

Back to the Future:
Images of Nostalgia and Renewal
In a Japanese Religious Context

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A recent film focusing on the Buddhist center of Mount Hiei juxtaposed two themes, the rebuilding of the eastern pagoda of the Hiei complex in totally traditional style and the life of one monk undergoing the *sennichi kaihōgyō* 千日回峰行, a thousand day austerity practiced at Hiei. These two themes were united to suggest one underlying motif, the revival of the Japanese spirit, an idea underlined by the film's title *Yomigaeru: Tōtō* よみがえる東塔 (subtitled in English "The Eastern Pagoda-Phoenix of Mount Hiei"). As the pagoda, originally destroyed by Oda Nobunaga in 1571, is rebuilt and the monk comes to the completion of his austerity, the film implies that what is taking place is a revival of a basically Japanese spirit. This message is heavily reinforced by a booklet that has been produced to accompany the film. In this, various writers record their impressions: Nakamura Hajime, for instance, feels that the film could have been called the "revival of the Japanese spirit" (*yomigaeru nihon no tamashii*; 1983, p. 6) while Matsumoto Ken'ichi comments particularly on the contrast between the ascetic in his traditional clothes and the modern, Westernized background of Japan that appears in the film. It is, Matsumoto suggests, in the ascetic's white clothes, redolent with the ethos of tradition and the past, rather than in the Western clothes more commonly seen in Japan these days, that the spirit of Japan resides (1983, pp. 32-33).

The film's theme of revival and renewal, reiterating what are projected as basic and traditional Japanese values, is by no means unique, for such emotive appeals to an idealized spirit of the past form a recurrent theme in Japan today. The clear contrasts between this ideal past and a modernity that is, at least as it appears in the context of such imagery, implicitly foreign

appear with great regularity at all levels in Japan. This is, for instance, a common theme in much popular religious literature and in the publicity of various religious organizations seeking to make use of an imagery that obviously strikes an empathetic chord in the minds of contemporary Japanese people.

Whether this empathy has been created by such skillful use of publicity, or whether the publicity is largely a response to a general mood, is a moot point. Certainly the existence of such a current of feeling has been widely commented upon by various writers. Thomas Rohlen, in the course of a discussion on contemporary education in Japan, remarks that

the country is experiencing a revival of many traditional attitudes and values expressive of a nostalgia for the simpler, "more Japanese" ways (1983, p. 199).

In the field of religion, too, one finds frequent allusions to nostalgia and revival. Joseph Kitagawa, for example, shows that nostalgic themes have appeared throughout Japanese religious history: they were prominent in Heian era Shinto (1966, p. 66) and have surfaced at other periods in Japanese religious history, being especially associated with efforts to revive and renew what are generally viewed as the religious strengths of former times (pp. 203–204, pp. 262–340). He particularly characterizes Buddhism in post-war Japan as tending "to live with a nostalgia for the past" (p. 296). Hoshino, discussing reasons for the popularity of pilgrimage in contemporary Japan, observes that there has been a revival of traditionalism which has stimulated interest in activities such as pilgrimage and festivals that are identified with earlier ages. This delving into tradition is portrayed as part of a continuing search for identity and values by which to live in a changing, modern society. In particular Hoshino suggests that pilgrimages and visits to historical temples and shrines (a practice extremely popular in contemporary Japan) can be seen as manifestations of this search for identity and renewal through contact with the past (1981, pp.180–193).

Despite these and many other allusions to the prominence of nostalgia and revival in contemporary Japan, however, one finds that very little analysis has actually been made of the actual images and motifs that are used. Whereas references to feelings both of nostalgia and renewal are common enough to suggest that these are fairly broadly accepted elements in the Japanese world in general, there appears to have been little attention paid to the ways in which such themes are expressed, or how they are actually used for any coherent purpose. In fact, I have only come across one article in which this topic has been focused upon rather than being referred to in passing: this is Kelly's discussion of the ways in which nostalgia functions in tandem with rationalization in the dynamics of contemporary rural life in Japan (1986, pp. 603–618).

In this article Kelly suggests that the changes brought about in society through the processes of rationalization and modernization occur in step with an idealization of the past, in which rural society is depicted, in advertisements, television programs and the media in general, as a “last reserve of noble values . . . a moral counterpart to the industrial core of bureaucracy and corporation” (p. 606). This “nostalgia boom,” as he terms it (p. 612), has by no means held back modernization or economic development: rather, it has developed as society has modernized. Kelly shows how urban Japanese society looks upon rural Japan in a dualistic way, both as backward (and hence in need of modernization, development schemes, new roads, etc.) and as traditional (the repository of real Japanese values and hence to be idealized and preserved). These two apparently conflicting sentiments work together to incorporate rural areas and the past into modern society, simultaneously providing rural society with the material benefits of modernity while giving it, and society in general, a defence, in ideal terms, against the excesses of modern society. In other words, nostalgia is an intrinsic part of the process of moving forward (pp. 611–614).

Bearing in mind that such nostalgic themes are prominent also in the world of religion in Japan, I feel that it would be useful to analyze them and the roles they play in the religious context. This might prove helpful in furthering knowledge of this “nostalgia boom” but also would be of some use in understanding many contemporary themes in the Japanese religious world. At the very least, such an analysis would fill the gap I have referred to above, between allusions to nostalgia and actual discussion of the way such images work. In this article I wish to investigate the uses of nostalgic imagery as it occurs in religious contexts in Japan, using various examples taken from the world of pilgrimage, from religious leaflets and from the publications of a Zen Buddhist organization. I will also discuss similar usages in the more general world of commercial advertising as, I feel, there is a close connection here. Religious publicity, after all, seeks to elicit support and attract followers just as commercial advertisements seek to sell products to consumers. Accordingly, both use forms of imagery that will appeal to the prospective customer and when, as will be shown, such imagery is duplicated in commercial advertisements and religious publicity, the affinity between the two becomes striking.

In addition, by examining the examples and images that I will refer to, one finds that a consistent and interlocking series of divisions and classifications is manifested. I consider that such classifications and divisions, when analyzed, can provide insights into a world view that appears to be common to much of the Japanese religious spectrum and, in my conclusion, I hope to suggest the basic premises of this world view and the ways in which it functions and is used in the furtherance of religious activity in Japan.

*Nostalgia and Renewal:
Gravestones, Pilgrimages and Noodle Advertisements*

Recently an advertising handout inserted into my morning newspaper promoted the gravestones and graves of one company in the Kobe area with the words

“The eternal homeland . . . the grave is one’s spiritual homeland” (*eien no furusato wo . . . o-haka wa kokoro no furusato*, Leaflet 1).¹

It went on to state that worshipping at the grave is a vital aspect of human life that should be passed on from parent to child and down to succeeding generations. The advertisement clearly implies that the continuity of family life and traditions revolves around the family grave and the custom of worshipping at it. Of course, it being the company’s business to sell gravestones, I was quite prepared to accept some degree of advertising hyperbole, but what caught my attention was the use of the phrases *furusato* (often written 故郷 or 古里) and *kokoro no furusato*. Both these terms occur frequently in such advertisements as well as in the publications of various religious organizations.

The terms *furusato*, whose basic meaning is one’s native place or birthplace, and *kokoro no furusato* (“spiritual homeland”) imply emotive meanings that go beyond any such dictionary-style definitions: while the *furusato* may be where one (or one’s family) originally hails from, it is further used to denote also places that are imbued with the spirit of the homeland, full of the essence of Japanese tradition. In tourist literature, for instance, the word *furusato* is often used to endow places with a traditional essence and spirit, thereby conjuring up images of antiquity, rural peace, and order missing from modern cities. In short, the term is a key word that, by its very use, creates expectations of tradition and reassures people that such aspects still remain in Japan. The term *kokoro no furusato*, equally, denotes a spiritual sense of belonging, a cultural and emotional home intrinsic to the Japanese experience. Thus, in the advertisement cited above, the grave is identified as part of an intrinsically Japanese spiritual and cultural heritage, through which cultural identity and roots may be experienced.²

These two terms thus create images that imply something is fundamentally Japanese, part of a common heritage. Indeed, they may even be found in

¹ As I make use of a number of undated leaflets without pagination I have, for purposes of clarity, simply numbered them according to the order in which they occur in this article. Although they are undated, all are fairly recent: number 1 was first seen in 1986, number 2 in 1985, and the other three in 1982.

² I have used the word “roots” very deliberately here. In very recent times I have noticed that the loanword *riisu* has begun to appear in advertisements and travel posters, which makes me think that this may be a new addition to the *furusato* imagery. Following the growth in popularity of this word in Western, especially American, culture, it looks as if it is entering into Japanese consciousness as well.

contexts that appear to be devoid of tradition. For instance, a contemporary television advertisement for instant *ramen* (noodles), a dish full of modern chemical food additives that can be made simply by emptying the contents of a packet into boiling water, flashes up on the television screen the words *urusato* and *kāsan* (mother) to convey the somewhat dubious message that this product, although superficially a development of modern times, really comes from the depths of the Japanese tradition. It is just like one's mother (used here as a symbol of continuity and tradition, as an image rather than a reality) used to make back in the ideal past. It really is, of course, no matter that the product is in truth totally modern, a product of its age; the important element within the advertisement is the nostalgic fantasy that transforms a modern development into an old tradition. The image is far more pervasive and important than any possible factual accuracy.

One finds, also, frequent occurrences of these terms and the images they evoke in literature relating to pilgrimage. Often, too, such motifs also tie up with revivalist themes like those found in the *yomigaeru* film discussed at the beginning of this article. The Shingon Buddhist priest and pilgrimage historian Miyazaki Ninshō, in discussing pilgrimage in contemporary Japan, looks forward to a new religious age symbolized by the Shikoku pilgrimage which, he contends, not only unites all currents of Japanese religion but in fact epitomizes the very essence of the Japanese religious ethic. Through the medium of this pilgrimage he envisages a religious revival that will enable people to return to the glories of former times, to the ancient age of Kōbō Daishi (1985, pp. 213–221). Miyazaki's concept of revival corresponds quite closely to that seen by Matsumoto in the Hiei film: indeed, the symbolic white clothes traditionally worn by Shikoku pilgrims themselves mirror the robes of the Hiei ascetic and stand in similar contrast to the modern world.

There is certainly a deeply nostalgic element in the continuing popularity of pilgrimage in Japan. The pilgrim's white clothing, symbolizing the pilgrim's separation from and death to the mundane, can in itself be seen as a symbol of the nostalgic past. It provides those who wear it with a means of identification with traditions not found within the bounds of everyday contemporary life in Japan but accessible through the world of pilgrimage. The activity of pilgrimage represents a return to a world that has to all intents and purposes disappeared from the everyday perspective of modern Japan. Further, it offers the opportunity to renew contact with the past while existing within the modern.

Such ideas are clearly expressed in the popular literature aimed at the pilgrimage market. In the monthly Shikoku pilgrimage magazine *Henro* へんろ which is edited and published by the Iyotetsu Bus Company, a company that does an enormous business in pilgrimage tours around Shikoku, pilgrims are described as:

going around the pilgrimage sites of Shikoku seeking their spiritual homeland (*kokoro no furusato wo motomete Shikoku no fudasho wo meguru*) (Iyotetsu kankōkaihatsu, ed., No. 1, 1984, p. 1)

Similar terms and images are also commonly used in publicity relating to other pilgrimages. The Awaji island *Jūsanbutsu reijōkai* 十三仏霊場会 (a pilgrimage association of Buddhist temples that organizes and publicizes pilgrimages to thirteen temples dedicated to different Buddha images on Awaji) has, for example, produced several leaflets to advertise this particular pilgrimage route. One of these describes the island as a Japanese spiritual homeland, due to its importance in many ancient Japanese legends, and goes on to state that:

if one is Japanese, one will at some time wish to visit this spiritual homeland (*nihonjin naraba, itsuka wa kanarazu tazunete mitai to negau kokoro no furusato*; Leaflet 2).

Accordingly, it states, this pilgrimage route has been established to allow people to visit this spiritual homeland and, at the same time, receive the grace of the Buddhas to whom the pilgrimage is dedicated. Thus are the themes of travel, pilgrimage, and nostalgia united. Of course, it hardly need be added that any growth in the numbers of pilgrims will be of direct benefit to the temples who have organized the route and advertized it in terms similar to those employed to sell noodles and gravestones.

Pilgrimage represents only one part of a wider dimension of travel in Japan in which the search for spiritual roots occupies a primary theme. The popular writer Kino Kazuyoshi, for instance, has written an entire travelogue discussing famous Japanese places, mostly with religious connections, such as the Shinto centres of Ise and Izumo, and the Buddhist centre of Kōyasan, in the context of the search for a spiritual homeland and identity. Indeed, his book is titled *Kokoro no furusato* 心の故里 (subtitled *Tabi to nihonjin* 旅と日本人 [Travel and the Japanese]) and, in it, he writes of the Shikoku pilgrimage in no uncertain terms:

Shikoku is the spiritual homeland of the Japanese people (*Shikoku wa nihonjin no kokoro no furusato de aru* (1985, p. 65).

The entire book is a series of cameo pictures of old Japanese places, heavily illustrated with monochrome photographs that highlight the old and traditional while studiously avoiding any hint of modernity. There is, for example, not a car in sight. The implicit message is clear in its equation of age, tradition and religious places with roots, identity, and the essence of being Japanese. The spiritual identity of Japan is intimately connected with journeys to places with deep historical and religious importance. Anything that is modern is therefore quite clearly excluded from the concept and essence of being Japanese.

There is a degree of irony in this image of Japanese people seeking their spiritual homeland and identity through the medium of travel. The very changes in society (increased prosperity, highly developed communications) that have made such travel so easily accessible in Japan are in themselves manifestations of that society from which people are, through their pilgrimages, escaping. The technological and economic advances that have made such pursuits so accessible have helped undermine the traditional in Japanese society to the extent that modern Japanese exist in different worlds and lifestyles from their ancestors. The factors that enable people to go out seeking their spiritual roots are part of the reason why such a voyage might be considered necessary.

Naturally, no one is expected to actually return to this world of tradition. As with all nostalgia, the idealized version is far more pleasant than any reality. Japanese people are not seeking to give up their modern homes, conveniences, and Western clothes to go back to a less comfortable style of living. Nor are Japanese advertisers or religious organizations trying to make them do so. Rather, existence in one world/lifestyle and the prosperity it has brought have facilitated the creation of an ideal, a romanticized form of existence to which affinity may be claimed. The romanticism of the simple life is far more attractive to those who do not have to live it, and who can cushion their experience of it with modern conveniences.

The luxury buses that ply the various pilgrimage routes of Japan, taking people from modern hotel to modern hotel, are an overt reminder of this. While the Shikoku pilgrimage may be a potent symbol of something that is basically Japanese, attracting people with its elements of nostalgia and returning to the roots, one does not find pilgrims returning to the actual *form* of the pilgrimage as it was in earlier times. Whilst they take on the symbolic form of return in the pilgrim's garb of white shirt, bamboo hat, and wooden staff, they do not seek to undergo the experiences of pilgrims of former times who set out on foot, slept in rough shelters or outside, who begged for food and had to go without whenever they were in places where none was available. Modern pilgrims ride on buses that guarantee that they will arrive at the hotels at which their accommodation has been arranged and at which they will be able to get the good food and drink that is an intrinsic part of the package they have undertaken. Their sojourn in the world of tradition is an interlude, a break from the everyday routines of ordinary life to which they return refreshed from the contact with their spiritual roots (Reader 1987, pp. 133–145).

There is thus a dichotomous relationship between the world of everyday existence and the imagery of the spiritual homeland: the idealized nuances of the latter stand in opposition to the experiences of the former to create a temporary alternative to and escape from that everyday world. Advertise-

ments, whether for gravestones, noodles, or pilgrimages, use such nuances to create feelings of empathy in people aware of the disparities between their modern lifestyle and a cultural heritage that appears to be undermined by the modern world. These nostalgic ideals allow people existing in the realms of one sphere to enter and experience the world of tradition while retaining the benefits of the modern. Implicit within the use of such imagery, then, is an awareness of a conflict in an emotive and cultural sense between traditional (which, in the terms of this imagery, is read as Japanese) and modern (which can, by implication, be read as Western).

Images of Nostalgia and Renewal in a Zen Buddhist Organization

I will return to the implications of this division and conflict later; first, I would like to move on to deal with the specific use of such images by one particular large and long established Buddhist organization, the Sōtō Zen Buddhist sect. By examining these themes at greater depth in one specific context I hope to illustrate more clearly some of the points I have already made, as well as showing the extent to which such themes are popular in contemporary religious literature. In addition I hope to show just why they are popular with and useful to established religious organizations such as Buddhist sects.

Sōtō, the largest Zen Buddhist organization in Japan, with approximately 15,000 affiliated temples is, like other Japanese Buddhist organizations, dependent to a great extent on the continued support of a traditional membership whose connection to the sect is through the *danka* 檀家 system of household temple allegiance, in which the primary focus is on mortuary rites and related ceremonies. Elsewhere I have indicated the ways in which Sōtō as a Buddhist sect has adapted its teachings, diluting some of the austere elements of its Japanese initiator, Dōgen, so as to attract and maintain the active support of households related to it through the *danka* system. To this degree, many of its publications are focused on this traditional membership and relate to concepts of tradition and continuity intrinsic to the ethic of venerating the deceased at Buddhist temples. There is, as a result, a very powerful concentration on elements of tradition and on the relationship of the living and those who have gone before them, the ancestral figures through whom the relationship between the household and the family temple in the present day is reiterated (Reader 1985).

The sect's central office produces numerous pamphlets and leaflets aimed at its household members. These are frequently issued at the times of year such as New Year and *o-bon* when it is traditional for people to visit their household temples. In such pamphlets one often encounters nostalgic themes such as those described earlier in this article. For example, one such leaflet, entitled *Jinsei no yasuragi* (Peace of mind in human life), commences

with the words:

Whenever *o-bon* comes, each year I think of the way of life of the countryside (Leaflet 3).

It continues along this theme of recalling the past and connections with previous ages, talking about the fields of the native village in which the family ancestors toiled in earlier times. Thus it emphasizes the need to revere past generations for having provided life and a home for the present generation. It remains unsaid, but implicit, that the place at which to do this is the family temple. Through this relationship with the past one is able to attain inner peace and return to one's original self. The pamphlet continues by stating that peace of mind has disappeared in modern society (this loss in contemporary society standing starkly by implication with the peaceful images of satisfaction and tranquillity conjured up by the thoughts of the countryside and the past) and concludes:

Through this festival, which is an important spiritual home (*kokoro no furusato*) of the Japanese people, we wish to restore peace of mind and to cultivate satisfied minds, especially among young people (Leaflet 3).

Other sect leaflets, particularly those relating to calendrical events at which people customarily visit temples, use similar themes. On the theme of *o-bon* the leaflet *Ōrakana kokoro no sekai* (The world of great peace of mind) contrasts what it sees as the failures of modern society, focusing upon elements such as suicides among schoolchildren oppressed by the examination oriented education system, with the imagined tranquillity of earlier times, times reawakened and brought into the present by identification with the past generations through activities at family temples (Leaflet 4). The leaflet aptly titled *Kokoro no furusato* (The spiritual homeland) contrasts modern unease with past harmonies, expressing the view that in contemporary society there has been a breakdown in human relationships, such as those between teachers and pupils and parents and children, which has led in turn to unhappiness and discontent throughout Japanese society. In contrast it indicates that a way out of such unease can be found in a return to the ethics and family and personal connections of earlier ages, in which people lived harmoniously. This will be a return to a shared spiritual homeland (Leaflet 5).

In all these leaflets, then, one encounters an intense element of simple nostalgia and idealization with a common theme that can be most simply outlined as comparing the past (classified as good/peaceful/harmonious) and the present (bad/turbulent/not harmonious). Implicit in the concept of a return to the harmonies of the past and of the countryside, wherein true spiritual identity as well as peace of mind are found, is a critical view of urban life. One notes that one always, in the context of such leaflets, *returns* to the countryside, suggesting that they are primarily aimed at city dwellers. The

themes of such leaflets are simplistic in the extreme and are almost wholly in the realms of image and nuance: in more substantial publications, however, the sect takes up their implications in a more concrete way, using this simple imagery as a vehicle for directing a deep current of criticism at modern society.

One major theme that emerges from many Sōtō publications is a concerted attack on modern Japanese education, on the grounds that it has forsaken intrinsically Japanese and traditional elements (amongst which may be counted Buddhist ethics) in favour of what the sect regards as a Westernized system. This Westernization is seen as a root cause of social unrest and turmoil in Japan (Osada 1981, p. 21; Uchiyama 1979, p. 12; Muchaku 1980, pp. 54–63; Kamata 1977, pp. 3–57). It also has led to a loss of cultural identity according to Kamata who asks, “Have we not virtually abandoned our education as Japanese people?” (1977, p. 3)

The sect’s assault on contemporary education in Japan, interpreting it as a *Western* system out of harmony with Japanese life, is underlined by the implication that all that is wrong in society is, like the education system, foreign and imported. One booklet in a recent series published by the sect deals with Japanese culture and its relationship to modern society, painting various contrasts between what it views as traditional Japanese behavior and the ways people now act: it argues that Japan has overzealously imbibed American and European lifestyles and culture, losing, in the process, its own to a great extent (Sōtōshūkyōkabu, ed., 1985, especially pp. 7–18 and pp. 42–43). These images are drawn in sharp black and white tones: family life in the old days is portrayed as warm and loving, in contrast to modern family lifestyles that are shown as cold, unfeeling, and fixated upon the television set. Such coldness, it is asserted, leads to all manner of social ills (pp. 11–12), to the extent that one is left with the impression that materialism had no existence in Japanese consciousness before contacts with the West and that all social ills derive from non-Japanese factors.

Probably the most extreme expression of this theme in Sōtō publications comes from Tanaka Tadao, a lecturer at Sōtō’s Komazawa University. Tanaka contrasts the obedience (as he imagines it) of prewar Japanese children with the undisciplined spoilt and pampered modern ones, who have no ability to endure problems and hardships (1978, p. 28). He continues by assaulting democracy (by implication, a Western concept) as a system that, he contends, actually undermines people by making them all conform to a common low standard. Here he makes a play on the words *bonkura* 凡くら (stupid, dull) and *bonkurashii* ボンクラシー, a loan word meaning “easy living/comfortable” that he uses to describe the present age. This era is, he says, an easy living one (*bonkurashii jidai* ボンクラシー時代) while democracy, by making everyone conform to a common low standard, makes people

dull (*bonkura*) with the result that, he considers, “democracy is *bonkurashii*” デモクラシーはボンクラシー (p. 28). By underlining only part of the word he transforms the overall statement that equates democracy with comfortable living into one stating that democracy is dull and stupid. The implied connections of democracy, the failures of education, the decline of the social fabric, and the incidence of Westernization are thus set in contrast to an idyllic past when children obeyed their parents and everything was harmonious.

Similar if perhaps less extreme sentiments occur elsewhere in Sōtō’s contemporary publications. Sakai Daigaku, for instance, contrasts what he sees as the desolation of modern society, in which nature is stifled, with the harmony of traditional society, painting a stark comparison between modern buildings (characterized as concrete/metal/soulless/lifeless and dehumanizing) with traditional ones (wooden/living/humanizing) (1980, pp. 59–63). Of course, this contrast of modern/traditional and of concrete/wood may also clearly be read as Western/Japanese.

Such explicit castigating of the modern as bad fuses with the nostalgic imagery of the past as harmonious to paint images of a spiritual homeland that stands in shining contrast to the unease of the current age of democracy, concrete and Westernization. What is wrong in Japanese society is analyzed in terms of separation from the ways of the past: any solution to contemporary problems lies in returning to old values, customs and ways of behavior. This return will involve an affirmation of the paramount nature of Buddhism (Sōtō is, after all, a Buddhist organization) and a restoration of Buddhist ethics. Muchaku, for example, sees the ills of the Japanese education system as coming from its copying of Western ideas and states that the government should alter this and immediately adopt the guidance of Buddhist law (1980, p. 63).

While this apparently idealistic notion of a spiritual revival based on the religious law of Buddhism could well be an important goal for a Buddhist organization, something that one might expect to hear, I feel that there is perhaps also a more cogent and practical basis to such imagery. Sōtō, like other Buddhist organizations in Japan, is very dependent on the support it gets from the households affiliated to its temples. Like other Buddhist organizations it has much to lose from any breakdown in this old traditional system. But, of course, the traditional system has been under increasing threat in recent decades. The changes in society that have moved people away from their old temples, the urbanization that has, amongst other things, weakened the ties between households and temples, and the growth of newer religious organizations that have drawn people away from previous affiliations, have all served to undermine this traditional economic and social base on which Buddhist organizations have rested (see, for example, Morioka 1975, pp. 89–106; pp. 155–167). To reassert tradition thus naturally reaffirms this tra-

ditional relationship upon which established Buddhism still greatly depends.

By creating an image of peace and harmony in the past and by linking the present to this image through the deceased members of the household the sect is effectively stressing the cardinal links that bind Japanese people and Buddhist organizations. It is, in this way, seeking to reassert the traditional relationships between the general populace and Buddhism in an age which has seen a general weakening of those ties. Nostalgia and idealized visions of the past are being used in attempts to turn people back towards their traditional affiliations to Buddhist temples, affiliations increasingly threatened by the changing social landscape. One could, I think, consider that such attacks are, as much as anything, a stylistic device, drawing on the fears and insecurities of people faced with rapid change so as to emphasize feelings of spiritual belonging that might entice people back to Sōtō temples. In this respect at least, the use of anti-modern sentiments and revivalist imagery has as a major and immediate goal the preservation in the present and the promotion in the future of the position of the Sōtō Zen Buddhist sect and its temples.

Conclusions

Throughout these images that play on nostalgic themes is a basic categorization which divides the world into two opposing poles, one of which is denied, the other affirmed. By analyzing this polarity, one can decipher an underlying world view that is not limited to just one Buddhist sect but appears in a wide variety of contexts. Just by taking a few of the opposing categories that have been cited in this article, one could construct a table of dualities along these lines:

city	country
modern	traditional
concrete	wood
lifeless	living
dehumanizing	humanizing
separation	union
disharmony	harmony
spiritual decline	spiritual revival
Western	Japanese

This table is by no means exhaustive, of course. Its significance lies in relating a series of concepts on one side of the division together (as with city/modern/disharmony) to stand in stark contrast to a related series on the other side (for example, traditional/harmony/spiritual revival). This then presents a categorization of the world based on two interrelated but opposing polarities focusing on identification in social, cultural, and (with the idea of spiritual revival) religious terms. The images represented by the terms

furusato and *kokoro no furusato* act to categorize all that is good and harmonious while excluding all that is not. The dynamic is always to classify anything that threatens either the peace of society or, indeed, the foundations of a religious movement, as outside and alien, not belonging to the spiritual home of the Japanese and hence to be — on the ideal plane — excluded.

These divisions, by acting as images of cultural determination, are used, in pragmatic terms, to create feelings of empathy and affinity designed to attract those who do find themselves faced with the identification conflicts that are bound to occur when a society undergoes the large scale and rapid changes that Japan has had in recent times. Such polarization also has intrinsically therapeutic qualities. The city/Western/modern pole acts as the scapegoat for all social ills, providing a means by which problems in society can be recognized and discussed without implying or necessitating any criticism of national culture. Elements that create problems and disharmony are, by this model, classified as belonging to the outside, not inherently part of true Japanese society. This in turn allows social problems to be “solved” on the theoretical level simply by restating older social and cultural values. It provides a route of symbolic purification that allows religious organizations to manifest concern about social problems without really needing to make any great practical commitment to their solution.

Of course, the lives of people in contemporary Japanese society are largely lived within the scope of the first series of categorizations, and the ideals created by the second series should be viewed in this light. The yearning for such ideals contrasts with the realities of everyday existence. Access to the second is manufactured through the first. People move between these polarizations, but in such controlled environments and situations as a pilgrimage, a calendrical festival, or a visit to the family grave. They move to these poles, into the stylized world of tradition but, and this is an intrinsic part of such events, they move back after completion, revived through their contacts with the ideal. Religious events such as pilgrimages and visits to family temples provide a means by which people can step outside their everyday modern lives and restate fundamental ideals, while not forsaking the advantages brought by modernity. In such ways the *kokoro no furusato* image allows for a controlled restatement of what are considered to be basic cultural and spiritual ideals and roots in a manner that neither threatens nor disturbs the comforts and benefits of city life.

In such respects these images function as a ritual organizing of the world, creating, classifying, structuring, renewing, and reinvigorating on an ideal level, just as the idealized bowl of instant/traditional noodles recreates the traditional harmonies of country life whilst reinvigorating the body of the person eating it. By such statements and differentiations, a framework is constructed by which to interpret the world in Japanese terms without threaten-

ing the basic premises of Japanese society. At the same time, of course, such a framework has the added value of promoting the aims of those that use it. The gravestone manufacturer aims to attract customers by the use of its imagery, the Buddhist sect seeks to persuade people not to allow their traditional affiliations to lapse, organizations that promote pilgrimages aim to draw more pilgrims, and the food company hopes to sell more noodles.

There is some evidence to suggest a growth of interest in spiritual matters in recent years in Japan.³ Such a revival, which appears to take such forms as the probings of spiritual roots, reassertions of concepts of “Japaneseness” and revivals of tradition, may, it is suggested, represent, as much as anything else, a defence mechanism against the incursions of outside influences (Swyngedouw 1986, p. 13) and, indeed, it is quite clear that the imagery I have cited contains an extremely defensive element within it. As an established Buddhist sect, Sōtō is affected by anything which might undermine traditional patterns of religious affiliation and the very vehemence of its attacks on what it sees as sources of disharmony in society betrays an immense degree of defensive anxiety.

Yet perhaps this is more than defensive. The very processes brought into motion by such images provide a model for identification and a means of adjusting to modernity in social, cultural, and religious terms. The rejection of modernity in ideal terms is not mirrored on the practical level. Indeed, the growing prevalence of the modern serves to heighten the value and contrasting imagery of the traditional, while restating the traditional in nostalgic terms serves to help in the assimilation of the modern. Kelly’s exposition of how nostalgia plays a role in the rationale of modernization, thereby actually giving increased support to modern lifestyles (pp. 612–613), is, I feel, as valid in the religious world as it is in that of rural development. The buses that ply pilgrimage routes attract customers through atmospheric advertising that makes pilgrimage appear to offer an appealing contrast to the hustle of modern life. Riding luxury buses and staying at modern hotels (modes of pilgrimage only made possible by modern developments) are made respectable and tempered by the traditional manner in which the pilgrims dress and by their symbolic return to a spiritual homeland, to the extent that nostalgia actually validates modernity.

A further possibility is that the popularity of traditional images is in part conditioned by a society that, as with Europe and the United States in the 1960s, is becoming so materially satiated that it needs to look at alternative routes to satisfaction and is thus led to look again at aspects of its own cultural consciousness previously neglected in the quest for material progress. It is possible that, in the way that many European and American fugitives from material excess in the 1960s developed idealized notions of Asian spirituality

³ For a fuller analysis of this trend see Swyngedouw 1986.

and sought solace through them, many Japanese are also seeking routes of spiritual escape in the idealization of their own past. One has, at least, to bear in mind that the means and opportunity to do this are closely bound up with the material developments that have made these nostalgically spiritual ideals so attractive and accessible.

In recent times there has been a steady surge in the popularity of “new” New Religions that combine intrinsically anti-modern aspects (as with Ma-hikari’s rejection of modern medicine or Agonshū’s use of esoteric rituals) and very modern packaging and high profile media events. Such religious organizations have certainly gained enormous sustenance from the unease of many Japanese at the rapid and vast scale of change in society. They have also been adroit at presenting their teachings in such a light as to elicit such responses. But one should not assume that New Religions alone have a monopoly in this. As I have attempted to show, similar sentiments and similar understandings of the degree to which such themes strike a responsive chord can be found in the traditional religious establishment as well. They also are common in the world of commercial advertising. Of course, to an extent all these diverse currents are mirroring and expressing popular unease and sentiments, but they are equally, I think, helping to actually stimulate and create them. When the Sōtō Zen sect highlights nostalgic themes it is doing more than merely responding to public wishes. It is actively working to heighten those feelings because it understands the potential benefits it may gain from their increase.

I have returned, in a circuitous way, to the image with which I started, of the monk in his symbolic robes of purity set against the impurities of the modern world, of the restoration of the pagoda, and the religious revival of the Japanese spirit that promises to counteract the impurities of the world. This image, by crystallizing the contrasts made between notions of tradition (Japanese) and modern (Western), concretizes the pervasive ethic of nostalgic longing extant in contemporary Japanese religion. This looking back to an idealized past has practical elements as well for it establishes cultural parameters through which to view and relate to the world at large. Moreover, it is a means by which various interests from religious organizations to marketing companies seek to solidify and increase future popular support for themselves and their products. Looking back is, indeed, in such terms an intrinsic part of looking forward.

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