READY ASSIMILATION: BUDDHISM AND JAPANESE RELIGION

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Introduction

Being asked to speak on a topic as broad as 'Civilizational encounters: The Japanese encounter with Buddhism and Confucianism in comparative perspective' is problematic as it raises questions of whether to focus in on a narrow area of the subject, to attempt to paint a very broad (and generalist) picture or to do what I shall do, which is to steer a path between the two and risk producing a confusing and unclear result. I shall narrow the field slightly by looking at Buddhism, not Confucianism, with the caveat that Confucianism and Buddhism cannot in any case be readily be disentangled in Japan: what aspects of the ancestor system, ancestor worship and the values of filial piety (Japanese: kôkô 孝行) can be said to be Buddhist, what Confucian and what, indeed, basic elements in any pre-Buddhist/ Confucianist Japanese religious worldview? In this paper I shall be making reference not only to the work of Professor Eisenstadt (referred to in references as E) but also to Professor Arnason (A), whose book is, along with Professor Eisenstadt's, a welcome addition to the study of Japanese society and civilisation.

I shall largely focus on the nature of Buddhism and on certain aspects of the religious dynamic in Japan that require further study and, in so doing I rely, in some sections of this paper, on a book I have co-authored with George Tanabe of the University of Hawaii, entitled *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Hawaii, 1998). I make no apology for this self-publicity, since the book deals with issues we are concerned with here, to do with the nature of Buddhism and its dynamics in Japan, and to what Tanabe and I see as the common core of religion in Japan- a common core produced through the interactions of Buddhism and other religious traditions (notably the folk religious tradition) in Japan. The sections I cite deal specifically with the question of Buddhism as a this-worldly religion, which is a basic thesis of the book. I will also make some comments about the dynamics of Japanese religion in relation to charisma and folk religion, which are central to an understanding of Japanese religion and which involve interactions with Buddhism as well. I will finish with a postcript, which has little immediate link to the rest of the paper but which I felt ought to be given, since it raises a query about some interpretations of new reli-

gions that appear in Eisenstadt's book and because it relates directly to my current work. The postscript initially concerns a new religion of the very modern day that has used Buddhist imagery and interpretations of Buddhism, along with elements of charismatic leadership, and that has posed a major challenge of interpretation to scholars of religion while raising also questions pertinent to some of the discussions we are having. The religion I am talking of is Aum Shinrikyô, which has (inadvertently) done probably more than any other religion to alter the tendency noted and rightly criticised by Professor Arnason in his comment that 'comparative studies of religion and its sociocultural role have taken far too little notice of the Japanese experience.' (A:139).

INTERACTIONS: THE JAPANESE AND BUDDHISM

Eisenstadt and Arnason, as with many commentators on Japan, have found one of its fascinations to be its 'openness to outside influence combined with a great ability to 'Japanize' these influences' (E:14), a point made in very similar terms by Arnason's comments about how the 'alternation of closure and opening in Japanese history' represents a 'structural duality' of 'redefinitions of a permanently problematic relationship between two poles, both exceptionally distinct and durable: openness to external models and maintenance of exclusive identity' (A:339). As both scholars recognise, the Japanese reception of Buddhism is a good example of this process in action, and I should commence with the comment (spoken as someone working on contemporary religious issues in Japan who often despairs of his colleagues in Japanese Studies for their neglect and ignoring of the role of religion in Japan) that Eisenstadt and Arnason are absolutely correct in emphasising the role of religion in the formation of Japan's civilization. The point made by Arnason about Buddhism's position as the link between India and East Asia is crucial, for any assessment of Asia east of the Indus (and at one time, at least to the 11th and 12th centuries, to its west as well) that wishes to treat it as having any form of cultural commonality, has to place Buddhism at or near the centre. I would then have to add the slight carp that religious dynamics (apart from considerations of Shinto and nationalism in the Meiji-early Shôwa periods) tends to fade out of both books later on when (a point I return to in my postscript) it remains a very pertinent area in terms of continuing issues to do with civilizational encounter and development, as well as in terms of expressions of modern identity.

The patterns of interaction mentioned above-whether in terms of contact and imbibing followed by periods of closure, or in terms of cultural assimilations which are filtered through specific Japanese cultural lenses-can certainly be seen in

Japan's reception of and interaction with Chinese Buddhism: as has been often observed, this followed a wave-like pattern, of intense interaction, in which Japanese Buddhists visited China in search of new teachings, texts and ritual implements which could be brought back to help establish or legitimate particular or new modes of teaching in Japan. Normally such bouts of interaction were followed by periods of withdrawal in order to consolidate. One point that should be emphasised concerning Japanese Buddhist history is that, if China was mostly regarded as a source of legitimation and a provider of new materials, it was rare for this to be extended into a search for new *teachers* from there. Buddhist priests from China who came to establish lineages in Japan were few and far between: after the earliest periods of contact, perhaps only Ingen, invited in the 17th century to establish a new branch Zen (Ôbaku), could be counted in this category. The Japanese went to China to get texts and ritual implements, and initially also statues: they sought out the material culture of Buddhism and some of its teachings as well and here China (and Korea) were fertile sources for them. In terms of the implementation of this religious tradition, however, the Japanese quite quickly looked to or created their own specialists. Thus the great figures whose names are found in Japanese Buddhist history are not *missionaries* from overseas, intent on carrying a particular brand of Buddhism to Japan, but but indigenous seekers-Saichô, Kûkai, and so on-whose intent was to transport back to their own country a religious form that could fit in and adapt to it. I shall return to this issue in another form later, but here will just note that the one opartial exception to this pattern was Dôgen, the founder in Japan of Sôtô Zen Buddhism. Dôgen did not bring much in the way of texts and the like back with him after his sojourn in China (1225-27), claiming that he himself now represented the 'true transmission' (shôden) of Buddhism to Japan because he was enlightened and was now a vessel of the pure enlightenment of all Buddhas. However, he also sought to established his new sect using a very Sinified ritual structure-which proved less than capable of attracting a following sizeable enough to assure the movement's survival after his death, until his successors 'Japanised' Sôtô by introducing into it ritual formats and prayers that appealed to Japanese folk sensibilities.

I should here add one important note about the question of Japan and its reception of Buddhism: what Japan encountered should not be termed simply 'Buddhism' but either 'Chinese Buddhism' or (recognising the input of Korea in the earlier period of transmission) 'East Asian Buddhism'. While Buddhism originated in India, it had passed through several cultural filters (the Chinese being the largest and most influential) prior to reaching Japan. The Buddhism that reached Japan was not that which left India or reached China, but a form that

had been filtered and translated through several cultural lenses. We should note that (despite Eisenstadt's comments about the 'direct contacts' between Indian and Japanese Mahayana sects (E:225) there were few if any of these until the modern era. Indeed, one is tempted to strengthen Eisenstadt's subsequent remark that 'Chinese and Korean Buddhism probably constituted the main reference points for large sectors of Japanese Buddhists' (E.225) by removing the words 'probably' and 'large sectors of', and perhaps, too, reduce the emphasis on Korean after the initial period of encounter. Despite the extension of Buddhism from India to Japan, via the Silk Road, via the southern seas, and via China and Korea, the links between India and Japan were minimal in religious terms, and this is perhaps worth stressing since it provides yet another little insight into the ways in which the Japanese viewed the outside world and the ways in which they imbibed and utilised cultural influences from outside.

Few if any attempts were made by the Japanese to make contact with India, even though it was the source of Buddhism, and even though one of the predominant patterns of much of earlier Japanese Buddhism focused seeking out origins and searching for authentication–a pattern displayed by the travels of Japanese Buddhists to China in search of texts and teachings. As Watanabe Shôkô has noted, in an era of difficult communications (from the inception of Buddhism in Japan until around the Muromachi) several hundred Japanese Buddhist priests went across to China to study Buddhism. However, it was extremely rare to find priests who even expressed the *wish* to go to India. Indeed, the only case Watanabe found of a Japanese Buddhist who actually attempted to make contact with India was Takaoka Shinnô, the third son of the Emperor Heizei who took the tonsure, studied in various temples but felt unsatisfied by Japanese and Chinese Buddhism, went to China in 861, and from there sought to travel to India. He got as far as the Malay peninsula in 864, after which there is no further record of him, save a story from that region that he had been eaten by a tiger.[1] The next priest to express such as desire to travel to India was Eisai (or Yôsai) founder of the Rinzai sect in Japan, at the end of the 12th century, who sought permission, while in China, to travel to India but then abandonned the plan.[2]

The wish to study the texts of Buddhism as written in Pali and Sanskrit (the root languages of Buddhism) was equally limited, and few if any attempts to do this were made by the Japanese. Partly, of course, this was due to the scarcity of materials, but it does represent a remarkable lack of interest in the linguistic fountainheads of Buddhism. It was not until Western academic influences in the

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1   Watanabe Shôkô 1970 *Nihon no bukkyô* (Iwanami Shoten) 1970, p.23
2   ibid, p.23.

1870s from scholars such as Max Mueller that the study of Indian Buddhist languages appeared on the Japanese Buddhist agenda. The separateness of India, which took on the aura of a semi-mythical place, contrasted with the more accessible China, which became the source of authenticity for Japanese Buddhists: the place from which sutras, ornaments and ritual implements were brought, and to which priests and seekers went, not merely in search of the law but, perhaps more importantly, also in search of validations of themselves and to develop their own status as specialists in Buddhism. Naturally much of this neglect of India was due to inaccessibility, but I think it also important to note that this served to make China the true reference point for the Japanese Buddhists. I should note, however, that I am not suggesting that the underlying and central themes of Buddhism as they emanated in India were necessarily that much different to those that proved appealing to the Japanese: the promises of this-worldly rewards and the offering of ritual services in order to assist the souls of ancestors originated in and were found in Indian Buddhism and spread to China and beyond.

Interestingly, it has only been in quite recent times- and particularly in the last two decades or so- that India has really figured as a serious marker on the religious landscape in Japan. The image of 'early' or 'original Buddhism' *genshi bukkyô* has proved very appealing in the present age, especially in the very new religions. To emphasise one's nature as a Buddhist movement faithful to and looking back to an earlier 'golden age' of Buddhism (prior to its supposed corruption in China), and to claim one's intent to revive this 'original Buddhism' is a strategy widely used by several of the very new religions of Japan: Agonshû, Aum Shinrikyô and Kôfuku no Kagaku are but three of the movements that have done this with varying degrees of success. Space does not permit full discussion of this point here, but since the call to a return to 'original Buddhism' is, in all these movements, combined with strong criticisms of established Buddhist sects for spiritual laxity and loss of dynamism, one can see an implicit critique emerging of the Chinese Buddhist cultural world from which Japanese Buddhism took so many of its guiding lines and parameters: in such a model it becomes the Sino-Japanese worlds that have tainted the purity of original Buddhism. Contemporary Buddhist revivalism does not look to China, which may be visited as part of Buddhist pilgrimage tours, but is not regarded as a potential source of spiritual inspiration. China is passed over in favour of India (and also Sri Lanka) which, in an age of accessibility, has become the source of contemporary legitimacy. I shall return again to the transmission of Buddhist themes and influences shortly, but first will comment on some further overarching themes that emerge from the studies of civilizational encounters that are discussed by Eisenstadt and Arnason in relation to religion.

OTHER-WORLDLY BUDDHISM?

This process of opening and closure, of interaction, borrowing, adaptation and reconfiguration has naturally played a part in the shaping of the Japanese religious tradition, and in the formation of a combinative (although not necessarily unitary) [3] religious world, the periods of closure being vital in the process of absorption and adaptation, just as have, especially in earlier periods, the spells of opening and interaction been crucial elements in the processes of regeneration. The existence of combinative elements within the Japanese religious world- namely the tendency of different traditions to operate together, or for shared unities of religious behaviour and action to occur across apparent religious barriers - is a widely recognised theme, but one which has constantly puzzled many observers.

Thus Eisenstadt notes 'one of the most puzzling aspects of the Japanese religious scene, namely its tendency to syncretism and, above all, the nature of that syncretism' (E:235), and he suggests that the 'tendency to this worldiness and the immanentization of Buddhism' are what explain this syncretism (E:235). While Eisenstadt does not find the syncretising or the adaptation of a great world religion to a local culture surprising, what he does find unique in the case of Japan is that 'its pagan premises, a basically this-worldly religious outlook, have transformed those of a 'great' religion in shaping the tradition of an entire civilization, bracketing-out... its more transcendental or other-worldly premises.' (E:235). This (as Eisenstadt puts it) 'de-theologization' of Buddhism resulted in a concomitant weakening of religious discourse and was part of the transformation of Buddhism and the syncretisation of religion in Japan.

Arnason also sees Buddhism as a largely other-worldly phenomenon and he regards the Japanese religious milieu and the complex of ideas, myths and so on which he describes as the 'imaginary complex- and its assimilation of popular religion' as representing 'a natural counterweight to the more other-worldly orientation of Buddhism' (A:125). He later talks of how a sense of confidence in Japan 'helped to tone down the other-worldly implications of the new religion' and adds (in reference to the world-view produced from this amalgam) that 'but to see it as indicative of an optimistic world-view is to stretch the evidence' (A:128). However, despite this comment, I am going to perhaps stretch the evi-

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3 The notion of Japanese religion as a 'unity' which was a common theme in earlier studies has been tempered in more recent times by an increased understanding of the nature and role of conflict in the religious world: conflict, as has been recently pointed out (Reader and Tanabe 1994 (eds.) Religion and Conflict in Japan (special edition of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 21/2-3.) can be a productive and regenerative force in the religious world.

dence a little and argue that (apart from obviously pessimistic but relatively small and unsuccessful movements such as Aum) Japanese religion in general is this-worldly and optimistic, and that movements that are not so do not fare especially well in Japan. Moreover, one of the most potent forces for emphasising this-worldliness has been the supposedly other-worldly force of Buddhism. To mention this theme of this-worldly positivism (which is a recurrent theme from the magical and this-worldly promises of the first Buddhist statues to enter Japan, to the claims of the Heian Buddhist sects about their abilities to bring benefits, to the predominance of wish-granting buddha figures such as Kannon, to the later optimisim of many of the new religions), is not to deny the pessimistic (or potentially pessimistic) dimensions of Japanese religion, for clearly pessimistic threads exist, while emphases on the dead and the other world have been important as well. Hiowever they have rarely if ever been as emphatic or important as the optimistic threads. Thus the most pessimistic, in some terms, form of Buddhism of Japan, Pure Land Buddhism, in fact presents a most optimistic face to this world in guaranteeing any follower entry to the Pure Land at death, and hence eradicating many of the great fears of life.

What primarily concerns me is the interpretation of Buddhism in other-worldly terms, which I would argue is an image of Buddhism that has been produced more by studies about Buddhism than it is by the nature of Buddhism itself. Before turning to the this-worldly aspects of Buddhism I will thus make a few comments about the background to the study of Buddhism, which are important to recognise in this case.

The very fluid and multidimensional nature of Buddhism (symbolised by the famous Buddhist story of the blind men trying to describe an elephant), coupled with its very definitional inexactitudes (the debates amongst religious studies scholars over what Buddhism 'is' are probably only matched by those over what 'religion' is, and by the debates about whether we should get rid of these confusing terms), make it especially hard to construct a notion of what Buddhism 'is' at its core and as it passes from region to region. Yet, from early in its academic study, much of the multidimensionality of Buddhism has been shut out of Buddhist Studies or has been ignored and marginalised.

Indeed, it might not be too extreme to say that the most radical transformation of Buddhism occurred not when it reached Japan in and after the sixth century, but in the 19th and 20th centuries, when Buddhism became a focus of Western academic study. Similar transformations occurred at this time also for Hinduism, with the famed Western 'recovery' of the Bhagavad Gita as an acceptable text and attempts, spurred both by Western missionaries and scholars and Indian Hindu intellectuals to sanitise Hinduism into an 'acceptable' religious phi-

losophy and to downplay all of its supposedly magical, Superstitious and sexually provocative sides.

This transformation was partially at least accomplished by the forms of academic scholarship prevalent in that era, in which Religious Studies rested on theological foundations. These foundations, based as they were in doctrinal studies and in viewing 'religion' as a form of philosophy relating to 'god', and enhanced by philology, centred, in the case of Buddhology (a field as methodologically unsound and problematic as Japanology), on producing a 'true' picture of Buddhism that would look respectable to nineteenth century missionaries. Nineteenth century students of Buddhism also, keen to 'rescue' a pure religion from its deviant manifestations in colonial settings that were de facto backward because they needed to be colonised, discovered in Buddhist texts the 'core' of a religion that appealed to puritan notions of what a good religion should look like, while also appealing to humanistic philosophical sensibilities as well. As such it emphasised the with other-worldly ideals, doctrines and aspects of Buddhist texts while scrupulously disregarding the rest (which in many respects was the real iceberg under the ecclesiastically respectable tip). This process of depicting Buddhism in such terms was later reinforced by later constructions and interpretations of that idealised form of iconoclastic mystic asceticism and oriental wisdom known as Zen, as produced by the often spurious writings of people such as D.T. Suzuki.[4]

In recent years, however, scholarship has started to move beyond these earlier rather idealised and misleading pictures, even if many of them still linger on and continue to be perpetrated in universities and in the minds of students: it was only recently that a reviewer of one book that critiques the Zen tradition bemoaned the fact that he still has to yell at his students every year that Zen is not a mystical oriental philosophy.[5] In a number of works, for example, Bernard Faure has criticised the ways in which Buddhist traditions such as Ch'an/Zen have been contructed or reinterpreted by scholars and apologists alike, so as to 'save' the theological aspects of the tradition from the other elements of practice, which have been seen as degenerate (Faure 1991, p.19) — a process Faure sees clearly as a nostalgic quest to restore a mythic past that never existed. Exacting critiques of how various Western scholars (as well as Suzuki) sought to 'preserve' the idealised truths of Buddhism have been have been discussed and analysed also

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4 There is a growing literature now debunking the work of people such as Suzuki and showing how constructs of Zen as other forms of Buddhism were the product of aWesten colonialising mentality that saw itself as the preserver of pure Buddhism (see Bernard Faure 1993 *Chan Insights and Oversights* (Princeton), and the essay by Robert Sharf in Donald Lopez (ed.) *Curators of the Buddha*.

5 See the review by Clark Chilson of Faure's 1995 work 'Images of Power' in *Japan Forum*, autumn 1997.

in recent times in works such as Donald S. Lopez's edited volume *Curators of the Buddha.*

Gregory Schopen also has been influential in alerting us to more realistic views and understandings of Buddhism. In a number of articles and papers Schopen has drawn our attention to, for example, the penchant of early Indian Buddhist monks for money and the tendency of early Buddhism to offer ritual and magical means for producing worldly benefits. He has also argued persuasively about the nature of early Buddhism as a form of exalted ancestor cult situated primarily around the relics of its founder Shakyamuni and around the stupas (burial sanctuaries) of early Buddhist saints. Schopen has argued that the earliest extant sources of Buddhism were not the texts whose study provided the foundations of knowledge about- and the constructions of images of- Buddhism, but the archeological evidence and remains at Buddhist sites. If 19th century scholars had not privileged the (historically later) text over the historically earlier remains, they would have developed a rather different view of early Buddhism, and would have seen a religion with a focus on the veneration of holy men whose spiritual powers of attainment made their remains and burial sites places of power and worship, and their stupas into sites of pilgrimage: as Schopen himself has noted, this pattern is not dissimilar, indeed, to the patterns of formation of parts of early Christianty as discussed by Peter Brown in his discussion of the 'very special dead' and the Cult of Saints in early Christianity.[6] Schopen's argument is that if an archaeology of religions - concerned with religious constructions, architectures and the like- rather than a history of religions that was and is focused on texts, it

'would have been preoccupied *not* with a small, literate, almost exclusively male and certainly atypical professionalized sub-groups wrote, but rather, with what religious people of all segments of a given community actually did and how they lived.'[7]

Gradually, then, we are moving into a new age of academic interpretations and understandings of Buddhism when we are getting beyond the images of Buddhism constructed by earlier scholarship, and are recognising not the elite tip of an iceberg but what was really there underneath, supporting, holding up that tip, merged with it, and far more extensive and influential than it. It is becoming increasingly difficult (and erroneous) to separate out some 'theologically correct' aspects of Buddhism from others that are equally or more extensively

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6 Gregory Schopen, Burial *ad Sanctos* and the physical presence of Buddhas in Early Indian Buddhism: A study in the archeology of religions' *Religion* 1987, Vol.17, pp.193-225, esp. p.194.

7 ibid. pp.193-4

present and in evidence in Buddhist settings. This is equally so not just in the archaeology of Buddhism but in its textual forms as well. We are coming to recognise that Buddhism was never other than this-worldly in at least two respects: one was in its emphasis on transcendence in this life (a feature of Mahayana Buddhism, as well as of esoteric and Tibetan Buddhism) and this immanentist theme can be found throughout the Mahayana tradition (and some scholars will claim also in the Theravada or southern Buddhist traditions as well). Indeed, immanentist ideas, as they apply to what Bernard Faure (1991) has termed the 'rhetoric of immediacy' were a central feature of the ongoing 'sudden-gradual paradigm' of enlightenment that permeated much of Chinese Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist history.[8] The other is in the growing recognition that in Buddhist texts and practice there is a very strong this-worldly element and focus on the provision of the good things of this world- a theme that sits at some variance with interpretations of Buddhism as other-worldly (and thus transformed into a far more this-worldly religion by the Japanese).

One of the major patterns of recent study also has been to recognise that separating out traditions and religions might perhaps work less well than looking at aspects of religion that are not specifically tied to one tradition but which display elements of commonality. Such understandings have been well articulated by various Japanese scholars (to whom I turn below) but here I first turn to the argument made by George Tanabe and myself in *Practically Religious*, where we argue there is a common core to the Japanese religious world (hence the 'common religion' of our subtitle) which centers on what in Japanese are termed *genze riyaku* ('practical, this-worldly benefits') — hence the title 'Practically Religious'. We show that such practical benefits relate to daily needs and concerns (health, prosperity, success, etc) but are not necessarily material (they involve assurance against worry, and provide for 'peace of mind' *anshin* as much as they speak to materialistic sentiments. This worldly benefits have been, it has been argued by numerous critics, a salient feature of the new religions of Japan, and the new religions have, from such a perspective, been dismissed by many critics (notably Buddhist academics) as base religions concerned only with materialism. While we agree with the analysis of the new religions as predominantly this worldly in orientation, we disagree with the above analysis that thereby labels them as materialistic and as false or base religions catering only to the material desires of the masses. Rather, we argue that a focus on *genze riyaku* is a common theme within Japanese religions in general found as clearly in Buddhism as in the new religions.

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8   Bernard Faure 1991 *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) pp.32-52.

Our book, in fact, discusses and analyses the topic of this worldly benefits from a variety of angles (including textual and scriptural sources and legitimations, as well as commercial ones relating to the proselytization and marketing of this worldly benefits by Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines), with little recourse to the new religions. Rather, we centre our studies on Buddhism and Buddhist institutions amd priests in Japan, and in so doing demonstrate that this is a trait that is so central and so crucial to the successful functioning of religions in Japan, that when it is ignored or when doctrinal stances are taken against the provision or promise of this worldly benefits, the religion in question undergoes severe problems.

Indeed, the term *riyaku* itself is a Buddhist term, meaning a benefit or grace provided by a buddha. Of course, while it was Buddhism that provided the term (and many textual references to it) the concept itself — of gods and deities providing benefits to supplicants, and supplicants having as the central core of their religious worldview the notion of beseeching their deities for such things — existed in the existing folk world view of the Japanese prior to their encounter with Buddhism.

Like Schopen and others, we are critical of much of Buddhist Studies for, as we see it, painting a picture of Buddhism as an other-worldly religion to which various addenda (magic, promises of worldly success, etc) have accumulated as a 'skilful means' (Sanskrit: *upaya*, Japanese: *hôben*) in order to facilitate the greater expansion of Buddhism, but which are not really parts of 'true' Buddhism. Tanabe and I take up this point in examining scriptural legitimations for the promise and the provision of this-worldly benefits in Buddhism, and argue that this should not be seen just as a 'skilful means' designed to increase the faith of ordinary people in the buddhas, and hence lead them further along the Buddhist path (i.e. it should not be seen as an appendage to 'real' Buddhism) but should be considered a basic and core theme within Buddhism itself. While we recognise the importance of renunciation and monasticism as major themes within Buddhism we also note that this was always an ideal of a particular stratum of religious practitioner, rather than an immediately attainable or preached goal for all. Like Schopen we would like, in considering what Buddhism was, and is, like, to examine not just small, privileged professionallzed sub-groups but wider communities. As a religion of mass participation requiring widespread social support in order to sustain its core monastic base, Buddhism also needed to build links to and theologies for, the various social strata and milieux without whose support it would be unable to function. Thus, it incorporated, along with its apparently unworldly and renunciatory sides, promises of worldly attainment that could be acquired through faith in and the grace of the buddhas. (Here, in-

deed, we can see elements of the double-pronged themes of civilizational development that are disucssed throughout Eisenstadt's book, but a double-pronged dynamic that accompanied Buddhism's growth and expansion from its earliest developments beyond Sarnath where the Buddha first turned the Wheel of Law.) It affirmed support for the ruling classes and expanded along trade routes, making alliances as it did with local rulers and merchants, both of whom began to appear in its sutras as sacred figures (the merchant Vimalakirti in the *Yuimagyô*, the notion of the Cakravartin or world ruler, and the various Kings who become buddhas) and whose patronage was a primary requisite of Buddhism's growth and expansion. Thus the buddhas were readily and easily co-opted as supporters of states, lords and kings.

These elements are not, one should note, convenient appendages affixed to or assumed by Buddhism merely as a means for creating better conditions in the present for the dharma's advancement in the future. Rather, they became and remained central issues in the overall phenomenon we know as Buddhism, messages and teachings and promises of religious validity for those who lived in the ordinary world.

It is not only in the burial cults and archeological remains, or in the practices visible at Buddhist temples (the sale of amulets, the prayers for worldly benefits) that such themes are visible, for Buddhism's ready affirmation of this-worldly dynamics is found throughout the Buddhist sutras, while its close association with the structures of power comes out in the frequent claims by Buddhist priests that, through rituals, they can provide the state with sources of power and sacred support. The sutras teach about the power of Buddhism to fulfill the wishes and desires of the people. It is not a matter of expedient means or syncretic assimilation of folk practices that allows Buddhist priests to promote actively the practices for practical benefits, but the explicit doctrines of the sutras that speak directly to the virtue of acquiring material as well as spiritual boons. In speaking of the universal applicability of his teachings, Shakyamuni in the Lotus Sutra explains how he preaches appropriately to the clever and the dull, the diligent and the lazy "in order to cause them to rejoice and receive benefits with pleasure" [9]

> Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence [*genze an'on*] and good circumstances in future existences [*goshô zensho*] [10]

"Similar emphases on and promises of this-worldly benefits are, as George

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9   Murano, Translation of the Lotus Sutra, p.97.
10   Burton Watson (trans.), *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.99

Tanabe and I have discussed at some length in *Practically Religious* (pp.73-82) found in many other Buddhist texts sutras, ranging from the Book of Gradual Sayings (Anguttara Nikāya) to the Flower Garland Sutra in which the Buddha Vairocana vows to assist humans in attaining all manner of worldly benefits."

THE ENTRY OF BUDDHISM INTO JAPAN

These issues coalesced, in terms of Japanese history, in the mid 6th century when Japan first encountered Buddhism. When the King of Paekche in the 6th century sought to interest the Japanese court in Buddhism he did not do it by asserting its philosophical richnesses or by claiming that it could provide an other-worldly path of transcendence. He did not even speak of enlightenment, nirvana, emptiness, or any of the other philosophical explanations of Buddhism that he admits can hardly be understood. Rather, he introduced it as a means through which benefits could be attained, and even affirmed the goodness of desire, which had been marked by other doctrinal formulations such as the Four Noble Truths as needing to be destroyed:

> This doctrine is amongst all doctrines the most excellent. But it is hard to explain, and hard to comprehend. Even the Duke of Chou and Confucius had not attained to a knowledge of it. This doctrine can create religious merit and retribution without measure and without bounds, and so lead on to a full appreciation of the highest wisdom. Imagine a man in possession of treasures to his heart's content, so that he might satisfy all his wishes in proportion as he used them. Thus it is with the treasure of this wonderful doctrine. Every prayer is fulfilled and naught is wanting.[11]

Two themes that stand out here are that Buddhism is proffered as a magical system, capable of supporting the state, and as a this-worldly system that can bring treasures to 'one's heart's content. The Buddhist monks who accompanied the statue (itself, incidentally, imbued still with sacral power and the source of miracles and the focus of pilgrimages, even though it probably no longer exists) [12] appear to have happily gone along with these assertions about Buddh-

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11   W. G. Aston (trans.), *Nihongi* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), part 2, p.66.
12   The statue is believed to be the famous Zenkôji triad enshrined at Zenkôji in Nagano prefecture, one of Japan's greatest and most sacred temples. The triad is so sacred it is never shown (rumour, which has some serious academic foundations, Suggests it no longer exists, but has been destroyed probably in a fire many centuries buck). A sacred replica has been made of it (known as the *maedachi* triad) and this is so sacred that it is only exposed to public view (in the ceremony known as kaichô) every seventh year. The Zenkôji icon remains the source of miracle stories and pilgrimages (the most recent was in spring 1997) (see Donald L. McCallum 1994 Zenkôji and Its Icon (Princeton University Press).

ism's role as a supporter of kings and as a provider of worldly benefits: they did so precisely because that was how Buddhism functioned and because such themes were central to Buddhism in Asia in general.

Similar patterns can be seen in other countries and cultures besides Japan. This-worldly orientations are certainly very prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism whose monks perform rituals sponsored by lay clients to bring wealth and worldly benefits, and who do divinations and the like. One of my first encounters with a Tibetan rinpoche lama was with a resident of Dharmsala who was asking the lama to conduct a divination to seek the best means of producing a worldly benefit for a mutual friend: the lama made the divination through throwing dice, and advised the woman concerned to sponsor two rituals at local temples, which would say prayers for the worldly benefit of her friend. Similar themes are important whether in Sri Lankan or south-east Asian Buddhism. The role of village priests in Sri Lanka, for example, as described by Martin Southwold in his book *Buddhism in Life* sounds quite similar to that of Japanese Buddhist priests (performing funerals, dealing with the ancestors, the prayers for worldly benefits) and their social stature as slightly marginal people is not dissimilar either. Equally, so are the roles of Buddhism in much of south-east Asia: not just the deep-seated political connections to royal households (eg in Thailand) or to nationalism, but to exorcisms and spirit cults, and to amulets and other manifestations of sacred charisma.[13] I am always mindful of the response of a leading scholar of early Buddhism and of Sri Lankan Buddhism in the present day, Richard Gombrich, to talks by myself and another scholar of Japanese Buddhism. We had both highlighted the this-worldly, magical orientations of Japanese Buddhism, the comparative lack of emphasis (even in Zen Buddhist sects) on meditation, and the immense preoccupation of Japanese Buddhism with the ancestors, death, funerals and the memorialisation processes. Gombrich simply asked why we were presenting this material in a manner that suggested we thought it was special unique or typical of Japan: all these things were part and parcel of South and south-east Asian Buddhism, all were found mentioned and promoted in early Buddhist texts, and none was specific or peculiar to Japan.

On this point, might I suggest that if we are to look for major transformations of Buddhism, or for the production of a Buddhist culture that appears at variance with the normal patterns of Buddhist development, it might be China rather than Japan that we should pay closer scrutiny to. What stands out in China, as opposed to Japan, Tibet, Thailand and so on (but which might link India and China) is the existence of entrenched, textually based, and doctrinally orga-

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13 Stanley J. Tambiah 1984 *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

nised religious systems, which thus made it more difficult for Buddhism to enter freely or to move as it would have liked. By comparison, the other societies I have mentioned had folk indigenous traditions, which are less likely to present formalised opposition to a new religion, or to operate in political terms in the same ways: such traditions provided Buddhism, because of *its* internal philosophies, with the most fertile ground to flourish using its own innate nature of accommodation and the promotion of worldly benefits.

BUDDHISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF ACCOMMODATION

Buddhism is a religious tradition with well formulated doctrines and legitimations for compromise: indeed, its entire missionary impulse might be termed conquest by compromise. The philosophical bases that condition this form of missionary impulse are found in sutras such as the Lotus and Vimalakirti Sutras (Jap: *Hokekyô* and *Yuimagyô*), which promote the concept of skilful means (*upaya, hôben*). This doctrinal tenet is rooted in the basic Mahayana Buddhist notion of two truths — a present, temporal and changing (and hence not 'real') truth which is rooted in the transient world of illusion, and absolute, unchanging truth — ultimate truth, ultimate reality, the realm of fully enlightened Buddhahood, unsullied by transience. The second is the final goal of Buddhism (in this reading), the first the basic materials with which Buddhism has to work in order to lead to or produce the second. Hence it must use means and methods appropriate to the transient and ephemeral world: it can thus legitimately utilise means which, in other circumstances, would appear devious. The famed story of the burning house in the Lotus Sutra is the locus classicus of this idea, but other stories are found throughout the sutras, especially the Lotus and Vimalakirti Sutras, which have proved two of the most popular of all in East Asia, and especially in Japan. (Some consideration of why these particular sutras have been so popular is surely needed in order to fully position Buddhism's role and dynamics in Japan, although it is outside the scope of this paper.)

While offering prayers for worldly benefits was legitimated and affirmed in the sutras, the concept of skilful means provided a further underpinning of the legitimacy of such practices, and a justification for the actions of Buddhist priests in performing ancestral rituals and so on. They were not just doing something that was part of the everyday (folkish) practices of Buddhism but were doing something noble and meritorious: their actions were in fact subtle attempts to lead people gradually and gently out of the mire of worldly suffering towards the absolute truth of Buddhism.

This is not the place to discuss the ways in which the concept of skilful

means has been used by priest and academics, save to note that in Reader and Tanabe 1998 we argue that the doctrine has been used as an excuse by priests and academics alike to help them hold onto an old traditionalist image of a pristine other-worldly Buddhism which is untainted by the impurities of folkish religious traits, and to excuse and explain away such elements and practices. However what skilful means really does is to endow worldly practices, rituals and magically oriented practices with enhanced spiritual value, suggesting that they are not merely valuable in themselves but because of their noble inner motives of leading all to eventual enlightenment.

Skilful means is closely linked to the Buddhist concept of assimilation, of working with indigenous religions, and subverting them through cooption. This notion involved adopting local gods as cousins, or localised manifestations of the buddhas: the Japanese term *honji suijaku* expresses this, with the buddhas being the core essence and the local gods localised versions of them or (as in another interpretation) as expectant deities, awaiting the arrival of the buddhas and of Buddhism so as to be led to enlightenment. Convert the gods and one converts the people. Such conversions were naturally products also of a Buddhist triumphalism (*honji suijaku* representing not so much merger as conquest by assimilation) and while attempts were later made by proponents of Shinto to reverse the meanings of this concept (i.e. to claim that the Shinto gods were the real core essence, the ultimate truth, and that the buddhas were the inferior partners in the relationship) the general understandings of *honji suijaku* always place Buddhism in a dominant and superior role. The doctrine has been used to argue for the syncretism of Buddhism and Shinto, for the intermarriage, as it were, of gods and buddhas, and as a means of showing why Shinto gods may be enshrined alongside Buddhist figures of worship. However, what is rarely considered is that this so-called syncretism is very partial indeed for in reality the arena in which gods and buddhas merged and 'married' was in their roles as providers of practical benefits. *Honji suijaku* was in fact a theory more of prioritisation than assimilation.

Interestingly, too, in relation to this theory (but a point I cannot go into here because of time and space limitations), in the supposed 'disestablishment' of Buddhism in the Meiji period, buddha figures popular for their this-worldly benefits often took up residence in shrines supposedly rid of Buddhist influences. The famous Benten statue at the Shinto shrine Enoshima, for example, used to reside at a Buddhist temple, Yoganji, at Enoshima. With disestablishment, the temple was removed from the Enoshima shrine area. Benten, however, was taken into the shrine and became a major image of worship there. The ideological separation of Shinto and Buddhism here (as in other places) actually produced

a greater degree of assimilation between gods and buddhas, with Benten (a deity originally associated with Buddhism) becoming venerated in Shito forms and becoming a Shinto deity here and in many other places.

Given the above, I would like to express my unease with the notion that Japan and the Japanese religious environment de-axialised an axial religion, at least in terms of transforming it from an other — to this-worldly and immanentist religion. Buddhism did not need the Japanese environment to innerly transform itself, since it already contained all the necessary tools and equipment for such an interpretation to be made. The Japanese were in fact (as the letter from Paekche shows) presented with a ready example of this point.

FOLK RELIGION, ASCECTICS, MEDIATORS, AND FIGURES OF POWER

This is not to say that the Japanese cultural and religious environment did not play a large role in producing a new religious amalgam in which Buddhist, Shinto, folk and other religious ideas and practices intermingled, and in which aspects of the broader Buddhist culture of East Asia were adapted to and assimilated into the Japanese environment. In examining this process and dynamic, perhaps the most critical theme is the interactions of Buddhism and the folk religious tradition (of which Shinto may form a part but not the whole), and here one should note the work of scholars such as Gorai Shigeru, Miyake Hitoshi, Miyata Noboru, Sakurai Tokutarô and Shinno Toshikazu, all of whom in their different ways have dealt with the questions of 'folk Buddhism' (*minzoku bukkyô*) as well as with the role of 'folk religion' (*minkan shinkô, minzoku shûkyô*) as central themes within Japanese religion. Indeed, much of contemporary Japanese religious studies scholarship — especially of those in the anthropological traditions and 'folk studies' (*minzokugaku*) and folk religious studies (*minzoku shûkyôgaku*) — has focused not so much on the 'identifiable' traditions (i.e. on Buddhism and Shinto) but on these more fluid, less readily categorised areas such as the *hijiri* and folk traditions. To some degree this type of interpretation mirrors the critical rethinking going on in Western scholarship.

Such focuses are extremely pertinent in the broader academic study of Japanese religions, for they represent an increasing understanding of how the high tradition was not high and the low one not low: they were part and parcel of one envelopping tradition that might, at its edges, have involved some lofty specualtions about dharma and practices of meditation, and might have attracted a few more aristocratic patrons because of its teachings of impermanence, but which for the most part was a united entity in which meditation and the sale of

talismans for earthly benefits were not mutually exclusive or antitheical to each other but were parts of one combined culture. While it would be impossible (without giving a history of the methodological study of Japanese religion) to discuss these issues in any detail here, suffice it to say that in the work of all these people we can see an emphasis on the central role of folk religion in the development of the Japanese religious world.[14]

One of the crucial elements in this process was the role of mediating figures who transcended the (vague) borders of these entities and traditions, and perhaps it is here that we can see the most striking 'Japanisation' of Buddhism occurring, with the production of numerous charsimatic mediating figures who served as the major facilitators of a merger of Buddhism and the folk religous world. The work of Shinno Toshikazu has consistently reflected on such issues, especially in his focus on the role of itinerant holy figures (broadly grouped under the title *hijiri*, which may be translated as 'wandering holy man') and the ways in which they functioned in the interface between the Buddhist temples of early and medieval Japan, and the ordinary people.[15] In English the work of Janet R. Goodwin[16] also examines the role of such mediating, intercessionary figures who, as both Goodwin and Shinno show, were closely linked to and worked for Buddhist temples, raising funds for them, praising their figures of worship (the various buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Buddhist pantheon), utilising their meditation techniques and preaching about Buddhist sutras, faith, piety and cosmology, while also operating as charismatic figures of healing and of benefit-giving through their use of magical rituals and incantations and amulets. Such figures also were influential in promoting Buddhist funerals and ritualisations of death.

Miyake also draws special attention to Shugendô (associated as it was with *hijiri* and wandering asceticism) which itself is a good example of Japanese religious eclecticism, showing us a religious tradition formed out of an eclectic blending of influences and traditions ranging from animistic folk-oriented religious views relating to the concept of mountains as spiritually charged locations of the 'other', where spirits (primarily of the dead) gathered, to Buddhism, especially of the esoteric (Tendai and Shingon) type, to influences of Taoism and of

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14 See for example Miyake Hitoshi 1974 *Nihon shûkyô no kôzô* (Tokyo: Keio Tsushin) and 1990 *Shûkyô minzokugaku* (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan)

15 See Shinno Toshikazu 1991 *Nihon yugyô shûkyôron* (Yoshikawa Kôbunkan) for an introduction to Shinno's work see my review of this book in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1992, Vol.19/1 pp.81-84, and the translation, by Paul Swanson, of the last chapter of this book in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 1993, Vol.20/2-3, pp.187-206.

16 Janet R. Goodwin 1994 *Alms and Vagabonds: Buddhist Temples and Popular Patronage in Medieval Japan* (University of Hawaii)

Chinese religious traditions, as well as more clearly Shinto notions of the sacrality of a nature that retains an inherently dangerous side to it.

Arnason, in his assessment of the process of religious development in Japan, has touched briefly on the arena in which *hijiri* and the like operated, in his comment on how 'Japanese images of nature allowed for divisions, tensions and polarities of various kinds: the distinction between the inahbited lowlands and the mountainous regions seems to have been particularly important for the development of religious symbolism and the acculturation of Buddhist ideas.' (A.126). This allusion to the mountain — village (*yama-sato*) relationship and dichotomy, the former representing the realms of the wild and sacred, relates directly to the role of ascetics and charismatic mediator figures mentioned above, who transcended and utilised this dichotomy as a means of integrating Buddhist and local, folk religious ideas and practices.

Perhaps the archetypal charismatic mediator (and certainly a model and example for subsequent *hijiri*) was the Buddhist priest Kûkai 'whose thought' (according to Arnason (A.132)) 'represents both an effort to gain understanding of axial religions and an attempt to link them more effectively to the archaic legacy'. Kûkai was, indeed, one of the great geniuses of Japanese religion, the founder of a sect and a builder of great temples, but I would argue that his legacy is more clearly as a popular religious figure whose religious powers were sought by the faithful and whose image was used as a magical symbol in the promotion of Shingon Buddhism. Kûkai's period in China was brief, not enough to learn the language adequately to grasp and be taught the inner esoteric meanings of the texts of Shingon, nor indeed to truly practice and attain the levels of mastery that a supposed master of the esoteric tradition would have. Though he returned from China claiming to be a Buddhist master, it was a self-proclamation-one of many self-proclamations of religious leadership and legitimation in Japanese religious history. Kûkai was a political actor and opportunist, as is clear in such actions as his rapid return to Japan to forestall Saichô's influence at court, and his clever manipulations to gain the upper political hand in Buddhist struggles for patronage. He was also a magical ritualist, whose claims of mastery of Buddhism rested to a great degree on his abilities to perform ritual services of benefit (economically) to the court and state, such as rainmaking. That he was also clearly a highly skilled interpreter of ritual practices and a teacher of spiritual practices good enough to gather around him a group of followers, does not diminish the aspects of his personailty as a manipulator, and in this he forms a model for many other leader figures over the ages, including many of the charismatic leaders of the Buddhistic new religions.

Kûkai's teachings included a focus on attainment of high levels of spiritual

awareness and a focus on practice, and, like his rival Saichô, incorporated the dynamics of mountain religion and the concept of a retreat to sacred mountain locations where one could more readily be in contact with gods and buddhas. His real importance, and his major influence and major religious role in Japan was not as a teacher of doctrines but as a provider of ritual forms for Shingon Buddhism and as a salvific figure venerated for his powers to bring about future salvation at the end of time (the Miroku cult) and in this world. In this latter guise (under his more popularly used posthumous title and name Kôbô Daishi) he is at the centre of a huge graveyard whose inhabitants have sought to be near him so as to gain salvation with him: indeed, Gregory Schopen, in his study of the cultic burial practices of early Indian Buddhism, mentioned earlier, finds an analogy here in the graveyard of Kôyasan centred around Kôbô Daishi.[17] Kôbô Daishi is a powerful this-worldly bringer of benefits and miracles, the centre of a major pilgrimage cult and many legends testifying to his position as a sacred in-tercessionary miracle working figure. It is this guise, as Kôbô Daishi the miracle worker, that is most important not just to the ordinary people but also to the priests of his own sect, as Saitô Akitoshi has shown in his depth survey of the attitudes of Shingon priests: Saitô concludes that Shingon Buddhism is de facto Kôbô Daishi worship.[18] Similar things might be said of other sects and their founders as well.

　　Kukai has been widely recognised as one of the best examples of a char-ismatic holy man-type figure in Japan, a prototype in his ascetic wanderings, for *hijiri* and pilgrims, and a model for self-proclaimed holy men, the sort of reli-gious figure who was so crucial to the expansion of Buddhism in Japan and to the creation of a blend of Buddhist, mountain, Shinto and folk religious themes into a Japanese popular religious dynamic. He has clearly transcended any secta-rian boundaries (surely a crucial point if we are to consider the cultural, rather than the doctrinal/sectarian dimensions of religion). This point was brought home to me in a striking way on my first visit to Japan in 1981. My wife and I were walking through the Chichibu region (one of the main pilgrimage areas of Japan) when, at a Rinzai Zen Buddhist temple we came across a large statue of Kôbô Daishi. I asked the priest (dressed in his Rinzai Zen robes) about this: why was a statue of the founder of one Buddhist sect doing in the courtyard of the temple of another? (Nowadays I would not even ask the questions, which perhaps says much about acculturation and what we expect from our studies). His answer dealt with historical processes as well as the pragmatic realities of

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17　Schopen 1987, p.202-3.
18　Saitô Akitoshi 1984 'Kôbô daishi shinkô ni kansuru jittai chôsa' *Bukkyô Bunka Ronshû* No.4, pp.400-479.

Japanese religion. Kôbô Daishi, he said, had been active before Rinzai came to Japan, and hence was part if Rinzai's cultural and historical heritage in Japan. Moreover, as a great spiritual activist and holy figure, he was not the property of any one sect. He belonged to all, and transcended all religious barriers.

This sort of self-proclaimed spiritual leader, commentator on texts, master of rituals, provider of benefits, healer and intermediary, sitting between traditions, is a common model found in various guises in the new religions today. It is perhaps no great surprise that two of the most prominent, charismatic and indeed controversial religious figures of the present day, Kiriyama Seiyû in Agonshû, and Asahara Shôkô, founder and former leader of Aum Shinrikyô, both have made references to Kûkai in their teachings, and both have picked up on and utilised the images of esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyô*) gleaned from overseas: both Kiriyama and Asahara journeyed to India and returned proclaiming special spiritual experiences there that affirmed their qualifications for spiritual leadership and both have seen themselves as religious leaders of the stature of Kûkai.

Charismatic religious figures who perform an integrative function drawing strands of Buddhist, folk, and other religious themes together, are a crucial element in the production of Japanese religious culture, and their role has been encouraged and developed by Buddhism, which has always provided space for powerful spiritual leader figures and which, if scholars such as Schopen are to be given credence, had a certain focus on saint-like figures of power from early on. Nonetheless, it is probably fair to say that the levels of personalised charismatic action in the form of the production of sacred mediating figures with Buddhist connections, is a more salient and striking characteristic of the Japanese Buddhist (and general religious) milieu than it is of other Buddhist cultures. This theme of charisma and wandering, liminally creative religious intermediary figures, is one that has received much attention from Japanese scholars and, to some extent, from Western ones, and it is a topic that should perhaps also be factored into the broader studies of Japanese civilisation, for it provides us with two of the most pertinent, yet generally unanswered, questions about Japan. The first is, why, if Japan is such a group/conformity conscious society as is so often suggested, does it produce so many charismatically extraordinary religious figures. The second relates to two paradoxes. The first is the often commented upon lack of charismatic leadership in politics: why is this so, considering that it is such a common element in the religious world? The second is even more paradoxical: why is it that scholars working on Japan, and especially on politics, have so singularly failed to note the prevalence of charismatic religious leaders and to ask the question why is there so much charisma and charismatic leadership in Japanese religion, yet so little in politics?

Concluding comments

Buddhism was assimilated by the Japanese because it was perceived as a potentially superior form of magic, and because it provided new figures of worship that could assist, support and uphold the status and authority of the ruling clans. Naturally its adoption in such terms brought with it numerous further dimensions: the textual themes and notions of meditation, enlightenment and personal liberation, architectural forms, artistic forms and techniques, ethical notions, and ultimately, although not for one and a half centuries, ritual forms and means of dealing with a major religious problem, death and the ways of dealing with it. This latter aspect of Buddhism — and the role it has played in the household in terms of dealing with the memorialisation of death and the ancestors, and in conducting funerals — has been a cardinal mainstay of Buddhist temples for many centuries. Many Sôtô Zen temples are meditation and training centres for the production of monks and at the same time are important prayer centres: there is no dualism or conflict here. The power and prestige of the temple as a centre of prayer and provider of benefits enables the temple to support a number of monks. The monks can carry out their training because of the role of the temple as prayer centre — and its role is enhanced because it is backed by the spiritual merit of a number of monks whose prayers and ritual services can call on the graces of the Buddhas to bestow favours on petitioners, and can sacralise the symbols and devices (amulets and talismans) used to transmit benefits.

Buddhism became part — a central part, indeed — of the Japanese religious dynamic and it was able to do so because it contained within it a ready potential to interact and intertwine with the forces in native Japanese religion, and because it possessed theories and world views capable not merely of adapting to those forces but of absorbing and appropriating their powers, and of using native religious traditions as a means of extending the power of Buddhism. The important point to note here is that whether Buddhism was changed, adapted, modified or, indeed, indigenised and Japanised, in its assimilation into Japan and in its development there, it was not immanentized and transformed from an other -to a this- worldly religion. Rather, I would thus suggest that Buddhism was able to penetrate readily into Japan *because of* its existing immanentist, this-worldly dynamics, and it did not require a de-axialisation process to do this. Indeed, as the concepts of skilful means and *honji suijaku* show us, it was a tradition that was *programmed* towards cultural accommodation and adaptation and as such was readily able to fit into a religious culture such as Japan's. If the Japanese reception involved a 'massive upgrading of Buddhism' and a 'downgrading of Confucianism' (A:110-111) this was due to the recognition by the

Japanese that the former was of a more universalistic nature than the latter, and with a less directly culturally specific orientation. More pertinently, Buddhism offered something pragmatic and useful that Confucianism appeared to lack in terms of gods and powerful magical forces and forms, and it had all the necessary this-worldly tools and orientations, along with a ready tendency to adapt and assimilate, to fit the needs of the Japanese. In so doing, Buddhism was able to shape the future directions and nature(s) of Japanese religion in many ways. It was, as such, a shaper of the environment in which it grew: it was also affected and changed by that environment, but mainly in directions and ways it already was pointing towards.

Postscript

I should add a short postscript which, although not related to the rest of my paper, raises a couple of interesting points for comment that do not fit into the body of my paper but that should be discussed in some form or other. As I noted at the beginning of this paper, Arnason has drawn attention to the woeful lack of notice given to Japan in the field of comparative studies of religion and its sociocultural role (p.139). He is correct in this, a point I know well from repeated discussions of many aspects of Japanese religion with Religious Studies scholars who tend, in general, to neatly partition Japan off as a 'special case' that need not disrupt their intellectual constructs. This tendency — which extends across much of academia — has been compounded by the attitudes of many Japan specialists, who have for too long treated Japan in such a way, as an exotic and esoteric subject that is *sui generis* and thus need not be subjected to comparative studies or theoretical analyses. I shall not go further into this now (due to space and time considerations) save to note that I am in general agreement with critics of Japanology who regard this type of attitude as being based in a theoretical vacuum, and as a product of the theoretical obtuseness, not to say total lack of capability, of many (perhaps the vast majority) of Japan specialists.[19]

However, I should note only in conclusion (and this is the subject of another paper!) that something has happened recently to alter this picture at least slightly: the Aum affair has woken up scholars working on new religions and violence to the existence of such issues and problems not only in the US but in Japan. I apologise for bringing up the topic of Aum, but this is the event that has

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19 See, for example, the critical article by H.D. Harootunian and Sakai Naoki 'Nihon kenkyû to bunka kenkyû' in *Shisô* No.7, 1997 pp.4-53. While not in complete agreement with them, I find aspects of their argument extremely valid, and am currently working on a review article which will take up some of these themes.

loomed largest on my horizons for the last two years and on the horizons of any-one who works in religions of Japan. Aum is relevant to the discussions we have here because in seeking to analyse the affair we are faced with questions of how much this is an affair of Japanese society *sui generis* (i.e how much it could only have happened in Japan) and how much it is a replication of, or bears parallels with, other cases of religious implosion in other societies. Aum firmly asserted that it was a Buddhist movement, and based its legitimations and justifications for many of its criminal acts on its interpretations of Buddhism, most specifically on its self-image as a highly advanced Tantric and Vajrayana Buddhist move-ment. These are not points that can be dealt with here, but Aum represents a further element in the discussions of Japanese interpretations of and utilisations of Buddhism — as do many other new and 'new' new religions.

One point I would like to bring up here relating to Aum and other new religions in Japan that is important just to raise, since it particularly contradicts something in Professor Eisenstadt's book that he drew from a noted specialist of Japanese religions, is the degree of anti-westernism within the new (and especially the new new) religions of Japan. Professor Eisenstadt cites the comment of Carmen Blacker (E. p.79) which states that the 'millenarianism of the *shinkô shûkyô* is not directed agasinst any specific enemy. The *shinkô shûkyô* feel no hatred towards Western culture.' While the *shinkô shûkyô* (or, better, the *shin shûkyô*, as scholars nowadays prefer to describe new religions) may be different to some degree from the 'new' new religions (*shin shin shûkyô*) which have come to prominence from the mid-1970s on and especially in the 1980s and 1990s, they share some similar millennial themes with these later movements. What is notable about the millennial themes of the 'new' new religions is that it very frequently expresses an overt anti-Westernism, that could be taken for a new form of religiously inspired nationalism, as with Agonshu's use of national-ist rhetoric and imagery in its rituals and festivals[20] or Kôfuku no Kagaku's almost gleeful predictions of dire disasters striking the USA in the later years of the century (see, for example, Ôkawa Ryûhô's two books *Taiyô no hô* and *Kogane no hô* (and their translations 'The Laws of the Sun' and 'The Laws of Gold' (1990), and the revised edition of the former, all of which were less emphatic about the disasters that would come and less overt in their attitudes to the outside world but nonetheless remained quite strikingly nationalistic and anti-western) and of Japan's new ascedancy, in which it was proclaimed that Japan would 'shine like the sun' in the age of cataclysm and would act as a beacon for the rest of the world (notably south-east Asia) to follow, bringing a new age of

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20 See Ian Reader 1991 *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Basingstoke and Honolulu: Macmillans and University of Hawaii Press), pp.227-233.

spirituality to the world.

We can see similar themes also in the manic antipathy of Aum Shinrikyô to the US: while Aum and its leader Asahara Shôkô were bitterly hostile to the Japanese government and mainstream Japanese society, they had an even deeper and more hostile view of America (which was virtually Aum's 'great satan', if I may quote the rhetoric of another religious leader). We should note, too, in some of these movements, too, that the theme of anti-Semitism is quite strong (a theme that first emerged in the new religions, in one of the earlier millenial new movements discussed by Blacker, Ômoto).[21] The Jews became one of the demonic forces (along with the Freemasons and the US government and militray) on Aum's paranoid radar screen, and these groups appear frequently in contemporary Japanese popular culture in similar, sinister and menacing guises, as threats to Japanese cultural sovereignity and as conspiartors seeking to subvert Japan.

Although Aum was an extreme case (fuelled by many other paranoias and interesting interpretations of Buddhism) it is nonetheless a symbol of some of the attitudes and ideas that are around in Japanese popualr culture and that attract a reasonably sizeable following. Latent nationalism and anti-westernism in fact permeate the new new religions (and many other areas of mass culture), and may be found in the Japanocentric rhetoric and perspectives of the earlier new religions as well. This is an issue that bears future consideration since it suggests a potentially new wave of hostility to the outside world which has not yet been properly studied or analysed yet in the context of the modernising state of late 20th century Japan. It is especially striking in that it is articulated in a religious context by movements that thrive, in a modern society, through using modern technologies and often utilising the concept of scientific discourse, combined with a ready assimilation and articulation of folkloric cosmologies and practices, such as spiritual healing, notions of possession and (in the case, for example, of Agonshû) of concepts of causation which centre on spirits of the dead and ancestral retribution. Professor Eisenstadt has quoted me at some length in his analysis of the new religions in Japan where I argue that Agonshû's interweaving of folk (i.e. particularist, Japanese) concepts with 'the most advanced aspects of modernity' (high technologies) and with claims of universality that is related to this modernity (E. p.81). His analysis of the new religions is that 'while attempting to change the quality of social interaction, (they) do not change the basic premises of the social order.' (E p.81)

This assessment is correct of the new religions in general, but when we look at Aum's radical attitudes and note also that other religious groups were

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21   Shimazono Susumu 1997 *Gendai Shûkyô no Kanôsei* (Iwanami Shoten), pp.31-2.

positing a strident and generally catastrophic millennialism until quite recently, it may well be that the assessment that new religious movements in Japan aim not to transform the political arena but to give it new moral directions 'thus differing in their goals from the fundamentalist movements of the monotheistic civilizations' (E p. 81) might require some reconsideration. Admittedly Aum's violent implosion has given rampant millennialism a bad name, and certainly other millennialist and anti-Western movements such as Kôfuku have subsequently toned down their rhetoric and their emphasios on catastrophic millenialism since (this has been a tendency in the more recent speeches and publications of Ôkawa Ryûhô, the leader of Kôfuku no Kagaku), but some of the underlying meanings and themes it exemplified — of the powerful anti-Westernism and especially the hostility to the USA — in the new new religions, have not just gone away. It will be an interesting theme of the next few years to see how far such ideas will remain part of the cultural and religious currency especially of the big cities and of Japanese youth (who tend to dominate the new new religions), and how far they will modify as cultural interactions increase and as prevailing social circumstances change. This, I would suggest, is one of those areas of cultural contact and civilizational development in the present day that should be of interest to social scientists as well as to specialists of religion in the next few years.

At the 1995 American Academy of Religion conference, in a special session on Aum, one American scholar made the somewhat flippant comment that now Japan had 'had its Waco' and that what it showed to him was that Japan had its pathologies just as did the USA. His point was, basically, not just that modern societies are liable to produce deviant and conflictual religious movements, but that their appearance in violent ways, as with Aum and Waco (and one might add to this list the Solar temple, Jonestown and others) appears to be a recurrent pattern across the globe in modern, advanced (technologically speaking) countries. (On this point, I should note I am treating Jonestown as such as case: although the site of its implosion was in Guyana, the factors and the surroundings that brought people to it and led to the eventual catastrophe, were based in its American background and nature.) Aum, viewed from such a framework, is an example of a modern socio-religious phenomenon with some recurrent patterns and similarities that occurs in modern societies. Whether the production of such forms of movement is another manifestation of modernity, or whether Aum represents a singularly Japanese version of it are perhaps also questions we might like to consider.