

On
Understanding
Japanese
Religion

Joseph M. Kitagawa



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For Evelyn and Anne Rose

Preface

THERE ARE MANY reasons for the publication of this volume, not the least of which is its aim to draw together in a single volume articles which originally appeared in disparate sources, many of them hard to obtain now. That fact may partially explain why the collection as it stands seems to betray a certain lack of balance and why it occasionally repeats the same theme. On the other hand, there may be some good reason to have studies in Japanese religion seen primarily from the perspective of the history of religions collected and available to students.

By training and profession, I am both a historian of religions and an Orientalist. Contrary to those who believe that the history of religions (*Religionswissenschaft*) is nothing but an umbrella term for all kinds of inquiries into specialized phenomena, I am persuaded that the history of religions is a discipline with its own coherent methodology and objectives.¹ Just as a student of linguistics from time to time feels called upon to deal with specific languages—not so much to get to know those languages as to advance his or her research in linguistics—the historian of religions often takes up the study of specific preliterate, classical, or modern religions. This is even more true in my case, as I have tried to remain both a historian of religions and a specialist in Japanese religion. I have thus studied Japanese religion and Buddhism for what the richness of these traditions might contribute to my understanding of the history of religions; but, conversely, I have also tried to bring the perspective and methodology of the history of religions to bear on my studies of Japanese religion and Buddhism. (It of course must be admitted that even though anyone studying Japanese religion must be sufficiently informed about Buddhism, Buddhist studies are obviously a legitimate area quite apart from studies of Japanese religion as such.)

In retrospect, it becomes more evident that my aspiration to become both a historian of religions and a student of Japanese religion was

¹ For my understanding of the perspective and methodology, see my articles in M. Eliade and J. M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); J. M. Kitagawa, ed., *The History of Religions: Essays on the Problem of Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); and idem, ed., *The History of Religions: Retrospect and Prospect* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

not so easily fulfilled, partly because of my upbringing. During the better part of my childhood, my father—a Confucianist-turned-Christian minister—was the pastor of a church in Kashiwara City, where the legendary first emperor of Japan was said to have founded the Japanese nation. Being brought up in the Kashiwara area with children of Shinto and Buddhist clerics among my playmates, and attending the Unebi Middle School, at which a series of eminent Japanese historians had taught, made me early on deeply appreciative of ancient Japanese culture. I could walk to many of the places mentioned in the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters), in the *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan), and in the early collection of verses called the *Man'yōshū*. Education was conducted according to the directives of the government, which was attempting to impose both the cult of the emperor and State Shinto on the Japanese people. My classes were thus required to make numerous trips to the Kashiwara Shrine, the legendary birthplace of the Japanese nation, and to the Unebi Imperial Mausoleum, where the first emperor presumably was buried. Our art teachers obliged us to visit old Buddhist temples to see famous Japanese, Korean, and Chinese paintings and other works of art. From my childhood experiences, then, I gained the strong impression that Japanese religion is a composite of different religious traditions, each with its own dynamics, and that the way to study Japanese religion is to study these traditions separately.

Even today I feel the importance of learning in depth the different strands of Japanese religion, to which many of the articles in this volume can attest. I would like to resist, however, the temptation to look at the whole of Japanese religion through the mental window of just one of its constituent elements. For example, some of my Shinto friends tend to feel that the most enduring thread within Japanese religion has been Shinto, which has managed to “indigenize” Confucianism and Taoism as well as Buddhism. Some of my Buddhist friends (who readily acknowledge the foreign origin of Buddhism) feel that the pre-Buddhist Japanese religion lacked sophistication in cosmology and epistemology, and that it was primarily Buddhism which elevated the religious standards of the Japanese people. Perhaps less surprisingly, Confucian diehards assert that from the seventh century onward, it was Confucianism which provided an invisible framework for both Shinto and Buddhism, and that the best way to understand Japanese religion is to see how Confucianism has penetrated every corner of Japanese life. Interestingly, I have met many Western observers and scholars who reflect these disparate views.

In college, I learned of two other ways to look at Japanese religion.

The first comprises a “religion and . . .” approach. Religion in Japan, as elsewhere, is closely related to other aspects of human life; thus, it is understandable that scholars in the fields of art, polity, sociology, economics, psychology, and so forth explore the meaning of Japanese religion in order to gain a better understanding of their respective subjects. And, not infrequently, these studies of nonreligious subjects illuminate aspects of religious meaning that have been overlooked by scholars of religion(s). This is particularly true in the areas of art and polity because of the proximity of religious and aesthetic experiences and of religion and state in Japan.

I also learned to appreciate the relevance of religion’s influence on the *Zeitgeist*. Certainly it would be impossible to discuss the ethos of early Japan without considering the influence of religious and semi-religious systems such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism on Japanese culture and society. How could one explicate the medieval mood of Japan, especially during the thirteenth century, without some appreciation of the heightened religious consciousness stimulated by leaders in the Pure Land, Zen, Nichiren, and Ise Shinto movements? Here again, studies of the *Zeitgeist* (prehistoric, early, medieval, pre-modern, and modern) might uncover some of the hitherto neglected aspects of Japanese religion. Important as the “religion and . . .” approach and studies of the *Zeitgeist* are, however, I am persuaded that they will not replace the study of Japanese religion any more than do studies of the specific features of Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

THROUGHOUT my thirty-odd years of teaching at the University of Chicago, I have encountered students with various motivations. Many students of the history of religions approach Japanese religion as a part of the religious experience of the human race and go on to explore the meaning and purpose of religion in human life. Among students of Far Eastern languages and civilizations, some are interested in the study of Japanese religion per se; others are attracted to specific religious systems—Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism, Japanese folk religion, and so forth; still others are motivated to study religious influences on a variety of subjects, including art, the state, literature, economics, and the *Zeitgeist*. And as is so often the case, I have learned much in teaching these graduate students.

In 1962-63, I was asked to give five lectures under the general title of “Religion in Japanese History” in the American Council of Learned Societies’ Lectures on the History of Religions. These lectures were

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later published under the same title, and in the preface to that volume I stated:

The complexity of the historic interaction of various religious systems in Japan is such that it would have been safer, for readers as well as for the author, if the study concentrated either on the religious development of one historic period or on one of the major religious systems, such as Shinto, Buddhism, or Japanese Confucianism. However, the scarcity of works, especially in Western languages, dealing with Japanese religion as a whole challenged me to undertake the present task.²

I went on to say:

I shall approach Japanese religion historically, not only in the sense of studying its involvement in the social and political life of the nation . . . but also to show how the universal phenomenon called "religion" has unfolded itself in the drama of Japanese history.³

Basically, I am persuaded that Japanese religion has been singularly preoccupied with *this* world, with its emphasis on finding ways to cohabit with the *kami* (sacred) and with other human beings. Also, Japanese religion, like other nonrevelatory religions, ultimately seeks an "immanentist theocratic model" from a synthesis of polity, religion, society, and culture, just as religions based on a transcendental deity and its revelation often seek a "theocratic principle." In the course of the Japanese experience, there have been three major syntheses: the Ritsuryō (imperial rescript) of the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., the Tokugawa (1603-1868), and the Meiji (1868-1945).

The Ritsuryō synthesis. Briefly stated, the Ritsuryō synthesis was primarily based on three principles: (1) the mutual dependence of Emperor's Law and Buddha's Law (*Ōbō-Buppō*), (2) Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism (*Shin-Butsu Shūgō*), and (3) the belief in Japanese deities as manifestations of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of India (*honji suijaku*). Saichō, called posthumously Dengyō Daishi (A.D. 767-822), described himself in his famous vow as "the greatest among all fools, and the least worthy among men, having violated the teaching of the Buddha and the laws of the sovereign, and failed in filial piety and propriety. . . ."⁴ Thus he portrayed himself as both a firm

² J. M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. vi.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ His "Vow" was translated in Wing-tsit Chan, I. R. al-Fārūqī, J. M. Kitagawa, and P. T. Raju, comps., *The Great Asian Religions: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 266-267.

believer in *Ōbō-Buppō* mutual dependence and a practitioner of the Shinto-Buddhism-Confucianism combination which was the main tenet of the Ritsuryō system. Clearly, Ritsuryō Japan followed the model of Emperor Wen Ti of Sui China (r. 581-604), who unified races, cultures, and diverse areas of his empire by subordinating Confucianism, Buddhism, and, to a lesser degree, Taoism to the throne. Likewise the architects of the Ritsuryō system did not hesitate to equate the sacred modalities of Buddhism with those of native Shinto traditions. Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism precipitated the establishment of Jingū-ji (Buddhist chapels dedicated to Shinto *kami*) and Shinto chapels within the Buddhist temple compounds. This synthesis furthered popular acceptance of the theory of *honji suijaku* because it was articulated not by Shinto theoreticians but by Tendai and Shingon esoteric masters in terms of *Sannō-ichijitsu-Shinto* or *Ryōbu-Shinto*.⁵

As I pointed out in "Monarchy and Government: Traditions and Ideologies in Pre-Modern Japan," which appears in this volume, the Ritsuryō system was destined to undergo some formal changes, but its ideology persisted until the Ōnin War (1467-1477), which ushered in the age of Sengoku (incessant wars among feudal lords). It took three strongmen—Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), and Tokugawa Iyeyasu (1542-1616)—to unify Japan under a new ideological synthesis. The first two, Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, gave lip service to *Ōbō* (the Sovereign's Law) but rejected the first cardinal principle of the Ritsuryō synthesis: that *Ōbō* needed *Buppō* (Buddha's Law) for the sake of the nation.⁶ Both men thus campaigned against the rich and powerful Buddhist institutions on Mount Hiei and Mount Kōya and against the Hongan-ji, the main temple of True Pure Land Buddhism.

The Tokugawa synthesis. In 1603, Iyeyasu established the Tokugawa feudal regime (*bakufu* or shogunate). A new type of "immanentist theocracy," it was a comprehensive political, social, legal, philosophical, religious, and moral order under the Tokugawa *shōgun* (generalissimo). In sharp contrast to the Ritsuryō system, which was based on

⁵ See Noboru Miyata, ed., *Kami to Hotoke* (*Kami* and the Buddha) (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1983) and Ichiro Ishida, *Kami to Nihon bunka* (*Kami* and Japanese Civilization) (Tokyo: Perikan-sha, 1983). On the technical Shingon debates on *honji* and *kami*, see Minoru Kiyota, *Shingon Buddhism: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles and Tokyo: Buddhist Books International, 1978), pp. 74-80.

⁶ On Nobunaga's religious policy, see Neil McMullin, *Buddhism and State in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

a Shinto version of sacred kingship, the Tokugawa synthesis was based on the Neo-Confucian principles of natural laws and natural norms implicit in human, social, and political order, all grounded in the Will of Heaven.

Although the Tokugawa regime considered Neo-Confucianism the official and guiding principle for the nation, it used Buddhist institutions to fortify its claims. In fact, Tokugawa shoguns skillfully maneuvered the Buddhist schools into serving as the bulwark of the regime. But the second cardinal principle of the Ritsuryō system, the institutional synthesis of Shinto and Buddhism, was still operative. Reared in the tradition of the Pure Land (Jōdo) School, Iyeyasu honored this Buddhist denomination by building an impressive edifice for the Zōjō-ji (temple) in Edo. At the same time, he catered to his adviser Tenkai's Sannō-ichijitsu-Shinto (the so-called Tendai Shinto); in return, Tenkai declared Iyeyasu the "Sun God of the East," to contrast with the "Sun God of the West," the emperor.

The Tokugawa system preserved as well the third basic principle of the Ritsuryō synthesis, the theory of Japanese deities as manifestations of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of India (*honji suijaku*). A passage in the edict banning Christianity and revealing Iyeyasu's understanding of the belief in *honji suijaku* reads: "Japan is called the land of the Buddha and not without reason . . . [*kami*] and Buddha differ in name, but their meaning is one."⁷

In short, the Tokugawa feudal regime had no room for *Ōbō* or *Ōbō-Buppō* mutual dependence (the first principle of the Ritsuryō system), was surprisingly supportive of Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism (the second principle), and openly affirmed the doctrine of *honji suijaku* (the third principle).

The Meiji synthesis. The combined effect of internal and external pressures resulted in the dissolution of the Tokugawa feudal regime and fostered direct monarchical rule under the boy emperor, Meiji, in 1868. The architects of the new regime were a group of ambitious warriors and lower courtiers who agreed on pragmatic policies and attempted to combine the earlier Ritsuryō and Tokugawa syntheses. They were aware that there was no room for the mutual dependence of *Ōbō-Buppō* and they dissolved Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism by proclaiming the separation of Shinto from Buddhism (*Shin-Butsu Hanzen-rei*). Instead, the Meiji regime concocted the hitherto

⁷ Quoted in Sir Charles Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), p. 309.

unknown State Shinto as a “nonreligious” (the term used by the government) national cult closely related to the cult of the emperor. The new regime did nothing, however, to interfere with the belief in *honji suijaku*. The precarious attempt to incorporate elements of the modern West and features of the Ritsuryō and Tokugawa syntheses into a new system could not halt so persistent a religious pattern as *honji suijaku*.

The belief in *honji suijaku* was kept alive through the reigns of Meiji (1868-1912), Taishō (1912-1926), and Shōwa (1926-) until 1945. Since then, Japan has become a modern, secular industrial nation in which there is no room for “immanent theocracy” in any form, as I point out in “The Religious Ethos of Present-Day Japan,” which is included in this volume. Nowadays, the Japanese people have no use for the principles of mutually dependent “sovereign’s law and Buddha’s law” (*Ōbō-Buppō*) or Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism (*Shin-Butsu Shūgō*). Yet an amazing number of Japanese continue to affirm the simplistic equation of *kami* and the Buddha.

THE ESSAYS of the present volume were selected from diverse articles I have written, mostly in English, over nearly three decades. Some of them, therefore, do not have up-to-date references, although it is hoped that their theses are still important and defensible. (It may be useful to mention my contribution, entitled “The Japanese Religion,” to *A Reader’s Guide to the Great Religions*, edited by C. J. Adams, for the benefit of those who need more current bibliographical data.⁸) For the same reason, the present volume does not pretend to present a well-balanced portrayal of all aspects of Japanese religion. Thus the book is unevenly divided into five parts: Prehistory, Historic Development of Japanese Religion, Shinto Tradition, Buddhist Tradition, and the Modern Phase of the Japanese Religious Tradition. An appended section, on Buddhism in this country, rounds out the book.

Prehistory. No one is certain how far back we can trace human habitation in the Japanese islands, for future archaeological discoveries could easily change our views on this problem. But as far as we now know, stone implements that belonged to early inhabitants can be traced to the so-called Tachikawa loam bed, a deposit of volcanic ash laid down on the Kantō plain in mid-Pleistocene times, some four to five hundred thousand years ago. The existence of such stone implements indicates that, although these early people did not yet possess pottery, they had passed the stage of scraping out a livelihood with

⁸ Published by The Free Press, New York, N.Y., 1965 and 1977.

their bare hands. It is estimated that this “pre-ceramic” period lasted for at least ten to twenty thousand years and can be divided into three stages based on developments in stone tool technology:

The first dates back thirty thousand years to a time preceding the diffusion of knife-shaped tools. The second stage was about twenty thousand years ago when knife-shaped tools of all kinds were extensively used. In the third and last stage, knife-shaped tools were eclipsed by thin stone blades known as microliths.⁹

These early Japanese soon began to use fire, which fostered the production of pottery, and which, in turn, ushered in the Jōmon period described in the first article, “Prehistoric Background of Japanese Religion.” In recent years, archaeologists have been joined by scholars from other disciplines—history, anthropology, mythology, linguistics, art, and religion—in exploring the pre-ceramic and archaeological stages of life in Japan.

Historic Development of Japanese Religion. In my book, *Religion in Japanese History*, I dwelt chiefly on the last two of the three syntheses in Japanese experience, those of the Tokugawa and the Meiji. Certain articles in this volume, however, demonstrate my keen interest in the first, the Ritsuryō, synthesis, which is the paradigmatic form of “immanent theocracy.” In two articles, “‘A Past of Things Present’: Notes on Major Motifs of Early Japanese Religions” and “Some Remarks on the Study of Sacred Texts,” I attempt to show that the so-called chronicles—the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*—were not unbiased ancient histories but were written from the perspective of the Ritsuryō synthesis of the seventh and eighth centuries. These chronicles contain mythologies of the old “imperial ideology,” as N. Saigō has phrased it.¹⁰ Even the *Man'yōshū*, which has been considered by many to be a collection of primarily nonideological nature poems, contains in fact many verses attributed to official “court reciters” (*kataribe*). One such poet laureate was the celebrated Kakinomoto Hitomaro, who, as a composer “of poems of praise and lament of the imperial family,” crafted “iconic images which ‘prove’ the divinity of the imperial family.”¹¹ The verses of the *kataribe* were intimately related to the political

⁹ *The History of Kanagawa* (Yokohama: Kanagawa Prefectural Government, 1985), p. 5.

¹⁰ Nobutsuna Saigō, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: Nihon Hyoron-sha, 1947), p. 291.

¹¹ Ian Hideo Levy, *The Ten Thousand Leaves*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 14. According to Nakanishi, the age of the *Man'yō* may be divided into four periods. During the first period (A.D. 645-672), there were a number of female court poets (*o'una*). During the second period (A.D. 672-702), these female court poets

and religious developments of the seventh and eighth centuries; they particularly reflected the growth of the Ritsuryō system.

Religiously motivated and religiously inspired political ideologies were key elements of the Ritsuryō, Tokugawa, and Meiji syntheses. In the final analysis, however, it is difficult to determine whether these ideologies were more religious or more political. I emphasize the religious aspect in “Stages of the Japanese ‘Religious Universe’” and the political aspect in “Monarchy and Government: Traditions and Ideologies in Pre-Modern Japan.” Yet the three syntheses arose not only from the importance of religious traditions, value systems, and ideologies; they also concerned the well-being of human beings—their hopes, dreams, ambitions, and disappointments. Thus my article, “The Shadow of the Sun,” treats the concerns and destinies of the Fujiwaras and the imperial family, whose paths crossed throughout Japanese history from the seventh century onward. Both families supported, sometimes modified, and often were supported by, the different modes of synthesis. It is virtually impossible to explain the history of the Fujiwara family—why it was content to support and not to supplant the imperial family, for example—to non-Japanese, with the possible exception of the Nepalese who, in the Fujiwara family, may see reproduced a lineage similar to the hereditary family of their prime minister. If one can understand the mystery of the Fujiwara family as the “shadow of the sun,” however, one can very likely understand many facets of Japanese society, culture, and religion.

A well-known salient feature of Japanese religion has been its affirmation of the principle of *saisei-itchi* (unity of church and state, or of religious affairs and political administration). It is undeniably difficult for those raised in the tradition of the separation of church and state to understand this principle. In my article, “*Matsuri* and *Matsuri-goto*: Religion and State in Early Japan,” I have explicated the ancient religious rationale for this principle.¹² Another salient feature of Japanese

were overshadowed by male court reciters (*kataribe*). (Nakanishi thinks that Kakimoto Hitomaro was the last major *kataribe*.) During the third period (A.D. 702-729), the *Man'yō* poems included an increasing number of noncourt themes. Finally, during the fourth period (A.D. 729-759), ritual functions traditionally performed by court poets, female or male, were gradually taken over by the new “religious leaders,” that is, Buddhist or Shinto clerics. (Susumu Nakanishi, *Man'yō no sekai* [The World of the *Man'yō*] [Tokyo, n.p., 1973], pp. 19-42.)

¹² How to square the tradition of the unity of religion and state with the postwar constitutional guarantee of religious liberty is a very difficult question. When the emperor visits the Grand Shrine of Ise, the tutelary shrine of the imperial family, questions have been raised as to whether he visits Ise as a private individual or as the emperor; for, since 1959, important national ceremonies have been officially required to be conducted according to Shinto rites and, since 1960, the *shintai* (literally, “*kami* body”) of

religion throughout its history has been the crucial importance of pilgrimage. My essay, "Three Types of Pilgrimage in Japan," therefore disagrees with those who define religion primarily in terms of doctrine, ethics, or cultic practices.

Shinto Tradition. I cannot explain why I have published several articles on the Shinto tradition in Japanese, German, and Italian, but only one in English.¹³ The article, "Shinto," in the present volume was written for Italian publication and has not previously appeared in English. There are two diametrically opposed approaches to Shinto. The first is espoused by leaders and adherents of Shinto. A major Shinto theorist, Sokyō Ono, states:

From time immemorial the Japanese people have believed in and worshipped *kami* [an honorific term for the sacred and the sacred spirits that permeate everything in the universe] *as an expression of their native racial faith* which arose in the mystic days of remote antiquity. *To be sure, foreign influences are evident.* This *kami*-faith cannot be fully understood without some reference to them. *Yet it is as indigenous as the people* that brought the Japanese nation into existence and ushered in its new civilization; and like that civilization, the *kami*-faith has progressively developed throughout the centuries and still continues to do so in modern times.¹⁴

The second view is represented by Ichirō Ishida, a well-known intellectual historian, who insists that Shinto has been transformed several times during the course of Japan's history by allying itself with—or by surrendering to—alien religious traditions (Buddhism and Confucianism) or native ideologies (the National Learning of the family-based State-ism).¹⁵ There is truth to both views. Ironically, those who hold the first view often exaggerate the importance of Shinto, thus making it almost a synonym for the whole of Japanese religion, while those who hold the second view often minimize Shinto's importance. Immediately following World War II, Shinobu Origuchi caused a heated controversy in Shinto circles by advocating a change from the tribal ethos of Shinto to the ethos of a global religion through a separation of the belief in the imperial system from Shinto itself.¹⁶ Is the

the Ise shrine has been declared to belong to the imperial family. There also does not seem to be a good solution to the current debate on whether the prime minister can officially visit the Yasukuni shrine for deceased soldiers.

¹³ J. M. Kitagawa, "Shinto," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 12 (1961).

¹⁴ Sokyō Ono, *The "Kami" Way: An Introduction to Shrine Shinto* (Tokyo and Rutland, Vermont: Bridgeway Press, 1959), p. 1. (Emphasis mine.)

¹⁵ Ichirō Ishida, *Kami to Nihon-Bunka* (*Kami and Japanese Civilization*) (Tokyo: n.p., 1983), p. 10.

¹⁶ Referred to in Nanzan shūkyō-kenkyūjo, *Shinto to Kirisuto-kyō* (Shinto and Christianity) (Tokyo: Shunjū-sha, 1984), p. 32.

imperial system *esse, bene esse*, or accidental to Shinto? What other institutions or qualities are necessary for Shinto? Unfortunately, I have more questions than answers about the Shinto tradition as a part of Japanese religion.¹⁷

Buddhist Tradition. I hope it is clear that my having written more on Buddhism than on Shinto in English is purely accidental. The article, "The Saṃgha and the Ecclesia," stresses the importance of the *saṃgha* not only as the institutional form of Buddhist faith but also as its object, since all adherents must take refuge in the three treasures (the *Buddha*, the *dharma*, and the *saṃgha*). I wrote "Master and Saviour" about the charismatic figure, Kūkai (774-835), who established the Esoteric School (*Mikkyō*) of Buddhism in Japan. After his death he was deified, an act that reflects the characteristic tendency of Japanese religion to depend on the charisma of the holy man as an efficacious aid to salvation. As I have also noted in the article, "The Buddhist Transformation in Japan," the uniqueness of Japanese Buddhism owes a great deal to the Esoteric School—also known as Tantrayāna, Mantrayāna, or Vajrayāna—which originally developed in India several centuries after the rise of the Mahāyāna tradition. The Esoteric School penetrated China significantly later than the introduction of the Mahāyāna tradition there; but in Japan, the introduction of Mahāyāna in the mid-sixth century was followed very quickly by the penetration of Esoteric deities and scriptures.

One of the two Esoteric Buddhist schools in Japan was the Shingon (Chên-yen in Chinese) School, introduced by Kūkai. It is usually called Tō-Mitsu, meaning *Mikkyō* (Esoteric School) connected with the Tō-ji, an important Shingon temple in Kyoto. A second school was the Tendai (T'ien T'ai in Chinese) School, which was founded by Saichō (Dengyō Daishi, 767-822) and is usually called Tai-Mitsu, meaning *Mikkyō* connected with the Tendai monastic center at Mount Hiei. Saichō was attracted by the Chinese T'ien T'ai system, which attempted to combine moral precepts, monastic discipline, Zen (Ch'an) meditation, and Esoteric cult practices within the framework of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The religious ideas associated with Kūkai's Tō-Mitsu and Saichō's Tai-Mitsu dominated the Japanese religious scene, particularly after the time of Ennin (792-862), chief priest of the Tendai School and an advocate of the *Nembutsu* (recitation of the name of Amida Buddha). In fact, most of the prominent Buddhist figures in Japan—

¹⁷ Many pertinent questions on Shinto were raised in the *Proceedings of the Second International Conference for Shinto Studies: Continuity and Change* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1968).

PREFACE

Yōsai (or Eisai, 1141-1215), Hōnen (1133-1212), Shinran (1173-1262), Nichiren (1222-1282), and Dōgen (1200-1253)—were trained in the Tai-Mitsu tradition, and they were strongly conscious of the transmission of *dharma* through patriarchal lineage and sacred scriptures. I believe that it was this strong impact of Esoteric insights that later enabled the Japanese Buddhist tradition to be integrated so smoothly into the mainstream of Japanese religion.

Strangely enough, Japanese Buddhism, which became a self-conscious feature of Japanese religion, always looked not to India but to China for its source of legitimacy. As I discuss in the article, “Buddhist Translation in Japan,” this focus is without doubt the underlying psychological reason for the absence of Japanese translations of the Indian Buddhist scriptures until our time. Yet, as I explicate in “The Career of Maitreya, with Special Reference to Japan,” Maitreya, who inspired political revolutions in China as well as in South and Southeast Asia and who was the eschatological symbol of the Buddhist tradition, completely lost eschatological meaning in the context of Japanese religion, preoccupied as it is with existence in the “here and now” of this world.

In my article, “Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism,” I compare the ideals of Japanese Buddhism to those of the Indian, South Asian, and Chinese Buddhist traditions. Contrary to those who uphold the “plural belonging theory”—that the Japanese belong simultaneously to Shinto, Buddhist, Confucian, folk religious, and other traditions—I believe that Japanese Buddhists are self-consciously heirs of both historic Buddhism and Japanese religion.¹⁸

The Modern Phase of the Japanese Religious Tradition. We suffer today from a strange cultural tendency which divides history into two components—traditional and modern—with the implication that whatever is not modern is traditional and so worthless. The author of this volume does not subscribe to that view. Irving Kristol’s observation that “the twentieth century began in 1945”¹⁹ is, however, applicable to Japan: in losing World War II, Japan was subjected for the first time in her history to occupation by foreign forces. The year 1945 thus marked the end of the Meiji synthesis.

There is real wisdom in placing postwar Japan in the larger context of modern history as I try to do in “The Religious Ethos of Present-Day Japan.” On examination of this essay, one finds that modern Ja-

¹⁸ This is taken for granted in *Understanding Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo: Twelfth WFB Confab Japan Committee, Japan Buddhist Federation, 1978).

¹⁹ In the Magazine section of the Sunday *New York Times*, 2 May 1965, p. 25.

pan is a peculiar mixture of external forces and internal dynamics. Westernization, for example, was not imposed by outsiders but was the conscious policy of the architects of modern Japan. They were willing to welcome things Western because of their secure grounding in the Eastern ethos, particularly in the Confucian tradition. One realizes as well that Westernization was inevitably instrumental in the modernization of Japan. These two trends, Westernization and modernization, confused both insiders and outsiders. Elements of this knotty issue are discussed in my article, "Some Reflections on Foreign Scholars' Understanding of Japanese Culture and Shinto."²⁰

While many Japanese and Westerners equated Westernization with modernization, there were some scholars—as I indicate in my article, "Buddhism and Modern Japanese Thought"—who perceived their own cultural experiences in modern, global terms. A group of thinkers often called the Kyoto School is a case in point. Their pioneers were Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945) and his junior colleague at Kyoto University, Hajime Tanabe (1885-1962). Concerning this school, Y. Takeuchi has written:

Adopting Western methods, utilizing Western categories, and at the same time criticizing both, they endeavour to find a new way to express their original philosophical insights and often, in view of the results so far achieved, their own life and world views, nurtured in the tradition of Oriental thought.²¹

Usually not identified with the Kyoto School were thinkers such as D. T. Suzuki (1870-1960), Nishida's childhood friend;²² Seichi Hatano (1877-1950), author of *A Study of Spinoza* (1910); Tetsurō Watsuji (1899-1960); and Satomi Takahashi (1886-1964). All addressed themselves neither to the East nor to the West but to the world. Many members of the Kyoto School have been influenced by the Zen or Amida traditions, as well as by the Confucian element of Japanese religion. This is evidenced in the contrast between Western thinkers, who defined thinking as being, substance, the individual, and self-awareness, and these modern Japanese thinkers, who dug into their religio-philosophical-cultural tradition until they reached the con-

²⁰ See also the introduction to J. M. Kitagawa, ed., *Understanding Modern China* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), pp. 21-41.

²¹ Yoshinori Takeuchi, "Japanese Philosophy," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1968 ed., 12:958J-959.

²² To date, D. T. Suzuki has been known primarily as the interpreter of Zen to the West. It is my feeling, however, that in the future, Suzuki's contribution to Nishida's thinking and his reflection of Nishida's religio-cultural background will be better understood.