida derives his understanding of "negation" from Shinran's explication of Amida's calculation and the practitioner's entrusting. For example, as the idea that Shinran would be able to attain enlightenment through his own calculations was abandoned, Shinran came to entrust in the activity of Amida Buddha, and thus realized that Amida's primal vow "was entirely for [Shinran's] sake alone."<sup>198</sup> It was through Amida as suchness taking form that Shinran was able to awaken the mind of *shinjin*. The transcendent thus not only identifies with its opposite but takes form and expresses itself as that which is immanent.

Through the *nenbutsu* sentient beings become expressions of Amida Buddha's primal vow in that they effortlessly reach "a state of existence described as 'being artless and one with the working of the dharma' (*jinen hōni*)."<sup>199</sup> Nishida goes on to explain that through becoming one with the working of the dharma sentient beings are able to act with true compassion, which means to act without regard for the "I" and in accordance with the working of Amida Buddha's primal vow, being one with the working of the dharma.

The entire universe is for Nishida the expression of suchness itself. The formless negates itself and takes form. Shinran understood this as Amida appearing in this world as Hōnen at a time when it was no longer possible, according to Shinran, for sentient beings to awaken aspiration for enlightenment on their own. Eshinni's letters also make clear that Shinran viewed Hōnen and other select individuals in this way.<sup>200</sup> Nishida expressed this relationship as the self-identity of absolute



contradiction, where the distance between the absolute is contained in and expressed by the relative. Absolute and relative do not stand diametrically opposed. Rather, as Nishida argues in the final paragraph of “The Logic of Topos,” the absolute and relative, as Pure Land and this world respectively, reflect each other. Nishida explains: “Just as the congregation centered around the Buddha on this shore sees the Pure Land, so this shore is seen by the congregation of the other shore. The world of human beings (*shaba* [娑婆]) reflects the Pure Land (*jōdo* [浄土]), and the Pure Land reflects the world of humanity. Clear mirrors mirror each other. This suggests the intrinsic identity of the Pure Land and the human world.”<sup>201</sup>

Nishida’s description of how the Pure Land and world relate in this paragraph echoes much of the above discussion. The Pure Land, as Nishida explains above, is not known apart from this world. This world mirrors the Pure Land and the Pure Land mirrors this world. Nishida seems to be suggesting here that one’s experience of the Pure Land is intersubjective. One can only understand the experience of birth in the Pure Land through the experiences of this world. Whether it be the realization of Amida’s light breaking into one’s everyday existence or Amida taking form in this world to teach, the way in which one views the Pure Land is shaped by one’s experiences of this world. Our experiences of this world are shaped by those around us. Thus, much like Shinran came to believe that Hōnen was the form taken by Amida Buddha in this world, Nishida allows in his philosophy for the absolute to manifest itself as form in this world. Nishida believed it is this ability—the ability of the absolute to willingly take on form—to cease being absolute that makes something absolute. While much of the above is common to general Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, when we read this in light of what has been presented above, we can speculate that Nishida’s introduction to these ideas came from Jōdo Shinshū. When we consider that Nishida grew up in a home where Shin Buddhism was a constant presence, that he had professional ties with a number of influential Shin thinkers, and that he came to understand foundational Zen Buddhist concepts through the lens of Shin Buddhism, it seems to follow that Shin Buddhism may have been the wellspring from which Nishida drew when developing the above ideas.

The purpose of placing Nishida’s ideas into a Jōdo Shinshū context has not been to argue that Nishida’s philosophy is a Pure Land theology, but rather to show the resonance between Nishida’s ideas

and Jōdo Shinshū doctrinal concepts. While these concepts may not be unique to Jōdo Shinshū, it is through Jōdo Shinshū that Nishida learned about them, and by an understanding of how Jōdo Shinshū uses and talks about such concepts as self/other and non-duality Nishida's ideas become more intelligible.

As is well known, Nishida wanted to explain the entire world. With this as his goal, Nishida drew from a wide variety of sources. This, then, is both the strength and weakness of Nishida's philosophy. It is the strength, as Kopf explains, because in Nishida's philosophy one finds "a network of terminology, which, when developed carefully, provides a model for an intercultural philosophy."<sup>202</sup> It is a weakness in that Nishida's philosophy is at times at best ambiguous, and sources are cut off from the socio-historical context within which they developed.

#### *Conclusions and Opportunities for Future Studies*

The study of Nishida's philosophy and its relationship to Buddhism is messy at best. In the past scholars have tended to see Nishida's philosophy as *the* philosophy of Zen Buddhism, thus giving a distorted vision of both Zen and Nishida's philosophy. For example, Steve Odin's *The Social Self in Zen and American Philosophy*, while an exemplary model of how comparative philosophy ought to look, deals very little with Zen and more with the philosophy of the Kyoto school philosophers in conversation with the Chicago school of American pragmatism, particularly the thought of George Herbert Mead.<sup>203</sup> While Odin's project of dialoging the thought of the Kyoto school with American pragmatism is welcome, the equation of Kyoto school philosophy with Zen Buddhism is problematic, as is the equation of Mead's pragmatism with American philosophy. Simply put, Odin does not differentiate how or where the thought of the Kyoto school is different from Zen Buddhism.

While the Shin tradition and Nishida's philosophy do have a number of commonalities, in essence they are fundamentally different. As indicated by the quote from Wargo above showed, Nishida was not interested in leading others to religious awakening; rather, he wanted to provide an explanation of the world that allowed for religious experience beyond the role of "superstition." Shinran and Rennyo set out to explain a religious path that would lead others to awakening; whether the path was rational by philosophic standards, frankly, did not concern them.

I believe that future studies of Nishida philosophy will need to continue to separate Nishida's philosophy from the field of Buddhist studies. While Nishida was clearly influenced by and drew upon a number of Buddhist sources, the true genius in Nishida's philosophy is found more in the hermeneutic that he was struggling to develop. Nishida may have created one of many philosophies of religion, and it is perhaps in the context of philosophy of religion that he will eventually be studied in the United States. In Japan, the study of Nishida's philosophy is currently being shaped by a number of individuals. With Kyoto University now having a Department of Japanese Philosophy, it seems Nishida studies have for the time being found a home. This home is significantly positioned apart from both the fields of religious studies and European and American philosophy, and is perhaps even in the midst of a revival as a philosophic movement given the focus of a number of recent Japanese publications. The future of Nishida studies thus looks bright throughout the world. At present a number of individuals in the United States, Europe, and Japan are at work on not only sourcebooks of Japanese philosophy, but on developing increasingly nuanced philosophic positions based on the groundbreaking work of Nishida.

Regarding the study of "the other" within Buddhist paths of awakening, it is clear that more studies need to be done. This study has examined mainly founder figures and traditional Buddhist sources. It would be welcome to read how both medieval and contemporary Buddhists describe their faith, with an eye toward whether others are important in what they both say and do. It was noted above that in the American Buddhist context, Buddhism has often been presented as a solitary pursuit. One wonders, therefore, whether American Buddhists too consider others as integral parts of the Shin Buddhist path. Additionally there is a need to delve deeper into traditional Buddhist texts to look at how the role of others is conceptualized. Ideally, these studies would look not only at the text itself but also at the socio-historical context within which these texts developed. Textual understandings as we have seen are not static. Scholars have documented how such seemingly basic Buddhist concepts such as nothingness, suchness, or the idea of a buddha have changed quite dramatically as the Buddhist tradition has developed. It is my opinion that the role of others has been conceptualized in a number of ways throughout Buddhist discourse. Employing the idea of intersubjectivity as it has

been developed in modern philosophy and psychotherapy has allowed us to understand both the extent to which Pure Land thought played a key role in the development of Nishida's philosophy and the necessity of others in Shin Buddhist paths of awakening.

#### NOTES

1. NISHITANI Keiji, *Nishida Kitarō*, trans. Yamamoto Seisaku and James W. Heisig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 26.
2. This description is problematic, as John C. Maraldo argues that it is dependent upon a rather narrow definition of philosophy. Maraldo notes that both critics (NAKAMURA Yūjirō) and supporters (TAKAHASHI Satomi, FUNAYAMA Shinichi, and SHIMOMURA Torarō) have described Nishida's work as being the first example of Japanese philosophy. However, Maraldo argues that describing Nishida as Japan's first philosopher implies "a double closure: premodern, indeed pre-Nishida Japanese (and Asian) thought was excluded from the title of philosophy, strictly speaking; and philosophy in Japan after him was bound to take a stance toward him, be it emulation, inspiration, outspoken criticism or silent rejection." Maraldo continues by calling for a broader understanding of philosophy that is constantly in a state of "trans-lation." Trans-lation, as Maraldo explains, describes a continual process of "transference and transposition, incorporation and expulsion, creation and destruction, writing and rewriting." Maraldo concludes by arguing that at present Japan has a long philosophic history, which includes figures such as Kūkai, Dōgen, and Shinran. See John C. Maraldo, "Tradition, Textuality, and the Trans-lation of Philosophy: The Case of Japan," in *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 228, 233, and 239–240.
3. On the development, naming, and membership of the Kyoto school, see James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 3–7.
4. *Ibid.*, 32.
5. See, for example, Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 52–88; Bernard Faure, "The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism," in *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 245–281; Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *Curators of the Buddha*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 107–160; Robert H. Sharf, "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 40–51.

6. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 144.
7. NISHIDA Kitarō, *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (An Inquiry into the Good) (Tokyo: Kōdōkan, 1911).
8. Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 84.
9. ABE Masao, introduction to *An Inquiry into the Good*, by NISHIDA Kitarō, trans. ABE Masao and Christopher Ives (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1990), xii. There are two translations of *Zen no kenkyū* available in English. The first, *A Study of the Good*, trans. V. H. Viglielmo (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1960), contains Suzuki's introduction. The second translation by ABE Masao and Christopher Ives (cited above) contains Abe's introduction rather than Suzuki's. For the Japanese see NISHIDA Kitarō, *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 19 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1948; repr. 1988), 1:3–200.
10. Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 81.
11. Ibid.
12. NISHIDA Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. ABE Masao and Christopher Ives (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1990), 176.
13. I thank Professor Eisho Nasu of the Institute of Buddhist Studies for pointing this out.
14. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 38.
15. Ibid., 39.
16. Ibid., 38.
17. Ibid., 52.
18. Ibid., 29.
19. Robert J. J. Wargo, *The Logic of Nothingness: A Study of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 3.
20. Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 86.
21. Agustín Jacinto Zavala, "The Return of the Past," in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 142.
22. NISHIDA Kitarō, "A New Year's Lecture to the Emperor: On the Philosophy of History," trans. YUSA Michiko; quoted in YUSA Michiko, *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 318.
23. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 311.
24. Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 75.
25. Ibid., 84.

26. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 98.
27. *Ibid.*, 98–99.
28. *Ibid.*, 99.
29. For more on questions of nationalism and imperialism in the Kyoto school see James Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994). Recently, David Williams has argued that questions of nationalism in projects of the Kyoto school are an example of how the “Allied gaze” has been used to frame understandings of Japan. Williams argues that in the Kyoto school one finds the first examples of post-White philosophy, and that questioning the Kyoto school on grounds of nationalism is a tactic to maintain both philosophic and academic hegemony. Williams arguments fall apart in that he fails to consider that a number of Japanese works have questioned the role of nationalism in the Kyoto school. In fact, eight Japanese authors contributed to *Rude Awakenings*, and every author draws upon Japanese sources in either critiquing or defending the Kyoto school. See David Williams, *Defending Japan's Pacific War: The Kyoto School Philosophers and Post-White Power* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).
30. *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 1:407–409. For an English translation see Dennis Hirota, “Nishida's ‘Gutoku Shinran,’” *Eastern Buddhist* 18, no. 2 (1995): 242–244.
31. *Ibid.*, 231.
32. *Ibid.*, 239.
33. *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* 7:371–464. For English translation see NISHIDA Kitarō, “The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview I,” trans. YUSA Michiko, *The Eastern Buddhist* 19, no. 1 (1986): 1–29, and NISHIDA Kitarō, “The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview II,” trans. YUSA Michiko *The Eastern Buddhist* 20, no. 2 (1987), 81–119.
34. TAKEMURA Makio 竹村牧男, *Nishida Kitarō to Bukkyō Zen to Shinshū no kontei wo kiwameru* 西田幾多郎と仏教禪と真宗の根底を究める (Tokyo: Daito Shuppansha, 2002), 47.
35. *Ibid.*, 48.
36. *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* 1:407; Hirota, “Nishida's ‘Gutoku Shinran,’” 242.
37. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 6.
38. Takemura, *Nishida Kitarō*, 49.
39. *Ibid.*, 50.
40. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 30.
41. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 117.

42. Ibid., 337.

43. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 278. Heisig cites the work of TAKEDA Ryūsei as being one of the few works from a Jōdo Shinshū perspective that is not dismissive of Nishida's understanding of Shinran. See for example TAKEDA Ryūsei, *Shinran Jōdokyō to Nishida Tetsugaku* 親鸞浄土教と西田哲学 (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1991).

44. Dennis Hirota, "Images of Reality in the Shin Buddhist Path," in *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World*, ed. Dennis Hirota (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 48.

45. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 34.

46. Gereon Kopf, "Between Identity and Difference: Three Ways of Reading Nishida's Non-Dualism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31, no. 1 (2004): 83.

47. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview I," 3.

48. Kopf, "Between Identity and Difference," 83.

49. For an in-depth study of the two truths theory see Paul L. Swanson, *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989).

50. References to buddha are to the cosmological buddha (which is without features or form), not the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. When references to Śākyamuni Buddha are made either the name or the particle "the" will precede the word "Buddha."

51. *Shinjin* has often been translated as "faith." This essay, following the precedent set by the Shin Buddhism Translation Series, leaves the term untranslated. As UEDA Yoshifumi explains, "the concept of faith stands on the duality of God (creator) and man (created), *shinjin* is the oneness of Buddha and man, or man's becoming a buddha" (UEDA Yoshifumi, "Response to Thomas P. Kasulis' Review of Letters of Shinran," *Philosophy East and West* 46, no. 3 [1981]: 507). In other words, faith, according to Ueda, is predicated on the notion of dualism, whereas *shinjin* is representative of a non-dual relation between buddha and sentient being. Challenging Ueda, TAKEDA Ryūsei, a member of the advisory board to the Shin Buddhism Translation Series, has argued that *shinjin* ought to be translated as "faith" given that both faith and *shinjin* are relational concepts, and that by not translating *shinjin* the Shin Buddhism Translation Series has committed itself to an exclusive position that prevents a dialogue among religions from occurring. See TAKEDA Ryūsei 武田龍精, "Shinran's View of Faith," in *Shinran Jōdokyō to Nishida Tetsugaku* 親鸞浄土教と西田哲学 (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1991), 74.

52. Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-Ha, *The Collected Works of Shinran*, 2 vols. (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-Ha, 1997), 2:532; Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensansho 真宗聖教全書編纂所, *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* 真宗聖教全書, 5 vols. (Kyoto:

- Ōyagi Kōbundo, 1940), 1:667.
53. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:679; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:792.
54. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:291; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:203.
55. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:517; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:44.
56. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 20.
57. See Brook Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as The Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity and Value Paradox* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
58. James W. Heisig, “Non-I and Thou: Nishida, Buber, and the Moral Consequences of Self-Actualization,” *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 2 (2000): 180.
59. Gereon Kopf, “On the Brink of Postmodernity: Recent Japanese-Language Publications of the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30, nos. 1–2 (2003): 134.
60. Kopf, “On the Brink of Postmodernity,” 134.
61. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 128–129.
62. *Ibid.*, 130.
63. UEDA Shizuteru, “Zen and Philosophy in the Thought of Nishida Kitarō,” trans. Mark Unno, *Japanese Religions* 18, no. 2 (July 1993): 187. The first sentence of Ueda’s quotation may represent a formulation of the logic of *sokuhi* 即非, found in the *Diamond Sutra* and often employed by D. T. Suzuki as “A is not A therefore it is A,” which Nishida identified later in his career as being synonymous with his logic of the self-identity of absolute contradiction. However, as Gereon Kopf has shown, the logic of *sokuhi* that Nishida employed is fundamentally different from the logic expressed in the *Diamond Sutra*. See Gereon Kopf, “Critical Comments on Nishida’s Use of Chinese Buddhism,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (June 2005): 318–321.
64. Ueda, “Zen and Philosophy in the Thought of Nishida Kitarō,” 188.
65. Thomas Kasulis, *Zen Action/Zen Person* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1981), 59.
66. Ueda, “Zen and Philosophy in the thought of Nishida Kitarō,” 166. The reader will recall that both Faure and Sharf have questioned the construction of the Zen tradition that Ueda and Kasulis are using; see *supra*, note 5.
67. Ueda, “Zen and Philosophy in the Thought of Nishida Kitarō,” 168.
68. Takemura, *Nishida Kitarō*, 50.
69. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 55. Nishida was at this time a middle school English teacher in Kanazawa.
70. Takemura, *Nishida Kitarō*, 50; Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 55.



71. Nishida Kitarō, “Letter no. 595, 4 January 1930, NKZ 18:396-398,” trans. YUSA Michiko, quoted in Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 246.
72. Takemura, *Nishida Kitarō*, 64–65.
73. *Ibid.*, 52.
74. *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 1:199; Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 176 (modified).
75. Takemura, *Nishida Kitarō*, 52.
76. FUJITA Masakatsu 藤田正勝, “Kiyozawa Manshi to Nishida Kitarō 清沢満之と西田幾多郎,” in *Kiyozawa Manshi: Sono hito to shisō* 清沢満之—その人と思ひ, ed. FUJITA Masakatsu 藤田正勝 and YASUTOMI Shinya 安富信哉 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2002), 120.
77. Nishida first uses Shin Buddhism to explain what the “true religious experience” is. Nishida writes, “Shinran is quoted in the *Tannishō*: ‘The *nembutsu* chanted in the heart to increase works leading to rebirth in the pure land is a practice based on one’s own efforts.’” The second quotation comes when Nishida explains the unity of absolute and relative. “Reflection is the route along which we attain a profound unity. (Shinran declares in the *Tannishō*, ‘If even a good person attains rebirth in the Pure Land, how much more so does an evil person.’)” Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 150, 170.
78. Fujita, “Kiyozawa Manshi to Nishida Kitarō,” 132–133.
79. Thomas Kirchner, “The Life of Manshi Kiyozawa,” in *December Fan: The Buddhist Essays of Manshi Kiyozawa*, trans. Nobuo Haneda (Kyoto: Higashi Honganji, 1984), 87.
80. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 86.
81. *Ibid.*, 87.
82. *Ibid.*, 127.
83. Hirota, “Nishida’s ‘Gutoku Shinran,’” 243; *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, 1:408.
84. NAKAMURA Sōichi 中村宗一, *Zenyaku Shōbōgenzō ikkan* 全訳 正法眼蔵一卷 (Tokyo: Seishin Shobō, 1971), 2.
85. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:679; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:792.
86. This quote seems to have intrigued not only Nishida but other members of the Kyoto school as well. NISHITANI Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), the third major figure of the Kyoto school after Nishida and TANABE Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962), took up this passage in his article “The Problem of Time in Shinran,” trans. Dennis Hirota, *The Eastern Buddhist* 11, no. 1 (1978): 13–26.
87. Fujita, “Kiyozawa Manshi to Nishida Kitarō,” 134.
88. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 99.
89. *Ibid.*, 100.

90. Kopf, "Critical Comments on Nishida's Use of Chinese Buddhism," 314.
91. *Ibid.*, 326.
92. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 330.
93. Kopf, "Nishida's use of Chinese Buddhism," 322. Kopf notes that Nishida first use of *gyakutaiō* occurs in "The Logic of Topos," while Nishida first use of *byōjōtei* occurred in *Philosophical Essays*, volume 3 (*Tetsugaku ronbunshū daisan* 哲学論文集第三), See Kopf, "Nishida's use of Chinese Buddhism," 328n52.
94. Kopf, "Critical Comments on Nishida's Use of Chinese Buddhism," 322.
95. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 103.
96. Takemura, *Nishida Kitarō*, 244.
97. FUJITA Masakatsu 藤田正勝, *Gendai shisō toshite no Nishida Kitarō* 現代思想としての西田幾多郎 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1998), 208.
98. KOSAKA Kunitsugu 小坂国継, *Nishida tetsugaku to shūkyō* 西田哲学と宗教 (Tokyo: Daito Shuppansha, 1994), 306.
99. Kosaka, *Nishida tetsugaku to shūkyō*, 252.
100. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:663; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:775.
101. Kosaka, *Nishida tetsugaku to shūkyō*, 252.
102. On the history and development of *nishu jinshin* see Ryōshō Yata, "An Examination of the Historical Development of the Concept of Two Aspects of Deep Belief, Part 1 and Part 2," trans. David Matsumoto, *Pacific World*, n.s., 3 (2001): 157–175 and *Pacific World*, n.s., 4 (2002): 237–257.
103. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview II," 105.
104. *Ibid.*, 106.
105. *Ibid.*, 92. Shinran quotes the Pure Land parable of "the white path between two rivers" in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*; see *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:89–90; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:221–222.
106. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview II," 100.
107. Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy*, 323.
108. *Ibid.*, 330.
109. Kopf, "Three Ways of Reading Nishida's Non-Dualism," 83.
110. Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 170.
111. Nishida uses the term "God" as a signifier for the highest of absolutes. At other times, Nishida interchangeably refers to the absolute as the Buddha, Amida Buddha, dharma, and absolute nothingness.
112. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness*, 103.

113. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview II," 104.
114. Gereon Kopf, *Beyond Personal Identity* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 53–54; Brook Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as The Good*, 199–201. Both Kopf and Ziporyn have published arguments that show the necessity of the role of the "Other" in Buddhist thought that are similar to those cited here, see for example Gereon Kopf, "In the Face of the Other," in *The Couch and the Tree*, ed. Anthony Molino (New York: North Point Press, 1998), 276–289; Brook Ziporyn, "What Is the Buddha Looking At? The Importance of Intersubjectivity in the T'ien-t'ai Tradition as Understood by Chih-li," in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 442–476; and, Brook Ziporyn, *Being and Ambiguity* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004) 293–294.
115. Varghese J. Manimala, *Being, Person and Community* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1991), 182.
116. Given that Shinran was originally ordained as a Tendai monk, it may strike the reader as being apropos to explore intersubjectivity and issues of identity and difference in Tiantai; however, these issues have previously been explored in great detail. Tiantai and Tendai notions of intersubjectivity that may have influenced Shinran's thought will be discussed in the section on Jōdo Shinshū conceptions of identity and difference. Although beyond the scope of this essay, for an excellent account of intersubjectivity in Tibetan Buddhism see B. Allan Wallace, "Intersubjectivity in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, nos. 5–7 (2001): 209–230.
117. W. T. Jones and Robert J. Fogelin, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Twentieth Century to Quine and Derrida*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1997), 359.
118. Notably absent in much of Benjamin's work and the present discussion is the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Benjamin makes clear that she disagrees with any psychological or philosophic theory that conceives of the Other as transcendent and ineffable. Benjamin, as will become clear in the ensuing discussion, notes the philosophic and psychological necessity for a relationship between self and other as interdependent. While Benjamin would most likely agree with Levinas concerning the danger of subsuming the Other to the self, Levinas's focus on the Other as transcendent and ineffable is ultimately untenable for theories of intersubjectivity. On Benjamin's rejection on an ineffable other, see Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 94. An excellent overview of Levinas's philosophy regarding Otherness is Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 34–62. Levinas's most well-known and often quoted work regarding the Other is Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. R. A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne

University Press, 1987).

119. Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 23.

120. Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 19–20.

121. Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 30.

122. *Ibid.*, 28.

123. Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 21.

124. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 148.

125. Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 33.

126. *Ibid.*, 49.

127. Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other*, 96.

128. Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 185.

129. Jeff Shore, “Basics of Zen Practice,” *Hanazono Daigaku Bungakubu Kenkyū Kiyō* 花園大学文学部研究紀要 36 (March 2004): 3.

130. Shore, “Basics of Zen Practice,” 3.

131. HAJIME Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1977), 63.

132. Edward J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha: As Legend and History* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1951), 146.

133. Roger J. Corless, *The Vision of Buddhism* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 13. Corless’s emphasis here on the word “collectively” is done in response to the all too common presentation of Buddhist practice as solitary.

134. Richard F. Gombrich explains that the words of the Triple Refuge (I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the dharma, and I take refuge in the sangha), when said with intention, are the means by which one becomes a Buddhist. See Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 65.

135. Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 199.

136. Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 93.

137. Kopf, *Beyond Personal Identity*, 97; Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 200.

138. Inagaki Hisao and Harold Stewart, trans., “The Larger Sutra on Amitāyus,” in *The Three Pure Land Sutras*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003), 16.

139. Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 200.
140. Dan Lusthaus postulates a number of reasons both historical and epistemological to account for the marked differences between Sinitic forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Indo-Tibetan forms of Buddhism. One of the most striking reasons is the development of a Chinese Buddhist shift from psychology to meta-psychology, whereas in the Indo-Tibetan traditions we find a shift from psychology to logico-epistemology. See for example Dan Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih lun* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 356–373.
141. Kenneth K. Tanaka, *The Dawn of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism: Ching-ying Hui-yüan's Commentary on the Visualization Sutra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 21.
142. Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 5.
143. Yoshito S. Hakeda, trans., *The Awakening of Faith: Attributed to Aśvaghosha* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 43.
144. Hakeda, *The Awakening of Faith*, 48.
145. Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 6.
146. *Ibid.*, 37.
147. Stone notes that the Japanese *hongaku* thought is “indebted not only to the specific category of ‘original enlightenment’ set forth in the *Awakening of Faith* and developed in its commentaries, but more broadly to the great totalistic systems of Chinese Buddhist thought, especially those of Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai.” See Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 6.
148. Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 127.
149. Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy* (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks University of Michigan Press, 1967), 92–106.
150. David L. McMahan, *Empty Vision: Metaphor and Visionary Imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 112.
151. *Ibid.*, 117.
152. TAKAKUSU Junjirō 高楠順次郎, WATANABE Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds., *Taishō Shinshū Daizokiyō* 大正新脩大藏經, vol. 10, no. 279 (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934), 432a.
153. Both *shih* and *li* have numerous English translations. Depending on context *shih* has been translated as “thing,” “event,” “matter,” “the particular,” “the concrete,” and “phenomenon.” Translations for *li* include “principle,”

“universal truth,” “reason,” “the abstract,” “the law,” “noumenon,” “judgment,” and “knowledge.” It should be noted that phenomenon and noumenon are problematic in this context given their connection with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, where the noumenon is unknowable.

154. Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 141–171.

155. *Ibid.*, 142.

156. *Ibid.*, 143.

157. Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-Mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 67–68.

158. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 144.

159. Gregory, *Tsung-Mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, 188–189.

160. *Ibid.*, 68.

161. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 133.

162. McMahan, *Empty Vision*, 122.

163. *Ibid.*, 122.

164. Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 87.

165. Hirota, “Images of Reality in the Shin Buddhist Path,” 50.

166. *Ibid.*, 56.

167. James C. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 71.

168. *Ibid.*, 72.

169. Presentations of non-duality in Buddhist scholarship, characterizing dualistic understandings of the world as “immature,” are perhaps part of a larger trend in both doctrine and scholarship that tries to portray Buddhism as a “rational” religion. Although beyond the scope of this essay, there are a number of historical reasons for the presentation of a rationalized form of Buddhism. Gerard Clinton Godart notes that during the Meiji period (1858–1912) Buddhism in Japan faced a number of challenges, including (1) decreasing popularity among the intellectual elite; (2) anti-Buddhist sentiment during the Meiji Restoration, in which a rising nationalism characterized Buddhism as a threat due to its foreign origins; (3) scholarly treatments, both Japanese and European, of Mahāyāna Buddhism as inauthentic; and (4) a general perception that Buddhism was “no longer a credible explanation of the world” (Gerard Clinton Godart, “Tracing the Circle of Truth: Inoue Enryō on the History of Philosophy and Buddhism,” *Eastern Buddhist* 36, nos. 1–2 [2004]). In response

to this INOUE Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919), a Jōdo Shinshū priest and founder of the Tetsugakkan 哲学館 (which later became Tōyō University 東洋大学), coined the term “Buddhist philosophy” (*bukkyō tetsugaku* 仏教哲学). The goal of Buddhist philosophy, as Godart explains, was to “separate the philosophical parts and the religious parts that exist in Buddhism”; additionally, “Inoue interpreted Buddhism as a religion based on philosophy” (Godart, “Tracing the Circle of Truth,” 111–112). While the categories of Buddhist philosophy are no longer used in Japanese academia, Inoue’s legacy and formulation of Buddhism seems to survive at present given the history of Buddhist studies in the United States. For more see Godart, “Tracing the Circle of Truth.” For more on the history of Buddhism during the Meiji era see James Edward Ketelar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 43–86. An excellent overview of themes and challenges that have shaped the field of Buddhist studies is Jacqueline I. Stone, “Buddhism,” in *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*, ed. Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 38–64.

170. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:532; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:667.

171. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:546; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:680–681.

172. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 2:182–183.

173. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:546; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:681.

174. Neil Donner, “Sudden and Gradual Intimately Conjoined: Chih-i’s T’ien-t’ai View,” in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1987), 204.

175. Donner, “Sudden and Gradual Intimately Conjoined,” 204.

176. Stone, *Original Enlightenment*, 45. For more on medieval Tendai methodology and its influence on Shinran, see Eisho Nasu, “‘Rely on the Meaning, Not on the Words’: Shinran’s Methodology and Strategy for Reading Scriptures and Writing the *Kyōgyōshinshō*,” in *Discourse and Ideology in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, ed. Richard K. Payne and Taigen Daniel Leighton (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

177. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:662; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:774–775.

178. Nasu, “Rely on the Meaning, Not on the Words.”

179. Roger Corless, “Who Was Shinran’s Teacher?: A Comparison of Lineage Authentication in Zen and Shin,” *The Pure Land*, n.s., nos. 13–14 (1997): 217.

180. Yoshifumi Ueda and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought* (Kyoto: Hongwanji: International Center, 1989), 112.

181. OKA Ryoji, “Amida Buddha and the Pure Land,” in *Beyond Comparison: Religious Pluralism and Religious Truth*, Shinran’s Thought in the Contemporary World III, ed. TAKEDA Ryūsei (Kyoto: Ryūkoku Daigaku Bukkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo,

- 1997), 71–72.
182. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:328; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:487.
183. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:390; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:514.
184. Concerning the development of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism following Hōnen's death, see Mark L. Blum, *The Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism: A Study and Translation of Gyōnen's Jōdo Hōmon Genrushō* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). It is interesting to note that Gyōnen does not include Shinran in his survey of Pure Land Buddhism. Blum notes a number of reasons why Gyōnen would not have included Shinran in his survey: (1) Shinran had a low profile among Hōnen's senior disciples; (2) Gyōnen's hermeneutic categories would have deemphasized Shinran's uniqueness in that he would share the position of Kōsai and Gyōkū; (3) Shinran had disdain for contemplative practices; and (4) Shinran rejected monastic life (Blum, *Origins and Development of Pure Land Buddhism*, 41–44).
185. Minor L. Rogers and Ann T. Rogers, *Rennyō: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 92–93.
186. Rogers and Rogers, *Rennyō*, 184; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 3:439. On the connection of *kihō ittai* and Jōdo Shinshū doctrine, see Rogers and Rogers, *Rennyō*, 184n25.
187. NAITŌ Chikō 内藤知康, *Anjin rondai o manabu 安心論題を学ぶ* (Kyoto: Hongwanji Shuppansha, 2004), 193.
188. *Ibid.*, 315.
189. *Ibid.*, 313.
190. *Ibid.*, 314.
191. *Ibid.*, 319.
192. Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*, 50.
193. Though not explicitly cited, the work of Thomas Kasulis has been influential in formulating my approach and reading of the work of Shinran, Rennyō, and Nishida. In particular, see Thomas Kasulis, "Philosophy as Metapraxis," in *Discourse and Practice*, ed. Frank Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 169–195; and Thomas Kasulis, *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002).
194. Nishida, *An Inquiry into the Good*, 163.
195. *Ibid.*, 165.
196. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview I," 19.
197. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview II," 98.



198. *Collected Works of Shinran*, 1:679; *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 2:792.
199. Nishida, "The Logic of Topos and the Religious Worldview II," 104.
200. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 147.
201. *Ibid.*, 119.
202. Kopf, "Nishida's use of Chinese Buddhism," 326.
203. Steve Odin, *The Social Self in Zen and American Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).



## **On- and Offline Representations of Japanese Buddhism: Reflections on a Multifaceted Religious Tradition<sup>1</sup>**

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### INTRODUCTION

The construction of Japanese Buddhism and Japan-related cultural forms made for and by the “West” has undoubtedly suffered from biased approaches influenced by Orientalist and Occidentalst stances. These have led to the creation of an *ad hoc* form of Japanese Buddhism, almost exclusively identified with Zen (Buddhism). In such presentations, Zen itself, which is only one among the many forms of Buddhism in Japan, has been removed from its historical and sociopolitical environment; claimed as something “uniquely Japanese”; and reduced to an “essentialized” religious tradition devoted almost exclusively to meditation and the practice of traditional arts, such as *ikebana*, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony. The word “Zen” has been misused and made a catchword for anything that is somehow related to Japan and meditation, spirituality, exoticism, mystical experiences, and aesthetics. Together, this creates a biased projection that is far removed from reality. Moreover, through this process, which is characterized by hegemonic representations of Japanese Buddhism as well as Japanese religion in general, other mainstream religious traditions have been marginalized. The resulting image of Japanese Buddhism to be exported outside of Japan has been one of a homogenized tradition deprived of its multifaceted aspects and historical developments.<sup>2</sup>

Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to analyze several representations of contemporary Japanese Buddhism. I will focus on the ways different Buddhist denominations are portraying themselves to the outside world and attempting to become more visible and acknowledged at a global level through the employment of new visual

media. Due to the limits of space, I will explore, in particular, both online and offline self-representations made by the Japan Buddhist Federation, Sōtō Zen, and Jōdoshū. These three cases have been chosen respectively because they offer different positions on the spectrum of Japanese Buddhism. In this regard, the Japan Buddhist Federation provides a “comprehensive” view of Japanese Buddhism, which allows us to see what problems are related to a general depiction of a complex and manifold religious system. Sōtō Zen is a denomination that has gained much popularity in the “West” even though through an image that corresponds only in part to the real state of affairs in Japan. Lastly, Jōdoshū represents a mainstream denomination that has been overlooked in representations of Buddhism for a non-Japanese audience.<sup>3</sup> I will then compare the image emerging from the presentations of the Japan Buddhist Federation with those provided by these two denominations. This will enable us to focus on common threads, denominational specificities, and differences, which will show the variety and complexity related to Buddhism in Japan.

DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO A “GENERAL” VIEW OF JAPANESE  
BUDDHISM: JAPANESE BUDDHISM AS PRESENTED BY THE JAPAN  
BUDDHIST FEDERATION

The Japan Buddhist Federation (Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai, 全日本仏教会) was founded in 1957 and comprises fifty-eight denominations belonging to the Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo, Jōdo Shin, Zen, and Nichiren traditions and the Nara schools. The Federation presents itself as the only organization that unites all traditional Buddhist denominations and organizations in Japan (*zenkoku no 58 no sho shūha* 全国の58の諸宗派).<sup>4</sup> When only looking at its affiliated institutions—which do not include all denominational branches—one can notice the great variety of Buddhist schools in Japan, which can hardly be reduced to a “general” representation of all Japanese Buddhist traditions. If it is true that these schools are all expressions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, they have developed differently over the course of their own history, creating a diverse constellation of Buddhism and also providing the basis for new religious movements, for example, Rishō Kōseikai, Reiyūkai Kyōdan, Sōka Gakkai, and so on.

In this context, how is Japanese Buddhism depicted on the website of the Japan Buddhist Federation as well as in its booklet titled *A Guide to Japanese Buddhism* that was published in 2004 for an English-speaking

audience?<sup>5</sup> In one of the pamphlets issued by the Federation it is stated that one of its aims is to “promote world peace through cooperating with other religions in the world.”<sup>6</sup> However, from the booklet emerges quite a strong Occidentalist approach toward other religions, in particular Christianity and Islam, which are indicated, together with Buddhism, as the two other “universal religion[s].”<sup>7</sup> Buddhism seems to have acquired here a privileged status over these two monotheistic traditions, and the renowned dichotomy of “East”/spirituality versus “West”/materialism comes to the fore in the preface. In this fashion, Japan’s obsession with materialism after World War II, its resurgence as a big economic power, the anxiety of modern society, and the awareness of the “limits of modernization and globalization” are also highlighted upon throughout the publication.<sup>8</sup> Japanese Buddhism is promoted as a solution for both internal and external crises, a remedy against conflicts and tensions, and a bringer of world peace. Due to its recognition of the buddha-nature in every sentient being, it is presented as a tradition that is open and “generous toward other religions.”<sup>9</sup> In this respect, Buddhism is considered somehow *super partes* in the conflicts between “the Muslim world” and the “West”/Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is able to overcome polarization, a typical trait of “people in the West.”<sup>11</sup> On another level, Japan is depicted here as the only East Asian country that, during the isolation of the Tokugawa period, was able to produce its own “unique culture,” and in the Meiji period, despite its being greatly influenced by Western powers, had the capability to combine the good traits of both Eastern and Western cultures, while integrating them into its own culture. All this was achievable owing to the “Japanese flexible and inquisitive spirit and their diligence nurtured by the influence of Buddhism.”<sup>12</sup> What we can see at work here is a contrasting pattern that has been proposed to a non-Japanese audience from the nineteenth century onwards, such as was the case in the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago held in 1893. As I have argued elsewhere, such representations have been useful to strengthen the prestige of Japanese culture and religion both inside and outside of Japan. Accordingly, these representations have served as tools in the struggle for power at the internal level, for example, to reinforce the prestige of Japanese Buddhist institutions in times of crisis, such as during the Meiji period, as well as in the Asian and international context, for example, to support Japanese wartime ideology.<sup>13</sup>

Buddhist cooperation with other religions inside and outside of Japan is briefly mentioned in the preface. However, the focus is on the potential of Buddhism to be a major religious tradition at the global level, which is emphasized through the participation of the Japan Buddhist Federation in the World Fellowships of Buddhists.<sup>14</sup> Japanese Buddhism is introduced in this book quite partially and as a positive instance of a religious tradition that “refutes . . . ego-centric vengeance, nationalism, patriotism, imperialism and unilateralism.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, there is no reference, for example, to Japanese Buddhists’ involvement in past wars, conflicts, imperialist enterprises, and so on. This lack of critical information is all the more striking since various Buddhist denominations—such as Shin Buddhism and others, which are also affiliated with the Japan Buddhist Federation—have officially acknowledged their war responsibilities and issued antiwar declarations.<sup>16</sup>

What emerges from this publication is an attempt by Japanese Buddhists to occupy a prestigious place within a religious market, which is characterized by a great variety of offers, at the expense, in part, of other religious traditions. This may entail assuming exclusivist tones, while at the same time trying to establish interreligious dialogues and collaboration with other religious groups.

With reference to the website of the Japan Buddhist Federation, it has both a Japanese and an English version. The latter, which is an abridged form of the original, opens up with news regarding the participation of the former president MATSUNAGA Yūkei 松長有慶 (Kōyasan Shingonshū) in the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2010.<sup>17</sup> In his contribution titled “Some Suggestions Offered from Japanese Buddhism” (“Nihon bukkyō kara no teigen,” 日本仏教からの提言), Matsunaga proposes a Mahāyāna/Japanese Buddhist model as a way to escape the “diseases of modern society.” His brief paper is worthy of analysis here in order to shed some light on the efforts made by the Japan Buddhist Federation to present a “general” Japanese Buddhism to an international audience.

Matsunaga’s contribution was included in the forum’s *Faith and the Global Agenda: Values for the Post-Crisis Economy*, an annual report published by the World Economic Forum and produced in collaboration with Georgetown University (a Jesuit university in the United States), on themes related to “the role of faith in global affairs.”<sup>18</sup> Against the backdrop of environmental and economic problems, ethnic and

religious conflicts, the increasing disparity between rich and poor, and anxiety of the individual in the twenty-first century, Matsunaga highlights the potential of “Eastern,” in particular Buddhist, culture to overcome these troubles. He articulates his proposal according to three main points: (1) A holistic (Japanese Buddhist) approach with an emphasis on the interdependence of all living beings; (2) a pluralistic sense of values, as can be seen in “Eastern cultures” like India, China, and Japan; and (3) social activities based on the idea that the life of individuals is owed to the society and the world.

With reference to the first point, emphasis is placed on Japanese Buddhism as a non-“homocentric,” non-egocentric tradition—a characteristic of monotheistic religions and, between the lines, of “Western” cultures—which is based on the interconnectedness of all living beings possessing a buddha-nature. The overcoming of any form of dualism is also highlighted here as a counterpart of “modern”/Western thought, and the Japanese Buddhist worldview is claimed to see phenomena not in opposition to each other but in a “harmonious state of identity.”<sup>19</sup> Japanese Buddhism, thus, can help individuals to shift their perspectives from the “modern one of the self” to a “universalist frame of reference that sees the world as an interrelated whole.”<sup>20</sup> This approach, according to Matsunaga, can be effective in facing pressing problems, such as “human alienation and environmental destruction.”<sup>21</sup>

In the second part of his speech, the positive attitude of Japanese Buddhism is highlighted according to its acceptance and inclusion of elements taken from different religious traditions. Buddhism, as it developed within Japan, is depicted here as a very “unique,” inclusive, and harmonious tradition, which from its inception in the sixth century was able to coexist with the “indigenous spirituality of the Japanese”<sup>22</sup> (read: Shintō). Further we can read that “these two faiths [Buddhism and Shintō] in Japan have experienced a history of mutual influence and coexistence.”<sup>23</sup> However, we should not forget that Buddhism was influenced by and contains elements from other traditions, such as Confucianism and Daoism, and on the other hand there is no reference here to historical events, such as the persecution of Buddhism (*haibutsu kishaku*, 廃仏稀釈) in the Meiji period—followed by the creation of State Shintō—which can hardly be considered an example of harmonious coexistence between these two religious traditions.

Moreover, this alleged harmony with Shintō is not necessarily a characteristic of all Buddhist denominations. This is the case, for example, of Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 (Shin Buddhism), a mainstream form of Buddhism in Japan, which has a traditional distrust towards Shintō.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, if what is stated in Matsunaga's contribution can be "generally" accepted as a common feature of Japanese Buddhism, then Jōdo Shinshū remains marginalized as a non-mainstream denomination, even though it is one of the largest denominations in Japan.

In such portrayals, which strive at depicting a "general," "traditional," and positive view of Japanese Buddhism for an international audience, there occurs the risk to reduce it to an essentialized tradition that does not take into account denominational features. Moreover, such generalizations are characterized by an "acritical" tendency that silences many other voices within Japanese Buddhism itself, some of which have critical and progressive stances. Japanese Buddhism—as with other religious traditions—can be considered multilayered, with not only different denominations, but also different views, interpretations, and practices within the denominations themselves and at the individual level.

The third and last part of Matsunaga's presentation is devoted to Buddhist engagement in society through public projects, welfare activities to assist the poor, and other social interest programs. This is explained not only as an expression of the Mahāyāna idea of a universal religious liberation from suffering, but also of the "Japanese understanding of wrongdoing."<sup>25</sup> Here reference is made to the concept of *sazen* 作善, which means to engage in meritorious activities to cultivate goodness. In this understanding, Matsunaga highlights that the individual should partake in social activities and contribute to the preservation of the environment because the individual owes his or her life to the society and the world.

What emerges from this presentation made for the World Economic Forum is an attempt to provide a non-Japanese audience with an overview of Japanese Buddhism and a way to understand the religious tradition simply and easily. However, this simplification may involve the risk of "neutralizing" and overlooking other aspects connected with a more critical approach; for example, war responsibilities, social discrimination (such as *hisabetsu buraku*), gender issues, and so on. Moreover, as mentioned before, some portrayed aspects cannot be applied to all mainstream denominations, like in the case of an alleged



harmonious coexistence between Buddhism and Shintō. It is a hard task to provide a “general” view of Japanese Buddhism given the many facets and different developments that occurred throughout its history. These changes have led to the creation of a complex and multi-layered reality that is difficult to summarize, as the Japan Buddhist Federation has attempted to do, as a single and homogeneous tradition.

REPRESENTING JAPANESE BUDDHIST DENOMINATIONS:  
ZEN BUDDHISM AND PURE LAND BUDDHISM

In this section I will take into account self-representations of two Buddhist denominations in Japan, Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, with the aim of exploring the dynamics connected with such “general” self-depictions. In turn, I will determine whether there is a common denominator among them, and between them and the representations made by the Japan Buddhist Federation. I will explore representational tools, such as books and pamphlets issued by the denominations, as well as the representations of the institutions on the Internet.

*Sōtō Zen Buddhism*

As aforementioned, the “popular” image of Zen Buddhism outside of Japan has been a non-institutionalized, simplified, and decontextualized form of Zen. Emphasis has been placed in this process on the practice of sitting meditation, *zazen* 坐禪, on the notion of *mu* 無 (emptiness, nothingness), and on a tradition transmitted “outside the teachings, not based upon words or letters.” However, this does not accurately reflect the Japanese situation and the characteristics of different Zen Buddhist schools.<sup>26</sup> For instance, Zen temples are involved in a series of everyday activities and religious services—such as funerals, which commonly provide one of their main sources of income—that are not related to meditation. In this regard, Ian Reader pointed out in the 1980s that although *zazen* is a fundamental part of Sōtō Zen teaching, this practice was not necessarily widely followed or publicized by the institution.<sup>27</sup> The publications addressed to the followers were focused, according to Reader, on institutional aspects, such as mortuary rites, rather than sitting meditation, which seemed difficult to popularize.<sup>28</sup> This applied not only to Sōtō Zen followers, but also to Sōtō priests, many of whom run their temples because of hereditary

obligations rather than by vocational choice.<sup>29</sup> In the Internet portrayals of Sōtō Zen Buddhism (Sōtōshū, 曹洞宗) *zazen* occupies quite a relevant position, particularly, but not exclusively, in its international website. Apart from the Japanese website, the institution has a version in six other languages: English, Italian, German, Portuguese, Spanish, and French. This is a clear attempt to present its public profile to a very wide audience around the world, specifically where the Sōtō denomination has centers and temples and carries out its activities.

Among the various events advertised in its Japanese website, early morning sessions of *zazen* (7–8 a.m.) are offered by the Sōtō Zen institution to people interested in “maintaining their hearts” (*kokoro o mentenansu suru hito toki*, 心をメンテナンスするひととき). These sessions take place at a central hotel in Tokyo (Tokyo Grand Hotel) and are advertised by the Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 曹洞宗宗務庁 (administration office of the denomination) as a chance for busy people to do something for their own spiritual well-being. This idea is expressed in the announcements related to this event, such as in the slogan *Mitai dake de naku, kokoro mo kirei ni naru* 身体だけでなく、心もキレイになる (“Clean not only the body but also the heart”). This can be seen as a “modern” attempt to attract busy people in an urban environment outside the temple, i.e., a hotel in the midst of the city, offering them a “set” that includes a brief session of *zazen*, a Buddhist service (*asa no hōyō*, 朝の法要), and drinking a cup of tea while having an informal talk with the priest (*gyōcha*, 行茶). The institution refers to these early morning sessions as a “quiet boom” (*ima, “asakatsu” ga shizukana būmu*, 今、「朝活」が静かなブーム) as well as claims that people who want to do something for their health and to “polish their selves” are increasing (*kenkō zukuri ya jibun migaki o suru hito ga fuete imasu*, 健康づくりや自分磨きをする人が増えています).<sup>30</sup> The focus, accordingly, has been shifted from *zazen* as a means for attaining enlightenment (*satori*) to a way to cope with a stressful society or one’s everyday life and work, and to do something good and healthy for one’s general well-being. In this way, sitting meditation has acquired a “New Age” flavor and, at the same time, has somehow had its religious link to salvation “neutralized.” This seems, therefore, an attempt to render *zazen* more appealing to a Japanese audience by not focusing a lot on its “religious” aspect and linking it to a “modern,” urban, and often hectic way of life.

In Europe and North America we find an almost opposite situation. In the course of its development in the “West,” *zazen* has been the most

alluring side of Zen Buddhism, and a strong point for its propagation as well as the image creation of this form of Buddhism. On the other hand, other mainstream Buddhist denominations—like Shin Buddhism, where meditation as a form of self-effort practice (*jiriki*, 自力) is generally discarded—have faced the need to propose meditation sessions in order to be more appealing and to not lose followers.<sup>31</sup> In Japan, on the contrary, during the development of Sōtō Zen emphasis has been placed on its institutionalized function and a shift has occurred from the practice of *zazen*, which was considered “difficult and unappealing.”<sup>32</sup> *Zazen*, or meditation more generally, does not seem an element that is perceived and publicized in the same way both inside and outside of Japan, and even within the same denomination it has assumed different uses according to divergent considerations.

#### Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdoshū*)

With regard to self-representations of Pure Land Buddhism (*Jōdoshū*), let us consider the official website of the denomination, which was renewed in October 2009 on the occasion of Hōnen’s eight hundredth anniversary.<sup>33</sup> As I noticed elsewhere, memorial services for founders often provide an occasion for reformulating some of a denomination’s basic assumptions as well as creating a public image. Moreover, these memorials are commonly accompanied by a variety of interconnected activities, such as the release of cultural products, including animation movies (*anime*), promotional DVDs, theatre pieces, and so on. At the institutional level, these events involve a reorganization of the denomination’s structure, while providing new methods to transmit its teachings.<sup>34</sup>

The website for Hōnen’s memorial is represented by the image of the moon (*o-tsuki sama*, お月様)<sup>35</sup> and by an alternating moon calendar. A countdown to the memorial is indicated on the top right of the page. Hōnen’s *tanka* poem “Tsuki kage” 月影 (“Moonlight”) appears within the lunar calendar. The poem reads:

月かげの	<i>Tsuki kage no</i>
いたらぬさとは	<i>itaranuna sato wa</i>
なけれども	<i>nakere domo</i>
ながむる人の	<i>nagamuru hito no</i>
心にぞすむ	<i>kokoro ni zo sumu</i>

(There is no village where the moonlight does not shine. However, it dwells in the hearts of those who gaze at the moon). This poem, which serves also as the anthem of Jōdoshū (*shūka*, 宗歌), is linked to the eighteenth of the founder's twenty-five sacred places (*reijō*, 霊場), the Tendai temple Tsukinowa-dera 月輪寺 on Mt. Atago in Kyoto.<sup>36</sup> Its meaning is that just as the moon shines over every single hamlet, Amida Buddha shines his salvific light upon all sentient beings without exceptions. However, only those who can view the moon are able to appreciate it and understand its existence. In the same way, only those who rely upon Amida's vow and follow the *nenbutsu* path will be able to obtain salvation in the Pure Land.<sup>37</sup> This concept lies behind the new website dedicated to Hōnen's anniversary. The website has been conceived as a tool to make an impression on a great number of people—not only Jōdoshū believers—making them aware of this event through an easy to understand language and the avoidance of difficult technical terms, and in a friendly way with a plenty of pictures and videos.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly to other denominations, Jōdoshū is attempting to provide a “soft” and captivating image of its own religious tradition. At the same time, through their Internet portrayals, the religious institutions take on a dimension of “mass-ness,”<sup>39</sup> becoming not only public but also overcoming the boundaries of Japan to reach a global level. However, the linguistic barrier remains since the English website of Jōdoshū is only a partial translation of the Japanese one and is not as sophisticated and up-to-date as the original. This clearly indicates that the institution's main target is a Japanese-speaking audience and thus the organization is addressing the internal market, although using a medium, the Internet, which is probably the most striking symbol of globalization. This constitutes a difference between the Jōdoshū and Sōtō Zen websites, with the latter patently conceived for an international audience. Regarding the modalities of self-representations of religious denominations online, various scholars have observed that they do not differ much from their printed versions, such as in pamphlets, books, and journals.<sup>40</sup> However, the website of Jōdoshū, while presenting the aforementioned features, also offers some interactive activities, in particular in the section dedicated to families and kids. In the page titled “Jōdoshū Gēmu” 浄土宗ゲーム (“Jōdoshū Games”), for example, there are various activities: a monthly crossword; a virtual *jōya no kane* 除夜の鐘 (bell tolling out the old year) where by moving the mouse from right to left one can ring the temple's bell up to 108

times (and seemingly receive a gift); and a dice game for children, *sugoroku* 双六 (snakes and ladders) where the die is rolled through a click of the mouse.<sup>41</sup> Another page dedicated to visual representations of Hōnen is *Bukkyō kagee banashi* “Hōnen sama” 仏教影絵ばなし「法然さま」 (“Hōnen”: a Buddhist shadow play).<sup>42</sup> It consists of twenty-four episodes on Hōnen’s life and his time in the form of an animated shadow play (*kagee*). As explicitly claimed by the organization, this is conceived as a tool for narrating the master’s story in an amusing way, while addressing both adults and children.

In this regard, forms of popular culture, such as *anime* (animation movies) and *manga* (Japanese comics), have been used by religious denominations to offer a more captivating image of themselves and reach a wide audience that includes both younger and older generations. This has been carried out by proposing a kind of religious entertainment for the family, while staying up-to-date and connected to modern society through the use of new visual media.<sup>43</sup> Another relevant aspect in this context is religious institutions’ use of popular characters and the creation of commercial goods, which are sold at temples and shrines throughout Japan.<sup>44</sup>

In the case of Jōdoshū, commodities related to Hōnen’s eight hundredth memorial,<sup>45</sup> together with new, cute characters as representatives of the institution’s public image, have been produced. One of these characters is Namu-chan なむちゃん. He is modeled after things *kawaii*, a very popular concept in contemporary Japanese culture meaning “cute,” “childish,” “pretty,” and so on.<sup>46</sup> His “family” is composed of two other members: his dog, Ami-chan, and a bird, Dabu-chan. Their names, Namu-Ami-Dabu, form the *nenbutsu*. They appear in the four-cell (*yon-koma*) *manga* entitled *Hello! Namu-chan*, which was published in 2005. Here, Jōdoshū adherents are considered by its author, SHIKI Shigeyuki 志岐滋行, as being themselves members of the “Namu-chan family.”<sup>47</sup> This *manga* includes 150 *yon-koma* comic strips that have been previously published in the official journal of Jōdoshū, the *Jōdoshū shinbun* 浄土宗新聞. The series, which was started in April 1993, continues today, with back issues being available online on the website of Jōdoshū.<sup>48</sup> Similarly to other denominations, a series of merchandise—such as pens, posters, aprons and more—connected to this official character have been produced by the religious organization.<sup>49</sup> Through such characters and friendly images, which are used as

representations for the public, the religious institutions are offering a more approachable profile of themselves. However, in their effort to stay connected to present-day society, Japanese Buddhist denominations, along with other religious traditions in the country, are adopting formats and communication strategies that are only of second nature to the religious dimension. With this emerges a contradiction. While there are often representations from Japanese Buddhists of the “West” as a negative counterpart deeply rooted in materialism and lacking spirituality—two aspects that are propagated as needing to be overcome—on the other hand Buddhist denominations are employing tools and strategies of what they are condemning in order to promote themselves as a valid religious alternative.<sup>50</sup>

With reference to the relationship between single Buddhist denominations and a general image of Japanese Buddhism, we can observe in the case of Jōdoshū that its website is exclusively focused on the denomination itself. There is no space for links to other Buddhist organizations or for an overview of Japanese Buddhism, apart from some brief historical references to other forms of Buddhism, or a section titled “Butsuji (Bukkyō) mame chishiki” 仏事(仏教)まめ知識 (“Bits of Knowledge on Buddhist Rites [Buddhism]”) where some religious festivities are presented, such as New Year, *higan*, and *o-bon*, that are common to other denominations.

The venue for a general view of Japanese Buddhism online remains, in this case, the website of the Japan Buddhist Federation, although the page “Kiso chishiki” 基礎知識 (“Basics of Buddhism”) is currently under construction.<sup>51</sup> This lack of attention toward other Buddhist schools also may be explained given the great variety of denominational features, as well as the institutions’ attempts to sketch and redefine their own identities and roles against the backdrop of the challenges posed by a secularized and globalized world.

#### CONCLUSION

From the examples taken into account in this paper, the following reflections emerge: It is hard to present a single Japanese Buddhism without incurring a partial and biased view, as pointed out with regard to the representations by the Japan Buddhist Federation. Furthermore, there are several denominational differences, and each denomination is striving to maintain and possibly enhance its religious prestige in a society dominated by the laws of the market and by a great variety

of religious options. To this end, Buddhist denominations are making use of communication strategies that are not primarily related to the religious dimension, but are part and parcel of a capitalist society based on “materialism,” which is often depicted as a characteristic of the “West” and a reason for its lack of spirituality. Additionally, they are using new visual media and popular cultural formats in an attempt to stay abreast of the times as well as provide an up-to-date and “modern” image of themselves. Therefore, while on the one hand Japanese Buddhist denominations propose Buddhism as an alternative to materialism and “Westernism,” through the employment and production of commodities to promote themselves and their teachings, they remain entrapped within the same “materialistic” model they are trying to overcome. All this may be explained by also taking into account the dynamics of globalization and secularization, which have led to a weakening of religious authority and the endeavors of religious institutions to redefine and relocate themselves within this framework. As we have observed, online representations of Buddhist denominations do not differ much from their offline versions, and websites are almost exclusively focused on their own denominational traits. There is no effort by single denominations, at least those taken into account here, to present a general view of a Japanese Buddhism. This may be explained if we consider the great variety of schools, movements, and newly established religious groups that have developed within Japan. This multitude of religious traditions, both old and new, have been then exported outside of Japan by assuming different characteristics and adapting themselves to the needs of the hosting countries, which together constitute the multifaceted and complex religious reality called “Japanese Buddhism.”

#### NOTES

1. I would like to thank Forrest Kilimnik for checking the English of this article.
2. On the issue of (mis)representations of Japanese Buddhism and the marginalization of the Pure Land tradition in representations of Japanese Buddhism for the West, see for example, Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: History and Orientalism in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and Elisabetta Porcu, *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008).
3. In regards to self-representations of another mainstream denomination, Jōdo Shinshū (Shin Buddhism) in English, see for example Porcu, *Pure Land*

*Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture*; and Elisabetta Porcu, “Speaking through the Media: Shin Buddhism, Popular Culture and the Internet,” in *The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism*, ed. Ugo Dessì (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 209–239.

4. See their website in English: [http://www.jbf.ne.jp/n03traditional\\_denominations\\_a](http://www.jbf.ne.jp/n03traditional_denominations_a). Cf. Matsunami Kōdō, ed., *A Guide to Japanese Buddhism*, 68 (Tokyo: Japan Buddhist Federation, 2004). See also the Japanese version of their pamphlet. However, in their website in Japanese this sentence is slightly different: *zenkoku no 58 no sho shūha* has been replaced by “58 main schools” (*juyōna 58 shūha*, 主要な58宗派). See <http://www.jbf.ne.jp/d00/index.html> (both websites accessed December 3, 2010).

5. It is available also online at [http://www.buddhanet.net/nippon/nippon\\_toc.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/nippon/nippon_toc.htm) (accessed October 3, 2010).

6. Under the title “What Is the Japan Buddhist Federation?” (“Zaidan Hōjin Zen Nihon Bukkyōkai to wa,” 財団法人全日本仏教会とは). Interestingly enough, this last sentence does not appear in the book *A Guide to Japanese Buddhism*, while the rest of the text is quite similar to that of the pamphlet. In the Japanese version it reads: *kakkoku no hoka no sho shūkyō to mo kyōryoku shi sekai heiwa no katsudō ni tsutomete imasu* 各国の他の諸宗教とも協力し世界平和の活動に努めています。

7. Kōdō, ed., *A Guide to Japanese Buddhism*, vii.

8. *Ibid.*, viii.

9. *Ibid.*, vii.

10. See *ibid.*, 60–61, “unless both sides [the Muslim world and the West] deeply reflect upon and repent their ignorance, and stand on the same ground of the Oneness of all life [as preached by Buddhism], there will be no cessation of battle with each other” (p. 61). See also pp. 65–66. Conflicts are mentioned here exclusively with reference to monotheistic religions (see, for example, vii, 58).

11. *Ibid.*, 58.

12. *Ibid.*, viii. Cf. Porcu, *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture*, 24.

13. Porcu, *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture*, 24.

14. See Kōdō, ed., *A Guide to Japanese Buddhism*, ix.

15. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

16. For example, in Shin Buddhism the Ōtani-ha acknowledged its war responsibilities in 1987 and the Honganji-ha in 1991.

17. [http://www.jbf.ne.jp/n00the\\_world\\_economic\\_forum\\_20/](http://www.jbf.ne.jp/n00the_world_economic_forum_20/) (accessed December 6, 2010).

18. See <http://www.weforum.org/en/media/Latest%20Press%20Releases/>



PR\_Faithvalues and *Faith and the Global Agenda: Values for the Post-Crisis Economy* on <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/faith/valuesreport.pdf> (accessed December 6, 2010). Matsunaga's "Some Suggestions Offered from Japanese Buddhism" is on pp. 39–41. The text is also available online (together with its Japanese version) at [http://www.jbf.ne.jp/2010/01/post\\_160.html](http://www.jbf.ne.jp/2010/01/post_160.html) (accessed December 6, 2010).

19. *Faith and the Global Agenda*, 39.

20. *Ibid.*, 40.

21. *Ibid.*, 40. Such a view is often found in presentations from different Buddhist denominations in Japan.

22. *Ibid.*, 40.

23. *Ibid.*, 40.

24. However, although *kamidana* (Shintō altars) are not allowed by Shin Buddhist institutions, at the individual level there are followers who have a Shintō altar at home and practice Shintō rituals, such as visiting the shrine at New Year (*hatsumōde*, 初詣). In this regard, see Ugo Dessì, "Social Behavior and Religious Consciousness among Shin Buddhist Practitioners," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 37, no. 2 (2010): 335–366.

25. *Faith and the Global Agenda*, 40–41.

26. There are three main schools of Zen Buddhism in Japan: Rinzaishū 臨濟宗, Sōtōshū 曹洞宗, and Ōbakushū 黄檗宗.

27. Ian Reader. "Zazenless Zen? The Position of Zazen in Institutional Zen Buddhism," in *Japanese Religions* 14, no. 3 (1986): 8–9. On this issue see also Porcu, *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture*, 7–10.

28. Reader, "Zazenless Zen?," 9.

29. Reader, "Zazenless Zen?," 10–11, 14–15.

30. This is a project organized by the Soto Institute for Buddhist Studies (Sōtōshū Sōgō Kenkyū Sentā "Asa Katsu Zen" Purojekuto, 曹洞宗総合研究センター「朝活禅」プロジェクト). See <http://www.sotozen-net.or.jp/category/gyoji> (accessed December 7, 2010).

31. See, for example, Porcu, *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture*, 8, 12. In the Honganji-ha, for instance, this has created conflicts between North American temples and the head temple in Japan, where there is a resistance to accept such a proposal (personal communication with various Honganji-ha priests and scholars in Kyoto).

32. Reader, "Zazenless Zen?," 24. See also Porcu, *Pure Land Buddhism in Modern Japanese Culture*, 8–9.

33. This event will take place in 2011.

34. Elisabetta Porcu, "Anniversaries, Founders, Slogans, and Visual Media in Shin Buddhism," *Japanese Religions* 34, no. 1 (2009): 53–54.
35. This is also mentioned in the fourth issue of *Tomoiki Dayori*, a journal of the denomination.
36. See also [http://www.jodo.or.jp/25reijyo/index\\_18.html](http://www.jodo.or.jp/25reijyo/index_18.html) (accessed December 20, 2010).
37. See *Jōdoshū danshinto hōten Henshū Iinkai* 『浄土宗檀信徒宝典』編集委員会, eds., *Jōdoshū danshinto hōten* 浄土宗檀信徒宝典 (Tokyo: Jōdoshū Shuppan, 2009), 138. See also the website of Jōdoshū, <http://www.jodo.or.jp/naruhodo/index11.html> (accessed December 20, 2010).
38. See "Dai onki hōmu pēji' ga rinyūaru" 「大遠忌ホームページ」がリニューアル, in *Tomoiki Dayori* ともいきだより 4 (25 September 2009): 1.
39. Cf. Stewart H. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 45–46.
40. See, for example, Inoue Nobutaka, "From Religious Conformity to Innovation: New Ideas of Religious Journey and Holy Places," *Social Compass* 47 (2000): 21–32; and Petra Kienle and Birgit Staemmler, "Self-Representation of Two New Religions on the Japanese Internet: Jehovah's Witnesses and Seichō no Ie," in *Japanese Cybercultures*, ed. Nanette Gottlieb and Mark McLelland (London: Routledge, 2003), 222–234. In the case of Shin Buddhism on the Internet, see Porcu, "Speaking through the Media: Shin Buddhism, Popular Culture and the Internet" (in particular, 230–235).
41. <http://www.jodo.or.jp/game/index.html> (accessed December 20, 2010).
42. <http://www.jodo.or.jp/onki800/kagee/index.html> (accessed December 20, 2010).
43. See Porcu, "Speaking through the Media: Shin Buddhism, Popular Culture and the Internet"; and Porcu, "Anniversaries, Founders, Slogans, and Visual Media in Shin Buddhism."
44. In the case of Shin Buddhism, for example, a big-budget *anime* production (*Shinran sama: negai, soshite hikari* 親鸞さま—ねがい、そしてひかり, *Shinran Sama: His Wish and Light*) was released on DVD by commission of the Honganji-ha in 2008, as one of the several projects related to the 750th memorial for Shinran's death. This memorial is a paramount event. Preparations started in 2005 and will last until 2011–2012. Closely related to this *anime* is a series of souvenir items and goods depicting the characters of the movie, which are sold at the head temple (*honzan*, 本山) in Kyoto and are available through the Honganji-ha's online shop (see <http://hongwanji-shuppan.com/bs02.html>, accessed December 21, 2010). These items include stationery, stickers, and mini towels. Moreover, straps for mobile phones featuring the popular commercial icon Hello Kitty are also to be found there. These straps have

been recently produced by the Honganji-ha in a limited edition to celebrate the completion of repair works in the Goeidō, the Founder's Hall (see Porcu, "Speaking through the Media: Shin Buddhism, Popular Culture and the Internet," 220–221). We may notice that through such commercial enterprises religious institutions are attempting to compete and consolidate themselves in the marketplace of capitalist society and relocate themselves in a globalized and secularized society where their authority seems to be at stake (*ibid.*, 221). In this regard, see also Ugo Dessì, "Shin Buddhism and Globalization: Attitudes toward the Political Subsystem and Pluralism at the Organizational and Individual Levels," in *The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism*, ed. Ugo Dessì (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 242–266.

45. See their online shop where several items, such as religious items (e.g., *kesa*, 袈裟) or non-religious items—like umbrellas, loupes, stationery—with the logo of Hōnen's memorial, and a special production of mineral water (Yoshimizu 吉水 water) are on sale: <http://www.tomoikishop.jp> (accessed November 2010).

46. See also the characters of the *anime Shinran sama* or of various *manga* in Shin Buddhism and other religious denominations.

47. See SHIKI Shigeyuki 志岐滋行, *Hello! Namu chan Hello! なむちゃん*, 94 (Tokyo: Ikeda Shōten, 2005).

48. [http://www.jodo.or.jp/namu/namu\\_back.html](http://www.jodo.or.jp/namu/namu_back.html) (accessed January 6, 2011).

49. <http://www.jodo.or.jp/namu/shopping/index.html> (accessed January 6, 2011).

50. There are several examples in this regard. To cite only a few closely related to this paper's topic, see, for example, the *Guide to Japanese Buddhism* mentioned above (p. 58); or the website in Japanese of Jōdoshū where there is a stress on a society lacking in spirituality and governed by materialism ("...*seishintekini wa kanarazushimo sō to wa ienai jidai de mo arimasu. Busshitsutekini megumarenagara, nani ka kokoro ni mitasarenai mono ga aru no dewanai ka. Sore wa kokoro no mondai to mo shūkyō no mondai to mo ieru deshō*" 精神的には必ずしもそうとは言えない時代でもあります。物質的に恵まれながら、何か心に見たされないものがあるのではないか。それは心の問題とも宗教の問題ともいえるでしょう。 <http://www.jodo.or.jp/naruhodo/index12.html>).

51. <http://www.jbf.ne.jp/b25/> (accessed December 20, 2010). A general presentation of Japanese Buddhism is the *Guide to Japanese Buddhism* taken into account above. There is, however, a page in the website of the Japan Buddhist Federation with a very brief illustrated introduction to Śākyamuni titled "Who is Sakya?" しゃかさまって? , <http://www.jbf.ne.jp/b00/index.html> (accessed December 20, 2010).



## Locally Translocal American Shin Buddhism

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IN HIS STUDY ON THE AMERICAN iterations of the Japanese-derived post-pregnancy loss ritual *mizuko kuyō*, *Mourning the Unborn Dead*, Jeff Wilson rightly points out that “Japanese-American Zen temples tend to be partially obscured by convert Zen on the one hand and Japanese-American Jōdo Shinshū on the other, [and] additional Japanese forms of Buddhism in the United States are more or less completely invisible to both the scholarly and popular media communities.”<sup>1</sup> While this is certainly an accurate observation, it is also a bit misleading in regards to the amount of scholarly literature on American Shin Buddhism. Yes, a majority of the work done on Japanese American Buddhism has focused on Shin Buddhism, but in the last three or four decades since the academic study of American Buddhism has begun to flourish, this majority is a minority compared to the much larger body of literature on American Buddhisms more generally. There are very few book-length treatments on the subject, the most thorough of which include Testuden Kashima’s *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Organization* and Donald Tuck’s *Buddhist Churches of America: Jōdo Shinshū*, both of which are now out of print.<sup>2</sup> Michihiro Ama’s forthcoming work on the pre-World War Two history of the Buddhist Mission of North America attests to the need for more research on American Shin Buddhism.<sup>3</sup>

Most edited volumes on American Buddhism include a chapter or two on American Shin Buddhism; however, their scarcity suggests that a generalized interest in the topic remains low. Moreover, these treatments have by and large not been particularly positive. Leaving aside Kashima’s sociological surveys and Arthur Nishimura’s historical survey,<sup>4</sup> most of the scholarship has cast American Shin Buddhism in the role of traditional, conservative, and static; Richard Hughes Seager’s survey *Buddhism in America* devotes an entire chapter to the

Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), but this chapter is tellingly titled “Jōdo Shinshū: America’s Old-Line Buddhists.”<sup>5</sup> This appellation is in stark contrast to James William Coleman’s depiction of “convert” communities as America’s “new Buddhism,” suggesting that the BCA remains separate from a dynamic, homegrown American Buddhism.<sup>6</sup> Beginning with the assumption that the BCA is but an ethnically homogenous Japanese American community, Kenneth Tanaka openly questions whether or not the “BCA can make the effective transition from being traditionally ethnic-centered to becoming more Dharma-centered.”<sup>7</sup> There is a persistent narrative of decline that hangs over the BCA in the academic literature, buttressed by George Tanabe’s repeated warnings that American Shin Buddhism is but a few days shy of dying out completely.<sup>8</sup> It is little wonder that no one would take American Shin Buddhism as a serious object of study; the overall consensus seems to be that American Shin Buddhists have not done much of anything in over a century and are going to completely vanish any minute now.

How then do we talk about American Shin Buddhism and the Buddhist Churches of America, its largest iteration in the United States? Is the BCA nothing more than an ethnic Japanese organization? Is it purely a form of Japanese Buddhism that happens to reside in the United States? Or is it an authentic and “home grown” variant of American Buddhism, broadly defined? Is it a participant in what might be called a global Japanese Buddhist ethnoscape?<sup>9</sup> Or, sixty-five years after internment, is it finally able to claim its American-ness, unapologetically? The present paper, based in part on an ongoing research project, presents a brief snapshot of the Buddhist Churches of America at present and suggests that far from being either a fully Americanized or thoroughly Japanese form of Buddhism, it is both of and in between these extremes. That is, American Shin Buddhism is *locally translocal*; it is impacted by the local concerns of the broader American religious and cultural landscape while being beholden to a transnational, global Shin Buddhist discourse. Here, I argue that the local concerns within BCA churches have impacted the training and ordination procedures for American-born Shin Buddhist ministers. These procedures are attenuated by the larger, transnational institutional structures of both the BCA and the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha in Japan resulting in a locally translocal form of Buddhism. This research suggests that American Shin Buddhism can be used as a test case for newer research

on transnationalism and globalization, issues that will certainly only increase in importance and influence in American Buddhism moving forward into the twenty-first century.

#### A SNAPSHOT OF AMERICAN SHIN BUDDHISM

The Buddhist Churches of America maintains a complex relationship with the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha in Japan. This relationship, however, does not mean that the BCA is merely a transplanted form of Japanese Buddhism residing in the United States. American Shin Buddhism differs significantly from its Japanese forms while nevertheless participating in a transnational Shin Buddhist discourse. To best understand this complex relationship, I will begin with a brief overview of the Buddhist Churches of America, its institutional structure, and its relationship to the Hongwanji.

In 1899, at the behest of Japanese immigrants to the United States, the Buddhist Mission of North America (BMNA) was established in San Francisco as an overseas mission of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. Over the first decades of the twentieth century, a number of small lay Buddhist organizations had sprung up along the West Coast, usually beginning as Young Men's Buddhist Associations. One by one, these groups affiliated themselves with the BMNA and established themselves as formal churches serving primarily the growing Japanese American population. The BMNA became the Buddhist Churches of America during World War Two internment, and following the war continued to serve the Japanese American community while simultaneously making small forays into the wider discourse on American Buddhism.<sup>10</sup> At present, the BCA, still headquartered in San Francisco, acts as an umbrella organization that oversees sixty-one temples, churches, and *betsuin*, as well as six "fellowships," that are divided into eight districts. The BCA collects dues from each of these organizations based on their number of dues-paying member families; in exchange the BCA offers a number of educational programs and resources, and, as an overseas district of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, assigns ministers to local sanghas. BCA-affiliated sanghas are alternately labeled churches, temples, and *betsuin*, and for all intents and purposes, there is little substantive difference between these types of institutions. Many "churches" have been called "churches" since their foundation more than a century ago and continue to call themselves such out of tradition more than anything.

Despite the rhetoric of decline that suggests that the BCA is becoming increasingly irrelevant, overall membership has actually remained rather steady over the past three decades. Of course, the business of “counting” Buddhists in North America is problematic on several fronts, the first being the difficulty of gathering reliable statistics. For example, recently the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey that suggested that the United States is only 0.7% Buddhist with more than half being of Euro-American descent. The survey, however, was criticized by scholars<sup>11</sup> who pointed out the limitations of accounting for Buddhists with a survey conducted only in the continental United States, only in English and Spanish, and only via land-line telephones, and therefore missing the high percentage of Buddhists in Hawai‘i, Buddhists whose native language may be any of a number of Asian languages, and younger Buddhists reachable only via cellular phones or the Internet. Secondly, there remains the problem of accounting for liminal persons, persons who may hold multiple religious identities or no identity at all while still participating in religious communities. These are, to use Thomas Tweed’s phrasing, Buddhist “sympathizers,” those who may or may not belong to a formal community but, nevertheless, have a Buddhist identity to some degree and influence the overall American Buddhist landscape. These liminal identities and their influence are overlooked by relying on the static categories used by such surveys as the Pew Forum.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas these issues may impact our ability to quantify the Shin Buddhist presence in the United States, there are further issues specific to the case of the Buddhist Churches of America. BCA membership is generally determined by family memberships, not individuals, which makes arriving at precise figures difficult at best. For example, in his 1977 study, Kashima estimates fourteen thousand member families representing nearly forty-five thousand individuals.<sup>13</sup> In research from the late 1980s, he reports a total BCA membership of just over twenty thousand. However, this “definition of membership includes both families . . . and single members,” and Kashima makes no effort to estimate how many individuals this number represents.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, because member churches must pay dues to the BCA based on their number of member families, some local churches have been suspected of regularly undercounting their membership numbers as a way of saving money. Finally, relying on membership numbers alone obscures the participation of non-members within local BCA communities as well



as those who may self-identify as Shin Buddhists but have no formal affiliation with a BCA church or sangha.

One test case, that of the Berkeley Buddhist Temple, can be illustrative. At present there are 220 dues-paying member families representing approximately 350 individuals.<sup>15</sup> In addition to regular member families and individuals, there are also approximately eighty children enrolled in the Berkeley Buddhist Temple's Dharma School. While many of these children's families are regular dues-paying members, others are not. According to David Matsumoto, the Berkeley Buddhist Temple's current resident minister, some Dharma School parents enroll their children in Berkeley's Dharma School because that is where they happen to live; however, they may have long-standing familial connections to another BCA church in the area at which they are official members. Others bring their children to Dharma School but never join the temple as official members while still participating in services or other events. Matsumoto reports that one such Dharma School mother told him that she never joined the temple officially "because no one ever asked me."<sup>16</sup> Finally, regardless of whatever number we arrive at when examining membership lists, there are an untold number of "unofficial members" as well as members of the general Berkeley population who attend the community's many annual events such as the Bon Odori festival. Many of these "sympathizers" and other nominally Buddhist persons may contribute to the temple financially, but their identity or affiliation, Buddhist or otherwise, is difficult if not impossible to ascertain. All told, there may be upwards of one thousand people who are in some way or another affiliated with the Berkeley Buddhist Temple.

Despite the fact that overall BCA membership has remained more or less stable for the past few decades, the rhetoric of decline that suggests that membership levels are falling and falling fast is not far off in smaller, rural areas. Small churches that were established more than a century ago in farming communities up and down the West Coast are suffering the effects of larger demographic shifts in the United States. To the extent that these communities were deeply tied to first generation Japanese immigrant communities that have long since left for more centrally located urban areas, we will no doubt see many small BCA churches vanish in the decades to come.<sup>17</sup> Despite these losses, however, many ministers from larger urban communities report year-over-year membership increases that may make up for whatever losses the BCA suffers in rural communities.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, while the

BCA remains overwhelmingly Japanese American, this demographic is shifting as well. To assume that the BCA is Japanese through and through is problematic to the extent that this stereotype blinds one to the increasing number of non-Japanese converts and life-long members, many of whom take very active and prominent leadership roles.<sup>19</sup>

Reacting to demographic shifts such as an increase in non-Japanese members and a movement away from rural areas to urban locations represents some of the ways that American Shin Buddhism is being impacted by broader American population trends. In short, the BCA reacts, as it has for more than a century, to a changing American religious and cultural landscape. However, to the extent that the BCA is inextricably linked to the global Shin Buddhist community, and specifically to the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, it is also impacted by transnational concerns.

The BCA is one of several overseas organization of the Kyoto-based Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. Whereas “Hongwanji” may refer to a specific temple complex in Kyoto, it also refers to the umbrella organization that oversees a large number of individual temples spread out across Japan. These temples are all members of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha in a manner similar, though not identical, to the relationship between individual American churches and the BCA. The most important difference between American churches and Japanese temples is that Japanese temples are hereditary institutions. Leadership is passed from father to (usually) eldest son in a patrilineal line of succession stretching back, in some cases, centuries. The Hongwanji, therefore, has no direct authority over local temples’ leadership and is not responsible for assigning ministers in the same way that the BCA has authority over the assignment of ministers to local American churches.

It is a commonly held belief that American Shin Buddhists have incorporated Anglo-American and, frankly, “churchy” language as a result of external pressure to “fit it,” to be more “American” in the face of rampant racism and anti-Japanese sentiment leading up to World War Two. And whereas this is no doubt true, it is also somewhat naive to believe that there was a straight and uncontested line of translation from Japanese to English; history is rarely that neat. We must recognize that American Shin Buddhist churches are significantly different from Japanese Shin Buddhist temples. Most significantly for our present purposes, it is important to note that within the Hongwanji hierarchy, temples (that is, *-ji*<sup>20</sup>), are a specially designated category of community

that have special rights and responsibilities that other types of Shin Buddhist organizations do not enjoy. Specifically, Japanese temples are hereditary institutions whose leadership is a matter of patrilineal succession. American churches, on the other hand, are run primarily by non-ordained lay leaders whose ministers are assigned to them by the Shin Buddhist hierarchy. It is important to note that no BCA church is considered to be a temple by the Hongwanji with one exception—ironically, the San Francisco Buddhist Church.

Compare this use of “temple” with *betsuin*. In Japan, *betsuin* have a different relationship to the Hongwanji hierarchy than regular temples; however, this is not the case on the American side. There are five BCA-affiliated churches that are designated *betsuin* and, like their Japanese counterparts, their resident ministers hold the title of *rinban*. Whereas these five American *betsuin* are listed by name within the Hongwanji’s records, in practice they are institutionally no different from other BCA churches. In general, American *betsuin* are far larger and older than other BCA churches, and their *rinban* tend to be older and more experienced ministers, affording them special status within the community at large. With their larger size and status, they are often responsible for overseeing local churches that may not be able to support a full-time minister. However, this “older and larger” designation or the ability to oversee smaller churches does not necessarily make a temple a *betsuin*. Arguably, the oldest community in the BCA is the San Francisco Buddhist Church, which is not a *betsuin*. And whether as a result of a shortage of full-time ministers in more rural areas of the country or long-standing cross-temple relationships, many churches that are not *betsuin* oversee other smaller churches. Finally, despite their special designation, the relationship between individual American *betsuin* and the Hongwanji hierarchy is no different than the relationship between any BCA church; that is, all churches and *betsuin* are subordinate to the San Francisco Buddhist Church, which does have a direct relationship to Kyoto. Thus, whereas in the American context, there is little substantive difference between churches, temples, and *betsuin*, the same cannot be said on the Japanese side.

In Japan, temples (again, *-ji*) and *betsuin* are not at all the same type of organization. Japanese *betsuin* are run and maintained directly by the Hongwanji temple in Kyoto and act as large regional centers spread out across Japan; *betsuin rinban* ministers are assigned directly by the *monshu*, the titular head of the Hongwanji.<sup>21</sup> And while Japanese

temples follow a patrilineal pattern of succession and are thus managed not unlike a “family business,” the same is not true in the United States. BCA churches are run by boards of directors, elected bodies of volunteer laypersons who are charged with overseeing the day-to-day functions of the community, managing temple funds, and maintaining the building and property. Whereas ministers meet with their boards and certainly have influence and input on day-to-day decisions, there is a diffused power structure within these communities that gives non-ordained, lay members considerable power and influence. Boards are typically not only responsible for running the temples, they also hire their ministers and set the annual ritual and liturgical calendars. Moreover, almost all BCA communities run Dharma Schools, programs of Buddhist education for youth, which are run almost exclusively by lay members of the community, primarily women.

In general, lay leaders within American Shin Buddhist communities have significantly more day-to-day involvement with the running of churches than one may expect to find in Japanese temples where the minister has more authority and oversight. An American minister is, for all intents and purposes, an employee of his or her church’s board of directors. Technically, of course, ministers are not hired by their local churches; rather, ministers are appointed by the *socho* (bishop) of the Buddhist Churches of America. The process of assigning ministers to temples is detailed in the *Shūmon hōkishū* (lit. *Buddhist Sect Laws and Regulations*),<sup>22</sup> a manual of rules and regulations written by the Hongwanji leadership in Japan. According to the *Shūmon hōkishū*, the bishop has the authority to assign ministers to specific churches; however, the individual church’s board of directors must approve these assignments. And it is fairly clear from my interviews with BCA ministers that much of these decisions are handled in unofficial conversations between all interested partners well before any actual assignments are made. These conversations may involve the bishop, individual members of the board of directors, and other lay leaders, but they may also involve several churches and leaders across an entire BCA district.

Thus whereas the Buddhist Churches of America remains deeply intertwined with a transnational Shin Buddhist organization and is therefore part of a larger Japanese Shin Buddhist diaspora, there are significant differences in institutional structure between the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha and its mission in the United States. The reasons for these differences are multifaceted. As an institution that

developed within an immigrant community, there was at the beginning of the BCA's history no assurance that there would be a "second generation" to whom to pass the churches or temples. Many first generation immigrants had no intention of staying in the United States but instead had come to work, save money, and return to Japan. Thus, the ministers who were sent from Japan to serve these communities had no long-standing familial ties to the community. They had no temples to inherit or bequeath. Moreover, as time went on and the communities developed and grew, they had to incorporate their institutions according to United States laws, not Japanese ones.<sup>23</sup> These laws favor democratically structured, non-profit religious organizations, not hereditary ones. Finally, from its inception, the BCA has been considered a missionary outgrowth of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha whose ministers have the charge to propagate the Buddha's and Shinran's teachings abroad. From the point of view of Japan, the BCA's position is clearly subordinate to the Hongwanji leadership. Thus, while we can detect significant differences between the Japanese and American Shin Buddhist institutions, they remain deeply interconnected. And this interconnection and its attendant translocal lines of influence is further attenuated by the process of ministerial training and ordination.

#### TRANSNATIONAL MINISTERIAL TRAINING AND ORDINATION

The Hongwanji has at present four overseas districts and several areas of missionary activity, including: North America, Canada, Hawai'i, South America, Australia and Oceania, Europe, Mexico, Taiwan, and Thailand. The North American District is, in essence, the Buddhist Churches of America, and this subservient role requires that all BCA churches must conform to the rules and regulations set forth by the Hongwanji as contained in the *Shūmon hōkishū*. This relationship is felt most strongly in the area of ministerial training and the assignment of ministers to American churches. The *monshu* has the sole authority to ordain new ministers. As an overseas district of the Hongwanji, the BCA's ministers must be ordained by the *monshu*, who has the authority to assign ministers to specific overseas temples. In the case of the North American District, the only "official" temple is the San Francisco Buddhist Church. Thus, on paper, all BCA ministers are ministers of this one temple and are then assigned to local branch churches by the BCA's *socho*. The BCA's role in the training, ordination, and assignment of ministers is not completely at the whim of the Hongwanji leadership

in Japan, of course, nor has this relationship remained unchanged over the course of its history.<sup>24</sup> Since the middle of the twentieth century, however, it has been assumed that the path to ministry leads inexorably through Kyoto.

At present, the normative process of becoming a BCA minister begins with an individual expressing interest in becoming a minister and receiving encouragement from his or her local BCA minister to enroll in a Hongwanji-approved training institution. While there are several options if one is willing to relocate to Japan, historically, the only approved institution in North America has been the Institute of Buddhist Studies (IBS) in Berkeley, though this has recently changed as we will see below. Regardless, after a period of study at the IBS or elsewhere, the aspirant will be granted ministerial candidate status by the *socho* following a number of interviews, a psychological evaluation, and approval by the BCA's Ministers Training and Development Committee. At this point, the candidate will be eligible to travel to Japan to complete the first level of ordination, *tokudo*, a two week ritual at the Hongwanji temple in Kyoto that includes a rigorous schedule of work, classes, chanting, ceremonies, and other rites. Initiates are required to ritually shave their heads as though they are taking formal monastic vows (women may opt out of this requirement), but they do not shave their eyebrows. The ritual itself is based largely on preexisting Tendai forms and is meant to replicate the process of ordination that Shinran himself went through, including ritually renouncing monastic vows.<sup>25</sup> Following this first level of ordination, *tokudo* ministers are required to serve in a BCA church, usually as a minister's assistant, for a period of time before returning to Japan for *kyōshi*, a second level of ordination. *Kyōshi* confers upon ministers the right to teach the dharma, and, generally speaking, most Hongwanji ministers have this level of ordination as a bare minimum if they wish to work as a Shin Buddhist minister. BCA ministers, like all overseas ministers, must complete one additional level of ordination, *kaikyōshi*, a certificate allowing one to minister outside Japan. Thus, somewhat ironically, American-born Shin Buddhist ministers hold the same position as Japanese-born Shin Buddhist missionaries.

However, this normative process to become a BCA minister has been recently circumvented by the establishment of the Minister's Assistant Program (MAP). As we have seen, within the normative timeline of becoming a minister, most ministerial aspirants will serve as a

minister's assistant for a period of time, a sort of internship or training period before they are allowed to lead their own community independently. Traditionally, the minister's assistant's role was to do just that—assist the minister—and came with clearly defined roles and boundaries. For example, assistants were not allowed to conduct certain rituals or services, especially funeral or memorial services, and only those who have received *tokudo* were allowed to sit within the *naijin* or altar area of a Shin Buddhist temple. However, as the position of the minister's assistant has grown in importance, these boundaries have become more flexible, regardless of ordination status, and especially in those communities outside of the immediate San Francisco Bay Area, far removed from the centers of American Shin Buddhist authority. As a consequence of this developing role, a formal Minister's Assistant Program of training was begun and championed by Socho Koshin Ogui in 2004.<sup>26</sup>

The Minister's Assistant Program is designed to allow interested individuals to train for careers in the BCA ministry and work toward *tokudo*, *kyōshi* or *kaikyōshi* without necessarily relocating to Berkeley or Japan. The program includes a significant amount of study done via the BCA's Center for Buddhist Education's online correspondence course and participation in several intensive retreats held throughout the year at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley. The bulk of the training is done by local ministers who have the burden of responsibility to train their assistants at their respective churches. Thus, the MAP training program allows individuals a new track toward ministry that does not require extended study at the IBS or a Japanese university; on the other hand, to the extent that it is something of a part-time course of study, it takes a substantially longer period of time to complete.

One of the initial justifications for the program was as a solution to the "minister shortage problem"; at present, of the sixty-one BCA temples and churches, nearly a third do not have a full-time resident minister, and a significant number of the remaining ministers are nearing retirement age. The hope was that the MAP program would be a way to make the path to ministry simpler and more appealing to a wider number of people who in turn would go on to serve these smaller communities. The hope that the MAP program would solve the ministerial shortage led to its inclusion within and oversight of the BCA's preexisting Ministers Training and Development Committee. Significantly, the Hongwanji's *Shūmon hōkishū* was amended to allow

for MAP participants to qualify for *tokudo*, reflecting the transnational influence the “subservient” BCA in practice has within the Kyoto hierarchy. Whereas it is still too early in the history of this program to judge whether or not it will in fact solve the ministerial shortage problem, it is important to note that less than half of those who have enrolled in the MAP program have actually gone on to become *tokudo* ministers, let alone *kyōshi* or *kaikyōshi* as required by the Hongwanji establishment.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the MAP program and position of the minister’s assistant represent a significant creative adaptation and response to larger demographic shifts both inside and outside the community proper. While the Center for Buddhist Education does not keep track of demographic information, anecdotal evidence culled from interviews and fieldwork suggests that a majority of MAP participants are converts to the BCA, non-Japanese-American, or both. Many minister’s assistants, while not technically authorized to perform certain rituals or services, push the boundaries of what is acceptable behavior for non-ordained members of the community. By leading Dharma Family Services or performing Buddhist weddings, minister’s assistants seem to have a greater level of spiritual responsibility within their communities, a trend that seems particularly strong in the mountain states. While it is mere speculation at this point without further research, it seems reasonable to suggest that the MAP program and the position of the minister’s assistant represent a way for converts to participate within the larger BCA community apart from the well-established, often family-centric and multi-generational relationships at play within local church organizations. But of course this increase in involvement on the part of converts is also a point of friction. One ministerial aspirant, a non-Japanese life-long member of the community, feels as though many converts are not sensitive to the BCA’s Japanese American heritage, that the increased number of non-Japanese converts are attempting to change the tradition too much too fast.<sup>28</sup>

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Arguably, over the past few decades Buddhism has entered the American religious discourse in a way that is contrary to traditional Shin Buddhist practice. As Americans increasingly embrace meditative and mindfulness-based practices, they expect that to be a Buddhist is to be a meditator. As a matter of doctrinal orthodoxy, Shin Buddhism



has eschewed such “self-powered” practices as seated meditation, and in practice its members have relied on the recitative practice of chanting the *nenbutsu*. One might conjecture that in order to attract new members, the BCA could promote seated meditation to potential converts who have come to expect that Buddhists meditate. Indeed, such attempts have been made but have not yet been successful. The Minister’s Assistant Program, however, has been successful, attracting a growing number of both converts and life-long members of the community. Being a minister’s assistant provides one an opportunity to more directly engage the spiritual life of a Shin Buddhist community by participating and even leading rituals and services. This level of engagement is quite different from the sort of “mundane” engagement lay Shin Buddhists typically enjoy through membership on a board of directors or within a lay group. Perhaps American Buddhists do not necessarily want to *meditate* as much as they want to *participate*, and being a minister’s assistant provides one an opportunity within a Shin Buddhist context.

This uniquely American impulse and the BCA’s response to it illuminates one way that American Shin Buddhism is affected by the local and is differentiated from Japanese Shin Buddhism. Nevertheless, the position of the minister’s assistant does not exist in a vacuum; minister’s assistants’ authority comes from the recognition given by the BCA. And this recognition is itself a result of the BCA’s relationship to the larger, transnational institution of the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. The rules governing the training and ordination of Shin ministers, written and codified by a Japanese institution, have been attenuated by concerns arising in a specifically American context. It is this relationship that allows us to conceive of American Shin Buddhism as locally translocal.

The local/translocal nature of American Shin Buddhism is not merely an institutional or theoretical construct. It impacts individuals and shapes their practice. Consider the following hypothetical example. Suppose there is a Japanese American woman who was born and raised in the Central Valley farming community of Lodi, California, approximately eighty miles east of San Francisco. Coming from a lower socio-economic background, she has lived and worked in the Lodi area her whole life, rarely traveling beyond her local community. She has never been to Japan, and her only association with her ethnic heritage is through the local Lodi Buddhist Church. She is as likely to attend the

city's annual wine-grape festival as she is the Buddhist church's annual *obon* festival. Thus, her experiences as a Buddhist will be informed by her specific locality. Nevertheless, to the extent that she belongs to a BCA-affiliated church, she is impacted by the larger translocal Shin Buddhist network. The minister who is assigned to her church will be assigned by the BCA's bishop. This minister will be the person from whom she learns about Buddhism, the person who will perform important rituals for her and her family. And this minister is likely not a Lodi native. He may have been trained in Berkeley (or possibly in Japan) according to the rules set forth by the BCA and the Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha. The minister's appointment to the Lodi church is entirely at the pleasure of the BCA bishop who, if it is warranted, may reassign the minister to another church without replacement, leaving the Lodi church to fend for itself spiritually, perhaps allowing a lay minister's assistant to take on greater responsibilities within the community. Thus, this woman's experience as a Buddhist will be shaped by the specific locality of a small farming town; but it is not immune to the larger translocal networks of Buddhist institutions and discourses, networks that should not be overlooked in our discussions of American Buddhism.

Is the local-translocal character of American Shin Buddhism an exception or the norm for American Buddhisms broadly speaking? The surest way to answer that question, of course, would be to dedicate one's life to conducting fieldwork across the country before a sufficiently adequate answer could be reached. Here we can only speculate that to the extent we can identify ways in which other American Buddhist communities participate in translocal discourses, to the extent that Buddhist practice in the United States is often the result of hybridized Asian- and Euro-American cultural tendencies, and that the subsequent communities in which these tendencies are enacted are bound up within larger translocal networks of institutional power, it seems reasonable to suggest that American Buddhisms in general are locally translocal. It is important to be attentive to the local, to be attentive to how local conditions on the ground will impact specific Buddhist communities. It is also important to recognize how these local conditions are often the result of far larger translocal networks of power. Thomas Tweed's aquatic metaphors for describing religion in his *Crossing and Dwelling* present an intriguing way of conceptualizing modern global religious discourse, but we should not forget how

cultural waterways are impacted by global, economic, and political power structures. “Organic-cultural flows,” he asserts, “are propelled, compelled, and blocked, directed this way and that by institutional networks.”<sup>29</sup> And a fuller understanding of how Buddhism is enacted in the West must be attentive to these institutional, translocal networks.

## NOTES

1. Jeff Wilson, *Mourning the Unborn Dead: A Buddhist Ritual Comes to America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.
2. Testuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Organization* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); and Donald Tuck, *Buddhist Churches of America: Jōdo Shinshū* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1987).
3. Michihiro Ama, *Immigrants to the Pure Land: The Modernization, Acculturation, and Globalization of Shin Buddhism, 1898–1941*, Pure Land Buddhist Studies (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011).
4. Tetsuden Kashima, “The Buddhist Churches of America: Challenges for Change in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Shin Buddhism: Historical, Textual, and Interpretive Studies*, ed. Richard K Payne (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007), 321–340; Tetsuden Kashima, “Japanese Religiosity: A Contemporary Perspective,” in *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich (Boston: Brill, 2008), 107–143; Arthur Nishimura, “The Buddhist Mission of North America 1898–1942: Religion and Its Social Function in an Ethnic Community,” in *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich (Boston: Brill, 2008), 87–106.
5. Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
6. James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); cf. James William Coleman, “The Emergence of a New Buddhism: Continuity and Change,” in *North American Buddhists in Social Context*, ed. Paul David Numrich (Boston: Brill, 2008).
7. Kenneth K. Tanaka, “Issues of Ethnicity in the Buddhist Churches of America,” in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 14.
8. George J. Tanabe, “Grafting Identity: The Hawaiian Branches of the Bodhi Tree,” in *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman, Topics in Contemporary Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), 77–100; George J. Tanabe, “Heresy and the Future of Japanese Buddhism

in Hawaii,” *Patheos*, July 5, 2010, <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Heresy-and-the-Future-of-Japanese-Buddhism-in-Hawaii.html>.

9. Steven Kemper has used Arjun Appadurai’s concept of an “ethnoscape” to refer to a transnational Buddhist community bounded by its connection to a specific ethnicity. While his work is specific to the case of Sinhala Theravāda Buddhism, this model is clearly applicable to other forms of diasporic Buddhisms. See Steven Kemper, “Dharmapala’s *Dharmaduta* and the Buddhist Ethnoscape,” in *Buddhist Missionaries in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Linda Learman, Topics in Contemporary Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 22–50; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

10. Michael Masatsugu’s work on the Shin Buddhist and Beat Buddhist connection in the 1950s and early 1960s is a particularly revealing look at how the American Shin Buddhist community interacted with the broader American Buddhist discourse in the post-war years. See Michael Kenji Masatsugu, “Reorienting the Pure Land: Japanese Americans, the Beats, and the Making of American Buddhism, 1941–1966” (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2004); Michael K. Masatsugu, “‘Beyond This World of Transiency and Impermanence’: Japanese Americans, Dharma Bums, and the Making of American Buddhism During the Early Cold War Years,” *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 3 (2008).

11. The full Pew report can be found at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>; for a discussion of the limitations, see the Buddhism forum of Humanities Net of March 3, 2008, <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=lx&list=h-buddhism&user=&pw=&month=0803>, as well as Wakoh Shannon Hickey, “Two Buddhisms, Three Buddhisms, and Racism,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 11 (2010).

12. Thomas A. Tweed, “Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures,” in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17–33.

13. Kashima, *Buddhism in America*, 142.

14. Kashima, “The Buddhist Churches of America,” 323.

15. Berkeley Buddhist Temple, 2010 Directory and Monthly Toban Lists (2010).

16. Rev. Matsumoto, interview with the author, September 28, 2010.

17. Elizabeth Eastman, “Incense at a Funeral: The Rise and Fall of an American Shingon Temple,” in *Transbuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation*, ed. Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Amherst Northampton: University of Massachusetts Press in association with the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute of Smith College, 2009), 69–85.

18. Rev. David Matsumoto, interview with the author, April 22, 2009; Rev. Gregory Gibbs, interview with the author, September 28, 2008.
19. Jeff Wilson, “The Convert Experience in North American and Hawaiian Shin Buddhism,” paper presented at 14th Biennial Conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies, Kyoto, Japan, 2009.
20. Temples are ordinarily designated with the suffix *-ji* 字 in Japan; there are, however, a number of different categories of temples with various relationships to the Hongwanji and places within the larger hierarchy, a complexity I have over-simplified for the sake of clarity here. See Kashima, *Buddhism in America*, 167ff., for more details on the institutional structure of the Hongwanji.
21. The closest English equivalent to *monshu* would be “abbot” to the extent that an abbot is the head of a particular religious community, order, or monastery, and the Hongwanji’s *monshu* is, on paper, the head of the Hongwanji temple. However, the *monshu*’s influence extends well beyond this one specific temple, having an impact on the broader Jōdo Shinshū community.
22. Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, *Shūmon hōkishū* 宗門法規集 (Religious Laws and Regulations), 60th ed. (Kyoto: Shūmusho, 2010); this manual of rules and regulations for the Hongwanji was first published in 1950 and is updated annually.
23. Wendy Cadge, “De Facto Congregationalism and the Religious Organization of Post-1965 Immigrants to the United States: A Revised Approach,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 2 (June 2008): 344–374; Michihiro Ama, “The Legal Dimensions of the Formation of Shin Buddhist Temples in Los Angeles,” in *Issei Buddhism in the Americas*, ed. Duncan Ryūken Williams and Tomoe Moriya (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 65–81.
24. Michihiro Ama, “Immigrants to the Pure Land: The Acculturation of Shin Buddhism in Hawaii and North America, 1898–1941” (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2007); Michihiro Ama, “The First White Buddhist Priestess,” paper presented at Buddhism without Borders: Contemporary Developments in Buddhism in the West, Berkeley, CA, March 18–21, 2010.
25. For a more detailed depiction of this process, see Eisho Nasu, “Ordination Ceremony of the Honganji Priests in Premodern Japanese Society,” in *Engaged Pure Land Buddhism: Challenges Facing Jōdo Shinshū in the Contemporary World: Studies in Honor of Professor Alfred Bloom*, ed. Kenneth Tanaka and Eisho Nasu (Berkeley: WisdomOcean, 1998), 201–220.
26. There were of course precursors to the current MAP program. For several decades the BCA had conversations about the role of *kaikyōshi-ho* (lit. ministerial assistants), and Bishop Watanabe championed a training or ordination program at the turn of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, it

was not until Bishop Ogui's tenure that these programs were formalized and given recognition by the Hongwanji hierarchy.

27. Rev. Matsumoto, interview with the author, April 22, 2009.

28. Anonymous ministerial candidate, interview with the author, July 15, 2009.

29. Thomas A. Tweed, "Crabs, Crustaceans, Crabiness, and Outrage: A Response," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (June 2009): 454.

## **Paths across Borders: Comparative Reflections on Japanese and Indo-Tibetan Models of the Buddhist Path**

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### INTRODUCTION

The thrust of this paper is to urge students and scholars of Buddhist thought to think more broadly about the tradition in at least two ways. One is to see commonalities across sub-traditions, such as Japanese and Indo-Tibetan. Another is to appreciate more openly similarities in Buddhist thought with theistic, non-Buddhist traditions. It is my premise that in both these areas—comparative investigation within Buddhist traditions and between Buddhism and other religions—there are unfortunate prejudices that obstruct possibilities for deeper understanding of both “self” and “other,” whether these terms designate bodies of scholarly or of religious identification.

The first “broadening” I emphasize concerns understanding models of the Buddhist path (*mārga*) across Buddhist traditions. The second regards the exploration of how important aspects of Buddhist faith are more “substantialist,” with similarities to theistic traditions, than commonly acknowledged.

### JAPANESE AND INDO-TIBETAN VIEWS ON THE BUDDHIST PATH

Some people say it is odd that Japanese tradition uses the term esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō*, 密教) for what Indian and Tibetan traditions call Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism. Yet there is nothing particularly eccentric about this usage. In the Indo-Tibetan traditions the term Secret Mantra Vehicle is virtually synonymous with either Tantrayāna or Vajrayāna. Furthermore, the Japanese tradition also commonly employs the term Vajrayāna (Kongōjō, 金剛乘) interchangeably with the

term esoteric Buddhism. Thus the terminology overlaps fully in the vast literature of these lineages.<sup>1</sup>

One aim of this essay is to depict some of the valuable contributions of Japanese esoteric or Vajrayāna Buddhist thought to the wider Buddhist tradition. I will emphasize similarities with Indo-Tibetan Buddhism in order to highlight key features of pan-Asian Vajrayāna and, by so doing, aim to offer Japanese Buddhism an honored seat (more so than it tends to get in scholarship on Buddhism) at the table of comparative Buddhist studies. Japanese (and Chinese and Korean, for that matter) contributions to Buddhist thought are rarely considered by scholars of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism to be comparable to those of the subcontinent. There seems to be an implicit disregard for the level of philosophical rigor demonstrated by Buddhist thought east of India, as if Indian and derivative Tibetan Buddhist traditions of thought express more sophistication in their intricate analyses of philosophical/theological issues. It is hard to provide evidence for my assertion since it stems from decades of observing in person the intellectual behavior of Buddhist scholars and is not specifically grounded in published statements. But I think anyone deeply engaged in the field of Buddhist studies is likely to acknowledge that in certain circles something like this prejudice operates as a steady assumption.

The first portion of this essay focuses on a comparative analysis of some related visions of the Buddhist path and its stages. For someone well versed in contemporary scholarship on Buddhism, the phrase “stages of the path” is likely to bring to mind the Tibetan model of religious development known as *lam rim* (literally, “path stages”). While this paradigm of Buddhist practice tends to surface more in the discourse of the Tibetan Gelug tradition, it is the inheritance of all the major Tibetan schools. The basic *lam rim* model derives from the ingenuity of the great Indian master Dīpaṅkara Atiśa (980–1054), who was instrumental in developing Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna doctrine and practice at a seminal point in Tibetan history.<sup>2</sup> The lineage of teachings descending from Atiśa is called the Kadampa tradition and is shared by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The Gelug school in particular, due to the contributions of its founder Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), seems to utilize the *lam rim* model, and its three-tiered path structure, most centrally. Tsongkhapa wrote multiple influential texts on this topic alone, his most extensive being the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*.<sup>3</sup>



Further east, Kūkai 空海 (774–835) set the foundations for Vajrayāna Buddhism in Japan. He established the Shingon school (“*shingon*” means “mantra”) and wrote volumes on a myriad of topics, among which were influential treatises on the topic of the stages of the Buddhist path. Most notable is his ten-stage model put forth in both his *Treatise on the Ten Stages of Mind of the Secret Mandala* and a subsequent, shorter version, *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury*. At a first glance, Kūkai’s ten-stage model might appear to bear little resemblance to the *lam rim* one of Tsongkhapa and Atiśa, which presents only three distinct stages. However, I think the path put forward by Kūkai shares significant features with the Indo-Tibetan *lam rim* structure. And this similarity is fairly remarkable considering that Kūkai developed his model in the early ninth century, a full two hundred years prior to Atiśa.

#### TEN-STAGE MODEL OF KŪKAI

Before addressing some of the congruencies of these two models, I will offer an abbreviated outline of Kūkai’s ten-stage schema.<sup>4</sup> The first thing to note is that, like many “doctrinal classification” systems (Ch. *panjiao*, 判教, Wade-Giles *p’an-chiao*) in East Asian Buddhist history that preceded Kūkai’s, his schema places his own school at the summit of a proposed hierarchy of schools because in his view it represents the highest, truest, most effective Buddhist teaching. Also, like some of the prior Chinese doctrinal classification schemas, Kūkai’s model incorporates non-Buddhist religious forms at the “lower rungs,” then ascends through Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna teachings to reach his “peak.” However, Kūkai’s inclusion of Vajrayāna teachings (at the top) was a unique feature. Previous doctrinal classification systems did not touch on Vajrayāna Buddhism because it was new to China and thus to Japan.

His model can be viewed from different angles, one of which sees his division of teachings into the two categories of exoteric and esoteric, with a surface interpretation of this division taking only the tenth level of Shingon to be esoteric. Alternately, he offers a “depth” interpretation that sees an esoteric dimension to every level. These two interpretative lenses derive from his vision, or premise, that all religious teachings, from whatever human tradition, that aim to draw people from a self-centered life toward the freedom that comes from wisdom and compassion derive from the same source: the spontaneous, effluent effulgence of the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana, the

Great Illuminating One, whose teachings guide beings by offering a myriad of skillful “patterned forms” (*mon*, 文).<sup>5</sup> He asserts that all religious lineages other than Shingon encounter the raw teachings that emanate directly from Mahāvairocana in only symbolic and indirect ways. Thus he designates them as “exoteric.” Shingon practices, on the other hand, bestow the capacity to enter into the very source of Mahāvairocana’s teaching, into the depths of His own profoundly enlightened *samādhi*, such that the practitioner unites directly with the spontaneous expression of this buddha’s body, speech, and mind. This is the “esoteric” approach, and its practice reveals that this deeper, hidden dimension is always present in any kind of teaching, provided one has the “precious key” to access it directly. The exoteric and esoteric approaches are often designated, respectively, as “vertical” and “horizontal.” While the vertical view of these teachings is that they are graded, with distinctions, the horizontal view is that they are all unified within the cosmic Buddha’s *samādhi*. Kūkai thus states that although from the vertical perspective there are nine exoteric stages (only eight of these represent teachings since the first level is beyond the pale; more on this below) and just one esoteric one, with accompanying stages of mind for each, from the horizontal perspective all these teachings are esoteric.

In brief, Kūkai’s ten stages are as follows. We can divide the ten into five ascending categories: the pre- or non-religious (just one); the non-Buddhist (two); Hīnayāna Buddhist (two); exoteric Mahāyāna Buddhist (four); Shingon Vajrayāna (one). The first stage comprises beings with no interests other than those of sensory- and self-gratification. Kūkai likens such beings to “rams.” While this is one of the ten stages of mind, unlike all the other stages it does not have a teaching that accompanies it because beings at this level have no aspiration for transcendence. The next two stages represent the first budding of spiritual awareness wherein inclinations toward morality emerge. Kūkai’s texts do not label these two as belonging to any particular religious tradition, but the language and citations he uses align them fairly unambiguously (but not exclusively) with Chinese Confucian and Daoist teachings. This “ranking” of placing Confucianism and Daoism, in this order, below Buddhism, appeared also in Kūkai’s very early essay, *Indications of the Three Teachings*, in which as a young man he laid out his reasons for devoting himself to the Buddhist path and for dropping out of the Confucian-based government college to do so. The inclusion

of non-Buddhist “stages of mind” in a map of human spiritual progress is, I think, worthy of note. Kūkai clearly acknowledges the spiritual efficacy, the real benefits, of non-Buddhist religious teachings, even if he places them at the bottom.

The first Buddhist “stages of mind” are the so-called Hīnayāna or “lesser vehicle” Buddhist teachings. It is commonplace in Mahāyāna literature to refer to the two vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and the *pratyeka-buddha* as Hīnayāna. From the Mahāyāna perspective these two types of Buddhist practitioner lack the deep compassion for all beings that characterizes the Mahāyāna bodhisattva path. Kūkai follows a traditional interpretive schema that takes the *śrāvakas* to focus on the teachings of the four noble truths and the *pratyeka-buddhas* to focus on the twelve links of dependent origination, both of which were foundational teachings from early in the historical Buddha’s career. While it might be difficult to establish that there were in fact communities of Buddhists who focused almost exclusively on these respective teachings, this portrayal is fairly standard in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. As with the non-Buddhist stages, however, Kūkai readily points to what is deeply spiritually edifying about the teachings that accompany these stages. They provide the foundational philosophical outlook from which all other Buddhist practices follow by depicting the core truths of pervasive suffering, its causes, and the path to its elimination.

The next four stages are Mahāyāna ones and essentially represent four main schools of Chinese Buddhism that flourished during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), two of which were relatively direct imports from India and two of which were established by Chinese masters. The two Indian-based schools represent Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra traditions, while the two Chinese ones are Tiantai 天台 and Huayan 華嚴. Kūkai places the Indian ones as foundations for the Chinese, in a manner that reflects historical development but also his own philosophical vision. The Indian-based schools emerged during the Tang as Chinese Buddhist schools in their own right. Three important Mādhyamaka texts became the basis for the Sanlun (“three treatise”) school, while various Yogācāra texts were the core of the Faxiang (“phenomenal characteristics”) school. Both of these schools had Chinese masters who wrote commentaries on seminal Indian texts as well penning influential treatises of their own. The Tiantai and Huayan schools, on the other hand, were not based as strongly on Indian Buddhist *śāstra* literature as were the Sanlun and Faxiang schools. Their putative founders—Zhiyi 智顛

and Fazang 法藏—took much of their creative interpretive strategies from sutra literature: the *Lotus Sutra* for Zhiyi's Tiantai school and the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* for Fazang's Huayan school. And while the Sanlun and Faxiang schools clearly had their own Chinese character, their basic doctrinal reliance on classical Indian *śāstra* literature marks them as quite distinct from the more originally Chinese ideas that grew in the Tiantai and Huayan schools.<sup>6</sup>

Kūkai's unique, or idiosyncratic, framing of the relative philosophical and religious “levels” of these four Mahāyāna schools has been an issue of doctrinal importance in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Naturally there have been criticisms of the criteria he used for his hierarchy, criticisms that often derived from scholars/practitioners aligned with one of these four “lower” Mahāyāna schools. Such sectarian doctrinal disputes have a long history in most Buddhist traditions. While we cannot dismiss that competitiveness might be one source, serious philosophical differences also emerge in such debates, differences with considerable spiritual implications for some practitioners. Disputes over how best to interpret even the earliest Buddhist teachings are as old as the religion, and hermeneutical principles such as criteria for classifying “definitive” versus “interpretable” teachings, or for distinguishing “conventional truths” from “ultimate truths,” have held tremendous weight in every Buddhist tradition.<sup>7</sup>

In Kūkai's case, his writings were produced in the environment of late Nara-period scholarship that was dominated by schools of Buddhist textual study imported from China and Korea. He was widely read in the major texts of all the Chinese Buddhist schools and was likely influenced by the classification systems created by their masters, especially those of the Tiantai and Huayan schools. One of these systems, by the Huayan master Zongmi 宗密, included at its lowest rank non-Buddhist ideas, which he labeled “teachings of men and gods.”<sup>8</sup> Much like Kūkai's second and third stages of mind, Zongmi's classification (which includes just five levels) of non-Buddhist teachings affirms that outside Buddhist traditions there exist effective instructions and practices for improving one's lot in this life and in future lives. I shall comment more on this important topic below when introducing the Indo-Tibetan models. For now it should suffice to conclude this section by noting that the unique quality of Kūkai's schema lies not so much in his ranking of various Buddhist teachings (stages four through nine) but rather in (1) his addition of the category esoteric or Vajrayāna

Buddhism and (2) his assertion that all religious teachings derive from the Buddha Mahāvairocana. The broad sweep of his vision of human spiritual development ranges from the bluntly animalistic to the incipience of moral urgings, to the wish for individual liberation, to the generation of a compassionate aspiration to liberate all beings, to a multitude of philosophical positions aimed at furthering this aspiration, to the final stage of esoteric Vajrayāna practice where, he claims (along with his Indo-Tibetan counterparts), this aspiration can be fulfilled in a single lifetime. It appears that he was the first in Buddhist history to articulate a sophisticated model of human religious development based on the perspective of Vajrayāna practice.

It is not easy to gauge the impact of Kūkai's model on the growth of Buddhist thought in Japan. The genre of doctrinal classification to which it belongs was a product of Nara and early Heian period Japan (eighth through tenth centuries). This sort of scholastic exegesis was less popular in the late Heian, Kamakura, and subsequent periods in Japanese history.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that within the confines of sectarian scholarship concerning the relative merits of the teachings of the various Japanese schools, debates over Kūkai's classification maintained some force over the centuries, and does so even today as critiques of his assessment still appear in Japanese scholarly journals. But the impact of his hierarchical paradigm in terms of any prevalent acceptance in particular of the sequence of the four Mahāyāna schools seems doubtful, outside, that is, the domain of Shingon apologetics. Elements central to his ten-stage model did, however, have influence on general modes of thinking about the relation between theory and practice in Japanese Buddhism, influence that probably lasted for many centuries. Of particular significance is Kūkai's theory of the "esoteric within the exoteric," where all teachings are seen to possess hidden dimensions (made knowable through the regime of Shingon practice) that ultimately originate from Mahāvairocana Buddha. It seems that this theory, coupled with the complex beauty and perceived power of Shingon rites of initiation and invocation, contributed to the centrality of Shingon esoteric ritual practices in all schools of Japanese Buddhism for many centuries after Kūkai's death in a pattern commonly referred to as "shared practice" (*kenshū*, 兼修) of both the exoteric and esoteric. Kūkai's socio-political savvy also secured prestigious court aristocrats as sponsors for elaborate Shingon rituals, private and public alike.<sup>10</sup> A combination of ritual expertise, creative theological interpretation, and a skillful social life

brought Shingon Vajrayāna practice into the mainstream of Japanese Buddhism. In fact a term coined by the noted Japanese historian KURODA Toshio, “the exoteric-esoteric system” (*kenmitsu seidō*, 顯密制度), points to the overwhelming dominance of a paradigm of Vajrayāna practice that allowed for the “exoteric” schools to use Shingon ritual and theory, for the entire medieval period of Japanese Buddhist history.<sup>11</sup> Thus while the vertical dimension of Kūkai’s ten-stage model might be rightly critiqued for its exclusivist inclination, the horizontal aspect allowed room for a broad vision of shared religious practice, a “mandalic” or inclusive vision in which all religious teachings have a rightful place. In this and in the above senses, Kūkai’s contributions to Japanese Buddhist thought were immense.<sup>12</sup>

#### INDO-TIBETAN “STAGES OF THE PATH”

As noted earlier, there is also a deeply inclusivist orientation to the model of the Buddhist path developed by the eleventh century Indian master Atiśa, a model that became the foundation for the *lam rim* (“path stages”) tradition prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism. Atiśa’s *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhi-patha pradīpa*) conveyed his vision of “three capacities/perspectives” in religious life that follow one another in a sequence on the Mahāyāna Buddhist path. While in theory each of these “capacities” can stand alone as a distinct and valid approach to religious life, it seems that Atiśa’s intent in presenting them together was to inculcate an understanding of how one can develop the highest Buddhist aspirations on top of the strongest possible foundation. Atiśa’s three-tiered model uses the labels of “lower,” “middling” and “highest” (or depending on the translation, something like “inferior,” “average,” and “superior”). Basically it is a division among stages of religious life that might also be rendered beginner-intermediate-advanced. While the beginning stage (or capacity) is understood to be the ideal place for a Buddhist to begin the path, it can also serve as the founding religious perspective for anyone who is not Buddhist. Much like Kūkai’s second stage, this beginning marks the emergence of a desire to transcend the ordinary limitations of worldly life by engaging in disciplines of mind and body that will enhance one’s potential for experiencing genuine and lasting contentment. The impulse to practice ethical, intellectual and contemplative disciplines to weaken the quantity and intensity of one’s suffering is understood in this model to be a profoundly healthy motivation toward freedom.

In Atiśa's vision, the "lower capacity" person is not inferior in any intrinsic way but merely has what he deems to be an elementary level of spiritual development, in particular of motivation. And his presentation of a person at this level is of one who seeks to improve his or her station in life, a station not limited to social status but rather more broadly conceived as an overall ratio of happiness to suffering. From his Buddhist perspective, this person aims to improve his station both in this life and in future lives, and in terms of future lives is particularly concerned to avoid the unfortunate rebirths of the lower realms of the animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings. Thus such a person is motivated by the laws of karma to increase performance of virtuous action and to decrease that of non-virtuous action. For Atiśa, this approach to spirituality is not necessarily Buddhist because in his Indian culture many non-Buddhists also believed in the reality of rebirth and of the force of karma that directs the process (though there were differences of opinion about specifics). And, incidentally, the fact that there is nothing particularly Buddhist about this spiritual "stage" is mainly what marks it as "lower." However, a very important feature of Atiśa's model is that this lower level is also an essential stage through which any Buddhist who wishes to effectively pursue the Buddhist path must pass. It is thus *both* a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist stage. Although the inclusivism here does not share the conceptually complex twists of Kūkai's "esoteric within the exoteric" view, it is still similarly inclusive. It affirms that spiritual stages designated as elementary are nonetheless intrinsically edifying, whether they lead into the Buddhist path or not.

What characterizes the second or "middling" level for Atiśa is the characteristic Buddhist attitude of renunciation of attachment to any state in the cycle of rebirths no matter how exalted. This includes renunciation not only of high status within the human realm, such as might assure comforts of good health, wealth, fame and long life, but as well of the delights of the godly (*deva*) realms. Thus the person of "middling" spiritual capacity recognizes the inherent instability and insecurity of any station within samsara and, consequently, desires complete liberation from all conditioned states in the final freedom that is nirvana. Similar to Kūkai's treatment of stages four and five, Atiśa designates this attitude as essentially that of (what he considers to be) the Hīnayāna Buddhist practitioner. And just like the first or

“lower” stage, Atiśa understands this stage to be an essential developmental step toward his vision of a fully mature spirituality.

The assumption here is that unless a practitioner wishes for increased well-being within the realms of rebirth—a wish that reflects both a genuine desire for fulfillment and an understanding of the karmic principles that can lead to improved conditions—and then goes beyond such a desire to achieve an even wiser intention to be free of all the vagaries of samsaric states, the person will not be able to authentically and effectively generate the highest attitude of the third Mahāyāna stage. For Atiśa sees the aspiration of the bodhisattva as a combined aspiration for (1) the fulfillment of the wishes of all beings (2) in their complete liberation from all samsaric states. The uncommon desire to free all beings is the highest aspiration, but it can only grow well in a soil moistened by a sincere concern for beings’ happiness (stage one) and a profound recognition of the limits of all temporal forms of such happiness (stage two). This unique combination of compassion and wisdom, of attention both to the conventional and the ultimate truth, characterizes the bodhisattva attitude. For Atiśa this is the highest of all possible religious orientations and represents the culmination of our human capacity for spiritual growth.

So the highest perspective is one fully imbued with *bodhicitta*, or the altruistic aspiration to awaken to buddhahood. In the Mahāyāna tradition this is the standard bodhisattva motivation: to pursue the path toward complete enlightenment in order to be of maximal benefit to living beings. Attaining buddhahood fulfills the aims of the “middling” perspective by effectively liberating one from the cycles of samsara, yet goes further by extending the wish to include the liberation of all beings, not only oneself. By definition a buddha has perfected both wisdom and compassion and thus possesses the highest possible degree of skillful capacities (*upāya*) to guide other beings to a similar state of perfect freedom. What higher state could there be than this win-win position of having fully benefited oneself *and* being fully, selflessly dedicated to benefiting others? Thus in terms of perspectives on spiritual growth, Atiśa’s three-tiered model culminates here.

In terms, however, of concrete methods of practice the highest capacity has one additional twist. Because the bodhisattva seeks to aid all sentient beings, and because the transformative path to buddhahood is said to take the average practitioner three incalculable eons to complete (which translates to an enormous number of lifetimes),



the bodhisattva of this highest aspiration, who is truly motivated by the strongest compassion, will seek to enter the Vajrayāna or Tantric path of practice. This final turn is necessary because according to the Vajrayāna tradition, only its methods—of “deity yoga” that include visualization exercises employing *mudrā*, mantra, and mandala (the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind that unite the practitioner with the Buddha)—can bring buddhahood to fruition within a single lifetime. This final “capping” with Vajrayāna practice parallels Kūkai’s schema perfectly.

Two centuries apart, with thousands of miles and many cultures and languages in between, the overall patterns of these two models of the path indicate striking similarities. Kūkai’s vision of spiritual development ascends from the non-Buddhist to the Hīnayāna Buddhist to the Mahāyāna Buddhist. While he divides each of these into subsections, from two to four (adding complexity perhaps at the cost of the elegance of Atiśa’s trimmer model), the basic shape remains the same. Moreover, both models share an inclusivist orientation that affirms the values of their so-designated “lower” stages of spirituality. And the movement within each schema from exoteric Mahāyāna to the esoteric teachings of Vajrayāna seals the congruency.

Scholarship in Buddhist studies tends to maintain a divide between the East Asian and South Asian traditions. There is often an assumption that when Buddhism left the subcontinent and migrated into China (and from there to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam), it took on the cultural trappings of lands so radically different from that of its origin that comparative studies are unlikely to be fruitful. Even though a few careful scholars have pointed out the shortcomings of holding such a blanket assumption, reminders of the deep continuities across the continent need repeating.<sup>13</sup> Sure, native Chinese Daoist influences on the Chan Buddhist tradition, for example, are indeed evident. But such blending occurred in every stage of Buddhism’s growth, even in its homeland, India. Developments in Japanese Buddhism are not only worthy of study in their own right, and for an understanding of Japanese religious history; they are also valuable for the comparative light they can shed on other Buddhist developments. It is remarkable that two hundred years before Atiśa, Kūkai penned “stages of the path” treatises bearing a profoundly similar pattern. It is also noteworthy that Kūkai presented what was probably the first attempt in Buddhist history to systematically distinguish exoteric and esoteric

Buddhism (what Tibetan traditions later called, respectively, the Sutra and Tantra traditions, and Kūkai called the “Perfections Vehicle” and the “Vajra Vehicle”).<sup>14</sup> While his chief arguments in favor of this distinction differ somewhat from those that developed later in India and Tibet, it is of great value for an understanding of the history of Buddhist thought to observe the shape that his theories took around the year 815. Interestingly, one key feature to his view of Buddhist teachings, as noted above, is that they all emanate from the Buddha Mahāvairocana. While his assertion that this Buddha is the *dharmakāya*, and that it “preaches,” naturally received criticism from some other Buddhists in Japan, it not only became the foundation for a model of Buddhist practice that dominated the subsequent near-millennium of Japanese history but also bears resemblance to some Indian and Tibetan theories.<sup>15</sup> Before concluding, I will reflect briefly on some aspects of Kūkai’s understanding of Mahāvairocana Buddha. I will also suggest that his explicitly monistic view of this Buddha as “source” shares elements with other Buddhist teachings and represents a fruitful point of comparison with non-Buddhist theistic traditions.

#### THE COSMIC BUDDHA

The claim that all religious teachings aiming to help people move beyond blind attachment to afflictive emotions derive from a single source can sound almost theistic. Yet Mahāvairocana as source is not a creator God, nor is he an entity external to the world and who intervenes in it. Leaving aside whether Kūkai’s view could possibly be classified as either pantheistic or panentheistic, it is certainly not monotheistic in the traditional sense. Mahāyāna Buddhist systems of thought developed a variety of theories such as that of the storehouse consciousness, buddha-nature, Adi-Buddha, and so on, all of which can sound at times as if positing some single substance as the basis of all existence, or at least as the basis of all conscious experience including the supreme consciousness of enlightenment. It is sometimes said that the Mahāyāna tradition moved closer to Hindu (Upanishadic or Vedantist) modes of thinking in this regard, and there can be no doubt that Mahāyāna thinkers took pains to clarify how they felt their philosophy/theology differed from these non-Buddhist ones. However, it is not only in Mahāyāna thought that one finds discourse with intimations of a “single source,” even though this source might be expressed more as a principle than as a substance. The earliest Pali *suttas*

have the Buddha describing the “unconditioned” (*asamskrta*) and the “deathless” (*amṛta*) as final, or primary, states of reality. If it were not for the existence of the unconditioned, the Buddha asserts, there could be no liberation or enlightenment, no freedom from the conditioned, no attainment of the “deathless” that is nirvana. He also mentions an essential purity of mind (*pabhassara citta*) that is undefiled by all our ignorant states.<sup>16</sup> This notion of an innately pure mind was controversial within the Theravāda tradition and commentaries on the subject proliferated.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the universal Buddhist concept of dharma—in the sense of “truth” rather than as “teaching” or “practice,” three of its standard denotations that can at times overlap—is most certainly resonant with the meaning of the deepest reality discovered (and then taught) by Buddha and is, accordingly, a sustained object of profound faith for all believing Buddhists. It does not require fancy theological maneuvering to be able to claim that, when a practicing Buddhist takes refuge in the three jewels of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, the core refuge is the dharma. Buddha became Buddha only because he realized this dharma, a “truth” he asserted to exist always whether a buddha awakens to it or not. Thus there indeed exists some kind of permanent object of faith for Buddhists. One traditional definition of the dharma realized by Buddha is the principle of dependent origination. Now while this is commonly taught as a principle that describes how nothing in the world, material or mental, exists on its own (nor permanently) but only in dependence upon certain causes and conditions (and thus impermanently)—the deep and direct realization of which principle brings liberation—dependent origination is at the same time understood as an eternal truth and thus as an enduring object of faith. Granted, as such the dharma is not a primordial or eternally existent substance. But it is something understood as centrally existent, and as the deepest reality one can know. Thus practically speaking the existence of dharma functions in the minds of Buddhists in ways that share features with the existence of a God in more theistic traditions.<sup>18</sup> And when one looks at the role of buddhas and bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Tārā in the developed Tantric traditions of India and Tibet, the quasi-theistic elements are exceedingly prominent. This is similar with Mahāvairocana for Kūkai. For him this buddha is perhaps like a combination of three things: the truth of dependent origination itself, the glory of the mind that realizes this truth, and the

power of the Buddha who teaches it. Mahāvairocana Buddha's name itself means "great illuminating one," and as such the name points both to the innate purity of mind *and* to the being who makes this purity known to the world. These two coalesce as something akin to a single object of religious faith.

My assertion here is not that Buddhist philosophical texts make strong claims for any permanent or substantially existent substance as the basis for all reality. On the contrary, the texts often take great pains to distance themselves from such a stance. Nonetheless, I think in the arena of the mentality of a practitioner that certain beliefs, or conceptions about what is real and what is possible, loom like fairly solid objects in the landscape of faith. Neither am I intending, however, to make a simple distinction between theory and practice. Rather, I want to highlight how certain theoretical assumptions about the origins and destinations of one's practice undergird and sustain the practice. These assumptions might be tentative and provisional "conventional" mental constructs that will dissolve when one experiences ultimate reality directly. But until then, their force is considerable and even indispensable.

The axial locus of Buddha Mahāvairocana undergirds Kūkai's vision of unity across a variety of religious teachings. This feature of his model of stages of the path distinguishes it from that of Atiśa, and of the subsequent Tibetan traditions that relied upon Atiśa's model. Thus there are significant similarities as well as differences between these models. Without developing an argument at length, I would like to suggest that Kūkai's quasi-theistic understanding of the foundation of all religious teachings—indeed of the foundation of all reality—is not as idiosyncratic a Buddhist interpretation as it might on the surface appear to be. In fact I think he very keenly points to some fundamental orientations in Buddhist thought that too often get brushed aside in mainstream discourse out of a concern for sounding substantialist or theistic.<sup>19</sup> But as I have indicated, although Buddhist philosophy/theology has fairly successfully avoided positing a substantialist ontology or metaphysic, in the realm of the discourse of Buddhist faith, of the all-important movements of the heart-mind that can keep one grounded on a religious path, there seems to be something substantially present as a light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps this light functions actually as a great *upāya*, or expedient/skillful means, and not as an intrinsic end (or beginning) in itself. Either way the light shines brightly and,

if it shines as long as anyone is on the path (that is, as long as the *buddhadharma* exists and beings follow the teachings), then it would certainly seem to be ever-present, or at least temporally coterminous with the existence of *samsara*. Emphasis here is on “seems,” for I want to highlight the normative and formative content of experience of the believer/practitioner, who thinks of *dharma* as real and of enlightenment as the truly existent terminus of its practice. To conceive of these things as “merely conventionally real” (a common exhortation based on the teaching of emptiness) is, for an unenlightened being, the equivalent of an afterthought, and one that had better not undermine the force of one’s *faith* in the path and its goal.<sup>20</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The two commonalities illustrated here are not unrelated. Recognizing overlaps between doctrines in different sub-traditions of Buddhism, and between Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions, can bring new insights into the nature and function of Buddhist beliefs and practices. Both intra- and inter-religious dialogue can foster increased understanding of “self” as well as of “other.” We dialogue with others (or just study them) not only to learn more about others but also to learn better how to understand our own pursuits in the process. Studying a tradition outside the bounds of one’s main field of learning can shed great light on one’s usual focus (I refer here to the virtue of crossing boundaries in academic study where one’s object of study might not be one’s personal system of belief, but the same holds true for believers/practitioners). It can fulfill the precept to “make what is familiar strange,” which is an invaluable aim for various forms of human learning.

In the case of the boundaries of Japanese and Indo-Tibetan Buddhist traditions—with particular reference to Vajrayāna Buddhism—there is a tendency for scholars of the latter to see Japanese Vajrayāna as somehow inferior due to its not having reaped the benefit of influence from late Indian traditions of Unexcelled (*anuttara*) Yoga Tantra. Thus the Japanese Vajrayāna tradition is seen to represent only an earlier stage of esoteric Buddhism, and as such is viewed as being comparatively stunted or immature in its growth. It is true that the majority of Japanese esoteric Buddhist traditions stem from earlier stages of the development of Indian esoteric Buddhism. As for what, therefore, is “superior” or “inferior” in this regard, one criterion would be to rely

upon the traditional Indo-Tibetan insider's view that only the later Unexcelled Yoga texts and their related transmissions provide an adequate vehicle for full enlightenment. And as some representatives of this tradition claim, even Śākyamuni Buddha's own enlightenment was achieved by such practices. Naturally, based on this criterion (that later is better), Japanese Vajrayāna is less "advanced" than that taught, say, in modern Tibetan communities. I do not wish to quibble with such a view now, but only want to record it and to note that I believe it is one reason why scholars of Indo-Tibetan traditions of Vajrayāna tend not to take East Asian versions of Vajrayāna very seriously and, as a result, are liable not to learn of some of the very creative and powerful turns of thought that grew from this tradition. Granted, the most rewarding serious study of East Asian traditions requires the ability to read texts in Chinese (and ideally Japanese commentaries), and it is not reasonable to expect many scholars to add one or two additional languages, and textual corpuses, to their already impressive repertoires (although a few scholars have). But there are abundant resources even in Western languages today for pursuing such study if one is so inclined. Therefore my appeal is to urge further comparative studies of Buddhist philosophical/theological traditions, in particular within the Vajrayāna. In addition, I urge more serious critical reflection on the monistic and quasi-theistic tendencies within Buddhist traditions. At least from the perspective of religious psychology, it seems clear that comparisons along these lines hold much promise. In sum, I hope that my observations here will convince some readers that these two sorts of border-crossings are eminently worthy of pursuit.

#### NOTES

1. For a recent example of good contemporary scholarship on Indian Vajrayāna that regularly employs the term "esoteric Buddhism," and that reflects on its meaning, see Vesna A. Wallace, "The Provocative Character of the 'Mystical' Discourses on the Absolute Body in Indian Tantric Buddhism," *Pacific World*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 245–256.
2. On Atiśa, see Ruth Sonam's, translation (with commentary by Geshe Sonam Rinchen), *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).
3. For an excellent survey of models of the Buddhist path, see Robert E. Buswell and Robert M. Gimello, eds., *Paths to Liberation: Marga and Its Transformation in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992).

4. For detailed treatments of his ten-stage model, see Yoshito Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Rolf W. Giebel, *Shingon Texts* (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research, 2004); and Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), esp. 323–334.

5. *Mon*, or “patterned forms,” can mean written language but has a broader semantic range that for Kūkai includes all signs of a sensory or cognitive nature from which humans derive meaning. See Thomas Kasulis, “Truth Words: The Basis of Kūkai’s Theory of Interpretation,” in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1988), 257–272.

6. Since the aim of this essay is broadly comparative, those seeking more detail on Kūkai’s classification of these schools might benefit from reading my “Transmission Problems: Kūkai and the Early Dissemination of Esoteric Buddhist Texts,” *Japanese Religions* 28, no. 1 (January 2003): 5–68, and my “Kūkai and the Beginnings of Shingon Buddhism in Japan” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1995).

7. For more on the tradition of doctrinal classification in East Asian Buddhism, see essays in Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics*; Robert E. Buswell and Robert M. Gimello, *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformation in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1992); Robert M. Gimello, ed., *Studies in Ch’an and Hua-yen* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1983), Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1991), and Stanley Weinstein, “Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T’ang Buddhism,” in *Perspectives on the T’ang*, ed. Arthur Wright and Dennis Twitchett (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973). Also there is a fine essay by Peter N. Gregory on the Chinese practice available online at <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/doctrina.html>. In it Gregory notes:

In the fifth and sixth centuries Chinese Buddhists like Hui-kuan employed *p’an-chiao* as a hermeneutical strategy to reconcile the discrepancies among the different teachings believed to have been taught by the Buddha. By resorting to the doctrine of expedient means, they were able to create a hierarchical framework within which the entire range of Buddhist teachings could be systematically organized into a coherent doctrinal whole. But *p’an-chiao* was not a neutral methodology. Nor did the rubric of expedient means offer any basis on which to decide the order in which the various teachings were to be classified. The order in which the teachings were ranked was a matter of interpretation that called for value judgments in regard to which scripture or scriptural corpus was to be taken as authoritative. Thus,

in addition to providing a hermeneutical method by which the diverse teachings put forward in different scriptures could be harmonized, *p'an-chiao* also furnished the structure according to which the different traditions of Chinese Buddhism advanced their own sectarian claims for being recognized as the true, ultimate, or most relevant teaching of Buddhism.

8. Zongmi was Kūkai's Chinese contemporary and it is not likely that Kūkai read his works, though he clearly read those of the earlier Huayan master Fazang. On Zongmi and the non-Buddhist teachings, see Peter N. Gregory, "The Teaching of Men and Gods: The Doctrinal and Social Basis of Lay Buddhist Practice in the Hua-Yen Tradition," in *Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen*. Gregory also treats this same teaching of Zongmi in his *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 110–127.

9. Classification schemes continued to be produced, but in general they were not of the "classical" sort of the Nara and Heian periods. See Carl Bielefeldt's "Filling the Zen shu: Notes on the *Jishu Yodo Ki*," in *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*, ed. Bernard Faure (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 179–210.

10. See my "Japan's First Shingon Ceremony," in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. George Tanabe (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

11. On Kuroda's term, see James C. Dobbins, "Exoteric-Esoteric (Kenmitsu) Buddhism in Japan," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr., vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 271–275. Note that Kuroda's term refers not only to a style of combined religious practice but beyond that to the entire system—ideological and institutional—of medieval Japanese Buddhism. For articles on Kuroda and his theory, see "The Legacy of Kuroda Toshio," special issue, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 23, nos. 3–4 (Fall 1996), available online at [http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/publications/jjrs/jjrs\\_cumulative\\_list.htm](http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/publications/jjrs/jjrs_cumulative_list.htm). And on Kūkai's legacy in terms of choreographing (both literally and figuratively) the fusion of the exoteric and esoteric teachings, see my dissertation and Abé's *Weaving*.

12. While the fact is often neglected in the abbreviated title of Kūkai's great treatise on the ten stages in both Japanese and English renderings, the full name of his text is *The Ten Stages of Mind of the Secret Mandala* (*Himitsu-mandala jūjūshinron*). The term "mandala" here represents the entire world/palace/tapestry (many metaphors will work and Kūkai employs them) of Mahāvairocana's teachings as they have manifested in our world in order to help liberate sentient beings. The term "mandala" has also often been used in contemporary Japanese discourse about Shingon teachings to express the tradition's support for a pluralistic religious vision.

13. Gregory Schopen, "Archeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Buddhism," *History of Religions* 31, no. 1 (August 1991): 1–23.



14. See for example not only his *Ten Stages* but also his earlier *Treatise Distinguishing the Two Teachings, Exoteric and Esoteric*. The former has not been fully translated into English. The latter is available in full translation in Rolf Geibel's *Shingon Texts* (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research, 2004) and partially in Yoshito Hakeda's *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

15. While it seems not to be the case that Indian esoteric Buddhist texts state that the *dharmakāya* actually communicates, the “gnostic body” or *jñānakāya* in these texts holds a place similar to that of the *dharmakāya* in Mahāyāna literature and is said to “express itself in linguistic forms.” See Vesna Wallace, “The Provocative Character of the ‘Mystical’ Discourses on the Absolute Body in Indian Tantric Buddhism.”

16. See Thanissaro Bhikkhu's translation, and his comments, of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (A.1.8–10) at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an01/an01.049.than.html>

17. For references, see Ru-nien Shih, “The Concept of ‘Innate Purity of the Mind’ in the Āgamas and the Nikāyas,” *Journal of World Religions* 13 (2009): 117–176. Also see the Wikipedia article “Luminous Mind” at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luminous\\_mind](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luminous_mind).

18. Paul J. Griffiths alludes, albeit it with a different focus from mine here, to monistic tendencies in mainstream Mahāyāna thought in his *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 199 *passim*. In the final sentence of the same book (p. 202), he refers to the theological problem of “the subsumption of dharma into Buddha.” Had this position been avoided in Mahāyāna thought, Griffiths argues, the tradition would have been able to successfully “preserve a critically realist, non-monistic metaphysic.”

19. Note the rich controversy over substantialist perspectives in Buddhist thought as accounted in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).

20. Note Śāntideva's luminous comment on this problem of the two truths in vv. 75 and 76 in the tenth chapter, on “Wisdom,” in his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. A hypothetical critic in the text asks who it is that has compassion, and for whom, if beings are “empty.” The author responds by saying that the construct of “being” is preserved out of the need to eliminate suffering and that the ultimate truth of emptiness is not allowed to undermine this task.



## The Dangerous *Kami* Called Buddha: Ancient Conflicts between Buddhism and Local Cults and Medieval Attempts at Resolution

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AN IMPORTANT ASSUMPTION underlying the study of processes of religious assimilation in Japan involving Buddhism and local cults (normally known as *shinbutsu shūgō*, 神仏習合, “amalgamation of *kami* and buddhas”), is that such processes were essentially peaceful and non-confrontational. Indeed, religious struggles opposing Buddhist institutions to local cultic centers were notably absent for the most part of late ancient and medieval Japan. However, religious assimilation was never complete and systematic. For example, elements remained that were kept separate, as in the phenomenon known as *shinbutsu kakuri* 神仏隔離 (lit., “separation of Shintō and Buddhism”), which can be observed in court rituals and, notably, at the Ise shrines 伊勢神宮. In addition, medieval authors posited the existence of spiritual/demonic entities, known as “real *kami*” (*jisshin*, 実神, or *jissha*, 実社), which could not be assimilated within Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it is also possible to identify a shift away from Buddhism in medieval and early modern discourses about the *kami* 神.<sup>2</sup> All this suggests the presence of tensions, if not open conflicts, in more or less latent forms, within the dominant discourse of assimilation.<sup>3</sup> One of the most evident points of tension can be found in the early accounts of the arrival of Buddhism to Japan and in their medieval interpretations.

In this article, I explore the tension between Buddhism and indigenous notions of divinities by focusing on two sets of related issues. First, I review the ways in which early eighth-century Japanese Buddhist authors described their understanding of the Buddha, in particular as it took shape from within the context of contemporaneous *kami* cults. This understanding was projected back in history to the time of Buddhism’s transmission to Japan. Next, I discuss a number of medieval

interpretations of the events presented in these earlier sources about the conflicts preceding the establishment of Buddhism in Japan. I will show that, while early texts present the Buddha in a manner that is strikingly similar to the contemporaneous understanding of the *kami* (in fact, the statue of the Buddha that marked the official transmission of Buddhism to Japan was considered a *kami* from the foreign countries to the west of Japan, *nishi no tonari no kuni no kami*, 西蕃神), medieval authors attempted to reinterpret the ancient anti-Buddhist movement as part of a larger, cosmic process of struggle opposing Buddha to Māra on the one hand, and Japanese *kami* as violent agents of Buddha's soteriological intentions on the other. Amalgamation of *kami* and buddhas, thus, was a cultural process that started at the very beginning of the transmission of Buddhism to Japan; it involved confrontations and negotiations, and contributed to shaping for a long time the understanding of both entities involved.

#### THE ARRIVAL OF “BUDDHA-KAMI” TO JAPAN

What we know about the introduction of Buddhism to Japan and the ensuing incidents is based on two accounts, one in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 and the other one in the *Gangōji garan engi narabini shizaichō* 元興寺伽藍縁起並資材帳 (hereafter, *Gangōji engi*).<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that both texts were composed approximately two hundred years after the events they described, and each had a rather explicit ideological agenda—in the case of *Nihon shoki* legitimizing the ruling dynasty and creating an official history and in the case of *Gangōji engi* legitimizing the role of Buddhism and the place of Gangōji temple in it. Thus, they cannot be read as factual, objective testimonies of the events. Here I will follow mainly the narrative of events in the *Nihon shoki*, and integrate it with elements from the *Gangōji engi* when they are significantly different.

In 538 (Senka 宣化 3), according to the *Gangōji engi*, or in 552 (Kinmei 欽明 13), if we follow the *Nihon shoki*, King Syōng Myōng 聖明王 of Paekche 百濟 in the Korean Peninsula (known as King Syōng, 聖王, in Korea) sent to the Yamato court as a gift a number of Buddhist sacred objects, in particular an image of Śākyamuni, tools for bathing it (*kanbutsu*, 灌仏, an early form of Buddhist worship), and a box of scriptures for the performance of ritual services. Obviously, the Buddha image became immediately the focus of attention by the notables of the Yamato clans, mainly because of its “noble aspect” (*hotoke no kao*

*kiragirashi*, 仏の相貌端巖し);<sup>5</sup> apparently, an anthropomorphic representation like that was previously unknown in that remote archipelago. The ruler, Kinmei 欽明, asked his ministers what should be done with it. Immediately, two positions emerged. The chief minister Soga no Iname 蘇我稻目 supported official worship in the name of international cooperation. In contrast, other important members of the court such as Mononobe no Okoshi 物部 尾輿 and Nakatomi no Kamako 中臣 鎌子 strongly objected for the reason that local deities may resent the “foreign god.” As a compromise, the ruler allowed Iname to worship the image privately.

Soon a terrible epidemic broke out in the realm and many people died. As the *Gangōji engi* reports, “the wrath of the *kami* manifested itself.”<sup>6</sup> Apparently there was a dispute between the two factions at court concerning the causes of the epidemic. While the Soga attributed it to a lack of official worship of the foreign god—therefore, the cause was Buddha’s anger—the Mononobe and the Nakatomi argued that it was the result of the anger of the local *kami* against the Soga’s worship of the foreign god. They asked the ruler that the new cult be eradicated, and Kinmei consented. The Buddha image was thrown into the Naniwa Harbor and the temple was burned to ashes; at that point, however, a disaster (presumably, a fire) hit the king’s residence.<sup>7</sup> There are a few discrepancies in the succession of events as told by the two sources. In addition to the year of the official arrival of Buddhism to Japan, the *Gangōji engi* says that the first persecution occurred after Soga no Iname died in 569. It also states that the death of emperor Kinmei in 571 was caused by an epidemic that broke out after the first anti-Buddhist persecution.

The narrative, for the moment, stops here. However, Buddhism had not been completely eliminated. A few months later, a miraculous log of camphor tree emitting music and light was found afloat in the sea not far from the coast. It was brought to the emperor, who ordered two buddha images to be made from it.<sup>8</sup> This narrative segment may be a fragment from the origin story of the image of Amida enshrined at Hisosanji 比蘇山寺 in Yoshino or at Zenkōji 善光寺; as such, it is probably a later interpolation. In any case, we get a sense that Buddhist artifacts kept coming to Japan from beyond the sea. The attitude of the Yamato authorities was ambivalent, as some images were rejected and others accepted.

Returning to the main narrative of Buddhism at court, we find that in 572 Emperor Bidatsu 敏達, the successor of Kinmei, appointed as his chief ministers Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子 and Mononobe no Yuge no Moriya 物部弓削守屋. It is from this moment that the contrast within the Yamato state concerning Buddhism escalated. In 584 the minister Kōga 鹿深臣 (written 甲賀 in *Gangōji engi*) brought back from Paekche two buddha images, one of Miroku 弥勒 and another, perhaps, of Śākyamuni, and Soga no Umako began to reestablish the Buddhist presence in the country. He built a Buddha hall in the eastern part of his private residence to enshrine the statue of Miroku, and asked a defrocked monk from Koryō, known as Eben 惠便 in Japanese, to become his preceptor. In addition, he ordered a daughter of the immigrant officer Shime Datto 司馬達等, together with two other young women, to take the tonsure and become nuns. He held a ceremony, during which Datto miraculously obtained a relic of the Buddha.

As the *Nihon shoki* writes, “this is the beginning of Buddhism” in Japan—of course, the text is talking about the “official” and authorized beginning of Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> It was a peculiar beginning indeed: A chief minister acquires Buddhist images imported from abroad, places them in his private residence partly converted into a worship hall, and chooses from among the community of expatriates a few people to be appointed as clergy. The “monk” had been previously defrocked, and the “nuns” were daughters of notables. The fact that women were in charge of Buddhist ceremonies indicates perhaps an influence of contemporary shamanistic practices, but also a deep lack of understanding of Buddhist doctrines, institutions, and ceremonies: of the three jewels, only the Buddha and the sangha were somehow present; the dharma was still absent (a relic, though, was produced in order to strengthen the sacredness of the entire affair).

Let us return to the report of the *Nihon shoki*. In 585, Umako built a *stūpa* and held a large ceremony to enshrine the relics there. In this way, Umako expanded the pro-Buddhist policy of Iname, which had remained on a purely private level. However, the difficulties were not finished. Soon after the ceremony, Umako fell seriously ill. Divination attributed the disease to a “curse” (*tatari*, 祟り) from, literally, the “Buddha-kami” 仏神 (with the two characters read *hotoke*, “Budha”) that had previously been worshipped by his father Iname. Umako recommended to his children that they worship the “kami of his father,” i.e., the statue of the Buddha. He also ordered a stone image of a buddha

to be made, and prayed to it to have his life extended. At that point, once again, an epidemic broke out in the realm, and many people died. Mononobe no Moriya and Nakatomi no Katsumi 中臣勝海 denounced Umako for violating the ban on Buddhism imposed by the previous emperor, Kinmei. Emperor Bidatsu agreed with them and proclaimed: “Buddhism must be stopped!”<sup>10</sup> Also according to the *Gangōji engi*, it was Emperor Bidatsu in person who ordered the persecution of Buddhism. Interestingly, Bidatsu was the only son of Kinmei without Soga blood (the other sons, related to the Soga clan, were subsequent emperors Yōmei 用明, Sushun 崇峻, and Suiko 推古).<sup>11</sup>

According to the *Nihon shoki*, Moriya went to the temple in person, cut the pole of the pagoda, fell it to the ground, and set the entire place on fire; he then took the burned image to the Naniwa Harbor and threw it in the sea. That day, we are told, there was strong wind and it rained even though there were no clouds in the sky. Moriya insulted Umako and the monk he had appointed; he also had the nuns beaten. At that point, another epidemic broke out. As the *Gangōji engi* reports: “After the destruction of Buddhism, an epidemic spread all over the realm and many people died. The sick were screaming: ‘I’m burning! Somebody is breaking my body! Someone is cutting me into pieces!’”<sup>12</sup> Even the emperor and Moriya themselves were affected. Finally, Bidatsu allowed Umako to worship again the Buddha privately. Two months later, in the eighth month of 585, the emperor died. The conflict between Umako and Moriya grew stronger.<sup>13</sup>

The new emperor, Yōmei, son of Soga no Iname’s daughter, Kitashihime 堅監姫, appointed again Umako and Moriya as chief ministers. In 587 Yōmei fell ill; he gathered the court and proclaimed his faith in Buddhism. He was the first emperor to do so, but he was also the first emperor related to the Soga. He also asked the opinion of the ministers about his faith. At court, pro- and anti-Buddhists quarreled fiercely. Predictably, Mononobe no Moriya and Nakatomi no Katsumi opposed the emperor’s decision to worship Buddhism, whereas Umako supported it.<sup>14</sup> During the debate, Moriya was secretly told that he was in danger, and fled to his residence in Ato (present day Osaka Prefecture). Shortly afterwards the emperor died. Umako quickly raised an army and defeated the pretendent to the throne, a son of Bidatsu without blood ties with the Soga. He then attacked Moriya. Moriya climbed a tree and fought bravely shooting countless arrows, but when the archer Tominoichii 迹見赤禱 in the Soga army killed and

decapitated him, Moriya's army disbanded and was defeated.<sup>15</sup> The site where the battle took place is traditionally considered to be the location of a Buddhist temple, the Taisei shōgunji 大聖勝軍寺 in Yao City 八尾市, Osaka Prefecture. A pond in the temple compound is believed to be the place where Moriya was decapitated, either by the warrior Tominoichii or, according to another version, by Hata no Kawakatsu 秦河勝.<sup>16</sup> Near the temple we still find Moriya's tomb.

The *Nihon shoki* reports, anachronistically, that Prince Umayado 厩戸 (the future Prince Shōtoku, 聖德太子, 573?-622?) had also joined the battle; in the decisive moment of the fight, he made wooden sculptures of the Four Heavenly Kings (*shi tennō*, 四天王) and vowed to build a temple for them if they helped the Soga to win the battle; Umako also expressed an analogous vow. Eventually, Moriya was killed and his party defeated; the Soga clan had won. From this moment, Buddhism would no longer encounter any official resistance; the Buddhist transformation of Japan had begun. The following year, in 588 (the first year of emperor Sushun's reign), Paekche sent to Japan relics, priests, and professionals expert in the arts related to temple construction (carpenters, tile makers, painters, etc.), probably upon a request from the Yamato state; then, Umako began the construction of Asukadera 飛鳥寺 (present-day Hōkōji, 法興寺). In the same year, Umayado began the construction of Shitennōji 四天王寺 (in present Osaka), the temple he had vowed to dedicate to the Four Heavenly Deities. Umayado donated to the temple the land and half the slaves that had belonged to Moriya.<sup>17</sup> In 592 Umako's daughter became empress with the name Suiko; in the following year, her brother Umayado became regent: here began his career as a Buddhist ruler, best known as Prince Shōtoku (Shōtoku Taishi, 聖德太子).

#### THE NATURE OF EARLY ANTI-BUDDHISM

Historians have traditionally raised the issue of whether the Mononobe and the Nakatomi were really anti-Buddhist or whether this accusation is a later fabrication. For decades, the received interpretation in modern times was that the Mononobe defended Japanese national culture, whereas the Soga were in favor of internationalization.<sup>18</sup> TSUDA Sōkichi 津田左右吉 downplayed the rivalry between the two clans on textual bases; he was perhaps the first to argue that tales of anti-Buddhist persecution do not reflect historical events, but are forgeries of later Buddhists.<sup>19</sup> He indicated three factors in support of



his hypothesis. Firstly, all sources repeat the same events. Passages in *Nihon shoki* concerning the early stages of Buddhism in Japan are considered to be based largely on the *Gangōji engi*; the entries on the persecution of Buddhism during the reigns of Kinmei and Bidatsu are patterned on the *Liao Gaosengzhuàn* 梁高僧傳 and therefore might have little historical value. Secondly, terms used to refer to the Buddha (such as “foreign kami” [*adashi no kuni no kami*, 蕃神] and “Buddha-kami”) and the general anti-Buddhist rhetorics are the same as those that appear in Chinese texts written well before the Japanese events took place. Finally, Tsuda argued, it is difficult to define pro- and anti-Buddhist positions at a time when no one really understood the Buddhist doctrines. In particular, it is hard to believe that the Nakatomi were anti-Buddhist when their descendant Kamatari 鎌足 (the founder of the Fujiwara House, 藤原家) was such a strong supporter of Buddhism. In fact, the struggle between the Soga and the Mononobe does not appear in the earliest sources: the *Gangōji engi*, concerning the anti-Buddhist events of the Kinmei era, only reports the opposition of “other ministers” without mentioning their names; as for the Bidatsu era, it only mentions the emperor’s anti-Buddhist attitude. According to Tsuda, these tales were used much later to give a religious meaning to the struggle between the Soga and the Mononobe in order to present the Soga especially as pro-Buddhist and the Mononobe as anti-Buddhist. Narrations of this kind may have played a role in temple and clan politics in the early Nara period, when both the *Nihon shoki* and the *Gangōji engi* were written. It may be useful to remember that the *Gangōji* claimed to have been founded by the Soga; the *Gangōji engi* had thus an interest in downplaying the role of other people in the diffusion of Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> However, Tsuda’s interpretation was later criticized by TAMURA Enchō 田村円澄. Tamura believed that the contrast between the two clan involved emphasis on Japanese versus international culture and religion; he even wrote that their contrast was the “first intellectual struggle” in Japan.<sup>21</sup>

There is an agreement among historians today concerning the existence of an anti-Buddhist movement as part of struggles between local clans. HAYAMI Tasuku 速水侑 suggests that the Mononobe clan might have had relations with Buddhism or with Buddhists. Members of the Mononobe clan were sent to Paekche during the reigns of Yūryaku 雄略 and Keitai 繼体, and may have been exposed to Buddhism; the Mononobe had a family relationship with the Kuratsukuri no suguri

鞍作村主, a group closely connected with Buddhism, in Shibukawa, Kawachi Province, their home region.<sup>22</sup> Recently, KUMAGAI Kimio 熊谷公男 has reiterated that there is enough historical evidence to support the received vision based on the *Nihon shoki* and other texts.<sup>23</sup> The Mononobe and the Nakatomi were ancient clans traditionally in charge of ritual and religious matters in the Yamato court. In contrast, the Soga was a new clan that had flourished thanks to foreign trade with the mainland and the control of the flow of immigrants to Japan (in fact, it may have been formed by immigrants). The entourage of Soga no Umako was formed almost exclusively by immigrants or descendants of immigrants.<sup>24</sup> It is well possible that one of the reasons for Iname's prompt acceptance of Buddhism was his desire to strengthen his ties with the mainland and the foreigners living in Japan.<sup>25</sup> In addition, we should note that in Korea as well there had been debates and struggles concerning Buddhism when it first arrived, which resulted in death and material destruction.

However, the struggle in Japan between the two clans was not necessarily over Buddhism per se, but about power and control. Recently, Michael Como has argued that much of the narratives about the struggle opposing Soga and the Mononobe could have been an echo of the rivalry between different groups of immigrants to Japan from the Korean Peninsula, namely, those such as the Soga related to Paekche, centered in Hōryūji 法隆寺, and those such as the Hata 秦 clan related to Silla 新羅, centered in Shitennōji and Kōryūji 広隆寺.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, the difficult relations among rival clans were not only due to Buddhism, but involved international relations with the states in the Korean Peninsula, local power, and prestige at court. As the *Gangōji engi* writes, despite the fact that Buddhism had been authorized as a private worship of the Soga clan, "people from Paekche, Koryō 高麗, and China gradually began to worship" as well.<sup>27</sup>

The geopolitical situation in East Asia had a growing impact on the internal situation in the Yamato state, and a critical point was reached during Emperor Kinmei's rule. The Soga were the proponents of a new government system and a more open position toward Korea, whereas the Mononobe were probably in favor of an older politics of direct intervention in the Korean Peninsula (the territory of Mimana, 任那). The arrival of Buddhism added another point of contention to the already convoluted situation. We should also add that the arrival of Buddhism coincided with frequent outbursts of epidemics, virtually unheard of in

previous times; this must certainly have been a major source of concern to the Yamato leadership.<sup>28</sup> Since the very beginning, then, Buddhism involved serious problems for governance in Japan: struggles among powerful clans, geopolitical considerations, even public health issues. My main concern here is neither to discuss Japanese tribal politics nor to establish which source is more historically reliable, but rather to understand the early Japanese attitude toward Buddhism, in particular in relation to contemporary beliefs about the *kami*. In this respect, both *Nihon shoki* and *Gangōji engi* appear to share the same outlook toward deities (*kami*) in general and the Buddha in particular.<sup>29</sup>

#### UNDERSTANDING THE BUDDHA-KAMI

To sum up our discussion thus far, sources outline the following picture. Acceptance of the Buddha at court angered the local deities who provoked an epidemic; the Buddha was therefore thrown away in Naniwa Harbor, perhaps as a way to return it to the land where it came from.<sup>30</sup> At this point, it was the Buddha who became angry and provoked an even worse epidemic. A striking aspect of the early accounts of the arrival of Buddhism is their ambivalent reaction to the new deity. Calls for rejection were made in order not to anger local deities, but sources also report interest for and fascination toward the new god (as we will see, texts mention its beauty, even its power).

More fundamentally, the new statue of the Buddha from Paekche was understood as a divinity, not as a symbol or a representation in general, thus indicating a basic form of religious fetishism.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, both parties involved, i.e., pro-Buddhist and anti-Buddhist, epitomized in the sources by, respectively, the Soga and the Mononobe clans, agreed in considering the Buddha statue a “visiting god.” In fact, the Buddha was called *kami* like the local deities: “*kami* recently arrived” (*imaki no kami*, 今来神), “*kami* of the neighboring country” (*tonari no kuni no kami*, 蕃神 or 他神), “*kami* called Buddha (*butsujin*),” are among the designations in the sources for the new deity; these terms are contrasted with “the *kami* of our realm” (*kunitsukami*, 国神). The Soga and the Mononobe conflicted, however, on the actual treatment this new god should be given, whether to accept and worship it or to reject it.<sup>32</sup> Thus, at this early stage, what opposed pro- and anti-Buddhists was not, strictly speaking, a religious struggle, since both parties shared the same logic governing local *kami* cults.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, at least, the entire discussion about pro- and anti-Buddhist attitudes is misleading;

what the clan chieftains debated, at court, were not different religions, but the treatment to be given to different *kami*—one of which, the Buddha statue, was closely related to Paekche. A brief discussion of “visiting gods” is thus in order.

ORIGUCHI Shinobu 折口信夫, in his discussion of *marebito* まれびと, people (and gods) coming from an elsewhere situated far away, reports ancient Japanese myths and stories about “visiting deities” (*marebito no kami*, *kyakushin*, 客神) who came to the Japanese archipelago, such as Sukunabikona 少彦名神, a god who arrived floating in the sea, and Amenohiboko 天日槍 (mentioned in the *Harima no kuni fudoki*, 播磨国風土記), who came from the Korean Peninsula and fought against local deities.<sup>34</sup> It is possible that these stories were records, in the mythical register, of movements of people, things, and ideas from the Asian continent to the Japanese archipelago. HAYAMI Tasuku has suggested that Buddhism was initially treated in the same way as these ancient gods, as a “visiting deity from a neighboring country” (*tonari kuni no marahitogami*, 隣国客神), according to the expression that appears in the *Nihon ryōiki*.<sup>35</sup> In the fact, the *Nihon ryōiki* seems to conflate two different episodes, namely, the official transmission of Buddhism from Paekche and the arrival of a miraculous tree trunk floating on the sea;<sup>36</sup> in any case, like Sukunabikona, a Buddha too, in the form of a magic tree, came floating in the sea. The relative mildness of initial anti-Buddhist persecutions in Japan, especially when compared with those that had occurred in China, could be explained, then, as a manifestation of this ambivalent attitude between acceptance and rejection of entities coming from the outside that were considered “sacred”—and not, as authors have argued, because of a supposedly tolerant, collective, and assimilative culture typical of Japan.<sup>37</sup>

Initial forms of anti-Buddhism, as they are described by the older texts, were not reactions against Buddhist ideology based on theoretical speculation or ethical arguments. They may have concerned power relations among the most influential clans of Yamato and visions of the state, but as we have seen the texts are rather elusive on these subjects. In contrast, something that immediately strikes the observer is the reported fear of the deities, both local and foreign. The early texts are unanimous in stating that the Buddha acted like the local deities as an unpredictable and violent force. As the *Gangōji engi* states, “the Buddha-*kami* was a dangerous being” (*hotoke [butsujin] wa kashikoki-mono [osoremono] ni aikeri*, 仏神は恐物にありけり).<sup>38</sup> The foreign god

is described as superior to local deities, which suggests an ambiguous attitude toward the Outside: did the ancient Japanese ultimately accept Buddhism because they “liked” this foreign religion, as it were, or just because the “Buddha-*kami*” was stronger than their own gods, thus suggesting a cultural form of inferiority complex? Be that as it may, it is interesting to note that it was the pro-Buddhists who emphasized the superior strength and devastating violence of the Buddha-*kami*; the anti-Buddhists do not seem to have been able to explicate the terrible consequences of anti-Buddhist persecutions as interventions of their local deities.

In particular, the arrival of Buddha images and their worship are directly associated in all extant sources to the outbreak of epidemics, natural calamities, and meteorological anomalies. In other words, the arrival of the “Buddha-*kami*” threatened not only the social and political equilibrium of the Yamato state, but the cosmic balance as well. In this sense, it is particularly interesting that buddhas were initially treated as visiting deities from elsewhere, similar to traditional deities of the Izumo 出雲 mythological cycle such as Ōkuninushi 大国主 and Sukunabikona; these deities were considered to be dangerous but also, when pacified, very benevolent to their worshipers. It is also interesting to notice that the arrival of Buddhism during a time of intense exchanges with the Asian mainland coincided with the diffusion in Japan of a series of epidemics on a large scale as yet unknown in the archipelago. It is natural that people at the time tried to explain these epidemics as supernatural interventions. It was also not by chance, then, that Buddhists stressed their religion’s power both to cause illnesses and to heal.

The *Gangōji engi* says that the death of Emperor Kinmei in 571 was caused by an epidemic that broke out after the first anti-Buddhist persecution that followed Soga no Iname’s death in 569. On his deathbed, Emperor Kinmei is reported to have said to his children: “The Buddha-*kami* is a dangerous entity. Do not forget your uncle’s [Soga no Iname] last words: do not abandon the cult of the Buddha-*kami*.”<sup>39</sup> Later, when Soga no Umako also fell seriously ill, divination attributed the disease to a “curse” (*tatari*) from the “Buddha-*kami*” who had been previously worshiped by his father Iname. Umako recommended to his children to worship the “*kami* of his father,” i.e., the Buddha. It is not clear why the “Buddha-*kami*” cursed Umako, who had just built a temple and established the first Japanese clergy. Perhaps he wanted his worship to

be expanded further. In any case, unpredictability and violence, and the use of violent means (especially, disease) in order to manifest their presence and requests, are typical features of the early *kami* as they are recorded in the *Nihon shoki* and the *Fudoki*; and as Michael Como has shown, deities associated with immigrant clans were considered especially dangerous.<sup>40</sup> It is easy to see initial resistance if not open hostility toward the Buddha-*kami*, another immigrant deity, in this religious context.

Other instances of sacred violence in the narratives seem to point, rather than to local *kami* beliefs, to a rudimentary understanding of the law of karma. For example, the *Gangōji engi* states in a passage that appears almost identical also in the *Nihon shoki*: “After the destruction of Buddhism, an epidemic spread all over the land, and many people died. The sick were screaming: ‘I’m burning! Someone is breaking me up! Someone is cutting me!’”<sup>41</sup> In this case, forms of violence employed against Buddhist objects (breaking things, cutting the pillar of the *stūpa*, etc.) were exerted upon people. Texts emphasize that the suffering of the common people was exactly the same as that which had been inflicted upon the nuns and the statues in Soga no Umako’s temple destroyed by the Mononobe and the Nakatomi.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the text presents a supernatural “an eye for an eye,” according to which innocent people were punished exactly in the way as the three treasures had been persecuted. Whereas this might be a primitive and very literal interpretation of the law of karma, still it clearly indicates the destructive potential of Buddha according to the ancient Japanese pro-Buddhists. We might think that this interpretation indicates a merely rudimentary understanding of Buddhism during the early stages of its propagation; however, we should notice an important difference between the early Chinese accounts of disasters striking anti-Buddhists and their Japanese versions we have discussed. For the Chinese, death of the persecutors was clearly due to the impersonal law of karma, whereas for the Japanese it was mostly the Buddha-*kami* himself who meted out punishment on his enemies—an idea that was later developed, in the middle ages, into the concept of *butsubachi* 仏罰 (punishment meted out by the buddhas).<sup>43</sup>

#### THE BUDDHA-KAMI’S ORIGINAL VIOLENCE

In fact, Jien 慈円 (1155–1225), the Tendai aristocratic monk, was aware of the ethical problems intrinsic in standard accounts of

Moriya's death, in which a pious Buddhist (Prince Shōtoku) prays to the Buddha that his enemy be defeated and killed. He tried to justify it in the following way: "It was not Buddhist Law that did such things as kill Moriya. Rather, Imperial Law did away with a bad minister who was bad because he was destroying the Three Treasures of Buddhist Law that were to guard Imperial Law."<sup>44</sup> Here Jien is deploying the idea of the mutual dependence of Buddhist law and Imperial law to justify Prince Shōtoku's lack of Buddhist compassion toward his enemy—and, at the same time, to exempt Buddhism from the taint of violence. Along these lines, an early biography of Prince Shōtoku, *Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi den hoketsuki* 上宮聖徳太子伝補闕記, presents a negative portrait of Moriya, writing that "internally he had forgotten the virtue of filiality, externally he despised the way of ruler and subjects."<sup>45</sup> *Genkō shakusho* (1322) 元亨釈書 by Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1278–1346) also ignores the moral conundrums related to Shōtoku's victory; according to it, Moriya's defeat was due to Shōtoku's prayers to the Four Heavenly Generals.<sup>46</sup> However, it is striking to discover that later sources—well into the medieval period—chose to explicitly emphasize the original violence of the Buddha, even in more brutal and complex forms than those we find in the Nara sources.

For example, the *Sangoku denki* 三国伝記 (1407) by Gentō 玄棟 (n.d.) clearly presents the fight between Mononobe no Moriya and Prince Shōtoku as a religious struggle in which supernatural entities participate on each contender's side. Moriya's stance is represented by these words he supposedly pronounced: "Why should we turn our back to the gods of our country and worship a foreign god?" At the beginning, Moriya's army was stronger in battle. Then, Prince Shōtoku vowed to build a temple to the Four Heavenly Generals (*shitenno*) should they support him until the final victory. During a particularly violent battle, Moriya climbed a hackberry tree (*enoki*, 榎) and shot an arrow belonging to his clan's god Mononobe no Futsu no ōkami 物部符都大神. The arrow hit Prince Shōtoku's armor, but did not harm him. The prince shot back an arrow of the Heavenly Generals that hit Moriya in the chest; after uttering the words, "My wish is realized; all my desires are fulfilled," he died. Moriya was decapitated by Hata no Kawakatsu and his head was brought to Prince Shōtoku, who said: "My wish is now fulfilled."<sup>47</sup> Moriya's army, having lost its leader, was defeated. Prince Shōtoku afterwards built the Shitennojōji to fulfill his vow as a sign of gratitude to the Four Heavenly Generals. We should

notice here that, as far as only human beings were involved, Moriya's army was superior to that of Prince Shōtoku; the latter's victory was determined by the supernatural intervention of Buddhism in the guise of the Four Heavenly Generals. In other words, the superiority of the Buddhist fighters (the Four Heavenly Generals) is shown as superior to that of the Japanese *kami*. Setting aside the crude battle images in this source, we should emphasize that the Buddhist monk Gentō, the author of this account, did not see anything strange in the fact that a Buddhist temple was built after the realization of a vow to defeat and kill one's enemy, and that Moriya was killed by Prince Shōtoku thanks to the help of the protectors of Buddhism (the Four Heavenly Generals). It is uncanny, though, that both Moriya and Prince Shōtoku claimed that their respective wishes had been realized, one with his demise, the other with his triumph. How can we explain this?

A number of medieval sources offer us several important clues. The Tōdaiji 東大寺 scholar monk Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321) explains Moriya's failure and murder in a very interesting way. Gyōnen argues that Moriya's attempt to destroy Buddhism was a skillful means (*hōben*, 方便) to increase the number of temples and strengthen belief. Gyōnen writes: "Thanks to Prince Shōtoku's victory, everybody in Japan now takes refuge in the *buddhadharma* and there are temples and pagodas everywhere."<sup>48</sup> In fact, Moriya's land and wealth were confiscated and donated to a temple—as an indication of the meritorious power of such donations. For Gyōnen, Moriya was a sacrificial victim, as it were: he was killed to display the superiority of Buddhism and Buddhism's function as the protector of the state and the legitimate emperor against usurpers. Prince Shōtoku's military triumph was a good way to advertise the power of Buddhism and to secure consensus among the populace. Jūshin 住信 (b. 1210), in his collection of Buddhist stories *Shiju hyaku innen shū* 私聚百因緣集 (1257), also wrote that Prince Shōtoku's fight against Moriya was done also in order to rescue Japan from its wretched condition as a "country of wrong dharma and pure evil (*jahō jun'aku*, 邪法純惡)," referring to the situation before the arrival of Buddhism.<sup>49</sup>

The medieval standard biography of Prince Shōtoku, however, the *Shōtoku Taishi den ryaku* 聖德太子伝略, develops the story of the struggle between the prince and Moriya by rejecting the logic of skillful means and introduces instead a vertiginous cosmic dimension. It quotes a certain *Hongan engi* 本願縁起, according to which Moriya had



been a criminal and a destroyer of Buddhism for several lives and in different countries. He had lived many times in China both as a man and as a woman; he had joined the Buddhists always with the goal to lure them to revolt against their country's rulers, to confound their minds, to inspire evil feelings, to grab temples' lands, and to destroy temples and *stūpas*. In particular, people who attempt to carry out this kind of actions in Japan are all manifestations (*hengen*, 変現) of Moriya.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, Moriya is presented as a cosmic felon, a true demonic entity (*jissha akunin*, 実者悪人),<sup>51</sup> the opposite of Prince Shōtoku himself, who was also reborn in China seven times but was instead a manifestation of Kannon 観音.<sup>52</sup> It is easy to recognize here a Japanese version of the cosmic opposition between Buddha and Māra—and, on a smaller, more localized scale, between Śākyamuni and Devadatta in India. In fact, the *Shōtoku Taishi den ryaku* reports the following words attributed to the prince: “I and Moriya are like reflections, we are like echoes [of each other].”<sup>53</sup> This obscure statement can be found in a clearer form in the *Shōtoku Taishi den shiki* 聖徳太子伝私記, one of the prophecies attributed to Prince Shōtoku, which states: “I and Moriya will be forever enemies and forever indebted to each other, like a shadow follows a shape. [We have been like that] already for five hundred lives.” However, this text gives an unexpected twist to these two heroes' relation: “Both the Prince and Moriya are manifestations of great bodhisattvas. They appear like that [i.e., as Prince Shōtoku and Moriya] in order to spread Buddhism.”<sup>54</sup> Aiming to strengthen the entire Buddhist system, they collaborate, each in his own capacity, one by causing troubles and the other by solving them. In the same vein, another text quotes an unnamed source defining Moriya a manifestation of Bodhisattva Jizō 地藏, who appears in our world after the extinction of the Buddha to save sentient beings<sup>55</sup>—with the implication that Moriya sacrifices himself by acting as an enemy of Buddhism in order to help the diffusion of the dharma, in a supreme form of *migawari* 身代り (self-sacrifice in favor of someone else), as it were.<sup>56</sup> It is possible that the different treatment reserved to Mononobe no Moriya, envisioned either as an evil felon or a self-sacrificial saint, depends on the place of composition of the sources, whether at Hōryūji 法隆寺 (often expressing the former attitude) or Tennōji (indicating the latter vision). In fact, the heads of families claiming to be the descendants of Moriya until recently lived nearby the Tennōji and presided over the major ceremonies of the

temple; in the middle ages they served as the lay administrators (*zoku bettō*, 俗別当) of the compound.

#### CONCLUSION

According to these narrations, Buddhism was accepted in Japan because of Buddha's power—not the power to save beings, but to punish them. Important consequences followed from this initial reaction to Buddhism. First of all, Buddhist violence, once domesticated, was put at the service of the state and its representatives. This was the beginning of the Buddhist discourse on the protection of the state (*chingo kokka*, 鎮護国家); this discourse involved a political ideology, a rhetoric, and a ritual apparatus that flourished for centuries and, in some form, still exists today. The subtext of such ideology and rhetoric, however, is precisely the violent power of Buddhism, according to which Buddhism defeats the enemies of the state (variously configured as natural disasters, famines, droughts, epidemics, bandits, traitors, foreign invaders, heretics, etc.) by employing a supernatural violence that takes place in the invisible realm of buddhas and *kami*. A second consequence is that a peculiarly Buddhist ideology of violence develops and materializes itself in violent actions carried out by members of Buddhist institutions precisely as Buddhists, similar to Shōtoku Taishi's military campaign. The Japanese Buddhist ideology of violence manifested itself in the actions of the medieval soldier-monks (*akusō*, 悪僧, lit. "evil monks"), but also in all the rationalizations of war and of violent political conduct produced throughout Japanese history until World War II.<sup>57</sup>

From our discussion thus far, it appears that Buddhism has fully absorbed the ambivalent, dangerous nature of the ancient *kami* with whom it came into contact since its transmission to Japan. Later, Buddhism tried to distance itself from its acquired *kami*-nature by re-inscribing its transmission to Japan (and its struggles with local *kami*) into a grander narrative about the cosmic fight opposing Buddha to Māra. In this way, enemies of Buddhism (and exclusive worshipers of *kami*) were re-envisioned as local embodiments of Māra and Devadatta. Subsequently, the *kami* were included in this new Buddhist meta-narrative as violent agents at the orders of the Buddha. From the middle age, Buddhist institutions tried to justify particularly serious and devastating occurrences as forms of voluntary self-sacrifice performed in accordance with the will of buddhas and *kami*. One of the first instances

of this logic is an explanation of the Mongol invasions reported in the *Nomori kagami* 野守鏡: “Since we are in the final age of the dharma, the power of Buddhism is declining . . . perhaps was it the gods, who, in order to revive the power of Buddhism . . . provoked the foreigners’ attack as a skillful means and brandished their sacred swords?”<sup>58</sup> In other words, it was the *kami* protecting Japan who actually unleashed the Mongols’ attacks, which were nothing else than skillful means (*upāya*) to “revive the power of Buddhism.” This was by no means an isolated position. Violent means were deemed necessary to save the Japanese. The *Shasekishū* 沙石集, a collection of Buddhist tales written in the early fourteenth century by Mujū Ichien 無住一円 (1226–1312), is even more explicit: “Our country is a marginal land far away [from India]. Its unruly people do not know the Law of Karma and don’t believe in the Buddha-Dharma. Out of compassion . . . the Dharmakāya [the Buddha in its absolute and unconditioned form] manifests its body of equal outflow and appears to the Japanese in the form of demons and dangerous animals, to subjugate such evil people and bring them to Buddhism.”<sup>59</sup> Deities protecting Japan are actually “demons and dangerous animals” or, more literally, “evil demons, malignant *kami*, poisonous snakes and violent beasts”; several Shintō texts belonging to the Buddhist tradition make clear that the true shape of the *kami* is that of snakes. Thus, Japan was protected by dangerous entities against the evil influences of demons. According to this reasoning, violent attacks against Buddhism were in fact the *compassionate* deeds of buddhas and *kami* together, and this togetherness again blurs the distinctions between them.

The protagonists of the early struggles preceding the adoption of Buddhism in Japan, Prince Shōtoku and Mononobe no Moriya, came to be interpreted in medieval Japan as actors in a larger world-historical and cosmic drama. Prince Shōtoku became the local, Japanese manifestation of the Buddha, while Moriya came to play the role of Devadatta. Furthermore, the contrast between Buddha and Devadatta was also re-configured as the paradigm of a cosmic struggle opposing Buddha to Māra as his opposite cosmic principle; this cosmic drama is explored in many facets of medieval Japanese mythology.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the roles of the initial enemies of Buddhism in Japan, Moriya and, by extension, the *kami* whose interests he defended, were also included in the Buddhist system, as local manifestations of historical and cosmic enemies of the Buddha. I would like to suggest that in this way the initial opposition

between Buddhism and local cults was not solved but contained, as it were, by transposing it onto this cosmic plane. Concrete historical events became parts of an abstract meta-historical narrative. But there was a price to pay for that: the medieval Japanese Buddha was no longer a *kami*, but had preserved some of the features of the ancient *kami*, in particular, the power to punish his enemies.

This fact seems to suggest an interesting movement in the process of assimilation that was parallel but inverse to the dominant one. In other words, whereas Buddhism claimed to be pacifying and saving local *kami* by including them in the Buddhist system in various forms, it also ended up by absorbing some very un-Buddhist features of the *kami* cults, such as the recourse to violence as a legitimate form of action and expression.<sup>61</sup> We can see in this process one of the interpretations of the term *shūgō* 習合 (as in *shinbutsu shūgō*), which means, literally, “to learn from each other,” “to be influenced by another’s customs and ways.” Interestingly, there is also a homophone of *narau* 習う (“to learn”), written with a different character 倣う, meaning “to copy” and “to model something after something else”; if we replace this character to the original one, we can acquire a good picture of the assimilation process, namely, Buddhism and the *kami* were copying each other to the extent that they were able to reciprocally model one after the other.

#### NOTES

1. On *shinbutsu kakuri*, see TAKATORI Masao 高取正男, *Minkan shinkōshi no kenkyū* 民間信仰史の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1962), esp. the chapter “Haibutsu ishiki no genten”; TAKATORI Masao 高取正男, *Shintō no seiristu* 神道の成立 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1979); and SATO Masato 佐藤真人, “Shinbutsu kakuri no yōin wo meguru kōsatsu 神仏隔離の要因をめぐる考察,” *Shūkyō kenkyū* 宗教研究 81, no. 2 (353) (September 2007): 149–173; on “real *kami*,” see Fabio Rambelli, “Re-positioning the Gods: ‘Medieval Shintō’ and the Origins of Non-Buddhist Discourses on the *Kami*,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 16 (2006–2007): 305–325.

2. See Fabio Rambelli, “Before the First Buddha: Medieval Japanese Cosmogony and the Quest for the Primeval *Kami*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 64, no. 2 (Autumn 2009): 235–271; and Rambelli, “Re-positioning the Gods.”

3. I already suggested that narratives about *kami*’s anger at Buddhists’ appropriation of *kami* lands and natural resources could be clues of struggles opposing Buddhist institutions and local cults, which could be related, in turn, to forms of resistance by local clans against the growing power of

the state. See Fabio Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas* (Kyoto: Italian School of East Asian Studies, 2001), 51–57; and Fabio Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 147–153.

4. *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, ed. SAKAMOTO Tarō 坂本太郎 et al., 2 vols., *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 日本古典文學大系 67–68 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1968); English translation in W. G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (orig. pub., 1897; repr., London: Allen & Unwin., 1956). *Gangōji garan engi narabini ruki shizai chō* 元興寺伽藍緣起並流記資材帳, in *Jisha engi* 寺社緣起, ed. SAKURAI Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎 et al., *Nihon shisō taikai* 20 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1975), 7–22; *kanbun* text 328–335. English translation in Miwa Stevenson, “The Founding of the Monastery Gangōji and a List of Its Treasures,” in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. George J. Tanabe (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 299–315.

5. *Nihon shoki*, 2:100–101.

6. *Gangōji engi*, 9.

7. *Nihon shoki*, 2:100–102.

8. *Nihon shoki*, 2:104.

9. *Nihon shoki*, 2:148.

10. *Nihon shoki*, 2:150.

11. KUMAGAI Kimio 熊谷公男, *Ōkimi kara tennō e* 大王から天皇へ, Series *Nihon no rekishi* 日本の歴史 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 201.

12. *Gangōji engi*, 17.

13. *Nihon shoki*, 2:148–152.

14. This episode is also mentioned in the *Sendai kuji hongī* 先代旧事本紀, in *Shintō taikai* 神道大系, ed. Shintō taikai hensakai 神道大系編纂会, 120 vols. (Tokyo: Shintō taikai hensankai, 1977–1994), *Kotenhen* 古典篇, 8:189, in a rare reference to Buddhism in that text.

15. *Nihon shoki*, 2:158–160.

16. *Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi den hoketsuku ki* 上官聖徳太子伝補闕記, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 71:123b.

17. However, it appears that the Shitennōji was actually built later; if this is true, it may not be directly connected with Shōtoku Taishi, and Umayado’s vow may not be true. In fact, at the time of the decisive battle, Umayado was only fourteen years old.

18. See for instance HARADA Toshiaki 原田敏明, “Kodai shūkyōron 古代宗教論,” in *Iwanami kōza Nihon rekishi* 岩波講座日本歴史, ed. IENAGA Saburō 家永三

- 郎 et al., vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1962), 279–313.
19. TSUDA Sōkichi 津田左右吉, *Nihon koten no kenkyū* 日本古典の研究, 2 vols; reprinted in *Tsuda Sōkichi zenshū* 津田左右吉全集, vols. 1–2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1963–1966), 2:86–104.
20. IENAGA Saburō et al., eds., *Nihon bukkyōshi* 日本仏教史, 3 vols. (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1968), 1:50–54.
21. TAMURA Enchō 田村円澄, *Kodai Chōsen bukkyō to Nihon bukkyō* 古代朝鮮仏教と日本仏教 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1980), 30.
22. HAYAMI Tasuku 速水侑, *Nihon bukkyōshi: Kodai* 日本仏教史—古代 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1986), 28–37.
23. Kumagai, *Ōkimi kara tennō e*, 201.
24. A clan closely related to the Soga, the Shime, originated with Shime Tatto who immigrated to Japan from the Korean Peninsula around the middle of the sixth century. The clan was mainly in charge of building horse stables. One of its member was the famous Buddhist sculptor Kuratsukuri no Tori 鞍造止利; they built their clan’s temple, the Sakatadera 坂田寺, in Asuka.
25. Kumagai, *Ōkimi kara tennō e*, 204.
26. Michael I. Como, *Shōtoku: Ethnicity, Ritual, and Violence in the Japanese Buddhist Tradition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. 22–27.
27. *Gangōji engi*, 9.
28. Since its beginnings in Japan, Buddhism was closely related to epidemics; the Buddhist discourse on healing, its spiritual and mental overtones notwithstanding, was always understood also in very concrete, bodily terms. In fact, scholars have pointed out that the arrival of Buddhism coincided with increasing contacts between the Japanese archipelago and the Asian mainland, which involved also the diffusion to a relatively isolated area of dangerous diseases, such as smallpox, bubonic plague, mumps, and measles, against which people had not yet developed an immune response. On this subject, see William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (orig. pub., 1976; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), esp. 133–134.
29. It is interesting to note that some exponent of the Shintō establishment still continue to uphold the belief in the initial struggle between Buddhism and Shintō. A Shintō memorial service is still performed in front of Moriya’s tomb to celebrate Moriya as the “hero” (*eirei*, 英霊) who gave his life to protect “our country’s divine national essence” (*wagakuni jingi kokutai*, 我が国神祇国体); see [http://www.jinjacho-osaka.net/oosakanomatsuri/mononobenomoriya\\_bozennsai.htm](http://www.jinjacho-osaka.net/oosakanomatsuri/mononobenomoriya_bozennsai.htm).
30. Returning an unwanted god to the sea already had an important precedent

in ancient mythology, namely, the episode in which the gods Izanagi and Izanami abandoned at sea their malformed “leach child” (*hiruko*, written 水蛭子 in *Kojiki* and 蛭児 in *Nihon shoki*); see *Kojiki* 古事記, ed. Ō no Yasumaru 太安萬侶, in *Kojiki, Norito* 古事記・祝詞, ed. KURANO Kenji 倉野憲司 and TAKEDA Yūkichi 武田祐吉, *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 日本古典文學大系 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1958), 23; *Nihon shoki*, 1:86.

31. Tsuda already indicated the cultic importance of Buddha’s statue as a *kami*: Tsuda, *Nihon koten no kenkyū*, 94–95. The concept of religious fetishism was first introduced by Charles de Brosses in 1760 (Charles De Brosses, *Du culte des dieux fétiches* [orig. pub., 1760; repr., Paris: Fayard, 1988]). On religious fetishism in Japan, see ISHIZUKA Masahide 石塚正英, *Fetishizumu no shinkōken: shinbutsu gyakutai no fōkurōa* フェティシズムの信仰圏—神仏虐待のフォークロア (Tokyo: Sekai shoin, 1993).

32. Hayami, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 36–37.

33. *Ibid.*, 37.

34. The locus classicus of ORIKUCHI Shinobu’s treatment of *marebito* is the third draft (*daisankō* 第3稿) of his seminal article “Kokubungaku no hassei 国文学の発生,” included in his *Kodai kenkyū* 古代研究 (reprinted in *Origuchi Shinobu zenshū* 折口信夫全集, vol. 1 [Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1965], 3–62). The episode is in *Fudoki* 風土記, ed. UEGAKI Setsuya 植垣節也, *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集 5 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1997), 201–217 (*passim*); see also Michiko Y. Aoki, *Records of Wind and Earth: A Translation of Fudoki, with Introduction and Commentaries* (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 1997), 71 and *passim*.

35. Hayami, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 28–37.

36. *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記, by Keikai 景戒, ed. IZUMOJI Osamu 出雲路修, *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 30 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 14.

37. See Hayami, *Nihon bukkyōshi*, 28–37.

38. *Gangōji engi*, 10.

39. *Ibid.*

40. See Michael I. Como, *Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009).

41. *Gangōji engi*, 17.

42. See for example *Gangōji engi*, 17; *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書, by Kokan Shiren, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 62:143; *Jōgū Shōtoku hōtei setsu* 上宮聖徳法王帝説, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 71:119–121.

43. See Fabio Rambelli, "Buddha's Wrath: Esoteric Buddhism and the Discourse of Divine Punishment," *Japanese Religions* 27, no. 1 (2002): 41–68.
44. *Gukanshō* 愚管抄, by Jien 慈円, ed. OKAMI Masao 岡見正雄 and AKAMATSU Toshihide 赤松俊秀, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文學大系 86 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1967), 138. English translation from Delmer M. Brown and Ichirō Ishida, *The Future and the Past: A Translation and Study of the Gukanshō, an Interpretative History of Japan Written in 1219* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1979), 27. On the same line of argumentation, Jien wrote that also Emperor Sushun was killed by Soga no Umako because of his attempts to eliminate Buddhism.
45. *Jōgū Shōtoku Taishi den hoketsuku ki*, 71:123a.
46. *Genkō shakusho*: the description of Prince Shōtoku's fights against Moriya is on p. 143.
47. *Sangoku denki* 三国伝記, by Gentō 玄棟, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 92:216c.
48. *Sangoku buppō denzū engi* 三国仏法伝通縁起, by Gyōnen 凝然, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 62:12c.
49. *Shiju hyaku innen shū* 私聚百因縁集, by Jūshin 住信, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 92:185c.
50. *Shōtoku Taishi den ryaku* 聖徳太子伝略, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 71:128c.
51. *Taishi den kokon mokuroku shō* 太子伝古今目錄抄, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 71:277. The term *jissha* is written 実者, a variant form of 実社. On the concept of true demonic entity (*jissha*) as opposed to supernatural entities as manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas, see Rambelli, "Re-positioning the Gods."
52. On this, see *Taishi den kokon mokuroku shō*, 71:271. The *Gukanshō* defines Prince Shōtoku a "magnificent incarnation of Avalokiteśvara": Brown and Ishida, *The Future and the Past*, 27.
53. *Shōtoku Taishi den ryaku*, 71:128c.
54. *Shōtoku Taishi den shiki* 聖徳太子伝私記, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 71:299c.
55. *Kenshin Tokugo kuketsu shō* 顯真得業口決抄, in *Dai Nihon bukkyō zensho* 大



日本仏教全書, ed. Bussho kankōkai 仏書刊行会, 100 vols. (orig. pub., 1912–1922; repr., Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1972), 71:304a–b.

56. I owe this information to Abe Yasurō (personal communication, London, June 10, 2005).

57. On *akusō* see Mikael Adolphson, *The Teeth and Claws of the Buddha: Monastic Warriors and Sōhei in Japanese History* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2007); on Buddhist rationalizations of war in modern Japan, see Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1997); and Brian Victoria, *Zen War Stories* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

58. *Nomori kagami* 野守鏡, in *Gunsho ruijū*, ed. HANAWA Hokiichi 埴保己一 and Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai 続群書類従完成会, 30 vols. (Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho ruijū kanseikai, 1959–1960), 278:508.

59. *Shasekishū*, p. 64. English translation in Robert E. Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien, a Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 75.

60. See IYANAGA Nobumi, “Le Roi Mâra du Sixième Ciel et le mythe médiéval de la création du Japon,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 9, Méorial Anna Seidel: Religions traditionnelles d’Asie orientale, Tome II (1996–1997): 323–396. IKOMA Tetsurō 生駒哲郎 has suggested that the struggle that opposed Prince Shōtoku to Mononobe no Moriya re-emerged in a new fashion after the destruction of Tōdaiji in 1181; Shōtoku was envisioned as the living Buddha of Japan, whereas Moriya became the embodiment of anti-Buddhist evil, who later manifested himself as Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 (IKOMA Tetsurō 生駒哲郎, “Chūsei shōjin shinkō to Mononobe no Moriya denshō: Seija to butteki no saisei 中世生身信仰と物部守屋伝承：聖者と仏敵の再生,” *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌 113, no. 12 [December 2004]: 100).

61. See SATŌ Hiroo, *Amaterasu no henbō* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2000); SATŌ Hiroo, “Wrathful Deities and Saving Deities,” in *Buddhas and Kami in Japan*, ed. Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 95–114.



## **“The Karmic Origins of the Morning-Bear Mountain”: Preliminary Research Notes on *Asamayama Engi***

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### INTRODUCTION

The world of Japanese mountain religion, *shugen* 修験, and its relationship with Buddhism has long attracted the attention of scholars, both in Japan and in the West. However, due to the implementation of strict laws and Shugendō’s eventual prohibition in the Meiji period, the dearth of surviving records documenting different types of mountain practice has created a certain gap in the understanding of Japanese religiosity, particularly in the pre-modern period.

The sweeping institutional changes and reformulation of state policies toward the forms of religious expression during the Meiji period caused irrevocable alterations to the majority of Japanese cultic institutions. Japan’s many sacred mountains were subjected to a series of campaigns and mounting external pressure to redefine themselves according to the new government regulations. For example, soon after the promulgation of the decree of separation of Buddhist and Shintō deities (Jpn. *shinbutsu bunri rei*, 神仏分離令) in March 1868, a movement was launched to firmly affix Shugendō practitioners under Buddhist authority, thus imposing the necessity for subordination on the *shugen* groups. Such motions caused much resistance and change at the local level, before Shugendō was completely prohibited in 1872. In this way, a centuries-long tradition of cultural and religious hybridity between Buddhism and Shintō (Jpn. *Shinbutsu shūgō*, 神仏習合) “came to an abrupt end.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite these historical circumstances, the religious traditions and ritual systems of Japan’s sacred mountains continued to inform academic work. The lifelong studies by renowned Japanese experts, such as MURAYAMA Shūichi, GORAI Shigeru, and MIYAKE Hitoshi, kept the studies

of the diverse traditions of Shugendō afloat and provided a firm foundation for this research field.<sup>2</sup> In the West, studies of Shugendō and mountain cults were pioneered by Nelly Naumann, Gaston Renondeu, Hartmut Rotermund, H. Byron Earhart, Carmen Blacker, Anne Bouchy, Paul Swanson, Royall Tyler, and Allan Grapard, and were continued by Sarah Thal, Max Moerman, Barbara Ambros, and others.<sup>3</sup> A 2009 symposium for the study of Shugendō at Columbia University, organized by Bernard Faure, attracted much needed attention to the problems in the study of the Japanese mountain practices and reinvigorated the state of research with a much anticipated volume on Shugendō.<sup>4</sup>

In Japan, as in most of East Asia and, indeed, the world, mountains have always inspired veneration and diverse forms of religious expression. Mountains, such as Miwa or Makimuku, located in central Japan, have been active as prolific ritual centers since prehistoric times, judging by the abundance of archaeological remains found in their vicinity. Since records began, the mountain ranges of Katsuragi, Yoshino, Ōmine, and Kumano attracted an unending stream of practitioners who sought a spiritual congress with deities and the acquiring of “miraculous powers” (*ken*, 験). Mountain practitioners and mendicant holy men, known under various guises such as *yamabushi* 山伏, *shugenja* 修験者, *gyōja* 行者, or *keza* 験者, underwent lengthy periods of training, often in dangerous conditions, in rock caverns or on steep cliffs and summits. Those who subjected themselves to such arduous physical and spiritual experiences could claim a possession of supra-human capacities and were often seen performing divination, healing, or religious rituals for the benefit of private donors and answering the religious needs of their local communities.

The routes connecting important sacred peaks and the networks of mountain guides, *sendatsu* 先達, already began developing in medieval times, but mountain religion itself had little formal organization before the Edo period (1600–1868). Such religious specialists acted as local *shugen* mentors, accompanying practitioners to the remote sacred areas and ensuring their progress in mastering basic and more advanced teachings and rituals practiced within the compounds of each cultic mountain or mountainous range.

The inner workings of many combinatory and ritual systems of worship in different types of mountain religion, especially in their pre-modern guise, still remain largely unexplored. For example, the elements of Daoist worship, such as the five elements (Jpn. *gogyō*, 五

行), techniques of astral divination, and the *yin-yang* principles, known in Japan as Onmyōdō 陰陽道, survived in many forms of Japanese religious practice during the pre-modern period, not in the least in the mountain religion of *shugen*. On the other hand, the teachings and rituals of esoteric Buddhism (Jpn. *mikkyō*, 密教), introduced and systematized mostly by monastic lineages affiliated with Shingon and Tendai temples, had permeated the worship of Japanese deities, *kami* 神; exerted a palpable influence on the development of Pure Land, Zen, and non-esoteric traditions; and undoubtedly played a sizable role in the emergence of different forms of Shugendō.

Thanks to these influences, mountain religion, too, can be seen as a conglomerate and repository of a multiplicity of different religious customs originated in India, China, and Korea. Add to that the specific physical settings and locale of each mountain, its "embedded-ness" into local and regional demographic, political, economic, and cultural discourses and their fluxes, and there is almost no ending to the process of constant redefinition of mountain cultic sites. For example, a handful of texts explaining the origins of sacred mountains in the Yamato area that remain from before the Edo period reveal a world of combinatory religion that rivals most intricate religious systems in its complexity and sheer breadth of cultural and religious references. Recent contributions to this research field have benefited from these references and have provided a framework for future analysis and study.

Japan is abundant in hills, mountains, and mountain areas that have been venerated since ancient times and connected by pilgrimage routes in the pre-modern period. While the historical centers of the mountain religion in Japan, such as Yoshino, Ōmine, Kumano, Haguro, Tateyama, and Iwaki (themselves large hubs of religious networks and combinatory worship), have been well mapped out and researched, there are still plenty of mountains whose origins, ritual systems, and networks of relations still require scholarly attention.

The following notes are dedicated to the case of Mt. Asama 朝熊, a mountain located in the Mie Prefecture, and its connections to other significant cultic sites and sacred areas that played an important role in the history of Japanese religions. This mountain has previously appeared in the excellent research of Anne Bouchy,<sup>5</sup> in which she investigates the assimilation of the sea and mountain cults and worship of composite deities, such as Sengen 浅間, the deity of Mt. Fuji, who

is still venerated in the eastern coast of Kii Peninsula. Her research also draws attention to the appropriating influence of Shugendō on the seafaring cults and the impact of these developments on the lives of local communities. In particular, the *takemairi* 岳参り cult at Mt. Asama, associated with the Oku no in 奥の院 of Kongōshōji 金剛証寺 temple, located on the mountain's peak, has been long connected with the pacification of the dead. Bouchy explores this cult in relation to the notions of marine netherworld and funerary practices, still ongoing in the Kii seaside, and transformation of the sea deities into the mountain deities.

The current study proposes to concentrate on one of the texts about Mt. Asama, surviving from the late medieval period, *Asamayama engi* 朝熊山縁起. It is envisioned that future research will concentrate on historical aspects of the development of the ritual and symbolic system of Mt. Asama, its involvement in esoteric Buddhist and combinatory practices, and its relationship to other sacred sites, such as the two shrines of Ise, Mt. Miwa, Hakusan, and others. It is hoped that the study of the textual sources related to Mt. Asama will also cast light on the esoteric *kami* cults proliferating in the Ise area during the medieval period. On the other hand, these research notes will offer some thoughts on how Buddhist practitioners conceptualized time and memory.

#### MT. ASAMA AND THE QUESTIONS IT POSES

Mt. Asama is located in Mie Prefecture, dividing the areas of Ise 伊勢 and Shima 志摩. At 553 meters high, it is a relatively small mountain, but its round shape, steeply rising slopes, and position in the vicinity of the two grand shrines of Ise (Jpn. *Ise jingū*, 伊勢神宮) make one suspect that in the past it was a site that naturally attracted the attention of mountain practitioners and religious specialists of all kinds.

Its name, which, when written with Japanese characters, can be literally translated as the “Morning-Bear Mountain,” has intrigued me somewhat for a long time. Moreover, the actual climbing of the mountain during my research trip to Ise during 2004–2005 and witnessing the vista that opened up from the mountain's peak has continued to stir my curiosity ever since. This personal encounter inspired me to learn more about the historical background of this landmark and, more importantly, its role in the mountain pilgrimage and formation of Shintō-Buddhist combinatory practices in the areas of Ise and Shima during the pre-modern period.

The mountain itself is rather steep and deeply forested. The very top of it reveals a great perspective: one can see a magnificent view of Toba Bay 鳥羽湾 and the areas of Ise and Uji-Yamada during the day, and a vast, starry landscape at night. A saying describing this mountain as offering "eighteen provinces in one view" certainly rings true. Anyone who performed the same journey would have no doubt that this mountain offered a unique ground for mountain training and was one of the most important landmarks for the religious practitioners from the areas of Ise, Shima, and beyond.

The religious history of Mt. Asama in pre-modern times provokes some queries. During the Edo period, its location near the Ise shrines and shores of Toba Bay made this mountain an attractive destination for pilgrims coming from other regions to pay homage to the deity of Ise on Ise *mairi* 伊勢参り. One folk song proclaims that the Ise pilgrimage was surely incomplete without a visit to Mt. Asama.<sup>6</sup> The Ise shrines dedicated to the imperial deity Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神 were a site of worship for the Japanese imperial family since the ancient period, and at all times served as a major attraction for visitors to Ise. Seen in this light, the popular tune described above betrays a rich history that is uniquely shaped by the proximity to such a symbolically powerful sacred site.

One of the commemorative steles on top of Mt. Asama, dated 1724, informs us that Mt. Asama, along with the inner and outer shrines of Ise, was a site of a thousand-day pilgrimage (Jpn. *Naikū Gekū Asamagatake senjitsu mairi*, 内宮外宮朝熊嶽千日参). Kubota Osamu notes that the first indications of such a joint "three shrine pilgrimage" (Jpn. *sangū mairi* 三宮まいり) were already emerging during the Muromachi period, around the year 1487.<sup>7</sup>

It was also reported that in clear weather the very peak of Mt. Fuji 富士山 could actually be seen across the bay. This convinced visitors that there was no need to make a lengthy and costly journey to Kantō to worship Japan's grandest mountain. It was only necessary to visit the Ise shrines, climb Mt. Asama, and worship Mt. Fuji from afar. Even now, there is a small platform, just enough to fit an observation hut on one of the mountain slopes, which faces Ise Bay in the direction of Mt. Fuji.<sup>8</sup>

One has to be reminded that Mt. Asama has been the site of veneration of Sengen bosatsu 浅間菩薩, the deity of Mt. Fuji, at least since the Edo period. As is often the case in Japan, the Chinese characters

representing the name of Sengen can also be read *asama*; thus, the two sites and their deities could be easily seen as related.<sup>9</sup> The creation of such lingo-symbolic relationships based on homophony, and strengthening them further through the establishment of local festivals and corresponding cults, was surely one of the vital strategies for attracting followers, religious practitioners, and donors. It could be said that such a strategy may even have been at times reinforced in the hope of gently precluding pilgrims from central Japan from travelling any further, making Ise and Mt. Asama their final destination. On the other hand, the existence of links between Mt. Asama and Mt. Fuji attracted visitors from the Kantō region, thus creating a vibrant circulation of goods, people, practices, and ideas during the Edo period.

At the very peak of Mt. Asama, there is a Buddhist temple, Kongōshōji, “Temple of the Vajra Sign [of Esoteric Enlightenment].” At present it is formally affiliated with the Rinzai Zen 臨濟禪 school, but as the temple’s name indicates, at the time of its foundation, esoteric Buddhist tradition and practice played a very significant role.

According to its foundation legend, the temple was said to have been established by the founder of the Japanese Shingon school, Kōbō Daishi Kūkai 弘法大師空海 (774–835) in the second year of Tenchō 天長 (825), long after his return from Tang China. In the third year of Meitoku 明德 (1392), the temple was reclaimed by the monk Tōgaku Monryū 東岳文昱, who was well versed in the doctrine and practice of Rinzai Zen. Since then, Kongōshōji was said to remain within the confines of the Five Mountain (Jpn. *Gozan*, 五山) system of Zen temples dominating the Kantō region.

In addition to the spectacular views opening from the peak, one of the most visually impressive sites on the temple precincts is its memorial ground (Jpn. *tōba*, 塚場). This is an area that forms labyrinthine pathways walled by tall boards, commemorating services performed for the deceased and displaying their posthumous Buddhist names and titles. The boards, up to a few meters high, are arranged in a series of corridors, which, to a dedicated viewer, would appear to represent a path or a lane that is made up of objects whose sole function is that of preserving memory. This is no surprise, of course, given the historical association of the mountain with the cults of dead. However, the symbolic ways in which this sacred mountain and its temple have been connected to the production and upkeep of memories still provokes many queries and will be at the background of these research notes.



At present, there are two directions in which the study of the texts related to Mt. Asama and its system of beliefs could develop. Firstly, of paramount importance is the mountain's historical connection with Ise shrines and *shugen* practices. One of the aims of ongoing research is to define the role this mountain played in the construction and development of esoteric *kami* worship in the areas of Ise and Shima before the Edo period. Clarifying these relationships could help to cast more light on the role of medieval *shugen* practitioners, the emergence of Ise Shintō, and patterns of circulation of secret theories about buddhas and *kami* in which Rinzaï Zen and other practitioners had apparently actively participated.

In addition to other angles of research that have already been undertaken, Mt. Asama should thus be approached as a cultic site with a ritual system historically connected to the ritual system of Ise and the networks of Buddhist facilities in the vicinity of the two Ise shrines. Surviving records documenting its past should thus be seen in the light of multilateral relationships, such as those between local Buddhist temples located at Ise and metropolitan Buddhist complexes patronizing them; between individual practitioners affiliated with concrete facilities and different forms of religious practice; and between buddhas, *kami*, and more intricate composite deities, which were enshrined at those sites before the Edo period and Meiji Restoration.

Secondly, of great interest is the relationship between the ritual system of Mt. Asama and the ways by which pre-modern Buddhist practitioners conceptualized time and memory. Throughout the history of Buddhist presence at Mt. Asama, different strategies for such construction can be seen. The investigation of these strategies can help to answer the questions of how and why this sacred mountain and its temple were able to position themselves so successfully at the crossroads of multiple religious pilgrimages, and how they accentuated the importance of Buddhist practice for creating meaningful links between past, present, and future.

The methodology of such an investigation is of vital importance. One of the metaphors that could be found useful in the survey of this significant but little-studied mountain is the notion of a "polyphonic system." This means that the researcher has to be acutely aware that the mountain's cultural landscape is constantly reconstructed and shifting. It consists of a multiplicity of threads and voices intertwined and acting in unison in precisely such ways that make this mountain's

identity sufficiently distinct, while leaving it both uniquely specialized in generating certain meanings and at the same time widely open to interpretation. By borrowing the notion of a “polyphonic novel” from Mikhail Bakhtin,<sup>10</sup> I do not seek to insist on viewing the physical site purely as a text—although it is certainly one approach to be considered—but to highlight the texture, complexity, and movement of ideas, practices, and historical events and the shifting nature of relationships between them that constituted the sacred site of Mt. Asama.

#### MT. ASAMA IN HISTORY: PRACTICES, TEXTS, AND PEOPLE

Mt. Asama’s location to the northwest of the Ise shrines is almost identical to that of Mt. Hiei 比叡山 in relation to Kyoto. Mt. Hiei, located in the province of Ōmi and its temple Enryakuji 延暦寺, the stronghold of Tendai Buddhism, was a large monastic and military complex that protected the entrance to the Heian capital from the northwestern quarter, a direction that was long considered a gateway for malevolent spirits.

While the Ise shrines had a ritual taboo on all things Buddhist, nearby Mt. Asama was long associated with Buddhist practice. For example, since the Nara (710–794) and Heian (794–1185) periods it was a site where mountain ascetics went to perform the ritual of “posing a question and retaining [the answer]” (Jpn. *gumonji hō*, 求聞持法).

This ritual entailed reciting the *dhāraṇī* of the deity Ākāśagarbha (Jpn. Kokūzō bosatsu, 虚空蔵菩薩) one million times during a certain period of time. This was said to lead practitioners toward a realization and experience of cosmos, which was achieved through a ritual union with Kokūzō manifesting itself as the morning star, Venus (Jpn. Myōjō, 明星). In Japan, performing this ritual was considered a perfect way of strengthening one’s memory. For Buddhist monks the benefits of practicing this ritual were embodied in quick learning of the sutras, iconographies, cosmologies, other rites, and doctrinal commentaries. Some clerics engaged in this practice in distant mountainous areas in order to achieve a certain “natural wisdom” (Jpn. *jinenchi*, 自然智). The leading figures of Japanese Buddhism, such as Saichō 最澄 (767–822), Kūkai 空海 (774–835), and Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282), were known to have performed it.<sup>11</sup>

The worship of Bodhisattva Kokūzō, especially its manifestation as the “Bright [Morning] Star,” was seen as closely related to the momentous event of Buddhist awakening. A practitioner ascending the

mountain to perform the *gumonji hō* on its slopes or its peak during the night would intone the Sanskrit *dhāraṇī* while gazing into the open sky awaiting the appearance of Venus before dawn and experiencing a jolt of sudden awareness of space, cosmos, and time—ultimately, a new, awakened self. It is easy to envisage this practice as connected with the formation of knowledge about stars, astronomy, and time-keeping. However, quite how this practice related to the improvement of memory still needs to be considered in closer detail.

A more palpable connection between Mt. Asama and the Ise shrines appears in the Heian period, when the members of the shrines' ritual lineages began to be more actively involved in various forms of Buddhist worship. It was during that period that Mt. Asama became a site of worship of the future Buddha Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku bosatsu, 弥勒菩薩) and his pure land and a site for sutra burials. Burying sutras was popular among court aristocracy in the late Heian period, when the ideas of *mappō* 末法, the latter days of the Buddhist dharma, permeated almost all aspects of life of the Japanese society. Effectively, this practice involved copying the Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Lotus Sutra* (Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing*, 妙法蓮華經; Jpn. *Myōhō rengekyō*, T. 262), the *Sutra of Immeasurable Meaning* (Jpn. *Muryōgikyō*, 無量義經, T. 276), the *Sutra of Contemplation on Bodhisattva Samantabhadra* (Jpn. *Bussetsu kan Fugen bosatsu gyōhōkyō*, 仏説觀普賢菩薩行法經, T. 277), and the *Wisdom Heart Sutra* (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*, Jpn. *Hannya hara-mitta shin gyō*, 般若波羅蜜多心經, T. 251). The sutras were then buried in specially made containers in the sacred area. At Mt. Asama, such area became associated with the pure land of Miroku, the Tosotsu heaven 兜率天.

Former *kannushi* 神主 priests of the Ise shrines could privately engage in Buddhist worship upon their retirement from the shrine duties. Given the historical context, it is not surprising that shrine priests, too, had to be involved in ensuring their own Buddhist salvation and creating ritual links between the somber present of declining dharma and luminous future in the company of buddhas and bodhisattvas. One example was the *negi* 禰宜 priest of the inner shrine Arakida Tokimori, who buried a container with a copy of a Buddhist sutra on Mt. Asama in 1173. The sutra burial ground continues to exist on the Kongōshōji grounds until today.

Mt. Asama was also a site to a small shrine, Asamayama jinja 朝熊山神社. This shrine was seen as the auxiliary to the Ise shrines (Jpn. *Ise*

*jingū Asamayama jinja*, 伊勢神宮朝熊神社), although the relationship between the two is yet to be clarified.<sup>12</sup> The mountain became gradually incorporated into the ritual system and pilgrimage network of the Ise shrines. It is in the context of this relationship and its development that the construction of Mt. Asama's esoteric Buddhist identity and the writing of *Asamayama engi* have to be considered.

Indeed, there are indications that the triple pilgrimage, encircling the inner and outer shrines and Mt. Asama, was already emerging during the medieval period. Despite the taboo on all things Buddhist at Ise shrines, the steady stream of the Buddhist pilgrims who travelled to Ise from Nara and Kyoto has been documented since the 1180s. Prominent Buddhist monks, such as Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206), Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213), and Eizon 叡尊 (1201–1290), sometimes alone, but often accompanied by a large number of fellow monks, travelled to Ise to pay homage to the imperial deity, consult its oracles regarding the reconstruction of important Buddhist temples and statues, present gifts, pray for the pacification of enemies and political stability, and gain secret knowledge about Japanese native deities, *kami*. The monk Tsūkai 通海 (1234–1305), himself a descendant of a hereditary clan of ritual specialists at the Ise shrines, left a detailed record of what such pilgrimages could be in a text entitled *Ise Daijingū sankeiki* 伊勢太神宮参詣記.

Even though the Buddhist monks were prevented from worshipping the imperial deity directly, the ritual lineages of *kami* priests who served at both inner and outer shrines—the Watarai 度会, the Arakida 荒木田, and the Ōnakatomi 大中臣—had their own family temples, *ujidera* 氏寺, where the members of these families could retire. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, old metropolitan Buddhist temples, such as Saidaiji, Onjōji, and Daigoji, began establishing their own branches (Jpn. *matsuji*, 末寺) and small Buddhist facilities known as “separate halls” (Jpn. *betsuin*, 別院) in the vicinity of the Ise shrines and the shrine families' temples in order to facilitate the flow of their own practitioners wishing to train or practice there.

By the fourteenth century, the number of such facilities in the area of Ise and Shima was considerable. At the same time, these temples, often connected with powerful Buddhist and mountain monastic complexes, were emerging as the hubs of intense ritual and intellectual exchanges. For example, Sengūin 仙宮院, a small temple adjacent to the Sengū shrine 仙宮神社 (located in the Watarai district

of Ise);<sup>13</sup> Sekidera 世義寺, linked to the powerful Tendai temple and a center of mountain religion, Onjōji 園城寺; and Kōshōji 弘正寺, the branch temple of Saidaiji 西大寺, became the places where many secret theories regarding Japanese *kami* and Buddhist deities were recorded and exchanged.<sup>14</sup> The texts, such as the *Secret Records of Sengūin* (Jpn. *Sengūin hibun*, 仙宮院秘文), *Oral Transmissions of the Great Deity Amaterasu* (Jpn. *Tenshō Daijin kuketsu*, 天照大神口決), *Records of Wiping the Nose* (Jpn. *Bikisho*, 鼻歸書), *Records of Divine Spirits of Heaven and Earth* (Jpn. *Tenchi reikiki*, 天地靈氣記), and the *Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Deity of Miwa* (Jpn. *Miwa daimyōjin engi*, 三輪大明神緣起), were circulating among Buddhist monks stationed in the vicinity of the Ise shrines.

Secret rituals of *jingi kanjō* 神祇灌頂, the *abhiṣeka* initiations involving *kami* and fearsome deities of esoteric Buddhism, as well as esoteric interpretations of the "Divine Age" (Jpn. "Jindai," 神代, the section in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* describing the deeds of Japanese *kami*) were other products of that environment shared by the Buddhist monks and *kami* priests described above. Among the most notable examples of their intellectual exchange were compilations by the retired member of the Arakida family, Tadaoki 匡興, better known under his Buddhist name Dōshō 道祥 (b. 1348), who resided in the area of Izō Kanbe 伊雜神戸 on the Shima Peninsula. He copied the texts about *kami* extensively, eventually producing one of his most remarkable collections, the *Personal Verbatim Account of Nihon shoki* (Jpn. *Nihon shoki shikenbun*, 日本書紀私見聞) in 1428.

The connections between Mt. Asama, the Ise shrines, and the esoteric Buddhist environment, as well as Mt. Asama's role in the Buddhist movements described above, still appear under-researched. But it is precisely this direction that further research should be aiming to take. The position of Mt. Asama as a protective mountain of the Ise shrines prompts one to think that in the medieval period it was inseparable from the more esoteric manifestations of the supposedly pure site of Ise, where the imperial *kami* resided. If these cultic institutions and their respective spheres of influence are viewed in connection, more can be understood about the shades and dimensions of the various forms of Buddhist practice, the patterns of circulation of esoteric theories about *kami* and other deities, and, more broadly, the history of medieval Japan.

## ASAMAYAMA ENGI

In a recent work on Mt. Miwa and its religious identity,<sup>15</sup> I came across a text about the origins of Mt. Asama entitled the *Karmic Origins of Morning-Bear Mountain* (*Asamayama engi*, 朝熊山縁起). The Buddhist term *engi* 縁起 is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *pratītya-samutpāda* and literally means “karmic origins.” In pre-modern Japan, such texts were often compiled in order to build correlations between local *kami* and Buddhist deities, ritual practice and places of worship, and legendary figures and concrete physical structures. It has been often remarked that *engi* were instrumental in constructing certain visions of sacred mountains and shrines, which were connected to their promotion as sites where the Buddhist cults thrived. In this sense, *Asamayama engi* (hereafter, the *Engi*) is not an exception from the rule.

It is a short text in three chapters, with a colophon dated the eighth year of Eishō 永正 (1511).<sup>16</sup> From the colophon it can be understood that the surviving copy of the original manuscript was made somewhere in the Mino 美濃 Province.<sup>17</sup> This could mean that before that time, local practitioners from Mino may have been involved in pilgrimage to the Ise shrines and mountain austerities at Mt. Asama. One of them had a chance to record the foundation story of this special mountain and take it with him back to Mino. Little is known of the author of this surviving copy of the *Engi*, apart from his name, Shinkai 真海 (b. 1453), and his Buddhist title, “Dharma-Seal, Provisional Archbishop” (Jpn. Hōin gon daisōzu, 法印権大僧都).

The *Engi* opens with a short note explaining the geographical position of Mt. Asama in the areas of Ise and Shima and outlines the status of its temple Kongōshōji as a resting place of the Immovable Wisdom-King, Fudō myōō 不動明王 (Skt. Acala *vidyārāja*). From this opening note it is already clear that the text proposes to set out the relationships between the physical landscape and esoteric Buddhist deities inhabiting it—in this case, a wrathful manifestation of cosmic Buddha Dainichi 大日 (Skt. Mahāvairocana) and a deity important to the ritual discourse of *shugen* practices, Fudō, the “Immovable King of Wisdom.”

The first chapter, entitled the “Secret of Mt. Asama” (Jpn. “Asamayama [no] hi,” 朝熊山秘), is said to be based on a certain text, known as the *Record of Wide Transmission of the Divine Mirror* (Jpn. *Jinkyō kōdenki*, 神鏡広伝記), which is attributed to Kōbō Daishi (Kūkai). This chapter explains how the patriarch of the Shingon school and main

systematizer of the teachings of esoteric Buddhism in Japan arrived in Mt. Asama.

In the first year of Tenchō (824), Kūkai was performing a ritual of "asking-hearing-holding" (for improving memory; Jpn. *gumonji no hō*, 求聞持の法) on top of Bright-Star Rock (Jpn. *Myōjō no iwa*, 明星石)<sup>18</sup> at Zengōnji 善根寺, near the Nari River in the province of Yamato.<sup>19</sup> At the darkest hour of night, a child-prince appeared from emptiness (Jpn. *kokū*, 虚空) and said: "I will show you my seat (Jpn. *za*, 座) at the peak of Mt. Asama in the province of Ise. Practice austerities there when the Bright Star appears, and you will surely attain [enlightenment]."

Following the instructions of the divine child, Kūkai goes to Mt. Asama, where he discovers a small, abandoned temple. He begins his austerities at the Cavern of Three-Pronged Vajra (Jpn. *Sankodō*, 三鈷洞). There he encounters a mountain deity, who urges him to perform the *gumonji* rite and revive the practice of ascetics on Mt. Asama. Following the request of the deity, Kūkai performs the rite and meets with other *kami*, led by Amaterasu. The imperial deity introduces the story of a rock on Mt. Asama where the primordial deities Omodaru 面足 and Kashikone no mikoto 愴根尊 first descended to earth. Mt. Asama is thus envisioned as a site of creation, the Cloud-Sea Peak (Jpn. *Kumomi no mine*, 雲海峰), a cultic site intrinsically connected with the workings of *yin* and *yang* and a primordial womb where the scores of future "seed-children" (Jpn. *sue musubi no taneko*, 未むすび種子) are emplaced.

The *Engi* uses these metaphors of procreation in order to induce a sense of urgency about the continuous and uninterrupted emergence of new generations of righteous Buddhist practitioners, *kami* priests, and mountain ascetics. Such pleas are repeatedly voiced by the imperial deity Amaterasu who, judging by the *Engi*'s unfolding narrative, happens to be a great conversationalist.

Moreover, for the duration of the story, various deities, such as *kami* (mostly of obscure origins) and the esoteric deities Kokūzō, Benzaiten, Fudō, and Miroku, are constantly appearing around Kūkai, making appeals, pronouncing oracles, and being invoked as parts of a mandalic vision of Mt. Asama and its manifestation as a pure land. This abundance of voices, characters, and figures is truly what makes one think of this particular *Engi* as a "polyphonic" text. The divine beasts (such as Golden Bear, 金色の熊), wish-fulfilling gems (Jpn. *nyoi hōju*, 如意宝珠), three imperial regalia (Jpn. *sanshu jinki*, 三種神器), flying

relics, magic jewels ensuring longevity, and the substance described as “Bright-Star [or Venus] water” (Jpn. *Myōjōsui*, 明星水) also appear in the *Engi* and join in this divine and carnivalesque dance of solicitation around Kūkai.

Among these, Bodhisattva Kokūzō plays one of the major roles, because it is designated by Amaterasu as a deity “protecting [its] future” (Jpn. *waga sue mamori no hotoke*, 吾が未守りの仏). Kokūzō, truly luminous and bright, epitomizes the sun deity itself and appears as a manifestation of the five wisdoms of esoteric Buddhism (Jpn. *gochi*, 五智), which is most likely to be an implied reference to the supreme Buddha Mahāvairocana (Jpn. *Dainichi*).

The second chapter is entitled the “Great Secret of the Protective Deity [of Mt. Asama]” (Jpn. “Chinju no daiji,” 鎮守の大事). It builds upon the relationships discussed in the previous sequence, while providing more details on the mandalic layout of Mt. Asama and describing the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 correlations between *kami* and buddhas who inhabit this sacred site. It is the deity Amaterasu herself who explains these important settings:

The Seven Divine Treasure spirits dwell here. First is Amaterasu’s mother, Benzaiten 弁財天 [*honji* is Treasure-Hat Jizō, 宝冠地藏]. The second is rough deity, *kōjin* 荒神 [that is, Fudō, 不動]; it is the entrance [Dainichi, 大日] to Prosperity [Monju, 文殊]. The third is Kasuga Daimyōjin 春日大明神 [*honji* is Śākyamuni, to the right of the rough deity]. The fourth is Miwa Myōjin 三輪明神 [to the left of Benzaiten, *honji* is Shōten, 聖天]. The fifth is Niu myōjin 丹生明神 [Shō Kannon, 聖觀音, Kasuga is on the right]. The sixth is Hakusan 白山 [Eleven-Headed Kannon, 十一面觀音, Miwa is on the left]. The seventh is Kiyotaki gongen 清滝権現 [Wish-Fulfilling Kannon, 如意輪觀音]; the Three-Shrine garden is in the middle. The person who wants to experience the true faith will come on pilgrimage and will be reborn after meeting Amaterasu and obtaining the Seven Treasures.

As often is the case with texts closely connected with *shugen* traditions, Mt. Asama is described as a lotus, a symbolic sacred site which is inhabited and whose sacrality is validated by selected Buddhist deities and *kami*. At the first glance, this particular collection of deities seemingly appears chaotic. But as often is the case with many foundation stories, these relationships might be providing vital clues as to what kind of places and cults the people who practiced at Mt. Asama were interested in or felt an affinity to. The above passage demonstrates that it was surely important to construct some sort of link to the sites



of important *kami* worship and large Buddhist complexes. In this case, such were the Kasuga shrine, Mt. Kōya, Mt. Hakusan, Mt. Miwa, and the Daigoji temple. The next step of the research would be to map out these relationships with more precision and supporting historical evidence.

The third and final chapter of the *Engi* is entitled the "Secret of the Red-Spirit Child" (Jpn. "Shakushō dōji no koto," 赤精童子の事). In it, Amaterasu manifests itself as a divine Rain-Treasure Child (Jpn. Uhō dōji, 雨宝童子), holding a red jewel and making a vow to protect Mt. Asama. In this more esoteric form, the imperial deity reveals at once its connections to the elementary needs of pre-modern societies, such as procuring the rain and ensuring the timely rotation of sun, moon, and stars, and presents an answer to the more complex religious desires: constructing memorial sites, worshipping esoteric deities, and finding new effective techniques for Buddhist salvation in the latter days of the Buddhist dharma (Jpn. *mappō*). This chapter, most puzzling of all, requires deeper consideration, especially in connection to the esoteric Buddhist environment that proliferated in the vicinity of the Ise shrines in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The compilation of the *Engi*, if its colophon of 1511 is to be trusted, must have been connected to the Rinzaï Zen lineage, at the time supported by the system of the Five Mountains (Jpn. *Gozan*, 五山). The text reveals little about possible ritual connections with this stream of Buddhist practice, but that just adds another layer to the dynamics of pilgrimage, ritual system, and religious development of Mt. Asama and, ultimately, the Ise shrines and their surrounding Buddhist milieu.

Even a preliminary assessment of *Asamayama engi* suggests the possibility that its further reading may cast light on the development of cultic movements in the Ise and Shima areas and beyond. An investigation of other texts associated with Mt. Asama, such as *Asamayama giki* 朝熊嶽儀軌 and *Shōchō Kumasha shinkyō sata bumi* 小朝熊社神鏡沙汰文, and their cross-reading with texts from the Ise, Miwa, Hakusan, and other traditions, could help us map out the world of medieval oral transmissions (Jpn. *kuden*, 口伝) with more precision. More materials preserved at Ise's Jingū bunko 神宮文庫 may shed light on the extended history of this peculiar "polyphonic mountain."

Kubota Osamu has described *Asamayama engi* as an example of a text from the Ryōbu Shintō 兩部神道 tradition, written by a member of the Sanbōin 三宝院 lineage at Daigoji who came to Ise to practice *shugen*.<sup>20</sup> The Sanbōin connection to Mt. Asama is certainly plausible;

however, its lineage's involvement in the medieval mountain practices has recently been contested. What is more, it is probably fruitless to reduce the contents of such a text to a single hand or treat it as a contribution by one lineage. Such singularity leads to an important but little-studied combinatory ritual system simply being overlooked. Star worship, improving memory, venerating the dead, creating the links between the past and the future—all these practices built on the diverse methods provided by esoteric Buddhism, Zen, *kami* traditions, mountain practice, and possibly the remnants of some vintage Daoist practice interacting together—that might be a better description for a text such as *Asamayama engi*.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

These short notes briefly introduce and survey the ritual traditions of Mt. Asama in Ise Prefecture during pre-modern times. It was understood that even within this relatively short late medieval text, a multiplicity of concepts, rituals, deities, symbols, and locations is being implicated and intertwined in a specific way. The themes that reflect the use of these items can be roughly mapped out as follows, although in no particular order.

Nature wisdom, *gumonji hō* rite, increasing memory, worship of Venus

The worship of Kokūzō, worship of stars and planetoids, memorial rites

Orientation toward the future and afterlife (sutra repositories)

Construction of Mt. Asama as a pure land

Ise shrines, mountain religion in the Ise area

Mt. Asama as a lotus, eight *kami* and buddhas inhabiting the lotus-mountain

Kokūzō as a protective Buddha of the Japanese emperor

Kokūzō bosatsu as a cosmic matrix, the true embodiment of cosmos

Esoteric Buddhism, Amaterasu as Uhō dōji

Amaterasu as a male esoteric deity, wisdom king Fudō myōō

It is further proposed that the *Engi* should be investigated on two levels. One approach could be historical: one can try to recover the forgotten pilgrimage links and temple connections through the patterns emerging in the *Engi* and corroborate it with more historical evidence. The second approach is through the analysis of concepts and symbols appearing in the *Engi*. For example, on the basis of linguistic, symbolic, and metaphoric devices seen at work in the text, one can search for traces of certain patterns and strategies of religious expression. Also, the researchers can look at the history of the wider region (Ise as a center of Buddhist and esoteric pilgrimage) and its broader time-span (from the ancient until the early modern period).

Future research should also cast light on how the "polyphonic" texts and cultic sites function. One helpful way of unraveling this problem could be through a use of the notion of "cultural memory," recently an important topic in contemporary cultural studies. As the leading expert on the subject Mieke Bal explains, cultural memory "has displaced and subsumed the discourses of individual, psychological memory and of social memory,"<sup>21</sup> and so that could be precisely how it was in pre-modern Japan. The inner mechanisms of the "memory work," essentially a collective cultural construction, are seen as conscious movements for the sake of the present. Influential cultural theorists, such as Pierre Nora,<sup>22</sup> also talk about certain "memory sites," *lieux de mémoire*, which are otherwise inert, or material sites associated with the past that become actively invested symbolically for a present purpose.<sup>23</sup> This means that at sacred sites, such as Mt. Asama, the past was constantly redefined, appropriated, and reshaped to answer contemporaneous "present" needs and desires. I suspect that it was not the only case in pre-modern Japan.

#### NOTES

1. Klaus Antoni, "The Separation of Gods and Buddhas at Ōmiwa Shrine in Meiji Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22, nos. 1-2 (1995): 143.
2. MURAYAMA Shūichi, *Yamabushi no rekishi* 山伏の歴史 (Tokyo: Hanawa shōbō, 1970); Gorai Shigeru *chosakushū* 五来重著作集, ed. AKATA Mitsuo 赤田光男 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2007); MIYAKE Hitoshi, *Shugendō girei no kenkyū* (*une étude des rites religieux à propos du shugendō*) (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1970); MIYAKE Hitoshi, *Shugendō Shidō no kenkyū* (orig. pub., 1895; rev. ed., Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1999); MIYAKE Hitoshi, *Shugendō: Essay on the Structure of Folk Japanese Religion* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Monograph Studies, Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003); and MIYAKE Hitoshi, *The Mandala of Mountain:*

*Shugendō and Folk Religion*, introduction by Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2005), just to name a few.

3. Nelly Naumann, “Yama no Kami: die Japanische Berggottheit,” Teil I: Grundvorstellungen, in *Folklore Studies* 22 (1963): 133–366 and Teil 2: Zusätzliche Vorstellungen, in *Folklore Studies* 23 (1964): 48–199; Gaston Renondu, *Le Shugendō: Histoire, doctrine et rites des anachorètes dits yamabushi*, Cahiers de la Société Asiatique 18 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1965); Hartmut Rotermond, *Die Yamabushi: Aspekte ihres Glaubens, Lebens und ihrer sozialen Funktion in japanischen Mittelaltern*, Monographien zur Völkerkunde 5 (Hamburg: Kommissionsverlag Cram, de Gruyter und Co., 1968); Anne Bouchy, “Atagosan gongen no ki,” “Atagosan ryōsha daidai kyakumi ryaku engi,” “Ise, Asamadake ryaku engi,” and “Tamakisan gongen engi,” in *Sangaku shūkyōshi kenkyū sōsho* 18, Shugendō shiryōshū II, ed. GORAI Shigeru (Tokyo: Meicho shuppan, 1984), 83–84, 84–87, 108–110, 148–155; commentaries: 742–743, 743–744, 745–746, 755–757; Anne Bouchy, “Shima, Ise no Yakushi shinkō,” in *Yakushi shinkō, Minzoku shūkyōshi sōsho* 12, ed. GORAI Shigeru (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1986), 123–185; Anne Bouchy, “The Cult of Mount Atago and the Atago Confraternities,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (1987): 255–277; Anne Bouchy, “Le littoral, espace de méditation. Cultes des monts Sengen, Asama, Aominé et systèmes de représentation chez les gens de la mer de la côte orientale de la péninsule de Kii,” *Cahiers d’Extrême Asie* 9 (1997): 255–298; H. Byron Earhart, *A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendō: An Example of Japanese Mountain Religion* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970); Carmen Blacker, “Initiation in Shugendō: The Passage through the Ten Stage of Existence,” in *Initiation*, ed. C. J. Bleeker (Leiden: Brill, 1965); Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1975); Paul Swanson, “Shugendō and the Yoshino-Kumano Pilgrimage: An Example of Mountain Pilgrimage,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 36, no. 1 (1981): 55–84; Paul Swanson and Royall Tyler, eds., “Shugendō and Mountain Religion in Japan,” special issue, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, nos. 2–3 (1989), esp. the bibliography to the editors’ introduction; Alan Grapard, “Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions,” *History of Religions* 21, no. 3 (1982); Alan Grapard, “Japan’s Ignored Cultural Revolution: The Separation of Shinto-Buddhist Divinities and a Case Study: Tōnomine,” *History of Religions* 23, no. 3 (1984); Alan Grapard, “Lotus in the Mountain, Mountain in the Lotus: Rokugō kaizan nimmon daibosatsu hongī,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 41, no. 1 (1986); Alan Grapard, “Linguistic Cubism: A Singularity of Pluralism in the Sannō Cult,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, nos. 2–3 (1987): 211–234; and Alan Grapard, “The Textualized Mountain—Enmounted Text: The Lotus Sutra in Kunisaki,” in *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, ed. G. J. Tanabe, Jr. and W. J. Tanabe (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1989). Recent studies are Anne Bouchy, “Du légitime et de l’illégitime dans le shugendō ou ‘Sang de Buddha,’ ‘sang des êtres des montagnes,’” in *Légitimités, légitimations—La construction de*

*l'autorité au Japon*, ed. Anne Bouchy, Guillaume Carré, and François Lachaud (Paris: coll. “Études thématiques” 16, EFEO, 2005), 111–177; Sarah Thal, *Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods: The Politics of a Pilgrimage Site in Japan, 1573–1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Caroline Hirasawa, “Early Foundation Legends of Tateyama,” *Journal of Human and Cultural Sciences* 37, no. 3 (2006); Max D. Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 235 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Barbara Ambros, *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The Ōyama Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008); and Anna Andreeva, “The Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Miwa Deity: A Transformation of the Sacred Mountain in Pre-Modern Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 65, no. 2 (2010): 245–295. Forthcoming studies on the mountain ranges, politics, and practices of Ōmine and Katsuragi are also much anticipated.

4. See Bernard Faure, Max Moerman, and Gaynor Sekimori, eds., *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, special issue on Shugendō, 18 (2009).

5. Bouchy, “Atagosan gongen no ki,” “Atagosan ryōsha daidai kyakumi ryaku engi,” “Ise, Asamadake ryaku engi,” and “Tamakisan gongen engi”; Bouchy, “Le littoral, espace de méditation.”

6. “If you pay homage to the august [shrines of] Ise, drop in to Mt. Asama! If you do not come to Asama, that’s a one-shrine pilgrimage.” *O Ise mairaba, Asama wo kake yo! Asama kakeneba, kata sangū* 「お伊勢参らば朝熊をかけよ、朝熊かけねば、片参宮」.

7. KUBOTA Osamu 久保田収, “Tenshō daijin to Uhō dōji—Asamayama no shinkō wo chūshin to shite” 天照大神と雨宝童子—朝熊山の信仰を中心として, in *Ise shinkō I 伊勢信仰 I*, ed. HAGIWARA Tatsuo et al. (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1984), 143–144.

8. This site was connected to the activities of the local Fuji confraternities (Jpn. *Fuji kō*, 富士講) active in the area during the Edo period.

9. Bouchy, “Le littoral, espace de méditation,” 270–271.

10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

11. SONODA Kōyū 園田香融, *Heian bukkyō no kenkyū* 平安仏教の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1981), 27–52; and Lucia Dolce, ed., “The Worship of Stars in Japanese Religious Practice,” special double issue of *Culture and Cosmos: A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy* 10, nos. 1–2 (2006): 8–9.

12. For example, see a text entitled “Instructions about the Divine Mirror of the Small Morning-Bear Shrine of the Grand Shrines of Ise” (*Shōchō Kumasha shinyō sata bumi*, 小朝熊社神鏡沙汰文), which describes the incident when the divine mirror of Asamayama shrine was broken and lost. *Gunsho ruijū* 群

- 書類従, *Jingi bu* 神祇部, scroll 12; *Shintō taikai* 神道体系, *Jingū hen* 神宮編, 2.
13. SUZUKI Yoshikazu, “Sengūin hibun no kenkyū” 『仙宮院秘文』の研究, in *Ise shinkō I* 伊勢信仰 I, ed. HAGIWARA Tatsuo et al. (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1984), 199–222.
14. Mark Jacobus Teeuwen, “The Kami in Esoteric Buddhist Thought and Practice,” in *Shinto in History: Ways of the Kami*, ed. John Breen and Mark Teeuwen (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2000), 111.
15. One example of such multiple visions is described in the above-mentioned text entitled *Miwa daimyōjin engi* 三輪大明神縁起. For annotated translation see Andreeva, “The Karmic Origins of the Great Bright Miwa Deity.”
16. I base these research notes on the Japanese version of *Asamayama engi*, ed. SAKURAI Tokutarō 桜井徳太郎, which appears in SAKURAI Tokutarō, HAGIWARA Tatsuo, and MIYATA Noboru, eds., *Jisha Engi*, *Nihon shisō taikai* 20 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), 77–87. Translations in progress are author’s own.
17. The southern part of the modern-day Gifu Prefecture.
18. In order to perform the *gumonji* rite, one had to perform prayers to the Bright Star, Venus, which was considered a manifestation of Bodhisattva Kokuzō 虚空蔵, so here the *Engi* is clearly linking the name of Kūkai to this practice.
19. Possibly the Nari River in the Taira district of the Ikoma Province in Yamato, the area associated with the activities of the legendary founder of Shugendō En no Gyōja 役行者. The location of Zengōji is unknown, but the *Nihon shisō taikai* editors suggest that it might be a reference to Senkōji 千光寺, a branch of Daigoji 醍醐寺 temple in Kyoto.
20. Kubota, “Tenshō daijin to Uhō dōji—Asamayama no shinkō wo chūshin to shite,” 147.
21. See, for example, Mieke Bal et al., eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH and London: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1999).
22. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Under the Direction of Pierre Nora*, English-language ed. with foreword by Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996).
23. Kathleen M. Ashley, “Creating Family Identity in Books of Hours,” in “The Cultural Processes of Appropriation,” ed. Kathleen M. Ashley and Veronique Plesch, special issue, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 1 (2002): 145–165.

## Contemplations and Imagery: Issues Relevant to Ancient Japanese Esoteric Buddhist Icons, Ritual Practice, and Cultural Contexts<sup>1</sup>

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THE SYSTEMATIZED “ESOTERIC TEACHINGS,” *mikkyō*, promoted by the monk Kūkai (774–835) during the ninth century, feature an efficacious ritual system that includes contemplations (Ch. *guan*, Jpn. *kan*) and ritual imagery. In his *Jo [tatematsuru] shin shōrai kyōtō mokuroku hyō* (Catalogue of Newly Imported Sutras and Other Items), an inventory of the texts, icons, and other goods he brought home from China in 806 following two years of study abroad, Kūkai explained the transformative potential of *mikkyō* teachings—and also of the new imagery. He writes: “Because the secret storehouse [*mikkyō* teaching] is so profound and mysterious it is difficult to manifest with brush and ink [i.e., text]. Thus it is revealed to the unenlightened by adopting the form of images [Jpn. *zuga*]. The great variety of postures and *mudrās* [depicted in mandala images] are the effect of the Buddha’s great compassion. With a single glance [at the images] one becomes a buddha.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Kūkai ends his *Catalogue of Newly Imported Sutras and Other Items* with a verse:

The dharma neither manifests nor conceals itself,  
According to the individual it comes and goes,  
Like a gem difficult to obtain.<sup>3</sup>  
Once attained the mind will be opened....  
I’ve assiduously copied the texts,  
That have come from far away....  
May this blessing be instrumental,  
In pacifying the nation and in bringing prosperity to the people,  
Only to hear [the teachings] only to see [the mandala],  
May all be freed from ills.<sup>4</sup>

Just four characters comprise the penultimate line of the verse: “one hearing, one seeing,” that is, simply the sound of the teachings and the sight of the mandala free the adherents from their ills. *Mikkyō* images were not only illustrations of the divine agents of power, but were the power of the divinity itself. According to Kūkai, a single glance at the images was the same as direct experience of the dharma—not a reflection of it. Kūkai claimed the same potential for language.

The best known type of *mikkyō* visual culture is the painted mandala and its ritual platforms. A mandala is usually understood as an illustration or diagram of the myriad esoteric divinities, but it can take many forms. According to Kūkai’s transmission there are four types of mandala, which are understood as the four characteristics of all phenomena, of perception, or four attributes of the Mahāvairocana Buddha. The four types of mandala are the great mandala, *mahā* mandala (Jpn. *dai-mandara*), which represents the divinities in their anthropomorphic form and is usually painted; the symbolic-form mandala, *samaya* mandala (Jpn. *sanmaya-mandara*), which represents the divinities with symbols such as their attributes; the seed-syllable form mandala, dharma mandala (Jpn. *hō-mandara*), or *bīja* mandala, which represents the divinities in their Siddham (Sanskrit) seed syllable (*bīja*); and the three-dimensional mandala, karma mandala (Jpn. *katsuma-mandara*), which represents the universal activity of the Mahāvairocana Buddha.

Kūkai taught that the material and visual forms of his teachings instantiate the absolute, transcendent *dharmakāya* Buddha, whose preaching is made accessible through ritual activity. In *mikkyō*, there is an unprecedented equivalency of ritual performance, including “sight” or understanding of the mandala, with the realm of the *dharmakāya* Buddha. When the novice sees the mandala for the first time<sup>5</sup> he or she is to understand the force of the mandala as “becoming the Buddha.” According to Kūkai, a mandala is one of many visual instantiations of esoteric practice and thought. It is not only a representation, or a didactic tool, but the very form of buddhahood. The painted, symbolic, or sculptural mandala, like the practitioner’s body, the sculpted icon, and the implements of ritual practice, participates in the *dharmakāya* universe or assembly of divinities. The *mikkyō* divinities are invited to the ritual space by means of the adherent’s practice. Kūkai addressed the relationship between practitioner, ritual practice, and the material-somatic topography of *mikkyō* in terms of the “three



mysteries” (Jpn. *sanmitsu*, Skt. *trigyuha*), the body, speech, and mind of the formless *dharmakāya* Buddha. The three inhere in all sentient beings in the ritual body: *mudrās* (*ingei*, hand gestures), recitation of mantras (*shingon*, incantations), and eidetic contemplation (*kansō* or *kannen*, often called “visualizations” in the literature). The paradigmatic ritual format is *abhiṣeka* or initiation (*kanjō*). This transformative power of the teachings and the mandala was unlike the efficacy claimed by eighth-century Japanese Buddhist praxis. Ritual and icon had long been understood as powerfully efficacious,<sup>6</sup> but their immediate correlation to attainment is new.

In the Japanese esoteric Shingon teachings, of which Kūkai is the founder, both metaphorical and optical vision can reveal or constitute new ways of understanding, perceiving, and comprehending. Imagery is accessible to perception in unrestricted ways that texts are not. Two- and three-dimensional forms are received differently, as are forms that are “viewed” as opposed to those that are held or manipulated.

What of immaterial forms, such as the components of contemplation? Some Chinese masters promoted a structured, sequential discernment of reality that reveals the experienced world as “nothing but cognitive construction.”<sup>7</sup> The progressive levels of “seeing” or “viewing” (Ch. *guan*, Jpn. *kan*) the world in contemplations (also *guan*) are “ways of understanding the nature of our experience of existence,” cultivated in meditation but without a distinct “visualization” objective.<sup>8</sup> If esoteric practices and modes of representation influenced the production of imagery in Japan broadly, as I believe occurred, this also spurs us to evaluate their effective structure within culture and society.

*Guan*, the key term for understanding eidetic contemplation, is the Chinese term for “discernment.” It is used either alone or in combination with other Chinese characters.<sup>9</sup> *Guan* may refer to two types of meditation, one “visualizing” and one “seeing” the divinity; though they have very different components and meanings, they are at times impossible to distinguish. Both are soteriologically oriented and both are part of cognition and perception. The “contents” of contemplation cannot be articulated in words, and yet the ritual texts both prescribe and describe the steps of contemplations. Contemplations produce (non)forms, but the (non)forms borrow descriptives such as color, shape, and size.

In the Japanese Shingon tradition, the ritual adherent and the *dharmakāya* Buddha, Dainichi, find common ground through the three mysteries (Skt. *triguha*, Jpn. *sanmitsu*). As propounded in Kūkai's *Transforming This Body into the Realm of Enlightenment*, "each divinity possesses three mysteries [countless] as the dust of [all the] lands. [The three] are mutually empowering and encompassing. So it is with the three mysteries of sentient beings."<sup>10</sup> The three mysteries are the secret communications of the *dharmakāya*'s body, speech, and mind. As explicated in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the body, speech, and mind of the Mahāvairocana Buddha are reflected by the three parallel practices that inhere in all sentient beings: *mudrās* (*ingei*, hand gestures), recitation of mantras (*shingon*, incantations), and eidetic meditations (*kansō* or *kannen*).<sup>11</sup> These three activities of the body (*sangō*) are made coexistent with the three mysteries of the *dharmakāya* universe through ritual activity and result in the attainment of great perfection. Among the three ritual activities, "mind" refers to contemplation; contemplative techniques are the highest level of *mikkyō* ritual.

*Kansō* are part of nearly every Shingon ritual and hold a primary role in *abhiṣeka* (initiations), the core practices of the tradition. To the outsider, contemplations seem to have a transparent, mimetic relationship to material form or representation. From the adherent's perspective, this relationship appears to be very different and calls for discussion of the nature of reality in ritual contemplation and its goals. A lack of ethnographic evidence and relative abundance of written liturgical texts leave lacunae that have been filled with either speculations or, conversely, pared down to available sources—ritual texts and commentaries. We are also limited by the fact that many *kansō* techniques are orally transmitted by the master to the disciple (or are tailored by master for disciple) and are not offered to the uninitiated. The present essay addresses this situation with an examination of "mind" and contemplation from the standpoint of representation and visual culture. Relative to practice, I note only that texts cannot be relied upon to provide the full content of contemplative practices, neither ancient nor modern, but nor can modern ethnographic evidence. To refer to *mikkyō* contemplation in English, I use the term "eidetic contemplation" instead of the more common "visualization," which could be translated unsuitably as "mental imagery," its closest equivalent in (Western) cognitive science. "Mind imagery" could also

be used, with the understanding that “mind” refers to “*mikkyō* mind” and that “imagery” in this case includes formless imagery.

*Kansō* are visually rich. My analysis takes up the history of “imagery” in contemplation, both material imagery (icons, etc.) and immaterial imagery (eidetic form). It is of interest that there is no agreement in cognitive science as to what constitutes a “mental image.” The various debates in studies of mental imagery may be useful in an analysis of the relationship between *mikkyō* contemplation, representation, and visual culture. My approach, however, is that of an art historian and, though discussions between Western scientists and Buddhist practitioners can be enlightening and fruitful,<sup>12</sup> I refrain from attempting to explain Buddhist processes in terms of Western cognitive research. Cognitive science is making discoveries regarding the brain’s processing of visual perception, concept of self, dreams, and memory. It has shown how consciousness can be manipulated—inducing out-of-body experiences, for example—and brought such topics into the mainstream.<sup>13</sup> The kinds of discoveries that cognitive science claims, however, often come as no surprise to masters of Buddhist meditation.

#### GUAN

The Buddhist lexicons give the Sanskrit *vipaśyanā* for *guan*: meditative insight or the clarity required to discern the real from the unreal, the vision that frees us from the bonds of attachments and suffering.<sup>14</sup> Especially in the Tiantai/Tendai tradition, *guan* means to see things as they really are, to discern or perceive the principle of reality. Sight (Ch. *jian*, Jpn. *ken*), can be many things, including insight, discernment, and other kinds of Buddhist apprehension, but it is also associated with form or a deluded view(point), especially in the Mādhyamika tradition. SAWA Ryūken notes that *kan* differs from *ken*, “sight,” as it refers to the mind that discerns and illuminates with wisdom.<sup>15</sup> In the *mikkyō* ritual system, *guan* (*kan*) refers more narrowly to “the workings of the mystery of the mind among the three mysteries,”<sup>16</sup> and to the workings of the mind in practices such as the A-syllable contemplation, the lunar disk contemplation, *gosō jōjinkan* (contemplation on the [Buddha] body comprised of the five marks), and other practices of the *shido kegyō* (four-methods emancipation practice). These esoteric initiations are among those taken up in the popular and academic literature.

The types of eidetic meditation practices that are named *guan/kan* in China and Japan followed a history of practices in which “recalling”

or “seeing” the divinities, or intoning their names, was used to improve concentration, or for other soteriological goals. The standard Buddhist account of memory employs two technical terms: *smṛti* and *pratyabhijñāna*. In what has been referred to as a “wave of visionary theism” across north India in the early centuries CE, Hindu and early Mahāyāna texts alike give us protagonists who have spontaneous visions of the supreme individual or the Buddha or paradise, and then through devout and accomplished practice of visualizations come to “learn to do for themselves what was given them” involuntarily.<sup>17</sup> The simultaneous popularity in northern India of Hindu texts that enabled, through contemplative practice, the revelation of a vast theophany in a vision of blazing light—revelations that were previously granted only through the grace of the deity—seems more than coincidence. The practice is *bhakti*, a precise contemplative activity that manifests an iconographic visualization of the god. As described in the Hindu *Bhagavadgītā*, and in meditation manuals and Pure Land-related texts alike, divine grace is posited by the text as primary, and yet the deity soon relents and teaches a visionary contemplative technique.<sup>18</sup>

There were increasingly frequent references in Buddhist literature circulating in early medieval China to *buddhānusmṛti*, “contemplating the image of the Buddha.” These are rendered in Chinese translations as either *nianfo* (Jpn. *nenbutsu*) or *guanfo* (Jpn. *kanbutsu*), “recalling the Buddha” and “contemplating the Buddha,” respectively, in addition to other less common terms. *Nianfo* is strongly associated with the recitation of the Buddha’s name in the Pure Land traditions; this vocalizing aspect should, however, historically speaking, be considered one of many possible components of “recollection” practices, such as offerings, prostrations, and the like. The mental or eidetic aspect of *nian* (recalling) is evident in its transmission from India to Central Asia and then to China where, despite the many ritual components of *nianfo*, the earliest translated sutras generally use *nianfo* for *mental* recollection of the Buddha and distinct terms such as *zhengming* (praising the name) or *jiming* (keeping the name) for intonation of the Buddha’s name.<sup>19</sup> The Sanskrit terms for mental constructions of forms, *vipaśyanā* and *bhāvanā*, are also translated in Chinese as *guan*. From within this same pool of visionary schema and contemplative techniques arose many elements of Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism.

In Buddhism the term *guan* fundamentally refers to examination and study, to the discernment of distinctions and illusions, and to the

illumination of wisdom; hence, for example, the parallel functions and characteristics of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin). In systematized Japanese esotericism, *kan* (usually *kansō*) refers to functions of the “mystery of the mind,” one of the three esoteric mysteries: dictionaries of Buddhism and *mikkyō*, and other general dictionaries, also state that, “broadly speaking, any contemplation of the form and principle of the various dharmas is called *kansō*.”<sup>20</sup>

Scholars have noted an emphasis on eidetic contemplation practices in a group of six sutras that contain the Chinese character *guan* in their titles, all or most of which were likely composed in Central Asia and China during the late fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>21</sup> These sutras feature a wide range of divinity types. It is possible that they represent the final development in contemplations that stress eidetic types of contemplation over calming and other kinds of meditative concentrations. The sutras feature both buddhas and bodhisattvas. They are:

*Sutra on the Sea of the Samādhi of Buddha Contemplation (Guanfo sanmei hai jing)*

*Sutra on Contemplating Maitreya Bodhisattva’s Rebirth above in Tuṣita Heaven (Guan Mile pusa shangsheng Doushuaitian jing)*

*Sutra on Contemplating Amitāyus Buddha (Guan Wu liang shou fo jing; often referred to simply as the Visualization Sutra, well known in Japan as the Kanmuryōjūkyō)*

*Sutra on Contemplating the Two Bodhisattvas Bhaiṣajyarāja and Bhaiṣajya-samudgata (Guanyao wang yao shang er pusa jing)*

*Sutra on Contemplating the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha [Void Storehouse, Jpn. Kokūzō] (Guanxu kong zang pu sa jing)*

*Sutra on the Practice of Contemplating the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Guan pu xian pusa xing fa jing)*<sup>22</sup>

On what does the mind base the construction of the (non)forms in eidetic meditation? Unlike the Theravādin meditation techniques in which material objects, typically clay disks (*kaṣiṇa*), were focus points that were then mentally “visualized” as a preliminary concentration exercise toward higher states of meditation,<sup>23</sup> in the *guan* practices of these six sutras contemplation begins with a series of “thoughts” (*zhuan xin*) and mental preparations, leading to a complex eidetic progression, culminating with seeing (*jian*) the deity in an elaborate and

highly detailed realization.<sup>24</sup> In the *guan* sutra devoted to Amitāyus/Amitābha, and related to Amitāyus images like the so-called Taima Mandara (Chinese) imported tapestry and Dunhuang *bianxiang* paintings, we find an elaborate exposition of a contemplation technique.<sup>25</sup> Śākyamuni teaches Queen Vaidehī a means of spiritual escape from physical imprisonment: a ladder of meditations, the culmination of which reveals the Pure Land. A disciple who employs this sutra begins with a contemplation of the sun setting in the west; then considers attributes of the Pure Land, such as jewel trees and waterways; then in the mind constructs a step-by-step visualization of the Buddha Amitāyus, starting with the lotus and ending with the image seated on a throne. A subsequent step recapitulates the earlier eidetic contemplation of the Buddha's body: "Only to imagine a Buddha image brings immeasurable benefits; how much more when one visualizes a Buddha complete with all His body attributes."<sup>26</sup> A distinction is made between imagining the Buddha and an eidetic contemplation of the Buddha.

Alexander Soper discusses the iconography and content of three sutras on Amitāyus and concludes that the *guan* sutra, *Sutra on Contemplating Amitāyus Buddha*, is the last of three stages in audience and content, with increasing emphasis on visualizations.<sup>27</sup> According to Julian Pas, it may be that the term *nian* (or *chan*, i.e., meditation, Skt. *dhyāna*) "was no longer felt suitable to describe the new method of visualization-inspection recently developed in meditation centers" that gave rise to these types of sutras.<sup>28</sup> The translators or alleged translators of the texts were all Central Asian, strongly suggesting developments in Buddhist praxis in Central Asia. Indeed, the most descriptive passage concerning eidetic meditations in the travels of the Chinese monk Xuanzang (602?–664) takes place just after his sojourn in Kashmir.

The number of commentaries on *guanxiang* (contemplation of images) sutras and abundant numbers of *jingbian* (*sūtra bianxiang*, narratives) related to the practice attest to the popularity of eidetic contemplation during the Tang dynasty. Kūkai and other monks who visited Chang'an encountered them. The *guan* texts contain many specific references to techniques and to the visual appearance of icons. Among the *guan* sutras, *Contemplating Amitāyus Buddha* is the most complex and explicit in its exposition of the *guan* technique. In the ninth exercise, contemplation of the Buddha's bodily marks, it states: "He who sees [i.e., obtains a vision of] Buddha Amitā, also sees the innumerable

Buddhas of the Ten Quarters. Because he obtains a vision [*jian*] of the innumerable Buddhas, the Buddhas appear in front of him [*xianqian*] and he receives the prophecy [of future Buddhahood].”<sup>29</sup> Soper notes that compared to earlier texts devoted to Amitāyus, the Amitāyus *guan* sutra specifically mentions setting up images as a requirement, in addition to raising *stūpas*; and that all six of the *guan* texts named above mention the ritual requirement for the altar of flowers, lamps, votive banners, and so on. Soper states that *guan*, “which [he] prefer[s] to render as visualize . . . describes here a special kind of mystical adventure, which can have become possible in the Buddhist world only after the cult of images had been accepted and drawn deep into the center of religious experience.”<sup>30</sup> He feels strongly that the step-by-step buildup of visual images required of the *guan* sutras was aided by memories of Buddhist icons, and I concur. The texts do not prove a relationship of *guan* practices and material imagery, but do give inferential evidence.

Typically, secondary literature on meditation approaches only the perceptual gap between an enstatic form of introversion, wherein sensory processing is ceased, and ecstatic forms, in which a practitioner is unaware of his or her environment because of enhanced participation in eidetic meditation and its alternative sensory reality. Even within ecstatic forms, however, the difference between “visualizing” and “realizing” is perhaps blurred at the highest level. Alan Sponberg distinguishes between ecstatic contemplation techniques, in which “the practitioner seeks a state of enhanced sensation by throwing himself into an alternative reality rich in aesthetic and emotional detail,” and an enstatic form prominent in the older *dhyāna* traditions in which a state of sensory stasis is sought. The Buddhist master Kuiji (632–682), Xuanzang’s successor in Faxiang (Jpn. Hossō) circles, made a Maitreya statue every month as part of his practice and may have conducted daily recitations before a Maitreya statue of the bodhisattva vows.<sup>31</sup> Here, a connection between the images (statues) and the Maitreya visualization techniques is implicit. Sponberg notes, “the apparent distinction between ‘visualizing’ and actually ‘seeing’ Maitreya probably becomes meaningless as one’s skill in the technique is perfected.”<sup>32</sup>

The *mikkyō* traditions acknowledge continuities between Shingon *guan* and other historical practices, but the popular Shingon literature tends to stress a direct relationship between eidetic contemplations and Shingon mandalas. There must have been contemplation practices in Nara-period Buddhist traditions, but they were not emphasized

in records before the arrival of *mikkyō* (followed by developments in pure land praxis). In the whole of the late eighth-century compilation of Buddhist stories *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* (Miraculous Stories of Good and Evil Karmic Effects in the Nation of Japan, hereafter Miraculous Stories) there is not a single usage of the character *kan* in reference to any kind of contemplation. *Nen* (recollection, contemplation) occurs, but it is rare: in two tales (1-6 and 1-17), both set outside Japan, *nen* is used for Kannon Bodhisattva contemplation. The story "On Gaining an Immediate Reward for Faith in Bodhisattva Kannon" concerns the elder Master Gyōzen who was sent to Koryō (Korea) to study.<sup>33</sup> When the country was invaded, he needed to cross a river to safety. As he contemplated (*nen*) Kannon at the riverside, an old man in a boat appeared to take him to the other side. He realized later that the old man was an incarnation of Kannon, and he made a vow to venerate an icon of Kannon.

*Nen* as a reference to a form of contemplation also appears in the story "On Suffering War Damage and Gaining an Immediate Reward for Faith in an Image of Bodhisattva Kannon."<sup>34</sup> The story relates how a governor of Ochi district in Iyo Province was sent to the Kingdom of Paekche in the seventh century, taken prisoner by Chinese soldiers, and sent to Tang China. He and other prisoners were put on an island, where they acquired an image of the Bodhisattva Kannon, which they devoutly worshipped. "They worked together cutting down a pine tree to make a boat, enshrined the Kannon image in the boat, and, meditating [*nen*] on the image, made their individual vows." With the Kannon on the boat, they drifted to Tsukushi (Kyūshū) and were able to tell their tale to the emperor. In these two tales, *nen* suggests a focused devotion. The term *shōnen*<sup>35</sup> occurs in one tale (3-12): the story of the "Blind Man Whose Sight Was Restored Owing to His Chanting of the Name of the Nichimanishu of the Thousand-Armed Kannon."<sup>36</sup> This story states that the man "was devoted to Kannon and contemplated the name [*shōnen*] of Nichimanishu to restore his eyesight." Other than in these three tales, *nen* is not used with regard to "contemplation."

Another devotional practice noted in the *Miraculous Stories* that may have had a contemplative component concerns the tying of a rope to a statue while intoning *dhāraṇī*. Otherwise, the only other type of meditative practice mentioned in the work is intoning the sutras (most often, the *Lotus Sutra*), a practice that was well established in the eighth century and widely considered to be efficacious.



*Guan* contemplations are central to Faxiang texts popular in China by the early Tang period,<sup>37</sup> but although *guan* practices are prescribed by texts that existed in pre-Heian Japanese compilations, there is no indication that they had anything but minor currency before Saichō and Kūkai returned from China—this even though the ritual apparatus for certain types of Amitābha Pure Land visualizations presumably existed in Japan, as substantiated by the Taima Mandara tapestry image. Unlike the situation in China, the introduction of *mikkyō* to Japan meant not only the influx of a huge new pantheon of divinities, but also a lexicon of ritual practices that contributed both the conceptual apparatus for envisioning the mandala cosmology and also the ritual technology to do so. With the introduction of *mikkyō* by Saichō and Kūkai in the early ninth century, *kan*, *kansō*, *kannen*, *kansatsu*, *sō*, and other terms with an eidetic contemplation component became current—not only in *mikkyō*, but in a range of traditions. Once again, this is not to doubt that meditations with eidetic content were already known in Japan, only that they were neither widespread nor important to practice. Some of the claims, then, made by Shingon exegetes are historically valid for Japan even though they are not true for the study of ritual or meditation in China—which nonetheless is given as the source for Japanese esotericism. Such claims may arise from the truly radical nature of the *mikkyō* worldview to the ninth- and tenth-century Japanese context.

#### SHADOW IMAGES

A famous Chinese painting at Mount Lu was allegedly based on the Buddha's "shadow" or "reflection," *foyingxiang* (Skt. *Buddha bimba* or *pratibimba*, Jpn. *butsu eizō*).<sup>38</sup> A "shadow image" made at the behest of the monk Huiyuan in 412 may have been used for *guanfo sanmei* (Skt. *buddhānusmṛti-samādhi*, Jpn. *kanbutsu sanmai*), that is, "samādhi for contemplation of the Buddha."<sup>39</sup> Legends about this image provide many clues concerning the Buddhist articulation of reality vis-à-vis imagery and the ways in which images became sacred. The shadow image was not visible at all times or from close by. It was neither image nor illusion—and it was both. Here we find some of the same entanglements suggested by the term "memory" in English. Memory is not stable: it neither equals the form of the object it recalls, nor can it be compared to another person's memory of the same object except in the process of representation.

Another famous shadow image was produced by quite literal means: King Bimbisāra, king of Magadha, wished to give a portrait of the Buddha to the king of Rauruka, but the painters summoned to make the portrait were unable to move their eyes from the perfection of their model. The Buddha therefore cast his shadow on paper and the painters added color after tracing the silhouette.<sup>40</sup> Such “portraits” or reflections of the Buddha were essentially images based on a residue, a form of “relic,” and were important conveyors of meaning and efficacy in Buddhist Asia.<sup>41</sup> Of the Christian tradition of relics and images of relics, Hans Belting suggests that “the observation that *images* could become relics and relics were displayed as images, introduces us into a historical process which can be understood as a general reevaluation of images. The reality that was sought in them was made *visible* by them.”<sup>42</sup> Something similar might be said for the legend of the Buddha’s shadow and the tremendous potency of its artistic heritage in Buddhist Asia.

The term *xiang* (Jpn. *zō*) in *foyingxiang* can mean “image,” “figure,” “form,” and so on. *Xiang* has a complex and ancient history in China. From pre-Buddhist times it referred to signs and symbols of power and magic. According to T. Griffith Foulk and colleagues, “For the Chinese, the act of representing or reflecting reality was closely associated with the ability to discern and iconically manipulate the structures or patterns underlying manifest phenomena.”<sup>43</sup> The term *foxiang* (Jpn. *butsuzō*) is most often used to translate the Sanskrit *Buddha pratima*, or *Buddha pratibimba*, the image of the Buddha. It can in some cases refer to images of bodhisattvas or deities other than a buddha. Another term that refers to an image is *xingxiang* (Jpn. *gyōzō*), literally “formal image,” which has distinct meanings in *mikkyō*.

Of the *xiang* (Jpn. *zō*) compounds noted above, *foyingxiang*, *foxiang*, and *yingxiang*, the latter two are the most common referents to a Buddhist image in the Buddhist sutras. The words are equivalent to an “icon” or a material image in some contexts, but in others indicate an eidetic image. Buddhist references to *xiang* philosophically question the notion that any form is real, simultaneously maintaining that all “empty” or non-real forms are actualized images of the Buddha. This differs from discussions in Western literature on art that take up the challenge of the represented “real.” In the circa 800 compilation *Miraculous Stories*, the term *zō* or *butsuzō* is most frequently used for Buddhist statues, and *gi* or *gazō* for painted Buddhist images.<sup>44</sup> *Zō* is not

used alone, but is modified by the name of the divinity or the material used to make the statue, or in some tales by “female” or “broken”; the honorific *sonzō*, “the venerable image,” is also used.<sup>45</sup> Eighth-century temple documents that inventory statues use the same terms.

The term *honzon*, “primary divinity,” does not appear in *Miraculous Stories*. It was not used until Kūkai’s return from China, when it was introduced with esoteric divinities both material and immaterial. In *mikkyō* it refers to the divinity honored in a rite, but during the medieval period *honzon* came to mean the main divinity on an altar or of a temple, as it is used today.<sup>46</sup> In Japanese *mikkyō* practice, the *honzon* can take three forms (*ji*, *in*, *keizō*): a verbal “seed syllable” (Skt. *bīja*, Jpn. *shōji*); a symbolic *mudrā*, or hand gesture; or a pictorial representation. Each of these is further subdivided into six groups according to ritual texts. There is a section on attainment with the *honzon*, “Honzon zanmai” (Ch. “Benzun sanmei,” i.e., *samādhi*) in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*;<sup>47</sup> Kūkai makes reference to this passage in *Transforming This Body into the Realm of Enlightenment* when he discusses the four mandalas and three esoteric forms of expression for all the *tathāgatas*.<sup>48</sup> In *Hizōki* (Notes on the Secret Treasury) (in which Kūkai claims to record the oral instruction he received in China from Huiguo), Kūkai also discusses the term *honzon*. *Honzon kaji* (ritual empowerment, Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*) is discussed in a number of *mikkyō* ritual texts and treatises.<sup>49</sup>

Descriptions of apparitions appear early in Tendai history. The characters for *genjyō*, “manifested form” or “transformation,” are typically used.<sup>50</sup> The most famous examples concern the manifested figure of a golden (or yellow) *Acalanātha* (Yellow Fudō Myōō). *Acalanātha* (Fudō Myōō), an important cult figure in China and Japan, took a golden or yellow form in Japan as the result of the vision of the Tendai master Enchin (814–891) around 838, which triggered extensive Japanese discussions of “manifested images.” An entry in the *Tendaishu Enryakuji zasu Enchin den* (Biography of Enchin of the Enryakuji of the Tendai School), compiled in 902, relates the story of a golden Fudō who appeared while the master practiced meditative rites in a cave:

(Winter, Jōwa 5 [833], afternoon) While he was seated in meditation in a stone cavern, there appeared suddenly a golden person, who in this manifested form spoke to him, saying: “Create a picture of this visage then continue your practices.” Kashō [Enchin] responded, “You in this transformed state, who are you?” The golden figure replied, “I am the golden Fudō Myōō. Due to my relation to the adherents of the dharma, I will always protect you. Immediately immerse

yourself in the profundities of the ‘three mysteries’ [*sanmitsu*] in order to save sentient beings.” The vision as it appeared was powerful and mysterious, radiant with efficacious light. [The divinity] held a sword in his hand while his feet trod upon emptiness. Thereupon Kashō prostrated himself and vowed deep in his heart to serve. He made an image that was the very replica of his vision. The image that comes down to us today is that very one.<sup>51</sup>

The term used for Enchin’s vision is *gengyō*. He allegedly had his recollection painted, corresponding to the *Yellow Fudō Myōō* of Onjōji,<sup>52</sup> which might instead be the painting he is recorded to have admired in China during his study there. The extant Onjōji painting is so secret that it was said as early as the eleventh century to have been lost in a fire, generating many copies. An early-twelfth-century copy owned by the temple Manshuin shows the standing golden (yellow) Fudō in a nebulous space, just as the 902 record states, filling the entire pictorial space and thereby appearing to enter the viewer’s space. During ascetic practices beneath a waterfall, the Tendai master Sōō (831–918) also encountered Fudō’s manifested form.<sup>53</sup> Representation of manifested visionary forms increased from Kūkai’s time onward. In the experiences of Enchin and Sōō, the duplication of the visionary form and the material icon goes in both directions: life imitates vision, vision imitates life. This same fluidity or transparency between the material and eidetic forms seems to define Shingon contemplations. In Shingon *mikkyō*, however, the individual icon does not receive greater attention than constructing the mandala altar and entertaining the mandala divinities.

Kūkai was said to have manifested all the attributes of the Mahāvairocana Buddha during *samādhi* attainment before the emperor and Nara clerics, as represented in numerous medieval paintings. The impetus to make visible and material the attainment of enlightenment in this body, *sokushin jōbutsu*, appears to have been a medieval impulse. Fudō was the choice of deity for many adepts who self-transformed. The Shingon priest Kakuban (1095–1143) was said to have manifested himself as Fudō to evade detection by bandits; confronted with two Fudō images, one of whom they suspected to be the priest, they cut the statue with a sword and it bled.<sup>54</sup> Enchin similarly manifested the physical form of Fudō while he was in China (853–858) to avoid detection by Chinese agents—this according to the *Uji shūi monogatari*, compiled circa 1190–1242.<sup>55</sup> Such fluidity of transformation is deeply inculcated by ritual practice and would have been understood by the

meditative community at large. The contemplative practice of *nyūga ganyū*, “interpenetration of self and deity,” well established in the monastic *mikkyō* communities by Enchin’s time, may account for this kind of unprecedented occupation of the divinity in the adherent’s abode, as well as increasing numbers of references to meditative visions and their depiction in sculpted and painted forms.

The A-syllable contemplation (*A-ji kan*) is an important *mikkyō* ritual (both Tendai and Shingon) that explicitly calls for a *material* focus for the contemplation. According to Kūkai, the A-syllable itself is a mantra and a sign. It is also a visualization practice noted in several sections of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and its commentaries. The *A-ji kan* is considered by the Shingon tradition to be part of both the Diamond and Womb Mandala lineages.<sup>56</sup> If the *A-ji kan yōshin kusetsu* (Oral Transmission of the A-Syllable Contemplation) is reliable, Kūkai transmitted the practice orally to his disciple Jichie.<sup>57</sup> Kūkai wrote a treatise on the A-syllable (*Ajigi*). His text does not provide many details on how to perform the rite (which is typical of early texts), so practitioners today rely on later versions such as a work by Seizon (1012–1074), used by the Shingon Chūinryū (lineage).<sup>58</sup> In the Womb Mandala-style A-syllable practices, the adherent typically uses a painted hanging scroll or painted disk on a stand that depicts a painted golden A-syllable on a lotus pedestal against a silvered or white full-moon-shaped circle.<sup>59</sup> The *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* instructs:

Contemplate that lotus. It has eight petals and its stamens are outspread. On the flower dais is the A-syllable. It gives fiery wonder to the lotus. Its brilliance radiating everywhere to illuminate living beings, like the meeting of a thousand lightning bolts, it has the form of the Buddha’s meritorious manifestations.

From deep within a round mirror it manifests in all directions. Like the moon in clear water, it appears before all living beings. Knowing this to be the nature of mind, one is enabled to dwell in the practice of mantra.<sup>60</sup>

The material painted object used in this rite is derived from such vivid descriptions; it is difficult not to consider contemplations stimulating pictorial images, and vice versa, when we read such texts, although Robert Sharf considers the language to be discursive.<sup>61</sup> Although contemplations are in part ineffable experiences, and descriptions are not their equal, the visual or representational is, similarly, subject to language in the same way that meditation is subject to discourse. Kūkai

compares the “image” with a moon in clear water, like the reflection of a mirror. This in turn is the nature of the mind, wherein one dwells in the practice of mantra.

Such practices were orally transmitted. Indeed, Kūkai provides an aspect of the A-syllable transmission that does not appear in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, namely the expansion-contraction technique.<sup>62</sup> He states: “Within your breast is the moon disk. It is like the moon on a clear autumn night. Within it is the A-syllable. . . . visualize the moon as one *chū* [a forearm’s length] in size, then gradually expand it to fill the three thousand worlds and the palace of the Dharma realm.”<sup>63</sup> The practitioner uses the image-manifesting technique to bring the image of the main divinity within his breast. He may also use the transformation technique, in which the deity is visualized using its seed syllable “A” and *samaya* (i.e., symbolic) forms—the lotus and moon—that are transformed into the divinity’s anthropomorphic form, the practitioner. These same forms of image, seed syllable, and symbol are part of the transmission of four kinds of mandala, discussed below.

#### MEDITATION ON THE MOVE

Zhiyi’s Tiantai (Jpn. Tendai) views on the Mahāyāna precepts is significant for a discussion of Saichō but not *mikkyō*; our interest here is in the contemplation and *guan* techniques in Zhiyi’s teachings.<sup>64</sup> Saichō studied a range of meditation techniques in China, including some from a Tiantai monk who may have taught him Chan meditation practices.<sup>65</sup> I have noted in chapter 1 of *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision*, the courses of study required by the court in 805 for Saichō’s training of monks—the *mikkyō* Shanagō course and the Tendai meditation course, or Shikangō, when the Tendai, Kegon, and Ritsu schools were each given annual ordinands (*nenbundosha*) for the first time (two each). The Shikangō was based on Zhiyi’s *Mohozhiguan* (Stopping and Seeing).<sup>66</sup> Saichō was deeply interested in this practice and made it part of his Tendai teachings. Only four months before receiving a *mikkyō* initiation from Kūkai in 812, Saichō erected a Lotus Meditation Hall (*Hokke sanmaidō*, literally “Lotus Blossom of the Dharma Samādhi [Meditation] Hall”). According to Zhiyi, *samādhi* (Ch. *sanmei*) “attunes, rectifies, and stabilizes [the mind].”<sup>67</sup> *Stopping and Seeing* prescribes a system of the four kinds of *samādhi*, which are not only meditative absorptions but are also the cultivation of this state. Zhiyi’s four *samādhi* are (1) constant sitting, (2) constant walking, (3) part walking

and part sitting, and (4) neither walking nor sitting. The Lotus Hall that Saichō built was for the *hokke zanmai* of the third practice. The daily regimen includes circumambulation of the hall with recitation of the *dhāraṇī*; prostrations; repentance; and vows. After Saichō died, his disciples erected halls for all four types of *samādhi*, according to his wishes.

The key to the efficacy of the four *samādhi* sequence is the proper incorporation of *guan* contemplations into all phases of the practice. Scholars of Tiantai Buddhism refer to Zhiyi's *guan* as "discernment"; the content of these *guan* is not described with the same kinds of visual terminology as that found for *kan* in Shingon ritual texts. Zhiyi's text critiques the fundamental mental processes by which *guan*, together with all other phenomena, are conceived. Daniel Stevenson notes that Zhiyi discusses the expression "discerning or visualizing the Tathāgata" (*guan rulai*) and "seeing the Buddha's marks" (*jianfo xiang hao*), asserting that "any image or characterization of a Buddha is ultimately equivalent to 'no mark'" and that discernment (*guan*) of phenomenal features is "fundamentally an empty enterprise," akin to "seeing the reflection of one's own image on the surface of the water." It is an empty enterprise that constitutes the initial experience of *samādhi*.<sup>68</sup>

In Zhiyi's second type of *samādhi* cultivation, constant walking (Jpn. *jōgyō zanmai*), the practitioner circumambulates an altar with an icon of the Buddha Amitābha for ninety days.<sup>69</sup> The meditative discernment is on the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor excellent qualities of the Buddha Amitābha, from the soles of the feet to the top of the head and from top to bottom repeatedly, with invocation of the name of the Buddha. Technique is important, but the mental processes are paramount: "as the practitioner becomes more skilled at constructing the mental image of the Buddha, the orientation of the visualizations begins to shift radically" to a constant awareness of the Buddha in which the Buddha "becomes the basis for a simple dialectical investigation into the nature of mind and the noetic act itself."<sup>70</sup> This is *nianfo*, "mindfulness of Buddha." The Amida statue at the center of the circumambulated altar is both present and not-present, just as the visualized Buddha is the object and subject. The altar is conducive to the process of discernment of phenomenon. Ultimately, its iconography and visual presence are transformed to metaphysical signifiers for understanding the nature of the mind—and absolute reality. During a circumambulation, the practitioner must not look around, but instead

fixes the eyes on the ground as he “launches visionary tableaux” (*faxiang*). According to the ritual text, the frequent practice of circumambulation hones visualization skills: visions come more easily because adherents’ minds are “polished like a water surface or a mirror on which a myriad of images would appear,” whereas those who do not practice circumambulation regularly are cluttered and clouded and “visions are not forthcoming.”<sup>71</sup>

In the last type of the four meditations, “cultivating *samādhi* through neither walking nor sitting,” Zhiyi reminds adherents that the images and goals they set up are not ultimate, but are mere conventions designed for expedient purposes. This demonstrates a difference between Shingon *mikkyō* visual culture and that propounded by Zhiyi: for the latter, imagery remains an expedient ritual tool, whereas, in Kūkai’s tradition, the divinities encountered and manifested in practice are part of a logic of similarity: “with a single glance” at the images one transforms one’s body into the realm of enlightenment.

#### CONTEMPLATION AS ATTAINMENT

Contemplations that in many Buddhist traditions would be considered but one component of praxis in *mikkyō* are acts that bring about “realization,” *sādhana*; the term *sādhana* also describes a liturgical structure or the practice itself. As described by Luis Gómez, “The typical Tantric meditation session is a pastiche or a stratified event, in which elements from different periods and currents of the tradition intermingle. Such a session, called a *sādhana* (realization, empowerment), is typically a mixture of evocation and visualization overlaying a classical Mahāyāna liturgy.”<sup>72</sup> Empowerment comes from the deployment of layered, hierarchical, and multisensory evocations, eidetic contemplations, and movements. The *abhiṣeka*—the ritual practice of the three mysteries—is the structure through which the *dharmakāya* Buddha reveals his innermost enlightenment. It may be called an “approximation”<sup>73</sup> of attainment (Skt. *siddhi*, Ch. *shengjiu*, also *xidi*, Jpn. *jōju*, *jōjuhō*) including both mundane and supramundane powers.

Quoting the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* in his *Transforming This Body into the Realm of Enlightenment*, Kūkai states: “If [a student of *samādhi*] enters the meditation called the ‘observation of Suchness, the Dharmakāya,’ he will have a vision that all is undifferentiated oneness like infinite space. If he concentrates on practicing this meditation continually, he will in his present life enter the first state of Bodhisattvahood. . . . Being



embraced by the grace of all the Tathāgatas, he will reach the final stage and be equipped with all-embracing wisdom.”<sup>74</sup>

*Siddhi* is achieved through ritual evocation and visualization, *sādhana*. In the Japanese Shingon tradition, *kaji* (Skt. *adhiṣṭhāna*) brings about a transformatory empowerment that may enable enlightenment, realizing the Buddha in this body. This transformation is structured in the *sādhana*: at the climax of the rite, the adherent potentially realizes a ritual identification of his “mind” with the “mind” of the primary divinity (*honzon*). Such realization is the doctrinal foundation for what was, in practice, a very real and difficult series of techniques that not only deployed but were *fully integrated with* visual and material means.

The primary Shingon ritual manuals, *shidai* (Skt. *vidhi*, Ch. *yigui*), stress the three ritual activities of the practitioner: *mudrā*, mantra recitation, and mind—eidetic contemplation. Such rites are differently elaborated depending on the purpose, the master, and the *honzon* of the practice, but the structure is inevitably the “guest-host” paradigm, in which one or more divinities are invited, entertained and honored, and sent back to the realm of the buddhas.<sup>75</sup> Central to this study is that eidetic contemplations are required or presupposed in each phase of the ritual framework. As noted, Kūkai explained Huiguo’s teaching on *dharmakāya* in terms of the sight and sound of the *dharmakāya*’s body and meaning. Huiguo said that the objects of the practitioner’s sight are the all-encompassing *dharmakāya* body and the sounds heard are the voices of the *dharmakāya*’s preaching. Thus, the utterances of the practitioner are also the *dharmakāya*’s preaching, and the contemplations of the practitioner are the sight of the *dharmakāya*. The mind that grasps this concept “is the reality that is the divinities populating the mandala. The reality is the divinities and the divinities are the practitioners’ very minds.”<sup>76</sup>

The body, speech, and mind of Shingon ritual are interchangeable because they are mutually constituting. They are different but in root meaning are not distinct. Kūkai writes of their interchangeability: “Because sentient and inanimate forms of existence are shaped by the letters of color, form, and movement, sentient existence does not always remain sentient and material existence, not always nonsentient. They are mutually dependent and interchangeable.”<sup>77</sup> For example, the A-syllable of the A-syllable contemplation is understood as a mantra of unequalled power. The *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* exhorts the adherent to breathe the A-syllable in and out and to contemplate it thrice daily.<sup>78</sup>

It is helpful to remember that “language” is to mantra as “representation” (or lack thereof) is to contemplation. In this way, to Kūkai all the sense fields are “letters.” Kūkai demonstrates that optical objects are marks of the *dharmakāya* universe:

Defined by the objects of sight  
 [The letters] of color, shape, and movement  
 Are both sentient and inanimate beings  
 Both life forms and their environments  
 As the Dharmakāya’s spontaneous play  
 And as their consequences, [these letters]  
 Can either trick one into delusion  
 Or guide one to enlightenment.<sup>79</sup>

#### CONTEMPLATION AND REPRESENTATION

Taxonomically and historically, eidetic contemplations can be seen as one of three types of meditative techniques generated by the Mahāyāna tradition, namely, “the resurgence of older visionary and ecstatic techniques aimed at the construction of alternative realities and the gaining of magic power to control the world of experience.”<sup>80</sup> There is a kind of bias about eidetic contemplations in the literature. They are not the purview of the tantric or *mikkyō* traditions, yet the term “visualization” is normally used in the literature in reference to eidetic contemplations by tantric and Shingon practitioners, whereas “meditation,” “contemplation,” “recollection,” “discernment,” and a host of other terms are used to refer to practices or experiences in non-tantric traditions—even though those practices and experiences may be eidetic or strongly visual in similar ways.

Wolfgang Iser writes: “The English term ‘representation’ causes problems because it is so loaded. It entails or at least suggests a given which the act of representation duplicates in one way or another. Representation and mimesis have therefore become interchangeable notions in literary criticism, thus concealing the performative qualities through which the act of representation brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object. For this reason I am tempted to replace the English term ‘representation’ with the German *Darstellung*, which is more neutral and does not necessarily drag all the mimetic connotations in its wake.”<sup>81</sup>

Just as Iser suggests that to conceive of representation in terms not of mimesis but of performance highlights its autonomy and its

relationship to the text, so does my description of eidetic contemplation benefit from examination of the structure of the ritual. As with the text, a “doubling” takes place in the eidetic representational context. That is to say, each text relies on extra-textual fields of reference, disrupts them, re-forms them, and yet the textual form includes and depends on “the function of that field in our interpreted world.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, the ritual practitioner relies on fields of reference beyond those of the context for the contemplation per se—such as works of art, previous ritual experience, and experience of the contemplation as it progresses. The textual form of the contemplation is largely fixed. The content of the contemplation, a (non)form, nevertheless includes (and in the unenlightened world depends for meaning on) the visual reference field that it eschewed. Ritual texts that describe and prescribe the content of contemplations bear this out.

The *Anantamukha-dhāraṇī* reviews the four dharmas of the bodhisattvas and eight-seed-syllable *dhāraṇī* method, and then states:

How can one remain in quiet meditation? He should work diligently day and night without pause. To visualize the Buddha’s image [*xing-xiang*], one should not abide by physical form. One shall meditate with wisdom to perceive correctly. If the practitioner sees a Buddha appear, and is going to take it as a real Buddha, he should consider where the Buddha he has seen comes from—east, west, south, north, above, or below. If he takes this Buddha as made by man, he should consider whether it is made of clay and wood, or made of gold and bronze. By visualizing it in such a way, he achieves knowledge of the Buddha he has seen. Only because one contemplates and reflects upon the Buddha’s image day and night in a place for pure cultivation does the Buddha always appear before one’s eyes. Thus it ought to be known that all the laws to be taken as precious arise from the mind and the will. This is why the bodhisattvas, firstly, practice without abiding [in the mind].<sup>83</sup>

Here we find an admonition to perceive the non-reality of the formal characteristics of the image while at the same time relying on them to construct an eidetic realization of the Buddha’s image (*xing-xiang*); then, we are to distinguish between an eidetic image of the Buddha based on or resembling a man-made image, and one that is the (transformed) Buddha, which will lead the practitioner’s meditation to paradise. The text espouses nonperception of things (*anupalābha*). It acknowledges that eidetic meditation is in part *dependent on man-made images*—if only for definition (and therefore [non]existence). *Mikkyō*

practice depends to a large degree on the recognition of different modes of “representing,” of distinguishing between different concepts as forms, including formless forms. In the *mikkyō* and tantric traditions it is not meditation alone that allows the practitioner to see the deity. The chanting of mantras and the use of *mudrās*, as well as the decorated space of the ritual altar, are integral. Mantras formed from seed syllables that deploy the Sanskrit syllabary of alternate, symbol names for the deity are at the same time empowered by the deity and are an effective genesis of the mandala and its deities.

When the *Anantamukha-dhāraṇī* states, “One should not abide by physical form. One shall meditate with wisdom to perceive correctly,” wisdom means the clarity of empty, mindful interpretation. The construction of the Buddha’s image is through a bodily and mental process that cannot be likened to “visualizing,” but instead is like *the process of sculpting or painting*. *Samādhi* is the result of cultivation, the cultivation of the nature of the mind and the practitioner’s relationship to the *dharmakāya* Buddha. *Samādhi* involves all the senses and movement.

The kinds of explanations and concepts that a study like this seeks to present are certainly external not only to the experience of ritual, but also to the doctrine of ritual. One important metaphorical aspect of “vision” is the insight that arises from meditation. But the “visions” of the “mind” are at the same time beyond abstract metaphor. Meditation techniques are typically deployed to *induce* a type of vision, such as insight or absorption. The protagonists of the sutras see the Buddha Pure Land, or are able to multiply buddhas, or step away from visionary realms and ask, “where do the buddhas of the vision go?” This confirms the buddhas’ (non)reality. Eidetic contemplations have no form, but they are real in that they can be conjured repeatedly, described, recollected, drawn, sculpted, and can serve as real (as well as ideal) goals or catalysts for other kinds of Buddhist insights.

#### MANDALA, MATERIAL, AND PRACTICE

Insight is not only “seeing,” but is a view of reality that typically incorporates both doctrine and cultivation techniques. Contemplation techniques attend to the (non)duality of form and emptiness. By extension, icons are caught up in the paradox of experienced reality and the reality of Truth known not only through ritual techniques but also through doctrinal reflection. In the ancient *mikkyō* tradition, it would seem that ritual was primary and doctrinal study secondary.

The control and manipulation of both non-forms and forms take many shapes. Among them are eidetic contemplations, meditations using symbols or images, and movement or sound to induce states of awareness—some of them are visual, or able to be recalled through discourse (and thereby “imaginable”). In this way, mastery of vision is regulated by the preparedness of the *mikkyō* ritual practitioner. In mastering vision the practitioner masters self and reality, the goal of the *sādhana*, and ultimately attains *siddhi*. Exercises in eidetic contemplation, juxtaposed with drawings and other representations of the divinities, contrast differences and continuities so that the nature of the real is perceived. One aim of eidetic contemplation may be to grasp the nature of perceived reality. In this way and in many others material culture and the intangible power of the icon have a distinct role in esoteric ritual and doctrine.

My discussion at the opening of this essay explained that the *mikkyō* mandala is not only a pictorial image but also instantiates visual efficacy. A mandala in any form is both a representation of a matrix of divinities and the realization of truth in their perfect assembly. Mandalas are at once fixed and fluid, symbolic of the truth and the truth itself, the non-duality of dual concepts of form and formlessness. Mandalas are a material support to ritual and the conceptual basis for ritual, and they structure the worldview of the adherent. Mandalas are a visual synthesis of the system of ritual practices developed in the *mikkyō* tradition and their structure is always present, overtly or not, in all that occurs in praxis. The full title to Kūkai’s magnum opus, *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron*, is *Treatise on the Ten Abiding Stages of the Mind According to the Secret Mandalas*.<sup>84</sup> The title conveys the rich meaning of “mandala” as a blueprint of the universe, which is in turn the structure of ritual and the body of the deity. Mandala are made, seen, performed, contemplated, and conceptualized. The *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* and other sutras and commentaries mention the role of mandalas and icons in esoteric practice, but not always in the ways that contemporary literature tends to stress: as the locus—both visual and ritual—of *abhiṣeka*. There are examples of ancient drawings or painted images serving as “primary icons” (*honzon*) in a rite, but the degree to which the ritualist visually engages the image is not stated in the texts. The ninth-century text, *Zokuhanshō hakki seireishū hokkanshō*, states that at the commencement of the rite for the Seven Days of the New Year, the master Kūkai “drew images according to the dharma and

performed austerities.”<sup>85</sup> In the *abhiṣeka* detailed in the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, the basis for Kūkai’s first esoteric initiation in China, the master and disciple visualize themselves as the divinities Mahāvairocana and Vajrasattva, respectively, after which the master immediately begins drawing his mandala on the central altar.<sup>86</sup> When the drawing is complete, the master prepares the disciple’s “entry into the mandala.” According to Śubhakarasiṃha’s commentary, the master recites the sutra to rouse the mind of enlightenment.<sup>87</sup>

Indeed, in the opening passage to *Treatise on the Ten Abiding Stages of the Mind According to the Secret Mandalas*, Kūkai writes: “The secret, adorned [*shōgon*] stage of the mind is awakened to the ultimate source and foundation of the self-mind [*svacitta*]. It is aware of proofs for the true measure of the self. It is what we call the ocean assembly [a metaphor for the mandala] universe for the Taizō [ritual], the mandala for the Kongōkai [ritual], and the mandala for the eighteen Kongōchō [*Diamond Peak*] [rituals]. Each of these mandalas is of four types, four *mudrās*, and so on.”<sup>88</sup>

#### NOTES

1. This essay is a revised version of chap. 8 in Cynthia Bogel, *With a Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision* (University of Washington Press, 2009). Used with permission of the University of Washington Press.
2. Kūkai, *Jo [tatematsuru] shin shōrai kyōtō mokuroku hyō* (Catalogue of Newly Imported Sutras and Other Items), titled *Shōraimokuroku* in *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* (Collected Works of Kūkai), 5 vols., ed. Mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo (Mount Kōya: Mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo, 1970–1977), 1:95.
3. The metaphor of the hidden gem “right below our feet” is common to other Buddhist traditions. The *Lotus Sutra*, for example, contains the story of the man who is unaware of the gem sewn in the lining of his garment.
4. *Shōraimokuroku*, *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 1:102. This translation is based on Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works; Translated, with an Account of His Life and a Study of His Thought*, UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, Japanese Series, Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies, 87 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 150.
5. In modern-day training at Mount Kōya the practitioner’s contact with the mandala formally begins at the *kechien kanjō* (binding of karmic affinity), the initiation open to lay adherents as well as ordained monks. After determining affinity with a deity, adherents briefly view the mandala as they enter the hall. For more on the role of mandala, see Bogel, *Single Glance*, 208ff.

6. Among works by art historians who have dealt with the issue of the power of icons, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), who are especially informative. Also of interest is John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

7. The “five-level discernment” of *vijñaptimātratā* promoted by Xuanzhang’s eminent disciple, Guizhi, is discussed (as Kuei-chi [Tz’u-en]) in Alan Sponberg, “Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism,” in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 4 (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1986), 30–31.

8. *Ibid.*, 34.

9. Ch. *guan*, Jpn. *kan* 觀. For a detailed discussion of *kan* and *guan*, see Robert Sharf, “Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism,” in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), esp. 185–187. I am indebted to Sharf’s discussion of textual sources on the etymological history of *guan*.

10. Kūkai, *Sokushinjōbutsugi, Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 1:506.

11. The three mysteries are taken up in chaps. 12–23 of the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*. There the mantras are silently intoned, the *mudrās* formed, and the *bijā* or mantra letters in Sanskrit Siddham letters contemplated.

12. See, for example, Antonio R. Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010); Christof Koch, *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach* (Englewood, CO: Roberts and Co., 2004); Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); and Dalai Lama XIV et al., *Gentle Bridges: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on the Sciences of Mind* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 84–106; also Francisco J. Varela et al., *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); and B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

13. For example, “Out of Your Mind, Not Out of Your Body,” *The Economist*, Aug. 25, 2007, 72–73.

14. *Bukkyō daijiten*, ed. Mochizuki Shinkō et al., 10 vols. (Tokyo: Sekai Seiten Kankō Kyōkai, 1974), 1:767.

15. SAWA Ryūken, ed., *Mikkyō jiten: zen* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1975), 110. See also Alex Wayman, “The Buddhist Theory of Vision,” in *Buddhist Insight: Essays*, edited and with an introduction by George Elder (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 153–162; and Mimi Yiengpruksawan, “Buddha’s Bodies and the Iconographical

Turn in Buddhism,” in *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 391–416, for her insights on iconography as part of vision and a helpful synthesis of material on seeing.

16. *Mikkyō daijiten*, 6 vols. in 1 vol., ed. Mikkyō Jiten Hensankai (orig. pub., Kyoto: Mikkyō Jiten Hensankai, 1931; repr., Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1970, 1983), 407.

17. Stephan V. Beyer, “Notes on the Vision Quest in Early Mahāyāna,” in *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems: Studies in Honor of Edward Conze*, ed. Lewis Lancaster and Luis O. Gomez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 331, 337.

18. *Ibid.*, 334–335.

19. Daniel B. Stevenson, “Pure Land Worship in China,” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr., Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 361.

20. *Mikkyō daijiten*, 407c, under *kansō*. See also *Bukkyō daijiten*, 809b, and for *kan*, 767a.

21. Some scholars think that the Chinese may have learned *guan* techniques, or at least deepened their familiarity with eidetic visualizations, through contact with Kashmiri practitioners. See, for example, Alexander Coburn Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China*, *Artibus Asiae*, Supplementum 19 (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1959), 144–145; Sponberg, “Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism,” 29n23 and elsewhere; and Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), *passim*.

22. The term *kuan* sutra (*guan* sutra) is from Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 144. There were certainly more texts of this type originally known. The six, given in *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō*, 85 vols., ed. Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku, et al. (orig. pub., Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō kankōkai, 1914–1922; repr., Tokyo: Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō kankōkai, 1969) (hereafter *T.*) are *T.* nos. 452, 365, 1161, 409, 277, and 643. See Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 144, 184, 215, and 222. See also Julian F. Pas, *Visions of Sukhāvati: Shan-tao’s Commentary on the Kuan Wuliang shou-fo ching [Guan Wuliang shou fo jing]*, SUNY Series in Buddhist Studies (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), on the Amitāyus *guan*; and Stanley K. Abe, “Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple,” *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 5ff.

23. See Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikkhu Nyānamoli (Berkeley: Shambhala, 1976). Sponberg uses the Sanskrit term *ekāgratā*, or “one-pointed” attentiveness, for this practice. According to Buddhaghosa, the duplicate image created in the mind’s eye is the “acquired vision” (*uggaha-nimitta*) and the subsequent and pure sign is the “counterpart vision” (*patibhāga-nimitta*). *Kaṣiṇa* meditation leads to the *jhāna*.



24. The record of Xuanzang's journey to India contains a visually detailed account of his Maitreya contemplation, carried out before pirates on the Ganges who planned to kill him. See T. 2087 for Xuanzang's account and T. 2053 for Huili's biographical account. In translation, see Samuel Beal, *Si-yu-ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World* (orig. pub., London: 1884; repr. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), a dated but useful work; for Huili's biography, see Li Yung-hi, *The Life of Hsuan-tsang* (Beijing: Chinese Buddhist Association, 1959). Malcolm David Eckel, *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) translates portions; also Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, passim. I use the translation from Sponberg, "Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism."

25. T. 365 (Jpn. *Kanmuryōjubutsukyō*), translated into Chinese by Kālayāśas between 424 and 442.

26. Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 146.

27. *Ibid.*, 141–143. Soper's dating of the two earlier texts may not be accurate, and so the stages may complicate (or oversimplify) unnecessarily the history of developments. See Pas, *Visions of Sukhāvātī*, 39.

28. *Ibid.*, 36. Pas's study features Shandao's *Commentary on the Sutra on Visualizing Amitāyus Buddha*. Pas asserts that in cases where it seems that there was a Central Asian or Sanskrit term for mindfulness or contemplation, the Chinese seemed to use *guan* instead of *nian*. See also Fujita Kōtatsu, "The Textual Origins of the *Kuan Wu-liang shou ching*: A Canonical Scripture of Pure Land Buddhism," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 149–173, which discusses the opinions of Tsukinowa, Suzuki, Nakamura, and Kasugai; and Stevenson, "Pure Land Worship in China," 358–379.

29. Pas, *Visions of Sukhāvātī*, 177n68. Pas notes that visions of the Buddha, or of other visualized features of the Sukhāvātī paradise, "are not the ultimate experience to be expected" in this kind of visualization sequence, rather *samādhi* is the supreme experience (pp. 177–178).

30. Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 143–144 (quotation is from p. 144).

31. Sponberg, "Meditation in Fa-hsiang Buddhism," 29. The statue making is noted on Kuiji's funerary inscription; his biography, written during the Song dynasty, notes his recitation before a statue.

32. *Ibid.*, 27.

33. For the English translation, see Keikai, *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai*, trans., annotated, and with an introduction by Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 20 (orig. pub., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973; repr., Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997), 117 (vol. 1, tale 6). In Japanese see Keikai, *Nihon ryōiki*, trans. IZUMOJI Osamu, Shin Nihon koten

bungaku taikei 30 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 17–18, *genpon* 208–209. This tale is in the *Fusō ryakki* (fasc. 6, dated Yōrō 2, ninth month) and the *Konjaku monogatari-shū* 16:1, and others.

34. Keikai, *Nihon ryōiki*, trans. Izumoji, 30–31, *genpon* 214–215; *Miraculous Stories*, 128 (vol. 1, tale 17). This story is also in the *Konjaku monogatari-shū* 15:2 and the *Kannon riyaku-shū* (Kanazawa bunko, 43).

35. *Shōnen* 称念.

36. Keikai, *Nihon ryōiki*, trans. Izumoji, 145–146, *genpon* 270; *Miraculous Stories*, 237–238 (vol. 3, tale 12). This story is also recorded in the *Konjaku monogatari-shū*, 16:23.

37. Sponberg describes two distinct types of practices among many meditation techniques of importance to Faxiang practitioners during the early Tang period. The first is an “eidetic visualization whereby one enters into a different level of existence”; the second “is a set of ‘discernments’ or ‘contemplations’ presenting the successive steps by which one gains insight into the nature of existence as understood by the Yogācārins.” Sponberg, “Meditation in Faxiang Buddhism,” 21.

38. On the Japanese term *eizō* (Ch. *yingxiang*), see *Bukkyō daijiten*, 255; see also *Bukkyō daijiten*, 1988, under *shibun*. According to Roger Goepfer, in Song-dynasty translations of esoteric texts, *yingxiang* designates a pictorial representation or the visualized image of deities. For example, Shihu’s rendering of the text known in Japanese as the *Yuga-daikyōkyō* (T. 887) repeatedly describes the shadow image as that visualized by the practitioner. See Roger Goepfer, “Some Thoughts on the Icon in Esoteric Buddhism of East Asia,” in *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift für Herbert Franke*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer, Münchener ostasiatische Studien 25 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979), 249.

39. The *Buddhānusmṛtisamādhisāgara-sūtra* (T. 643; Ch. *Guanfo sanmei hai jing*, Jpn. *Kanbutsu sanmaikaikyō*), a sutra devoted to this practice, has a long passage dealing with the miracle of the “shadow,” followed by a description of the contemplation of the Buddha’s “shadow form” (Ch. *guanfoying*, Jpn. *kanbutsu ei*). The Sanskrit title is unattested. On the shadow images and contemplations in China in English, see Marilyn M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, 2 vols. in 3 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999–2002), 2:104–136; and Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 223–225. See also Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 185. Another legend about the shadow image tells how the Buddha cast his shadow on cloth and had it drawn by a court painter for King Bimbisāra, which is noted in Goepfer, “Some Thoughts,” 247.

40. Paul Demiéville et al., ed., *Hōbōgirin: Dictionnaire Encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d’après les Sources Chinoises et Japonaises*, 8 vols. (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient Adrien Maisonneuve and Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1929–; repr., Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1974–), 3:212b.

41. See Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.),” *Artibus Asiae* 47, nos. 3–4 (1986): 274. In Japan, relics from China or India were thought to be particularly sacred.
42. Hans Belting, *Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: A. D. Caratzas, 1990), 214 (emphasis mine).
43. T. Griffith Foulk et al., “On the Ritual Use of Ch’an Portraiture in Medieval China,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie, revue de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, Section de Kyoto 1993–1994*, 7, numéro spécial sur le Chan/Zen (1993–1994): 160. “The etymology of *hsiang* [xiang], and the use of the term in texts such as the *I Ching* [Yijing] and the *Tao-te-ching* [Daodejing], suggests the sense of mystery and creative power associated with the iconic reduplication of reality in ancient China. This is corroborated by the mystique of bronze mirrors . . . the back of the mirror imaged the world through a set of icons or *hsiang* arranged in geometric *mandala*-like patterns” (160). See also Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements,” for an excellent discussion of mirrors and mirroring.
44. Zō 像, *butsuzō* 佛像, *gi* 儀, *gazō* 画像.
45. *Sonzō* 尊像. See Keikai, *Nihon ryōiki*, trans. Izumoji (vol. 1, tales 7, 33, 35; vol. 2, tales 14, 17, 22, 39).
46. In China, *benzun*, the equivalent of *honzon* (Skt. *svayadhivatā*), was used to refer to a Buddhist image since the sixth century.
47. T. 18 no. 848:44; see *Mikkyō daijiten*, 2068.
48. Kūkai, *Sokushinjōbutsugi*, translation from Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 230–231.
49. Kūkai, *Hizōki*, *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 2:10, 30, 34. See also the section on *juhachidō* ritual in TOGANOO Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū*, vol. 2 of *Toganoo Shōun zenshū* (orig. pub., Kōyasan: Kōyasan Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1935; repr., Kyoto: Sōhatsubaimoto Rinsen shoten, 1982), 44–48.
50. *Gengyō* 現形.
51. *Tendaishu Enryakuji zasu Enchin den*, in *Dai nihon Bukkyō zenshū*, ed. Bussho Kankōkai, 151 vols. (Tokyo: Bussho Kankōkai, 1912–1922; new ed., Tokyo: Meicho Fukyūkai, Shōwa 53–58 [1978–1983]), 28:1364–1365, dated Engi 2 (902) by Miyoshi Kiyoyuki (847–918). For a detailed discussion, see AJIMA Noriaki, “Konjiki Fudo Myōō gazō no kenkyū: konpōnzō to manshūinbon,” *Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan kiyō* 29 (1994): 66.
52. The Onjōji work has long been considered to be the very work painted for Enshin; it is rarely displayed, and we must be content to view a copy based on a lost copy (by Renshō, 988–1048) owned by Manshuin, circa 1107 and painted by Gyōson (1055–1135). Recent scholarship by the widely respected late YANAGISAWA Taka believes it to be Chinese. See YANAGISAWA Taka, “Onjōji kokuhō

kinshoku Fudō myōōgazō (Ki Fudō) ni kansuru shinchiken—Fudōmyōō gazō shūrihōkoku,” *Bijutsu kenkyū* 385 (Feb. 2005): 135–150. The late Yanagisawa’s opinions are highly regarded, but the silence surrounding this report in Japan may suggest disagreement. Conservators who analyzed the *Yellow Fudō Myōō* painting from 1996 to 1998 could find no comparators in Japan for the materials and techniques, and concluded that this painting was made in China. AJIMA Noriaki has recently argued that Enchin had the painting made for the dharma transmission (*abhiṣeka denpō kanjō*) for two of his disciples in the last year of his life, 891. Ajima, “Konjiki Fudo Myōō gazō.” He discusses Renshō’s claim that the original painting was destroyed in the Onjōji fire and also discusses subsequent copies. See also AJIMA Noriaki, *Hibutsu konjiki Fudō myōō gazō* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 2001). He dates the Yellow Fudō to after both Enchin’s return from China in 858 and the circa 880 Sai’in Mandara.

53. The *Tendai Nanzan Mudōji konryō kashōden* (circa 918–923), the *Katsuragawa engi* attributed to Jien (1155–1224), and the early thirteenth-century *Uji shūi monogatari* all describe Sōō’s experience.

54. Bernard Frank, “Vacuité et Corps Actualisé: Le Problème de la Présence des ‘Personnages Vénères’ dans leurs Images selon la Tradition du Bouddhisme Japonais,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1988): 53–86.

55. Douglas E. Mills, *A Collection of Tales from Uji: A Study and Translation of Uji Shūi Monogatari* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 390.

56. *Mikkyō daijiten*, 17.

57. *T.* 3:329. On the ritual and its history, see Toganoo, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū*, 224–226; and in English, Yamasaki Taikō, *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, trans. Richard and Cynthia Peterson, ed. Yasuyoshi Morimoto and David Kidd (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 182–215.

58. *Mikkyō daijiten*, 17. Kūkai’s transmission text has served as the basis for hundreds of commentaries and expanded versions of the practice in the Shingon tradition; the practice can be performed in as little as a few minutes or for an hour or more. The practice was favored by the Shingon master Kakuban. Yamasaki, *Shingon*, 192–206, translates various texts.

59. Toganoo, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū*, 224. Although the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra* states that the A-syllable should be visualized above an eight-petaled lotus dais, it does not specify the moon disk.

60. *T.* 18:21. Trans. in Yamasaki, *Shingon*, 199.

61. Sharf, “Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism.”

62. After Kūkai’s time, the expansion and contraction elements of the rite were associated with the Diamond World lineage, not with the Womb lineage derived from the *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*.

63. Sōfu sen'yōka, ed., *Kōbō Daishi shodeshi zenshū* 1:476, as cited and translated in Yamasaki, *Shingon*, 202.
64. See Paul Groner, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*, Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series 7 (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1984), 220–228, on the precepts.
65. *Ibid.*, 43.
66. In English see Zhiyi, *Stopping and Seeing: A Comprehensive Course in Buddhist Meditation*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1997).
67. Daniel B. Stevenson, “The Four Kinds of Samādhi in Early Ti'en-t'ai Buddhism,” in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 4 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1986), 48–49. The passage is from Zhiyi's *Mohozhiguan*, T. 46:11a22–28.
68. Stevenson, “The Four Kinds of Samādhi,” 57. Zhiyi is citing a passage in the sutra *Wenshu wenjing* (T. 14:506c–507a).
69. T. 46 no. 1911:26c.
70. Stevenson, “The Four Kinds of Samādhi,” 59.
71. *Fangdeng sanmei xingfa*, T. 46 no. 1942:946, summarized and translated in Eugene Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005), 377. Chinese pagodas such as Longhuta at Shentongsi in Shandong suggest the passage of time by four-directions iconography and symbols of the four seasons. On the medieval Chinese visual context and contemplations, see E. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*.
72. Luis O. Gómez, “Meditation,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, 2 vols., ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 2:520–530.
73. Tson-kha-pa Blo-bzan-grags-pa, *The Yoga of Tibet: The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra, 2 and 3*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins, The Wisdom of Tibet Series 4 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 185–88, cited in Charles D. Orzech, “Seeing Chen-Yen Buddhism: Traditional Scholarship and the Vajrayāna in China,” *History of Religions* 29, no. 2 (Nov. 1989): 100n36.
74. From Kūkai's *Sokushinjōbutsugi*, translation from Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 231.
75. On tantric *sādhana* see, for example, Sanjukta Gupta, “Tantric Sādhana: Pūjā,” in *Hindu Tantrism*, ed. Sanjukta Gupta et al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979); Luis O. Gómez, “Two Tantric Meditations: Visualizing the Deity,” in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr., Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 318–327; and David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors*, 2 vols. (Boston: Shambhala, 1987). See also Paul Williams, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete*

*Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 229; Shashi Bhushan Dasgupta, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1950); and Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London: Rider, 1965). For an excellent discussion of tantric ritual, mandalas, and the philosophical, historical, and practical features of tantric thought and practice, see David Gordon White, introduction to *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–38.

76. Kūkai, *Hizōki, Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 2:40–41.

77. *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 1:531, translation from Ryūichi Abé, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 284.

78. *T.* 18 no. 848:19.

79. *Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 1:527, translation from Abé, *Weaving*, 284. Abé uses “letter” throughout. I would prefer “mark,” since the point of the text is that letters are signs that make things legible, and in the case of the discussion of the “objects of sight” it seems more appropriate to refer to them as “marks” or “shells” produced through differentiation.

80. Stephen Beyer, “The Doctrine of Meditation in the Mahāyāna,” in *Buddhism, a Modern Perspective*, ed. Charles S. Prebish (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 148. The other two types of meditation technique are “the standard meditative structure” of earlier Buddhism “yet with the twofold process of calm and insight infused with a universalist fervor,” and “new techniques of spontaneity” for a direct experience of freedom (p. 148; emphasis mine).

81. Wolfgang Iser, “Representation: A Performative Act,” in *The Aims of Representation: Subject, Text, History*, ed. Murray Krieger, *Irvine Studies in the Humanities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 217.

82. *Ibid.*, 218.

83. *T.* 19 no. 1018:705c–706a, trans. Zhiyan. 1019:675–679 by Amoghavajra.

84. Kūkai, *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron, Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 1:397–414. Kūkai composed the work in 830 in response to Emperor Junna’s request for an explanation of the Vajrayāna teachings. The title is frequently abbreviated such that the second half, “according to the secret mandalas,” is lost.

85. Quoted in YAMADA Kōji and MIYAJI Akira, *Tōji, Nihon no kojibijutsu* 12 (Osaka: Hoikusha, 1988), 72. Here, “images” is 像.

86. Abé, *Weaving*, 133; *T.* 18:6b–9b; *T.* 39:30c–642c.

87. Abé, *Weaving*, 134; *T.* 39:661b.

88. Kūkai, *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron, Kōbō Daishi zenshū* 1:397.

## Ritual of the Clear Light Mantra

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*On abogya beiroshanō makabotara mani handoma  
jimbara harabaritaya un.*

—Clear Light Mantra in Japanese pronunciation

THE MANTRA OF THE CLEAR LIGHT (Kōmyō Shingon, 光明真言), “oṃ amogha vairocana mahā mudrā maṇi padma jvala pravarttaya hūṃ,”<sup>1</sup> has its origins in the tantric period of Indian Buddhism, and texts promoting its practice were introduced into China in the sixth to eighth centuries. For example, the mantra is found in the *Sutra of the Mantra of Divine Transformation of the Unfailing Rope Snare* (†Amoghapaśa vikrīṇita mantra sūtra, T. 1092, trans. Bodhiruci<sup>2</sup>). A portion of that work that treats the Clear Light Mantra was translated as a separate text by Amoghavajra under the title *Sutra of the Mantra of Light of the Baptism of Vairocana of the Unfailing Rope Snare* (T. 1002).<sup>3</sup> These works form part of what may be considered Pure Land Buddhism broadly defined, that is, although the chief deity of the texts is Mahāvairocana, birth in Amitābha’s Sukhāvātī is advocated.<sup>4</sup> As has been suggested in another essay, this supports a view of medieval Indian Buddhism in which Pure Land and tantric forms were not clearly delineated as distinct sectarian entities.<sup>5</sup>

Although the work by Amoghavajra is recorded to have been brought from China to Japan by Kūkai, the mantra was not popularized in Japan until the late medieval period. Key to these efforts at popularization were such figures as Myōe Kōben (明慧高辯, 1173–1232)<sup>6</sup> and Eizon (叡尊, also pronounced Eison, 1201–1290).<sup>7</sup> It seems likely that efforts to popularize practice of the Clear Light Mantra were, like similar efforts related to visualization of the syllable A (*ajikan*, 阿字觀), intended to provide a simple practice comparable to, and perhaps

competitive with, the *nenbutsu* (念仏). Like the *nenbutsu*, both the Clear Light Mantra and visualization of the syllable A were presented as single practices sufficient in themselves of bringing the practitioner to awakening.

The importance of mantra such as this one for the Japanese esoteric tradition is evidenced by the way in which in some cases mantra became the focus of ritual practices. In this case, the Clear Light Mantra plays a central and repeated role in the ritual known as the Clear Light Mantra Ritual (*Kōmyō shingon bō*, 光明真言法). Several variations of this ritual exist, and the following translation is drawn from a contemporary collection of rituals, the *Thirty-Three Deities of the Chūin Lineage* (*Chūin sanjū san son*, 中院三十三尊).<sup>8</sup> The author obtained a copy on Mt. Kōya, where the Chūin lineage is predominant, in 1982, during his studies there. At that time the collection was freely available in shops in the town. The place of esoteric practice in contemporary Japan has moved away from the “culture of secrecy,” and instead one finds works of esoteric Buddhism, including ritual manuals, freely available in bookshops. They are perhaps in a sense “self-secret” in that only those who are trained as priests would have any interest in them.

In addition to the version translated here, other versions of the *Kōmyō shingon bō* found in the following works were also consulted:

TANAKA Kaiō, *Kōmyō shingon shūsei* (Osaka: Tōhō Shuppan, 1978)

TOGANO Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū* (1940; reissue, Koyasan: Koyasan Daigaku Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūjo, 1982)

UME Ō Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kōyasan Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1935)

TAKAI Kankai, *Mikkyō jisō taikai: toku ni Sanbōin Kenjingata o kichō to shite* (1969; reissue, Kyoto: Fujii sahei, 1987)

TANAKA Kaiō, *Himitsu jisō no kaisetsu* (1962; reissue, Tokyo: Rokuyaon, 1984)

Toganoo’s version has additional structural information about the organization of ritual actions. To facilitate further study, therefore, the numbers assigned to the different ritual acts or sets of actions by Toganoo are noted in braces { }—these numbers are not found in the manual itself, and there are some variations between the version found in Toganoo and the version translated here. In addition, the groupings of the ritual actions that he indicates are also included in braces.



**RITUAL OF THE CLEAR LIGHT MANTRA (KŌMYŌ SHINGON BŌ)**

Perform as per the *Jūhachi dō*.

**{I. Enter the hall, proclaiming vows section}**

- {1} Perform the ritual before the Buddha [in the practice hall] as usual.
- {2} Prostrate before the altar.
- {3} Seated prostrations.
- {4} Powdered incense.
- {5} Three Mysteries.
- {6} Purify the Three Karmas.
- {7} Don the Armor of the Three Classes.
- {8} Empower the Perfumed Water.
- {9} Empower the Offerings.
- {10} Visualize the syllable RAM.
- {11} Visualize the Buddhas.
- {12} *Vajra* Arising.
- {13} Universal Homage.
- {14} Declaration to the *Kami*. Supplication.
- {15} Five Repentances.
- {16} Aspirations. *Samaya* (Vows).

Evocation, use the [same evocation as in the] *Vajradhātu* [ritual].

Initial Vows:

- Sincerely pledging
- Solely calling on the chief deity
- Dainichi Nyorai
- The Thirteen Great Assemblies<sup>10</sup>
- The Three Classes of Various Deities<sup>11</sup>
- Both Classes of Worldly Deities.<sup>12</sup>

- {17} Five Great Vows.
- {18} Universal Offering and Three Powers.

**{II. Samaya, command section}**

- {20} *Mahāvajracakra*.
- {21} Bind the Earth.
- {22} Bind the Four Directions.

Visualize the Seat of Awakening; Prostrations to the *Tathāgata*.<sup>13</sup>

Above the heart is the syllable AHḤ; this changes, becoming the Clear Light Heart Palace (*Kōmyō Shinden*) and there is in the center of that the syllable HRIḤ; this changes into a great Lotus Blossom King

(†*Mahāpadmarāja*) above which is the syllable A; this changes, becoming a moon *cakra*, above which is the syllable HRIḤ; this changes, becoming an eight-petalled lotus blossom, above which is the syllable AḤ—this syllable is of five colors—a flame of five colors shines forth from the syllable; this changes becoming a five-*cakra stūpa* (*gorintō*, 五輪塔); these are your own five *cakras*, each [*cakra*] emitting light, namely the five colors of the clear light *stūpa*; this changes, becoming Dainichi Nyorai [Mahāvairocana Tathāgata] as dwelling in the *dharmadhātu*, namely, wearing the jeweled crown of the five wisdoms, seated with his legs folded into the lotus position, having a body emitting the clear light of five colors, shining throughout the *dharmadhātu*, on all of the living beings above and below oneself, leaving no space that is not filled with this clear light, [revealing] countless multitudes of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sages surrounding one on all sides, providing comforts and benefits of the four wisdoms<sup>14</sup> and four practices<sup>15</sup> to anyone suffering alone.

Empower the seven places [on the body], as usual.

### {III. Majestic hall of practice section}

{29} *Mahākāśagarbha*.

{30} Small Vajracakra.

### {IV. Respectful request, protective enclosure section}

{31} Send the chariot.

{32} Call back the chariot.

{33} Requests, Great Snare.

{34} Four *Vidyas*.

{35} Clap hands

{36} Close the circle [ritual enclosure], Fudō Snare *mudrā*, Loving Compassion (mantra).

{37} Empty Space Net.

{38} Fire Palace.

{39} Great *Samaya*.

### {V. Pūjā and praises section}

{40} Offering of perfumed water (*argha*, aka *misu*, 闍伽水).

{41} Flower Thrones.

{42} Ring the Bell.

{44} Initial offerings: symbolic offerings and material offerings.

{45} Praises: Four Wisdoms.

{46} Disperse the offerings. Three Powers.

- {47} Supplications.  
 {48} Bowing to the Buddhas, all as in the Vajradhātu.

**{VI. Nenju practice section}**

- {49} Me entering, entering me.  
 {50} Empower the chief deity.

A BI RA UN KEN.

Five colored lights *mudrā*: extend the five fingers of the right hand open before the face; left fist held at waist.

*Kōmyō shingon*:

ON ABOKYA BEIROSYANO MAKABODARA MANI HANDOMA  
 JINBARA HARABARITAYA UN

(*om amogha vairocana mahāmudrā maṇi padmi jvala pravartaya hūṃ*)

- {51} Calming the mind recitation.

*Kōmyō shingon*.

- {52} Empowerment of the Chief Deity, as usual.  
 {53} Akṣaracakra. [Visualize] the five great.  
 {54} Empowerment of the Chief Deity, as usual.  
 {55} Buddha eye (*buddhalocana*): *mudrā* and *vidya*.  
 {56} Expanding the mind recitations.

Buddha eye.

Dainichi.

*Kōmyō shingon*.

Amida.

*Sonshō dhāraṇī*.

Amoghapāśa.

Fudō.

Mahāvajracakra.

One-syllable.<sup>16</sup>

**{VII. Latter offerings, upāya}**

- {57} Latter offerings. Symbolic and material offerings.  
 {58} Offering of perfumed water.  
 {59} Latter bell.  
 {60} Praises, as usual.  
 {61} Disperse the offerings. Three powers.  
 {62} Supplications. Bow to the buddhas.  
 {63} Returning.

- {64} Sincere returning.  
 {65} Open the boundaries.  
 {66} Send [the deities] away.  
 {67} Three classes. Don the armor. Prostrate to the buddhas.  
 {68} Leave the hall.

## NOTES

1. HATTA Yukio, *Shingon jiten* (Tokyo: Heika Shuppansha, 1985), #53, 13. Toganoo gives a variant in the form of “om̐ bhuh̐ kham̐ amogha vairocana mahā mudrā maṇi padma jvala pravartaya hūṃ.” TOGANOO Shōun, *Himitsu jisō no kenkyū* (Koyasan: Koyasan Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1940).
2. According to the *Hōbōgirin* catalogue, this is Bodhiruci II. See Paul Demiéville, Hubert Durt, and Anna Seidel, eds., *Répertoire du Canon Bouddhique Sino-Japonais* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, and Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1978), “Table des Auteurs et Traducteurs,” s.v. “Bodairushi,” 237.
3. Mark Unno, *Shingon Refractions: Myōe and the Mantra of Light* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 26. Unno gives additional textual information regarding the sources for the Clear Light Mantra. On Amoghavajra, see Martin Lehnert, “Amoghavajra,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles Orzech, Henrik Sørensen, and Richard K. Payne, *Handbook of Oriental Studies/Handbuch der Orientalistik*, section 4 China, vol. 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 351–359. According to Charles Orzech, although the attribution of T. 1002 to Amoghavajra is widely accepted, it is subject to debate. In particular, the title does not show up in Amoghavajra’s own “catalogue.” The title is, however, recorded in Tang period catalogues. The first appearance of the title and ascription to Amoghavajra is, it seems, in Yuanzhao’s *Da Tang zhenyuan xu kaiyuan shijiao lu* 大唐貞元續開元釋教錄 (T. 2156) of 794. The date of this reference to the text and ascription is very close to Amoghavajra’s own dates of 705–774. At the very least then, that record would appear to rule out any likelihood that the text is a Japanese pseudepigraphon (personal communication, 27 August 2011).
4. Cf. Gregory Schopen, “Sukhāvātī as a Generalized Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Literature,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 19 (1977): 170–210.
5. Richard K. Payne, “Aparimitāyus: ‘Tantra’ and ‘Pure Land’ in Medieval Indian Buddhism,” *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 9 (Fall 2007): 273–308.
6. See Unno, *Shingon Refractions*, for a comprehensive study of Myōe’s works on the Clear Light Mantra.
7. See James L. Ford, “Exploring the Esoteric in Nara Buddhism,” in Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne, eds., *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 790–

791.

8. KŌYASAN Daigaku, ed., NAKAGAWA Yoshinori, ed. in chief, *Chūin sanjūsan son*, 5 vols. (Kōyasan: Wada Yugen, 1979/Showa 54), vol. 4 (unpaginated).

9. See Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, 2006), the last three chaps. in particular.

10. Groups of deities found in the thirteen sections of the Vajradhātu Mandala.

11. Buddha, Padma, and Vajra classes.

12. The two classes of Vedic deities.

13. Not numbered by Toganoo.

14. *Shichi* 四智, *catvāri jñānāni*; the four transformed consciousnesses that arise when the eight consciousnesses of the Yogācāra tradition are purified.

15. *Shigyō* 四行, the four practices.

16. See YŌEN Ariga, *Darani daijiten* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankokai, 1998), 797.



## BOOK REVIEW

**Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada.** Edited by John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010. 464 pages. Hardcover, \$95.00; paperback, \$29.95.

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SCHOLARSHIP CONCERNING BUDDHISM in America, since the late 1970s, has produced a series of monographs and edited volumes. Buddhist studies scholarship from other non-Buddhist regions has emerged in Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, and England, each generating one to a handful of scholarly works. Canadian Buddhist scholarship is now poised to take the lead in conversations about global Buddhism. Scholars of Buddhism in Canada are aware of the newness of their work and have taken steps to continue their efforts through a number of venues. One of these steps is the recent edited volume, *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*. This book makes a significant contribution toward creating and developing ideas on Buddhism in Canada and is related to other efforts such as national conferences and panels dedicated to the topic. Indeed, ideas for this book sprang from two sessions on Buddhism in Canada at the Canadian Asian Studies Association annual conference (CASA) in 2006. Thus this book is part of a larger effort to increase awareness of this sub-field of Buddhist studies as it has developed and continues to develop in this multicultural land. But the editors are only beginning in their creation of this scholarly niche—they have more conferences and volumes planned.

This volume clearly demonstrates that scholars of Buddhism in Canada are in dialogue with scholarship developed within American Buddhism. But the contributors of this volume are also advancing these conversations and issues about Buddhist developments in Western countries while considering the distinct nature of Buddhism in the

Canadian context. This is a large volume with fifteen contributions in four parts. With just over four hundred pages this book offers a hefty amount of theoretical and case study work on Buddhism in Canada and represents the vibrancy of this emerging field.

The book opens with vignettes of the current dynamism and diversity of Buddhism in Canada and offers an outline of the history of Canadian Buddhist scholarship that preceded this book. This history begins in 1999 with Janet McLellan's ethnographic study *Many Petals of the Lotus: Five Asian Buddhist Communities in Toronto* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1999). The next book concerning this topic was Bruce Matthews' *Buddhism in Canada* (New York: Routledge, 2006), which consisted of ten essays organized geographically. Building on these two diverse works the editors of *Wild Geese* intended to bring order to this field by exploring general themes that had not been addressed previously. They offer content in the categories of statistical analyses, historical surveys, global Buddhist movements, and biographical life stories, and use these to reflect on theoretical issues that will shape the field of Buddhism in Canada.

The first section of this volume, aptly titled "Openings," sets the theoretical aims of the book and presents two of the most provocative articles in the collection. The authors in later sections frequently refer to these two chapters, written by two of the editors. Victor Hori's "How Do We Study Buddhism in Canada?" aims to answer this question as well as the more specific question: "What do we need to do to ensure that this academic field accurately describes and explains Buddhism in Canada?" (p. 13). His rough guidelines to establish Buddhism in Canada as a field of study are to (1) resist the distinction between Asian/ethnic and Western/convert, (2) research statistical data and historical information, (3) write life stories of Canadian Buddhists, (4) reflect on appropriate theories and methods to apply to scholarship on Buddhism in Canada, (5) take into account globalization and modernization in Asia, and finally (6) create a new template for training graduate students with less philology and more fieldwork. The rest of the chapter expands on these ideas, many of which are discussed more fully throughout the book.

The second chapter of Part One, Alexander Soucy's "Asian Reformers, Global Organizations: An Exploration of the Possibility of a 'Canadian Buddhism,'" is perhaps the most significant chapter of the book. Therein, Soucy explores the nature of modern Buddhism



as it relates to Buddhism in the West and offers new theoretical ways of thinking about this relationship. By critiquing the notion of an American Buddhism Soucy makes the case that we should consider the question of whether there is such a thing as a Canadian Buddhism. He does this by looking at two global movements, Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing and Shambhala International, founded by the late Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Using these two examples he argues that the characteristics of American Buddhism reflect that of modern global Buddhism so that it is difficult to untangle the two. Thus he finds the characteristics of American Buddhism are really the features of something much broader, so we must move beyond the distinction between Western Buddhists and Asian Buddhists.

Part Two, "Histories and Overviews," answers Hori's call for historical overviews and statistical analysis with two articles focusing on historical communities—one on the early history of Japanese Buddhism in Canada and one more recent historical overview, along with one article analyzing Canadian census data on Buddhism. "Looking East: Japanese Canadians and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, 1905–1970" by Terry Watada focuses on early Japanese settlers in Canada and the establishment of Japanese religious institutions by Shin Buddhists. He uses interviews with Japanese-Canadians and archival research of early Japanese newspapers and newsletters in Canada. This is a tale of how these Buddhists overcame adversity, racism, and isolation; thus, it is a history not just of the developments in the religion but of the communities' troubles and triumphs.

Watada concludes his piece with the 1960s and 70s when other schools of Buddhism started to arrive on Canadian soil. Henry C. H. Shiu's "Buddhism after the Seventies" captures the next stage of history as Buddhism takes root among new immigrants and native-born Canadians. This chapter offers summaries of developments in Japanese, Chinese, Tibetan, and South and Southeast Asian Buddhist groups. Shiu also describes convert-oriented movements such as the Zen boom, the Vipassana movement, and Soka Gakkai International. The author looks at socially engaged Buddhism, new Buddhist movements, and Buddhist education in Canada. The article ends with a summary of Canada's 1971 Multiculturalism Act and how this policy is distinguished from American policy. The author concludes that Buddhism is becoming a mainstream religion and a choice within the cultural landscape of

Canada. Similar to the previous chapter, because of the rich and comprehensive data here, there is little room for analysis.

“Buddhism in Canada: A Statistical Overview from Canadian Censuses, 1981–2001” by Peter Beyer is the sole chapter focusing on statistics of Canadian Buddhists. The essay opens with statements on the futility of statistics and what they obscure. Beyer, however, also finds such data can be useful in explaining the national origin of Canadian Buddhists, as well as their gender, education, and region. Beyer notes significant trends within the population and ethnic composition of Canada’s Buddhists, which he presents in a series of charts. Beyer finds that it is easier to understand the statistics related to the immigrant and ethnic populations as he admits trying to isolate Western Buddhists is fraught with difficulties. He is careful to state the limitations of statistics while at the same time offering some solid conclusions and arguments about the nature and use of such data.

“Part Three: From Global to Local” looks at local movements of global Buddhist organizations in Canada. There are articles here on Jōdo Shinshū and Lao Buddhist communities, Zen practice among converts, Shambhala International in Nova Scotia, and an international program from Taiwan’s Fo Guang Shan called Woodenfish. This section is a highlight of the book as it offers interesting case studies of Buddhist life in Canada with an eye to larger global developments. “Jodo Shinshu in Southern Alberta: From Rural Raymond to Amalgamation” by John S. Harding details the history of an old church, a new temple, and the amalgamation of two Jōdo Shinshū communities in southern Alberta. Harding outlines the adaptations of these communities as successive generations alter their language and practices. Along with this come important issues of assimilation, integration, attraction, and retention. Harding also shows with this case study how the categories of Asian/ethnic and Western/convert break down as the new leaders of this community are no longer immigrants but still have ties to an ethnic Japanese identity.

“That Luang: The Journey and Relocation of Lao Buddhism to Canada” by Marybeth White is based on research as a participant-observer at Wat Lao Veluwanarm in the Greater Toronto Area as well as interviews with members of the community. The chapter opens with a description of That Luang, Laos’ most renowned *stūpa* in Vientiane. She explains the journey of Lao Buddhism to Canada and the significance of That Luang as a symbol for this community. Using Thomas Tweed’s

concept of “dwelling” throughout this chapter, White seeks to understand how Lao communities are creating a place in Canada for their religious tradition. Instead of building on Tweed’s theory, however, the author allows her research to follow Tweed without any challenge. Only in the notes does she critique Tweed for not adequately describing the notion of permanent space that she feels Wat Lao Veluwanarm provides the community.

Based on ethnographic interviews with twelve members of the Zen Buddhist Temple of Toronto, “Transforming Ordinary Life: Turning to Zen Buddhism in Toronto” by Patricia Q. Campbell contributes to research on the appeal and attraction of Buddhist conversion. She asked members of the Zen Buddhist Temple of Toronto with non-Buddhist familial and cultural backgrounds how they came to Buddhism and points out the significant themes that arise within these stories. She also addresses the question of conversion and notes that many regard Buddhism as a nonexclusive religion so that even some long-term practitioners do not feel comfortable calling themselves Buddhist. This chapter provides solid ethnographic data looking at practitioners’ experiences and perspectives on Buddhist identity.

“The Woodenfish Program: Fo Guang Shan, Canadian Youth, and a New Generation of Buddhist Missionaries” by Lina Verchery argues that contrary to scholars’ conclusion that the Taiwanese organization Fo Guang Shan (FGS) has not attracted non-Chinese to their organization, their Woodenfish program successfully appeals to this demographic. The Woodenfish program is a one-month academic residency program held annually at FGS headquarters in southern Taiwan. Verchery argues that this program is central to FGS’s promotion and creation of a “Westernized” or “localized” form of Buddhism. Throughout the chapter she examines ways FGS is modifying Chinese-style Buddhism and thus how the participants, mostly youth from North America, are changing the presentation of Buddhism in the West. With an interesting overview of this program and the changes and accommodations being made to the Western participants, Verchery successfully shows the mutual influence and global connections between FGS and the international participants.

Another noteworthy case study titled “Shambhala International: The Golden Sun of the Great East” by Lynn P. Eldershaw looks at the ideological adaptations within Shambhala International’s presentation of Tibetan Buddhism. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the founder

of this group, created Shambhala Training as a secular program for non-Buddhists and Vajradhatu as a practice that was more closely tied to Tibetan religious traditions. These two strands of Shambhala International have merged under the leadership of Chögyam Trungpa's son, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. Eldershaw details the integration of these two paths as well as the adaptations that Shambhala International has made to accommodate contemporary Western lifestyles, and thus Shambhala is viewed from within the larger framework of Buddhism's adaptation and accommodation to non-Buddhist cultural contexts.

"Part Four: From Local to Global" examines another series of case studies but focuses on the links from Canada to larger global organizations in China and Tibet rather than from the global world to Canada. "Globalization and Modern Transformation of Chinese Buddhism in Three Chinese Temples in Eastern Canada" by Tannie Liu focuses on three Chinese Buddhist communities in Canada and argues that their presence has to be understood in the context of the wider global movement. To this end Liu offers a historical grounding of modern Chinese Buddhist history. She finds that Chinese Buddhism in Canada is not only adapting to a Western environment, but, following Soucy in this volume, it was the Chinese reforms during the mid-twentieth century that have affected Canadian Chinese Buddhism. In this theoretically significant chapter Liu finds that Chinese Buddhism in Canada does not serve to primarily help Chinese immigrants assert and maintain their identity but the temples in Canada are part of global movements aimed at the large migratory population of Chinese Buddhists.

Using materials from the Tzu Chi Merit Society, interviews with scholars and journalists, and visits to several branches of this organization, Andre Laliberte and Manuel Litalien, in "The Tzu Chi Merit Society from Taiwan to Canada," present the Tzu Chi Merit Society as a case study of contemporary Buddhist philanthropy and detail its obstacles for expansion in Canada. Limiting its expansion, the authors find, is its inability to attract members outside of Taiwanese origin. The authors conclude that non-Chinese hesitate to get involved when the dominant language of the members is not English or French. Similar themes emerge in this chapter such as adaptations to the Canadian context, and the retention and attraction of new members. Thus the vitality of this movement is being studied in this interesting if not crucial chapter.

“A Relationship of Reciprocity: Globalization, Skillful Means, and Tibetan Buddhism in Canada” by Sarah F. Haynes addresses one of the main themes of this volume—the relationship between ethnic and convert Buddhist communities. Specifically Haynes addresses Tibetan Buddhism and the process of globalization within developing communities in Canada. Haynes focuses on Tibetan refugee communities, which arrived in Canada in the 1970s, and their relationship with Western-based Tibetan Buddhist communities in Canada. The points of attraction of Tibetan Buddhism for Canadians is also examined here, through investigating the role of the media, the impact of Tibetan politics and the Dalai Lama, and the use of skillful means or appropriate action (*upāya-kauśalya*) in disseminating this newly globalized religion. In interviews with non-Canadian Tibetan Buddhists and careful media analysis, Haynes offers a significant contribution to ideas of global Buddhism through the lens of Tibetan Buddhist communities in Canada.

Part Five contains only two chapters but contributes to Hori’s request for recordings of life stories of Canadian Buddhists. But a life story is only valuable if it furthers the conversation of Canadian Buddhism and relates to issues within this sub-field, as both of the essays in this section attempt to do. “Albert Low: A Quest for a Truthful Life” by Mauro Peressini is a study of British Zen Master Albert Low, who is now eighty years old and the long-time director of the Montreal Zen Center. Peressini composed this biography by reading Low’s works, including an unpublished autobiography and filmed interviews. The story begins with Low’s spiritual quest in adolescence and details Low’s associations with Scientology, experiences of *kenshō* (momentary flashes of oneness/insight), as well as his family’s immigration to Canada and subsequent formal discovery of Zen through Philip Kapleau. The most useful part of this chapter is Peressini’s conclusions drawn from Low’s life that can help to understand how Buddhism is taking root in Canada. To this end, Peressini discusses Low’s perspectives on such issues as adaptation, lay practice, teacher-student relations, and Western individualism, which all relate to broader trends within Buddhism in the West.

“Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri: Buddhist” by Victor Hori and Janet McLellan tells the story of a lay Buddhist leader of Canadian Buddhism. The authors argue that Sugunasiri’s life is a window onto the history of Buddhism in Canada as he has dedicated it to Canadian Buddhism’s development. This chapter details Sugunasiri’s passion for spreading

Buddhism in Canada through the many projects he has created as well as his participation in media and interfaith groups. The chapter also outlines his own theology regarding Buddhism and his take on Buddhism in the West. To conclude, this chapter looks at what Sugunasiri's life story reveals in relation to major issues within Buddhism in Canada. Specifically, the authors find that Sugunasiri represents the conservative end on the spectrum of adapting Buddhism to Canada, especially in comparison with Western-born Buddhist leaders. With these two essays it is clear that more scholarship on life stories will reveal different strategies and perspectives regarding the adaptation of Buddhism to the West.

Unlike most edited volumes, this one offers a "Conclusion" in order to discuss which direction the study of Buddhism in Canada should take from here. The editors highlight a number of false assumptions scholars often bring to the study of Buddhism in Canada, such as preconceived ideas about what is modern and what is traditional, the division of Buddhist communities into Asian/ethnic and Western/convert, and the nature of global and local influences. To counter these assumptions, the editors argue that Buddhism in Canada is not unique but only the latest development in the global movement of Buddhism that began during the Asian reforms in contact with Christian missionaries and Western colonialists. They also hope that scholars will see Buddhism in the West as a kind of ethnic Buddhism and that there is no inherent correlation between modern and Western and traditional and Asian. The editors also point to the continued global interactions and influences between Canadian and global Buddhist communities rather than a one-time adaptation and movement from Asia to Canada. The other conclusions suggest that scholars need to collect more factual data and, similar to Hori's introductory chapter, that universities need to train researchers in more developed programs for the study of Buddhism in Canada.

As is the case with edited volumes, some articles are stronger than others and contribute more fully to the purpose of the book. However, most of the authors signify their awareness of the intentions of the volume and refer to other articles within the book. Thus there is a coherency here that is rarely seen in such a large series of essays. The "Introduction" and "Conclusion" also add to this coherency. The "Introduction" presents ways to enhance the study of Buddhism in Canada and the volume follows by modeling this advice.

The “Conclusion” points the way forward to creating more valuable scholarship in the field. Therefore there is much to recommend in this volume for those interested in Buddhism in Western countries or global Buddhist movements. This book makes significant contributions to the study of Buddhism in Canada, marking it as a leading contributor to theories of Buddhism’s global movements.





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### **The *Pacific World*—Its History**

Throughout my life, I have sincerely believed that Buddhism is a religion of peace and compassion, a teaching which will bring spiritual tranquillity to the individual, and contribute to the promotion of harmony and peace in society. My efforts to spread the Buddha's teachings began in 1925, while I was a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley. This beginning took the form of publishing the *Pacific World*, on a bi-monthly basis in 1925 and 1926, and then on a monthly basis in 1927 and 1928. Articles in the early issues concerned not only Buddhism, but also other cultural subjects such as art, poetry, and education, and then by 1928, the articles became primarily Buddhist. Included in the mailing list of the early issues were such addressees as the Cabinet members of the U.S. Government, Chambers of Commerce, political leaders, libraries, publishing houses, labor unions, and foreign cultural institutions.

After four years, we had to cease publication, primarily due to lack of funds. It was then that I vowed to become independently wealthy so that socially beneficial projects could be undertaken without financial dependence on others. After founding the privately held company, Mitutoyo Corporation, I was able to continue my lifelong commitment to disseminate the teachings of Buddha through various means.

As one of the vehicles, the *Pacific World* was again reactivated, this time in 1982, as the annual journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies. For the opportunity to be able to contribute to the propagation of Buddhism and the betterment of humankind, I am eternally grateful. I also wish to thank the staff of the Institute of Buddhist Studies for helping me to advance my dream to spread the spirit of compassion among the peoples of the world through the publication of the *Pacific World*.

Yehan Numata  
Founder, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai

### **In Remembrance**

In May of 1994, my father, Yehan Numata, aged 97 years, returned to the Pure Land after earnestly serving Buddhism throughout his lifetime. I pay homage to the fact that the *Pacific World* is again being printed and published, for in my father's youth, it was the passion to which he was wholeheartedly devoted.

I, too, share my father's dream of world peace and happiness for all peoples. It is my heartfelt desire that the *Pacific World* helps to promote spiritual culture throughout all humanity, and that the publication of the *Pacific World* be continued.

Toshihide Numata  
Chairman, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai