Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 1989 16/1

Historical and Historiographical Issues

In the Study of Pre-Modern Japanese Religions

Neil MCMULLIN

The purpose of this essay is to address four broad issues in regard to the study of the history of religions in pre-modern (prior to 1868) Japan, especially in the early (712–1185) and medieval (1185–1600) periods, in order to redress certain imbalances in the study of pre-modern Japanese religions with regard to those issues.[1] Those four issues are:

First, the relation between Buddhism and Shinto.

Second, the relation between the development of religious institutions, rituals and doctrines, and developments in the society-at-large of the time.

Third, the comparative importance of religious institutions, rituals, and doctrines, as well as the main purposes of ritual.

And fourth, the relation between religion and politics.

Each of these issues contains within it two sets of questions: one, an historical set, has to do with the whole matter of the nature and structure of pre-modern Japanese societies, and the second, an historiographical set, involves an inquiry into the matter of why modern studies of pre-modern Japan have the shape that they do. In this essay we will consider sequen-

[1] This essay is an abbreviated and re-edited version of a paper that was submitted to the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, in June of 1984 upon the termination of a research fellowship that I had there in the 1983–84 academic year. I wish to express my appreciation to the East-West Center, particularly to Allan G. Grapard, who was then the Director of the Lotus Project at the "Center," for making that fellowship available to me. A distilled version of that paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Anaheim, California, in November of 1985. Some insights contained in the papers of the other participants in that panel (James Foard, Richard Gardner, and Helen Hardacre), and observations made in person by them, have been incorporated into the present essay.

tially each of the aforementioned issues, first in terms of the historical questions and then in terms of the historiographical ones. Examples in support of the points being made will be drawn mainly from the history of the Tendai tradition, but they could be drawn from any of the forms and branches of the Japanese religious traditions. It goes without saying that none of the complex questions raised in this essay can be dealt with adequately in such a limited space. Some of the following observations might strike the reader as obvious, perhaps even trite, and others might be deemed simplistic or too sweeping and herein unsupported, if not unsupportable. Undoubtedly many of the following observations require clarification, and some demand much explication, but were the necessary qualifications and explications offered in this essay it would multiply in length manyfold and never get written.

Buddhism and Shinto

The first of the four issues identified above has to do with the relation between Buddhism and Shinto in pre-modern Japanese societies. Although the word Shinto is very much a part of our lexicon of Japanese religious terms, it is important to recognize that until the late medieval period there was no such a thing as Shinto in the sense of a structured, self-conscious tradition existing over and apart from Buddhism. Prior to that time what we call Shinto was a plethora of tribal and local myths, legends, beliefs, practices, etc. that were bound up in various ways and to varying degrees with continental myths, beliefs, and practices from pre-Nara (prior to the eighth century) times. In this essay Shinto refers to the predominantly indigenous strain in the mosaic of Japanese religion, but even that strain included within it a great many Korean, Chinese, and even some Indian, elements.[2] As KURODA Toshio has pointed out in an exceptionally important article, before the modern era even the meaning of the word Shinto was unclear (1981, pp. 1–21). Indeed, because Buddhist influences pervaded Japan well before Shinto *qua* Shinto was identified and defined, the very identification and definition of Shinto were, at least partly, Buddhist exercises.

It appears that in the minds of the pre-modern Japanese, Buddhist and

[2] One of a large number of cases in which continental and indigenous elements were combined from very early times is that of the divinity Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王. Gozu, the ox-headed deity, is an Indian mythological figure who was identified with Mutō Tenjin 武塔天神, a Korean deity, and both were identified subsequently with Susanoo no Mikoto, one of the most important divinities in the classical Japanese myth recorded in the *Kojiki*. This issue is discussed in MCMULLIN 1988.

Shinto views were thoroughly integrated. In evidence of this, for example, when Saichō 最澄 (767–822), the founder of the Tendai school of Buddhism in Japan, established the Enryaku-ji 延暦寺, his choice of the site (Mt. Hiei 比叡山) at which he built that monastery was most likely influenced by native Shinto (in the sense noted above) feelings about sacred mountains,[3] and perhaps also by Taoist notions about auspicious places and directions. The fact of the matter is that Buddhist monks in pre-modern Japan were also Shintoists, which is to say no more – but no less – than that they were enmeshed from birth in a cultural fabric that was shot through with a melange of indigenous and imported myths, symbols, rituals, and moods that taken together we call Shinto. Throughout most of Japanese history, foreign (Buddhist, but also Taoist and Confucian) and indigenous elements were amalgamated in a single, cohesive whole. Indeed, Buddhism and Shinto were amalgamated institutionally, ritually, and doctrinally to such a degree that to treat them as distinct, independent traditions is to misrepresent the structure of pre-modern Japanese societies. The tremendously intimate relation between Buddhism and Shinto, a relation that went through various stages of development and interpretation, is demonstrated by overwhelming evidence.

Doctrinally, the Buddhist-Shinto amalgam is demonstrated by *honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹, a pairing technique that served to identify and draw out the relations between the foreign Buddhas and bodhisattvas and the native and nativized deities (*kami*). In the late-nineteenth century the Meiji government gave indirect witness to the fact that the *kami* and Buddhas had been united over the preceding centuries by its institution of the policy of *shinbutsu-bunri* 神仏分離 ("separation of the *kami* and Buddhas"). By decreeing that thenceforth the *kami* and Buddhas were to be separate, the Meiji ideologues thereby acknowledged that theretofore the *kami* and Buddhas had in fact not been considered to be separate, and by decreeing that thenceforth the *kami* and Buddhas were to be separate as they had been in the past, those ideologues engaged in an exercise of rewriting history (see GRAPARD 1984).

Ritually, Buddhism and Shinto formed one tradition throughout early and medieval Japanese history. From early times Buddhist divinities had a place in Shinto rituals, and the *kami* had a place in Buddhist rituals. Some Buddhist rituals were performed to honor various *kami*, and Buddhist sūtras were copied for the salvation of the *kami*. To cite one of many pos-

[3] Saichō's father, so it is said, worshipped the *kami* of Mt. Hiei and once built a small shrine on the mountain as a way of evoking the intercession of that *kami* to grant him a son. See KAGEYAMA 1974, p. 42.

sible examples: from the ninth century on, some of the rituals performed at the Enryaku-ji were devoted to Sannō 山王, the protector *kami* of Mt. Hiei, and from 887, in response to a petition by the monk Enchin 円珍 (814–891), the fifth head abbot of the Tendai school (*Tendai zasu* 天台座主), two "yearly ordinands" (*nenbun dosha* 年分度者) were assigned to the Enryaku-ji with the duty of studying and reciting two sūtras in honor of "the great Sannō divinity" (*Sannō daimyōjin* 大明神).[4] Various Buddhist masters, such as the famous Ennin 円仁 (793–864), the third head abbot of the Tendai school, worshipped and even had chapels built in honor of non-Buddhist divinities.[5]

From a reading of early and medieval Japanese literature it appears that there was a distinction in the religious communities between Buddhist and Shinto rituals; that is to say, the rituals were not so indiscriminately mixed together as to obviate any distinction between Buddhist rituals and Shinto ones, and therefore one might make the argument that Buddhism and Shinto were in fact quite separate traditions over the centuries from the earliest times. However, whereas it is true that there was such a distinction, it was just one of a number of distinctions applicable to rituals: there were also distinctions between, for example, exoteric rituals and esoteric ones, public rituals and private ones, state rituals and family ones, and so forth. The texts, paraphernalia, type of preparation, etc., required for the performance of an esoteric ritual, for instance, were different from those required for an exoteric one. However, for an Enryaku-ji monk to perform a ritual in honor of the protector *kami* of Mt. Hiei (Sannō) was no more incongruous, and would have required no more justification or apologetic, than would have been required, for example, of a *shanagō* 遮那業 ("esoteric practice") master who decided to participate in an exoteric ritual. Thus I suggest that the basic distinction in the religious communities in regard to rituals was not along "sectarian" (Buddhist- Shinto) lines but along functional ones: i.e., the distinction was based not on an

[4] See SHIBUYA 1939, p. 24. The two rituals that those monks were to perform were the *dainichigō* 大日業, in which the *Dainichikyō* was recited, and the *ichijigō*, in which the *Ichijikyō* (i.e., the *Bodaidōjōshosetsuichijichōron'ōkyō* 菩提道場所説一字頂輪王経) was recited. For a study of Tendai devotion to Sannō see YAMADA 1979.

[5] In 868, Ennin's disciples, in keeping with the wishes of their recently-deceased master, constructed a chapel (the Sekizan Zen'in 赤山禅院) at the southwestern foot of Mt. Hiei in honor of a Chinese divinity to whom Ennin had prayed for a safe trip home from China in 847. See TSUJI 1944, p. 340. Ennin and other monks also prayed to "the divinities of the soil" of Quelpart Island, at which Ennin and his traveling companions stopped on the way back to Japan, for a safe voyage. See REISCHAUER 1955, p. 299.

awareness of or a sensitivity *vis-à-vis* the fact that certain rituals are Buddhist and certain other ones Shinto, but, rather, that these particular rituals serve such and such a purpose, and those particular rituals so and so a purpose.

Institutionally, Buddhism and Shinto were also united from very early times through the nineteenth century. In the case of the Enryaku-ji, for example, over the centuries the monastery atop Mt. Hiei and the Hie 日吉 shrine at the eastern foot of the mountain formed a single complex (Allan Grapard uses the apt term multiplex).[6] From the mid-Heian period most Shinto shrines were "branch shrines"(*massha* 末社) of one or other of the major shrines which themselves were affiliated with one or other major monastery, and they functioned as parts of the larger Buddhist-Shinto complexes. For example, from the 970s the Gion shrine (*Yasaka jinja* 八坂神社) in Kyoto was a "detached cloister" (*betsuin* 別院) of the Enryaku-ji and functioned as a branch shrine of the Hie shrine, and the chief priest (a "Shinto" figure) of the Gion 祇園 shrine was a member of the Enryaku-ji ("Buddhist") community.[7] Similarly, the Tōnomine 多武峰 shrine in Yamato province was a detached cloister of the Enryaku-ji from the late-tenth century, and its members, Shinto clerics, customarily went to study at the Enryaku-ji. Eventually the Hie shrine, and thereby the Enryaku-ji, established "home-branch" (*honmatsu* 本末) relations with 108 shrines spread throughout a number of provinces.[8]

This institutional intimacy is apparent also in the cases of two of the most important shrines, those at Ise and Izumo, that might be thought of as having been "purely" Shinto in character over the centuries. Until the Meiji period, with its implementation of the *shinbutsu-bunri* policy, the Ise shrine was literally surrounded by upwards of 300 Buddhist institutions, and thus that shrine was, in fact, located within, and formed a central part of, an immense Shinto-Buddhist complex. Similarly, the Great Shrine at Izumo formed the nucleus of a large Shinto-Buddhist institutional complex until the end of the nineteenth century.

[6] For instance, from the late Heian period the "sacred carts" (*omikoshi* 御神輿), in which the Hie divinities were transported, were carried in procession by Enryaku-ji monks when they marched on Kyoto to lodge a protest.

[7] For a discussion of the relation between the Enryaku-ji and the Gion "shrine" see MCMULLIN 1987.

[8] Interestingly, the Kasuga shrine, which was affiliated with the Kōfuku-ji, the head monastery of the Hossō school of Buddhism in Nara, had fifty-one branch shrines, the same number as there were Kasuga divinities. See SHIMONAKA 1937–1938, Vol. 3, p. 270. One might wonder which came first at Kasuga, the branch shrines or the divinities, or if the number of divinities expanded as the shrine assumed control of more and more smaller shrines.

From the tenth century there was established a structure of twenty-two major monastery-shrine complexes, each of which included numerous "branch monasteries" (*matsuji* 末寺) and branch shrines, and which together wielded great power and influence from that time through the medieval period. In a recent study (1988), Allan Grapard argues that Shinto, as it is commonly portrayed, developed during the medieval period out of that structure of twenty-two monastery-shrine complexes.

Thus it is, I suggest, incorrect to speak as though religious institutions in pre-modern Japan belonged completely and exclusively either to the Buddhist tradition or to the Shinto tradition but not, at least at some level, to both at the same time. To put this point in strong terms: through the millennium from the middle of the Heian period (794–1185) to the modern age, there was no such a thing in Japan as an exclusively Buddhist institution. All so-called Buddhist institutions were at least partly Shinto, and all so-called Shinto institutions were at least partly Buddhist. In other words, all major religious institutions in Japan combined both Buddhist and Shinto elements into complex, integrated wholes. This institutional amalgam both reflected and generated the Buddhist-Shinto doctrinal and ritual syntheses.

Institutions, Rituals, Doctrines

The second major issue raised above has to do with the intimate relation between the development of religious institutions, rituals, and doctrines, and developments in the society-at-large of the time. Throughout premodern Japanese history, those institutions, rituals, and doctrines developed almost invariably in response to, or at least in symbiotic conjunction with, developments in other sectors of the society of the time, and most often in response to, or in conjunction with, economic and political developments. Developments in the monastery-shrine complexes in the Heian period, for example, most often reflected developments in the court world. For instance, the establishment of intimate relations between the Enryaku-ji and the Gion shrine had little to do, at least initially, with doctrinal matters but much to do with efforts on the part of the Enryaku-ji to develop an institutional power base in Kyoto, and with efforts on the part of the court to control the masses of peasants in the capital by asserting control over a type of popular ritual, the *goryō'e* 御霊会, that involved large numbers of arms-bearing peasants (McMULLIN 1988).

Indeed, the outcomes of many of the formal "religious debates" (*shūron* 宗論) that took place among monks of the various schools in the early and

medieval periods cannot be understood simply in the contexts of those debates. That is to say, frequently it appears to have been the case that the victor in a debate was determined less on the basis of his debating skills than on other factors, notably economic and political ones (i.e., the rank and power of the patrons of the monk who was declared to be the victor), and therefore it is necessary to take those factors into consideration in order to understand the reasons for the outcome of a debate.[9]

Throughout Japanese history there were, undoubtedly, many monks who devoted themselves to the pursuit of enlightenment, but much more than personal devotion has to be taken into account to explain the reasons even for that activity. Why so many people in certain ages decided to become monks is a question that has to do with complex sets of economic and political factors. To account, for example, for the tremendous growth of the Mt. Hiei-Hie community in the ninth and tenth centuries from a handful of residents to upwards of 3,000 members demands that we inquire into economic factors (such as the taxation structure of the times and peoples' efforts to avoid taxes by becoming monks and thus having their names stricken from the tax rolls) and political ones (such as the fact that the only avenues to positions of political power that were open to most people at that time were the religious communities), in addition to such factors as personal devotion or the presence in the Enryaku-ji of a number of great Buddhist masters.

To consider one example to demonstrate the foregoing point: in the year 818 Saichō petitioned the court for permission to establish a rule whereby all aspirants to ordination in the Tendai school first had to spend a twelve-year uninterrupted period of study and practice in seclusion on Mt. Hiei. It is possible to offer various reasons for Saichō's establishment of that rule (he wanted to develop holier monks, more educated monks, and so forth), but, without denying that Saichō had such motives, I would suggest that his main reason for implementing that rule might be discovered by considering the growth of his community in the period from 807 to 818. In that period the court assigned Saichō twenty-four yearly ordinands, but by 819 fourteen of those twenty-four had left the Enryaku-ji: one had died, one was away on pilgrimage, two had quit the religious

[9] A similar situation appears to have prevailed in the case of early and medieval "poetry debates." That is, it is not clear from the contemporary essays on aesthetics and poetics that were written to explain why poem "X" was judged to be superior to poem "Y" just why in fact poem "X" merited that victory. Evidently factors other than the rules of aesthetics and poetics were influential in the judging procedures in the poetry debates, just as they were in the religious debates.

life to care for their ailing mothers, nine had transferred to other monasteries in Nara, and the whereabouts of one was unknown. Thus it appears that Saichō's seclusion policy, while serving perhaps various purposes, was primarily a strategy designed to solve the problem of the loss of ordinands: by keeping his assigned disciples locked up on Mt. Hiei for an extended period of time, Saichō lessened the risk of losing them, especially to monasteries of the rival Hossō school to which almost half of those who abandoned him went.[10]

Furthermore, theories regarding the relations between certain *kami* and Buddhas, the *honji-suijaku* relations, often developed in response to or together with developments in the economic realm, namely the absorption of Shinto shrines and their lands into the large Buddhist-Shinto institutional complexes. Thus, doctrine often rationalized and justified economic developments, and, at the same time, helped to make those developments possible. For example, the development and proliferation of esoteric (*mikkyō* 密教) forms of ritual in the Heian period reflected important political and economic developments: namely, as the bureaucratic state structure (*ritsuryōsei* 律令制) weakened in the early Heian period, the powerful families searched for other supports for their positions of power and privilege, and one type of support that they discovered and patronized was certain kinds of esoteric rituals that they believed to contain great power. Moreover, as we shall see, even the understanding of the nature of the politico-religious ideology changed in accordance with changes in the politico-economic conditions of the times.

Comparative Importance of Institutions, Rituals, and Doctrines

The third issue noted above has to do with the comparative importance of religious institutions, rituals, and doctrines in the pre-modern Japanese world, and the main purposes of ritual. In this context it should be noted that although it is convenient to use the words "Buddhism" and "Shinto(ism)," it is important to be aware that those terms refer not just or even primarily to sets of doctrines, but to large numbers of highly concrete institutions and the people who belonged to those institutions. Religion's importance in Japanese history was due primarily to the religious institutions, notably the monastery-shrine complexes, which made a tremendous impact—artistically, economically, educationally, literarily, politically, so-

[10] Information on those monks is contained in a register, the *Tendai hokkeshū nenbun tokudo gakushō meichō* 天台法華宗年分得度学生名帳, that Saichō compiled in 819, and is reproduced in TSUJI 1944, pp. 270–274. This matter is discussed in GRONER 1984, pp. 125–126.

cially, and so forth — on society for over a millennium.

In regard to the question of the comparative importance of ritual and doctrine, Frits STAAL points out that what counts primarily in Asia are:

> ancestors and teachers — hence lineages, traditions, affiliations, cults, eligibility, initiation, and injunction — concepts with ritual rather than truth-functional overtones. . . . Like the other so-called religions of Asia, Buddhism is characterized by the fact that ritual (in which all monks engage) is more important than mystical experience (which only a few attain), which is in turn more important than belief or doctrine (a matter confined to scholarly monks or [observes Staal with somewhat cynical humor] reserved for Western converts, anthropologists, and tourists). . . [In Asia,] practice and ritual are more important than truth, belief, or doctrine (1984, pp. 11–12, 17–18).

Staal's assertion of the preeminence of ritual in Asia is clearly applicable to the case of Japan. Primary source materials on the Buddhist-Shinto tradition(s) are replete with information on lineages and rituals: in the case of the Mt. Hiei/Hie complex, for example, those materials provide detailed information on what masters the various abbots studied under, by whom they were initiated and ordained, and to what lines of masters the abbots belonged. Those materials also include much information on ritual: on what rituals were customarily performed at the Mt. Hiei/Hie complex; on which abbot was the first to have performed a particular ritual; on how many days the performance of a certain ritual required; on what eminent people participated in a particular ritual on a specific occasion; and so forth. There were, in every age, scholarly clerics who produced doctrinal tracts, but the primary activity of the vast majority of the clerics over the centuries appears to have been not so much the production and study of doctrinal tracts but the learning, practicing, and performing of rituals. In a recent study, Helen Hardacre provides evidences of the relative importance of ritual over doctrine in the case of Reiyūkai Kyōdan 霊友会教団, one of the so-called New Religions (see HARDACRE 1984, pp. 72, 75, 141), and thus it appears that the preeminence of ritual in Japanese religion continues into the modern day.

In early and medieval Japan, the vast majority of rituals appear to have had less an "other-worldly" (having to do with the monks' attainment of enlightenment or salvation) than a "this-worldly" (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) purpose. From the earliest days, as shall be discussed later, the most important rituals were performed for the stability and protection of the state. Other rituals were frequently performed for the purpose of bringing about

the realization of specific, practical goals (the safe birth of a child, deliverance from sickness, the designation of a certain imperial prince as crown prince, and so on), and those rituals were usually performed at the court or in the residences of the wealthy patrons of the monks who performed them. Clerics who performed efficacious rituals — that is, rituals that were believed to have brought about the intended effects — were rewarded by the rituals' patrons with finances, grants of land, promotion to high offices in the religious communities, appointment to the *sōgō* 僧綱 (the council that oversaw all matters pertaining to Buddhist monks and monasteries), and court titles. Thus, just as the rituals served the court élite, they also served as the coinage whereby clerics could purchase power and prestige.

It might also be argued that developments within the Buddhist-Shinto tradition(s) may best be understood less as developments of new doctrines than as the appearance of new kinds of rituals. The rise of esoteric traditions in the Heian period can best be understood in this way, and the so-called reform schools of Buddhism that developed in the early Kamakura period (1185–1333) might also be interpreted as movements that propagated new forms of ritual rather than as new doctrinal traditions, each with a dramatically new and different interpretation of important Buddhist concepts. Indeed, many of those new doctrines and rituals might have been less unique than has often been thought, and the Kamakura reform schools probably represented less of a break with the Buddhism of the Heian period than is commonly assumed. According to Kuroda Toshio, a mixture of esoteric and "exoteric" (*kengyō* 顕教) teachings and rituals characterized all Japanese Buddhist schools from the Nara period down to the modern age; all pre-modern Buddhist schools, including the Kamakura reform schools, were variations on a persistent "exoteric-esoteric structure" (*kenmitsu taisei* 顕密体制).[11] Kuroda's theory points up a problem in the commonly-accepted periodization of the history of Japanese religions.

Thus, were we to rank religious institutions, rituals, and doctrines in order of their relative importance in pre-modern Japanese societies, institutions would rank first, rituals second, and doctrines last.

Religion and Politics

In regard to the fourth issue noted above, that of the nature of the relation between religion and politics in pre-modern Japanese society, there

[11] This issue is discussed in numerous works by Professor Kuroda, to whom I am deeply indebted for his kind guidance during a year of research in Japan in 1981–1982. See KURODA, especially 1963 and also 1967, 1975a, 1975b, 1980, and 1983.

are two sub-issues that might be addressed: an ideological one regarding the role that religious concepts played in the formation and formulation of state ideology, and an institutional one regarding the nature of the relation between religious institutions (the monastery-shrine complexes) and the organs of government.

In regard to the ideological issue, in the period before continental influences made a strong impact on Japan, the justification for the possession of authority in society by certain "families" (*uji* 氏) appears to have rested on the claim that those families were descended from certain ancestral *kami*, and thus their possession of authority was, as it were, a divine birthright. By the sixth century, Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian materials had begun to arrive in Japan as part of a wave of Chinese and Korean influences that swept over the country. The formulators of the earliest Japanese political statements to have come down to us were familiar with those materials and used concepts contained in them when they were making their formulations. It was not the case that certain imported religious notions were selectively adopted by a group of people who possessed a fully developed indigenous politico-religious philosophy, and still less an "extra-religious" political philosophy: rather, the ways of thinking of those people, their mental frames of reference, were profoundly shaped by and imbued with religious notions. In other words, some of the earliest statements about the nature of authority in Japanese societies were religious statements; or, to put it differently, "political" statements were simultaneously "religious" statements.

Possible examples of the commingling of "political" and "religious" symbols are many. For instance, in the first part of Article 2 of the "Seventeen Article Constitution" (*Jūshichijō kenpō* 十七条憲法) of 604 C.E., a "political" document, there is the "religious" profession that the "Three Treasures" (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) are the ultimate refuge of all beings and the absolute norm for all countries. Emperor Shōmu's construction of a huge statue of Vairocana Buddha in the 740s is another case in point: by building that statue, which some might interpret as an exclusively "religious" event, Shōmu was making the "political" declaration that just as Vairocana Buddha is the symbol and guarantor of unity and harmony in the universe, so he, Shōmu, is the symbol and guarantor of unity and harmony in the state.

From the early periods of Japanese history, state ideology was expressed in two sets of terms. One of those sets is indicated by the well-known phrase *chingo-kokka* 鎮護国家 ("the prosperity and protection of the state"). This expression is a statement of the belief that the state had divine guarantees,

that by way of certain rituals it could invoke the power of the *kami* and Buddhas to protect it. This belief is in evidence continuously throughout early and medieval Japanese history. Saichō designated the monastery that he built on Mt. Hiei the "Practice Hall for the Protection of the Country" (*chingo kokka no dōjō* 道場), and he called the nine cloisters that he built there the "Cloisters of the Nine Directions for the Everlasting Protection of the Country of Japan" (*Nihonkoku kōgo kuhō-in* 日本国恒護九方院).[12]

Ōbō and Buppō

The other fundamental politico-religious formula was that of the "mutual dependence of the 'Imperial Law' (*ōbō* 王法) and the 'Buddhist Law' (*buppō* 仏法)" (*ōbō buppō sōi* 相依). From the middle of the Heian period, Japanese state ideology came to be enunciated in terms of the relation between the *ōbō* and the *buppō*. Although, as the use of these terms would indicate, there was a recognition of two "fonts" of politico-religious authority, those two concepts did not represent anything resembling "secular" and "religious" laws, for both were equally "religious" and equally "political." Indeed, even the notion of the *ōbō* is an Indian Buddhist one (Skt. *rāja-dharma*), as is, of course, the concept of *buppō* (Skt. *buddha-dharma*). In Japan, the *ōbō* concept also had Shinto overtones in that, as was mentioned above, the early ruling families justified their possession of power on the basis of their descent from certain ancestral *kami*, and therefore the "Imperial Law" had the sanction of the *kami*. Thus, in reference to the first issue addressed in this essay, Buddhism and Shinto were also linked together in the formulation of state ideologies. From the eleventh century there appear in the documents declarations to the effect that although the *ōbō* and the *buppō* are two in terminology, they are one in reality. The *ōbō*, with its sanction of the *kami*, and the *buppō*, with its sanction of the Buddhas, formed the two chambers of the heart of a single living organism, the Japanese body politic (see KURODA 1983, pp. 8–22; MCMULLIN 1985).

Furthermore, in reference to a point made earlier, the relation between the *ōbō* and the *buppō* was interpreted differently in accordance with changes in the politico-economic conditions of the time. In the mid-Heian period, for example, as the monastery-shrine complexes became richer and

[12] In reference to a point made earlier, Saichō's decision to build nine cloisters on Mt. Hiei may have been influenced by Chinese geomancy according to which there were nine directions (north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest, and center). The *I Ching*, for instance, contains schema of the eight directions moving out from the center. On that model, the merits generated at Saichō's nine cloisters would permeate the entire country of Japan in all directions.

stronger, the definition of the nature of the relation between the *ōbō* and the *buppō* changed from one that described the *buppō* as the servant of the *ōbō* to one that identified the two as equals. From the late Heian through the medieval periods, the relation between the *ōbō* and the *buppō* was likened to the relation between the two wings of a bird, the two horns of a cow, and the two wheels of a cart: the *ōbō* and the *buppō* were, so to speak, the two oars that propelled the Japanese ship of state.[13] This new understanding of the relation between the *ōbō* and the *buppō* represented the "ideologization" of the fact that the major monastery-shrine complexes had become quite powerful (as powerful as the leading court families), a development that was made possible by a shift in the economic base of the major monasteries from state finances to patronage by powerful families.

Thus, as several modern Japanese scholars, especially Kuroda Toshio, have demonstrated, religion and politics were intimately related in Japanese society from the pre-Nara age up through the Tokugawa period (1600–1868).[14] From the earliest period of Japanese history, "political" ideology was never formulated in isolation from "religious" ideology: political and religious thinking/language in regard to the state were so totally intertwined that to regard politics and religion as separate phenomena is to impose on early and medieval Japanese society a kind and a degree of fragmentation that it did not know. There was no politics-versus-religion dichotomy in pre-modern Japanese societies: all notions about authority were politico-religious. Indeed, in these societies, religion and politics were so commingled that the very use of the terms "religion" and "politics" in reference to them causes an interpretative splitting of them.[15]

[13] In his review of my book (1985), Martin Collcutt raises the question of just how pervasive and persuasive the "*ōbō-buppō* mutual dependence rhetoric" might have been in the late medieval period. He suggests that it was a one-sided rhetoric on the part of the monasteries, and that there is no reason to think that the sixteenth-century *daimyō* ever accepted that rhetoric "or anything like parity between Buddhist claims and secular claims." See COLLCUTT 1986, especially p. 406. This topic requires further examination.

[14] See the works of KURODA, particularly 1975b. For exemplary studies that do for the development of state ideology in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) what would be most valuable to do also for the development of state ideologies in earlier periods of Japanese history, see OOMS 1984 and 1985, and HAROOTUNIAN 1988. For a similarly important work on the Meiji period (1868–1912) see GLUCK 1985.

[15] In the pre-modern Japanese lexicon there was no equivalent of the English word "religion." The word *shūkyō* 宗教, which was first used in its modern sense in 1869 to translate the German term *religionsübung* ("religious exercise") had been used prior to that time to indicate either the Buddhist tradition in general or one or other of the schools of Buddhism. See OGUCHI and HORI 1974, p. 256.

Rituals and State Ideologies

From the earliest times in Japan, religious rituals played an important role in state ideologies, and it is doubtful that anyone would have thought of them as having an exclusively or even a primarily other-worldly purpose as opposed to "this-worldly" (political, economic, social, etc.) ones. As tools whereby clerics, as well as members of the ruling élite who had rituals performed on their behalf, gained and maintained power, the rituals were, in a very real sense, political tools. Because the proper and regular performance of various religious rituals was believed to be a *sine qua non* for the wellbeing and smooth running of the state, and to contribute to the acquisition and preservation of political power by the élite, then the performance of such rituals was part of the political process. Religious rituals were not ancillary to the doing of government; to "do rituals" was, in a very real sense, to "do government."

The most important rituals were those that were performed for the wellbeing of the imperial house and the inner circle of ruling families. Those rituals, and the religious institutions at which they were performed, played an indispensable role in communicating and reinforcing state ideology. As Paul Wheatley and Thomas See point out, ritual is "an important component of the communications network of a society, transmitting information through both its content and its occurrence" (1978, p. 15). The major state rituals of early and medieval Japan were customarily performed at the aforementioned twenty-two monastery-shrine complexes which were the central component of the *chingo-kokka* ideology.[16] In the words of Paul Wheatley, citing an earlier study of his, "[the great ceremonial centers] functioned as instruments for the dissemination through all levels of society of beliefs which, in turn, enabled the wielders of political power to justify their goals in terms of the basic values of that society, and to present the realization of class-directed aims as the implementation of collectively desirable policies" (WHEATLEY and SEE 1978, p. 16). In other words, religious symbols were used for political purposes; ritual served power. From very early times in Japan, the ruling élite used religious symbols to legitimate, and indeed sanctify, what was, when all is said and done, a fundamentally arbitrary structure of control and domination. As was seen in the case of Emperor Shōmu, "it is only too evident that the Japanese rulers had mastered the art of cloaking power in a garb of sanctity" (WHEATLEY and SEE 1978, p. 17).

[16] See GRAPARD 1988, where he argues that Shinto originated in those cultic centers which were deeply involved in the court ideology.

Some scholars who acknowledge the intimate relation between religion and politics in the early and medieval periods claim that religion and politics became separated with the advent of the modern age (post 1868). I would suggest that this claim is not correct, because religion and politics are still intimately related in Japanese society, albeit in a fashion that differs from the ways in which they were related in earlier periods. It might be argued that that relation is somewhat parallel to the one between religion and politics in modern American society as portrayed in the "American civil religion" model offered by Robert Bellah and others (see RICHEY and JONES 1974). Evidence of the continuing intimacy between religion and politics in modern Japanese society may be found, for example, in the roles played by the Meiji shrine, the Ise shrine, the Yasukuni shrine, the Sōka Gakkai organization, and various other institutions.

Religious Institutions and the State

As to the relation between religious institutions (notably the monastery-shrine complexes) and the state, the history of that relation is one in which, for the first few centuries (seventh to tenth), the court tried, but eventually failed, to enforce a strict control over those institutions. From the mid-tenth century through the mid-sixteenth, a number of the major monastery-shrine complexes possessed so much political, economic, and even military power that they could not be controlled by the state.

The main reason for the monastery-shrine complexes' acquisition of political, economic, and military power was the court's increasing loss of control of the land from the mid-eighth century around which time powerful families, especially the Fujiwara, and the major monastery-shrine complexes began to amass privately-controlled parcels of land that came to enjoy various immunities from court interference and, subsequently, from the authority of the shogunate's provincial "military governors" (*shugo* 守護). As George Sansom once observed pointedly, "The truth is that the real source of power in Japanese life was the land. . . . Land is the key to political history in Japan, at almost every point" (1958, pp. 110 and 139). Estimates of the percentage of the land that was controlled by the monastery-shrine complexes in the Heian and Kamakura periods vary wildly between twenty and sixty percent of the total: whatever the case, it was a substantial fraction of the total.

On their estates the monastery-shrine complexes collected taxes and corvée from the people, and in some cases they even had juridical authority, that is, the right to police their lands and punish offenders of

the law. There is much evidence of the economic and political power of those complexes through the early and medieval periods. For example, the Kōfuku-ji/Kasuga complex was the de facto master of Yamato province for centuries. Similarly, the Mt. Hiei/Hie complex, which owned over 350 estates scattered throughout dozens of provinces, was the de facto master of most of Ōmi province where many of its estates were located, and it was also a powerful force in the commercial world in the medieval period. According to Kuroda Toshio, in the medieval period the institutions that imposed order and structure on those large segments of society that were not under the direct control of the military (*bushi* 武士) class were the monasteries and shrines.[17] In early and medieval Japan, the monastery-shrine complexes provided for the residents of their lands a socio-political structure that differed significantly from those headed by the court and the shogunate, and it appears that in the medieval period many people (the *ikkō monto* 一向門徒, the *hokke monto* 法華門徒, and others), preferring to live in a socio-political structure based on certain classical religious notions rather than in one constructed by the *bushi*, resisted incorporation into the *bushi* structures.[18] It was with the eradication of the power of the monastery-shrine complexes in the latter decades of the sixteenth century, and with the establishment of the Tokugawa regime in the early seventeenth century, that there came about the total "*bushi*-ization" of Japanese society.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations it is necessary to revamp certain interpretations of the nature of the political structure in early and medieval Japan. According to a still generally accepted model of that structure, the court élite ruled the country up to the latter decades of the twelfth century, from which time the military élite ruled it, through the shogunate, until the late-nineteenth century. Another model, one that best fits the evidence in that it takes into account the power that the monastery-shrine complexes wielded over the centuries from the tenth through the mid-sixteenth, is as follows: from the mid-tenth century

[17] On the issue of the power of the monastery-shrine complexes in the early and medieval periods see KURODA, especially 1980. The Kamakura shogunate attempted to limit the power of the monastery-shrine complexes by prohibiting the formation of new home-branch (*honmatsu*) relations among monasteries and shrines in the Kyoto area. For an English-language study of the power of the Zen institutions in the medieval period, see COLLCUTT 1981.

[18] See Herbert Bix's discussion of medieval *ikki* 一揆, which he describes as "solidarity bands" that were "based on the will of heaven" and the "ancient Japanese belief in the oneness of men through and with the gods." Bix points out that an *ikki* "was also a ritual for keeping alive prefeudal ideas of impartial justice, equality and equity in a society dominated by kinship, hierarchy, and fixed statuses" (BIX 1986, p. 143).

through the twelfth, the monastery-shrine complexes controlled so much of the land, and the people who lived on and worked that land, that they, together with the court élite, formed the government in fact if not on paper. Indeed, in that period the court élite together with the monastery-shrine élites formed a single class of people who were usually related by blood: the people who had the highest offices in the major monastery-shrine complexes were often the younger sons of noble families, the older sons of which held the highest court offices at the time. In the period from the late-twelfth through the mid-sixteenth centuries, there was a gradual decline in the power of the monastery-shrine complexes, and yet a number of the major ones maintained so much, and in some cases most, of their power, and others (like the Ishiyama Hongan-ji 石山本願寺 in Osaka) came to possess such immense power, that together they formed, so to speak, one leg of the tripod of political power, the other two "legs" being the military élite and the court élite. Therefore, rather than think in terms of the nature of the relation *between* religious institutions and the state in the early and medieval (at least the first half of the medieval) periods, it is appropriate to adopt a model proposed by Kuroda Toshio—the "influential parties system" (*kenmon taisei* 権門体制)—according to which the monastery-shrine complexes constituted a power bloc (albeit an ununited one) that functioned in effect as a co-ruler of the country for a number of centuries.[19] Indeed, it was not until the latter half of the sixteenth century that the *bushi* had enough power to be able to confront, defeat, and finally eliminate the forces of the major monastery-shrine complexes.

Historiographical Issues

The second set of questions related to the four general issues with which this essay is concerned is a complex historiographical one regarding the premises with which modern scholars approach the study of pre-modern Japanese societies, the issue of why the history of religions is done in the way that it is.

In addressing any topic in history, Asian or Western, pre-modern or modern, one might do well to reflect on Voltaire's caustic observation to the effect that history is a pack of tricks that we play on the dead. This "playing of tricks" has to do with the fact that historians approach their topics of research with packs of assumptions that they carry with—or, more accurately stated, are part of—them. In attempting to acquire an under-

[19] The *kenmon taisei* is discussed in a number of Kuroda's works. See especially 1963 and 1967.

standing of the nature and structure of pre-modern Japanese societies, it is important to be aware of the assumptions that color that inquiry lest we fall victim to the "retrospective fallacy"[20] whereby we read present structures into the past. It is also important to avoid what might be called the "infantilization fallacy," which is rooted in a theory first proposed by Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) and according to which cultures pass through a life cycle from youth to maturity to old age and death. This theory allows us to treat peoples of the past—i.e., of earlier stages of Spengler's cycle—as simpler, more gullible, and all-round less mature than we are. In a recent piece on "buddhology," John MARALDO notes that Buddhist scholars "have not reflected sufficiently on their own interpretive stance" (1986, p. 43). Perhaps, as Herbert Bix points out, there are complex ideological reasons for the way in which Japan studies in the United States and Britain have been conducted since the late 1940s.[21]

The truth of the matter is that not only religious traditions but Religious Studies itself furthers certain views and values that are in fact indissociable from certain ideological/political ones. The idea that there are non-political forms of inquiry is simply a myth (in the ordinary sense) that furthers certain political agendas all the more effectively. Consider, for instance, two hypothetical Religious Studies scholars who produce studies of Genshin's Ōjōyōshū, one of whom expounds on Genshin's oral portrait of the pleasures of paradise, and the other of whom tries to reconstruct Genshin's class biases as manifested in that text. Let me emphasize that what differentiates the works of these scholars is not that the former is a non-political piece and the latter a political one. The distinction is, rather, between different forms of politics. It is not the case here that I am trying to drag politics into Religious Studies. Indeed, to paraphrase Terry EAGLETON, there is no need to do so because, as with South African sport, politics has been there from the beginning (1983, p. 194). Again, paraphrasing Eagleton, Religious Studies is

> not to be upbraided for being political, but for being on the whole covertly or unconsciously so—for the blindness with which . . . [it] offers as supposedly "technical," "self-evident," "objective," "scientific," or "universal," truths doctrines which with a little reflection

[20] This is Herman Ooms' expression.

[21] Bix argues that after World War II "Japan studies in the United States and Britain was reconstituted along cold-war, anti-Marxist lines," and that the Japanese past was recast with concepts and assumptions "derived in large part from American state ideology, whose construction of the past meshed nicely with the needs of American foreign policy" (BIX 1986, pp. xiii–xiv).

> can be seen to relate to and reinforce the particular interests of particular groups of people at particular times (1983, p. 195).

It would be naive to believe that modern scholars in Religious Studies produce objective, ideology-free studies of the past. It was Roland Barthes who pointed out that the university critique, in spite of its professed objectivity, is postulated upon an ideology as much as any of the types of interpretative criticism that it accuses of systematic bias and prejudice.

This is not a moral critique that calls into doubt the state of the souls of modern academics, but a critique of the shape of our society and the role of the academy in it. Speaking of the Tokugawa Period, Herman OOMS states that there were

> genuine cognitive limitations inherent in the social perceptions of the ruling elite, perceptions which stemmed from their position in society . . . [and that] escaped their consciousness (1984, p. 51)

What, we might ask, are our cognitive limitations (assuming that we can ask that question)? I am reminded here of Noam Chomsky's scathing indictment of the intellectual élite of our present society as the "secular priesthood" of the state.

As a general consideration it should also be noted that historical studies of pre-modern societies, not only of Japan but of many countries, tend to be warped in such a way that disproportionate attention is devoted to the famous and powerful members of the societies that are being studied, or, in other words, to the ruling élites, if for no other reason but that it was members of that class who had the education, the economic wherewithal, and the leisure time to compose the documents that have come down to us and that historians study. As Mikhail BAKHTIN has pointed out, at its very core literary language is the oral and written language of a dominant social group (1981, pp. 289–290). Thus the views expressed in so many classical texts were, in Joseph KITAGAWA's words, "based on reading Japanese historical experience through the mental prism of the aristocracy, another form of mythologization of history" (1985, p. 92). Because of the nature of so many historical documents (and, perhaps, for ideological reasons), it might be tempting to accept Thomas Carlyle's dictum that the history of the world is but the biography of great men. A whole genre of historical writing is founded on that view, and many examples of it can be found among modern studies of the history of Japanese religions. In some cases scholars appear to favor the "great men" over the "unruly" masses.[22]

[22] Latterly a number of books on the peasant classes in pre-modern Japan, including the one by BIX 1986, have been attempting to compensate for the lack of studies of the peasants.

As a rule, the masses are seen as passengers of the ship of state and are not considered to have been major players in the religious dramas.

In the context of modern scholarship, both Asian and Western, on the Buddhist tradition, the term "history of Buddhism" has come to be largely synonymous with "history of Buddhist doctrine," or "history of ideas"; that is, the history of the development of a vast variety of views on a wide range of issues that were espoused by numerous schools of Buddhism and various lines of Buddhist masters over the centuries from the fifth century B.C.E. to the present. The focus of such studies is on what those schools and masters thought: how they interpreted and reinterpreted such concepts as enlightenment, buddha-nature, emptiness, and so forth. That kind of "history of Buddhism" is a variant of the "great man" type of history, but with an added level of abstraction: that is, the physic of the great master is discarded and there is left just a psyche, a free-floating, ahistorical, ethereal corpus of "great ideas." In the West, Buddhism has often been portrayed as an other-worldly tradition dedicated to the private salvation of the individual. Possibly more than any other tradition, it has been religionized, doctrinalized, spiritualized, other-worldly'ized, and individualized in ways and to degrees that simply do not fit the classical Buddhist case but that do fit the case of some modern Western views of religion. Many studies tone up the "enchanted" dimension of the Buddhist tradition at the expense of other dimensions. Pierre BOURDIEU, who is speaking of art history in the following quotation but whose words are easily translatable into the realm of the history of religion, points out that

> art history [as conventionally done] gives free reign to celebratory contemplation and finds in the sacred character of its object every pretext for a hagiographic hermeneutics superbly indifferent to the question of the social conditions in which works are produced and circulate (1977, p. 1).

Another general problem that is encountered with regard to historiographical questions is a simple but most serious one: namely, because modern scholars rely on Japanese sources, both primary and secondary, in conducting their research on pre-modern Japanese societies, they inevitably transmit views contained in those works. For example, many Western works on the history of Japanese religions have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the *Hasshū kōyō* 八宗綱要, which was written in 1268 by the Hossō monk Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321). In that work Gyōnen interpreted the nature and structure of the Nara and Heian schools of Buddhism in a rigid "sectarian" way that is misleading and largely incorrect. The problems with Gyōnen's view have been demonstrated by several

modern scholars,[23] but nonetheless, as AKAMATSU Toshihide points out, its influence has continued down to the present (1967, p. 311). Also, many modern Japanese works on the history of religions are sectarian tracts that present pictures that are highly colored by the views of the branches of the traditions to which the authors of those works belong.

As to the first major issue raised above, that is, the intimate relation between Buddhism and Shinto in the pre-modern period, it is possible to identify several reasons why that intimacy is sometimes overlooked. Even though latterly it is frequently acknowledged that it is impossible at times to "demarcate" Buddhism and Shinto in pre-modern Japanese society,[24] many studies make such a demarcation; i.e., they treat Buddhism and Shinto as two separate and distinct traditions in the face of and despite the evidence that they were not. As an example of the degree to which Buddhist and Shinto institutions are segregated in some modern works, neither the *Nihon bukkyōshi jiten* (ŌNO 1979) nor the *Koji meisetsu daijiten* (KANAOKA 1970), standard reference works for the study of the history of Buddhism and Buddhist monasteries in Japan, contains an entry on the aforementioned Gion shrine, presumably because that institution is termed a shrine and is, accordingly, considered to be a Shinto as opposed to a Buddhist institution, the latter of which are the concern of those reference works (ŌNO 1979 and KANAOKA 1970).

Moreover, there is a tendency on the part of some scholars to take the Shinto of the ruling élite of premodern eras for Shinto in general, and to fail to recognize that the vast bulk of what we call Shinto was local cults that were concerned not with state legitimation myths and rituals but with fertility and disease. Also, the Shinto of the ruling élite was less a "religion," in the sense of a set of soteriological beliefs and practices, than an ideological support structure for the imperium, and it began to appear as a separate, autonomous tradition in the medieval period in that context and for that purpose.

A fundamental reason for the tendency to treat Buddhism and Shinto as completely separate traditions has to do with the modern Western "genus-species" view of religion that divides religion into a number of forms: "primitive religions," "world religions," "gnostic religions," and so forth. In keeping with this view, because Buddhism and Shinto are considered to be two species of the "world religions" genus – or perhaps even

[23] Kuroda's *kenmon taisei* thesis opposes Gyōnen's view. See note 19.

[24] For example, in a recent work Peter NOSCO observes correctly that in pre-Tokugawa Japan "the degree of Buddhist-Shinto syncretism was at times so great as to make it impossible to demarcate the two" (1984, p. 170).

members of different genera, Buddhism being a member of the "world religions" genus, and Shinto of the "primitive religions" genus—then ipso facto they are, and must always have been throughout history, separate and distinct traditions. Thus the genus-species model of religion is imposed upon and read back into Japanese history. Those who accept this view assume that in Japanese history people and institutions must have been either Buddhist or Shintoist, but not both at the same time, and were some people to have behaved as though they were both, then somehow something was awry. Some modern scholars have cast doubt on the universal applicability of the concept of religion and others, have suggested that we do away with the concept entirely.[25]

So far in this essay we have accepted the common understanding of the word religion according to which there are numerous phenomena "out there" in the world that are sui generis religious in character, and that, accordingly, the task of the historian of religions is to identify, gather, and interpret those religious phenomena. However, some deadly blows have been rained on this "essentially essentialist" view of religion by a number of modern, especially European, scholars whose works cause us to turn our attention away from the so-called religious phenomena themselves and to the sets of assumptions that underlie the view that there are such things as inherently religious phenomena. Thus the rudimentary question is not what are the religious phenomena but, rather, why do we, as students of "religion," assume that there are such phenomena "out there," and what are the sets of criteria that we employ when we identify a certain phenomenon, a certain human event, as a religious (as apposed to a political, etc.) one. To paraphrase Terry EAGLETON, we might ask if it is even possible to speak of religion without perpetuating the illusion that religion exists as a distinct, bounded object of knowledge (1983, pp. 204–205).

A problem also lurks in the common usage of the word religion in the singular. We might ask if there is, or ever was, Japanese religion (singular). The religious discourse of any age (not to mention across the ages) was not a single, unified one at all; rather it was a tension-filled, multi-valent field of competing discourses that were differentiated one from the other not primarily along horizontal sectarian/denominational lines (i.e. Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, etc.), but along the vertical axis of class divisions

[25] For example, SMITH 1962. James Foard disagrees with Smith on this matter. While acknowledging that we will never find adequate definitions for words like religion, Taoism, Buddhism, and the like, Foard says that "this does not mean that I side with Wilfred Cantwell Smith in abandoning such words. Instead, I find them quite useful; I would just like greater specificity as to how they are being used in specific situations." See FOARD 1985, p. 20.

and urban-rural divisions. It has been the tendency for scholars to overplay the sectarian/denominational divisions in the Japanese religious fabric, and to fail to address adequately the class-based divisions. Moreover, the familiar couplet "Japanese Religion" is heavily ideological in that it infers unity and continuity in Japanese culture and thus it obfuscates the diversity that was constantly manifested in the vertical (class) divisions in Japanese societies over the centuries. It allows for evolutionary transitions in history, but it has no room for sharp breaks, for fractures in the smooth fabric of history, for dialectics. Japanese history was a bumpier ride than the phrase "Japanese Religion" implies.

Religion, Society, and "Great Ideas"

In regard to the second main issue raised above, developments in the religious world must be understood in terms of the ways in which they reflected and addressed developments in the societies of the times in which those developments took place. It is important to steer clear of the isolationist fallacy according to which, in this context, developments in the religious discourses came about primarily as the result of dynamics inherent to those discourses. There are, I suggest, several reasons for the tendency of some studies to deal with the development of institutions, rituals, and doctrines in isolation from the broader context of the societies in which they developed and existed. A perhaps obvious reason for the isolationist tendency is that no scholar of pre-modern Japanese societies is an expert on every dimension of those societies. Many Buddhist scholars, for example, are very familiar with the teachings of one or other Buddhist master, the person on whom their research is concentrated, but less familiar with the economic and political structures of the society of the period in which that master lived and taught. Consequently, for instance, Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262), the founder of the True Pure Land school of Buddhism in the early Kamakura period, is not infrequently spoken about without reference to the major political shifts that were taking place at that time: it is as though Shinran could have lived at any time at all; as though the major political developments that took place in his time had little or nothing to do with the shape of his teaching; as though Shinran's True Pure Land movement had little or no political context or agenda; and as though his teachings evolved simply by the rules of their own internal logic.

A major reason for this "isolation" tendency may have to do with another aspect of the common, modern (Western) understanding of religion

that allows one to pull "a religion" out of its social-political-economic-cultural setting and examine it in isolation from that setting as though each "religion" were, so to speak, a closed circuit that need not be plugged in somewhere for sense to be made of it. In the words of Fitz John Porter Poole,

> from an anthropological perspective, . . . the curious assumption that religion could be studied almost *in vacuo* became untenable in the midst of a newfound functionalist concern to see religious phenomena intricately suspended in broader webs of cultural significance and subtly embedded in wider arrays of social institutions (POOLE 1986, pp. 411).

"Buddhism" and "Shinto" can be abstracted from the general fabric of Japanese history only in a highly reified and wholly theoretical way. In the same way that it is misleading to speak in reified terms of Christianity "in" medieval European society (that society *was* Christian), it is also misleading to speak of Buddhism "in" early and medieval Japanese societies, for those societies *were* Buddhist. In other words, Buddhism was not an autonomous "thing" that had, as it were, a fenced off place in the Japanese world, or an accretion that was somehow stuck on to Japanese societies by some kind of removable tape; it was endemic to, at the very heart of, those societies. While it is true that the pre-modern Japanese were Buddhists, they were also, at the same time, Shintoists, Taoists, and Confucians. Japanese Buddhists, in other words, were not just Buddhists: they were all enmeshed in an extremely complex and intricate economic-political-social-cultural fabric that was informed in many ways by Buddhist influences, but also by a variety of other sets of influences in such a mutually interpenetrating and interpermeating way that Buddhism cannot be abstracted from that fabric without transforming it into something that it never was, and without, at the same time, rending the fabric so badly that it bears little resemblance to the reality.[26] Thus, to try to understand and explain the development of religious institutions in early and medieval Japanese societies by examining only or primarily a sequence of great masters or a causally unfolding line of "great ideas" is to overlook major sets of determining mechanisms that lie behind that development, and therefore to warp the examination.

[26] It might be worth noting here, in follow-up to the earlier reference to Christianity, that the pre-modern Japanese were probably less exclusively Buddhist than the medieval Europeans were Christian because whereas in Europe the Church completely absorbed or suppressed the native "pagan" religions, in Japan the Buddhist "Church" did not so absorb or suppress the native traditions.

In regard especially to doctrine there is a tendency to treat doctrinal statements as extrahistorical phenomena that can be understood in their own terms as exercises in philosophy, as self-enclosed packets of "great ideas." The study of a doctrine in isolation from its cultural setting can be, it goes without saying, a valuable and fruitful intellectual pursuit in its own right, but it is also necessary to "ground" the doctrine under consideration in its cultural and historical context if the reasons for its development, the nuances of its meaning, and its full significance are to be understood and appreciated. This is because it is not primarily ideas but structures—economic, political, social, and so forth—that form the foundation on which any society is built and that determine to a great degree the shape of that society's religious discourse, and those structures must be taken into account if any particular aspect of a given society is to be explained with accuracy. By focusing too narrowly on "great ideas" we run the risk of trying to explain complex issues in excessively narrow terms, and thus of forcing many of the great masters of the past to sleep in procrustean beds.

Like doctrinal developments, the development of religious institutions and rituals also must be understood in the broad context and against the background of the societies in which those institutions and rituals arose and functioned, for they were established and had meaning in an environment that was intimately conjoined to the rest of society.

It must be noted that this essay does not make the reductionist claim that institutional, ritual, and doctrinal developments can be accounted for fully by reference solely to economic and political factors, for such a claim would be the equivalent, in the words of *The Philosophical Lexicon*, of attempting "to deduce [Einstein's] . . . special theory of relativity from the social structure of the Zurich patent office" (DENNETT and LAMBERT 1978, pp. 5–6). Nor is it being claimed that religious structures are merely reflections of the economic and political structures of a given society: religious structures are both the effects and the causes (more the former than the latter, I suggest) of economic and political structures, and the relation among them is symbiotic.

On a simpler level, a major reason for the tendency of scholars to deal with the development of institutions, rituals and doctrines in isolation from the broader context of the societies in which they developed may be found in the fragmented condition of the modern university curriculum whereby, in this age of "professionalism," one can specialize in one aspect of a particular society in a particular period without having to master the other aspects of that society in that period. In the case of Japanese studies, for example, it is possible to become a specialist in Japanese Buddhism

without studying Shinto, a specialist in religion without studying economics or politics, or a specialist in history without studying the religion of the period of one's specialty. As a consequence of this situation, scholars of pre-modern Japanese societies are inclined to assign disproportionate importance to those dimensions of society that they know and understand well, and to underplay or undervalue those that they do not.

Ritual, Myth, Magic

In regard to the third issue raised above, the comparative importance of religious institutions, rituals, and doctrines, it is apparent, and curious, that much modern scholarship on the history of Japanese religions has tended to overlook institutional and ritual issues in favor of doctrinal ones. Thus there is in English a disproportionate number of studies of Japanese Buddhist doctrines and masters, and extremely few studies of religious institutions and rituals despite the fact (or at least the claim made earlier) that religion was important in pre-modern Japan less for doctrinal than for institutional and ritual reasons. Why there is such a disproportion is difficult to say. It seems that many people in the West are interested in Japanese religions less in order to understand and explain their development in Japanese societies—which would necessitate an examination of the economic and political developments in the periods under consideration—than for existential or therapeutic reasons. In this regard, perhaps the psychopathology of contemporary American society as diagnosed by Christopher LASCH (1978 and 1984), and the reasons for the present popularity of Asian religions in American society as analyzed by Harvey COX (1977, especially pp. 74–90), can help to account for the present state of Japanese religious studies in the West.

In regard to the institutions, rituals, and doctrines troika, it may be the case that we are attempting to replace an old set of fixed notions (Buddhism, Shinto, religion, politics, etc.) with a new fixed set that is equally inapplicable to pre-modern Japanese societies. This may indeed be the case, but it remains to be seen, and I suggest that we do not assume it to be true *a priori*. It might be argued that there is evidence, at least in the case of the structure of the Mt. Hiei-Hie community, that there was an inherent distinction between ritual and doctrine in that community in that some members of it, notably the "scholar monks" (*gakuryō* 学侶), were charged specifically with studying the sūtras and writing what we would call doctrinal treatises, whereas others (a larger number) were responsible for learning and practicing rituals. And yet, there may be problems here in

that the duty of the *gakuryō* might have been not just "doctrinal" activity but general intellectual activity that had to do with both doctrinal and ritual matters. Thus the distinction may have been between "thinkers" and "doers," rather than between doctrinalists and ritualists, for it was in fact the case that the *gakuryō* were also the leaders of the rituals. This matter requires further investigation and clarification.

A factor that might help to account for the lack of sophisticated, in-depth studies of Japanese rituals is the "demythologizing" exercises of a century ago, which, conducted as they were in a climate of empiricism and rationalism, tended to denigrate myth and ritual. Myth is still taken by some to mean a story that is both primitive and false, and ritual smacks of magic and superstition. Accordingly, some scholars of religion seem to consider rituals to be comparatively unimportant, to be secondary or ancillary to doctrine; that is, rituals are believed to express or act out the truths contained in doctrines. It appears to be assumed that what people thought and believed was prior to and more important than what they practiced, and this, as suggested earlier, is a reading into pre-modern Japanese societies of a quality that may have characterized some religious traditions in the pre-modern world, but not the Japanese. Frits Staal urges us to "abandon the view that underlies most contemporary approaches to ritual: the view that ritual is symbolic, and depends on doctrine or belief," and he argues that in Asia rituals do not symbolize or depend on doctrines. Indeed, says he, "it is the other way around: one of the most important functions of doctrine is to make sense of ritual" (1984, pp. 18–19).[27]

In the foregoing analysis of historical and historiographical problems in the study of pre-modern Japanese religions, much of the blame for those problems is attributed to certain ways of thinking that have come down to us from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Richard Gardner applies this analysis to the matter of the relation between religion and art. According to GARDNER,

> To put a complex matter simply, religion and art, as these categories develop from the Enlightenment onward, frequently define one another by similarity and contrast within the context of efforts to define the nature of perception, epistemology, and the symbol. The problem of the relation of art and religion, in other words, is at root a problem of deploying categories and

[27] It may well be the case that ritual took precedence over doctrine in the case of the Western religions also. According to Stephen REYNOLDS, "In both Judaism and Christianity, worship is the act of ultimate self-determination. Doctrine arises out of it, rather than preceding it" (1977, p. 22).

distinctions bequeathed us from the Enlightenment (1985, p. 3).

James Foard, on the other hand, suggests that the root problem in regard to our understanding of pre-modern Japanese religions may be traced not so much to categories inherited by us from Enlightenment thinkers, but to sources that are both more ancient and more modern than Enlightenment thought. In FOARD's view,

> the distinction, even opposition, between religion and magic, which is as old as Augustine's denunciation of theurgy, is at the root of most of our problems in understanding Japanese religion. . . [And, he adds,] as long as we have just "magic," for which symbolic anthropology provides only universal, ahistorical explanations, and not "magics," or as I prefer "techniques," which have distinctive, historical traditions, we will be blind to how such practices functioned in Japanese history and society, where they came from, under what circumstances they developed, and how they are used, distinctively or not, in the new religions (1985, p. 14).

Thus, in addition to the yokes imposed on us by Enlightenment thinkers, we are also working under the influences of such disparate figures as Augustine and some modern social anthropologists.

Religious vs. Secular?

Finally, turning to the fourth major issue raised above, the relation between religion and politics in pre-modern Japanese societies, a common modern Western assumption appears to be that the religious and the secular (religion and politics, religion and economics, etc.) are, and indeed ought to be, separate entities, and this assumption influences its bearers' interpretations of the nature and structure of those societies. One can find, for example, debates over whether a particular movement in pre-modern Japan was primarily religious or primarily political in character, as if the movement in question had been mainly one or the other but not both at the same time, or as if it were possible to categorize it as having been a certain percentage of the one and the remaining percentage of the other.

Moreover, it appears to be because of the fact that some scholars accept the religious-secular-separation premise that their works have a critical, if not contemptuous, attitude toward the clergy and religious institutions seemingly in direct proportion to the degree of economic, political, and military power that the clergy and the monastery-shrine complexes possessed. Thus, not infrequently an adjective like avaricious modifies the word monk in the case of a monk who owned or controlled great wealth.

Wealthy courtiers, on the other hand, are usually called successful, prosperous, and so on, but rarely avaricious simply on the basis of the fact that they were wealthy. Similarly, an adjective like villainous often modifies the word abbot in the case of abbots who wielded military power, especially when those abbots opposed or defied the "state" (i.e., the court or the shogunate). Shoguns and *daimyō* who wielded military power are never called villainous simply because of the fact that they wielded such power; on the contrary, they are termed formidable, mighty, etc. And monastery-shrine complexes that possessed considerable political, economic, and military power are frequently called degenerate, corrupt, secularized, and so forth, whereas the shogunate, which also wielded such power, is, for that very reason, termed healthy, stable, well-established, etc. Thus the language of some modern works on the history of Buddhism is shot through with expressions that manifest, on the part of their authors, the acceptance of a dualistic view according to which religious institutions ought to wield only "spiritual" and not "secular" power, and, conversely, that political institutions should wield only secular and not religious power.

It is, perhaps, easy to find in Japanese history many things that the clergy "ought not to have done." Monks, for example, ought not to have striven to accumulate wealth, for such activity offends against the codes of the clerical life, but the fact is that many monks did amass great wealth. Also, monks ought not to have had sexual liaisons with women, other men, or boys, but the fact is that some had such liaisons. And the monastery-shrine complexes ought not to have maintained armies of "monk-warriors" (*sōhei* 僧兵), but some did. Thus it is possible to make a long list of the things that the clergy and the religious institutions ought not to have done in pre-modern Japan. Such an enterprise is not, however, the doing of history, the point of which is to describe and analyze, insofar as it is possible to do so, how Japanese societies developed and why they took the turns that they did, as well as to understand why historians, both pre-modern and modern, have treated those societies in the ways that they have. To take the aforementioned *sōhei* phenomenon as a case in point:

In the early and medieval periods, the *sōhei* were called "wicked monks" (*akusō* 悪僧). The reason why those monks were deemed wicked was, I suggest, not so much that their bearing and use of arms was a transgression of Buddhist ethics and the clerical codes, which indeed they were, but that those monks did not submit to the ordinances of the central administration in regard to such matters as the proper acquisition of ordination licenses and the building of privately funded cloisters, and they could not be con-

trolled by that administration. To put it differently, the monks were termed wicked primarily because they acted in a manner that did not serve the best interests of the ruling élite (which included, in many cases, the monks' masters, i.e., the abbots of the monastery-shrine complexes) who enacted the laws and wrote most of the texts, and who wanted to repress the *sōhei* so that they might have a freer hand to control a still larger portion of the land. Instead of accepting the ruling élite's language and joining them in condemning the monks as *akusō*, it would be more valuable to try to understand how and why the *sōhei* came to be: how the collapse of the *ritsuryō* system, and the rise in the number of estates controlled by the monastery-shrine complexes, led rather naturally to the development of armed units of monks whose main duty, at least initially, was to police the complexes' precincts.

It is, I suggest, incorrect to assume with reference to pre-modern Japanese societies that politics and religion had different spheres of operation, the former having to do with public, "this-worldly" issues, and the latter with private, "other-worldly" ones. If the word religion is taken in its absolutely narrowest sense, whereby it refers to a set of private beliefs, then it may be possible to keep religion and politics separate, but there is no society, pre-modern or modern, in which religion functioned only in that narrow sense as simply and strictly a private affair. Belief may be strictly private, although this too is highly problematical. If religion is understood in a broader sense, whereby it refers to a body of institutionalized expressions of beliefs, rituals, observances, and social practices found in a given cultural context, then religion and politics greatly overlap insofar as the latter has to do with the regulation and control of people living in society. Throughout history most states have, in fact, recognized this reality, as it demonstrated by their supervision and control of the "religions options" (meaning also the "political options") available to their citizens. In Japanese history, for example, various traditions, such as the *fujufuse* 不受不施 branch of the Nichiren school, the *ikkō* 一向 branch of the True Pure Land school, and Christianity, were banned when they were considered to present a threat to the incumbent politico-religious power/authority structures. Thus the only "religious" options allowed were those deemed "politically" acceptable.

Moreover, and more importantly, it is incorrect to assume that the acquisition of political, economic, and military power on the part of clerics and the monastery-shrine complexes is ipso facto a sign of corruption, degeneration and/or secularization, and equally incorrect to assume that there was once a time in Japan—or even, for that matter, in India—when

religious communities were utterly devoid of "secular" power (assuming, for the sake of this point, that there was a notion of purely secular power in pre-modern Japan and India). It is not possible for an established community to enjoy such a "pure" (?) condition, and, at any rate, such a condition is not necessarily one that the Japanese religious communities aspired to; indeed, there is no historical reason to assume that Japanese clerics or the monastery-shrine communities had such an aspiration. History simply does not support that assumption. From the very first, clerics and their religious institutions possessed various forms of political and economic power, and therefore to accuse the politically, economically, and militarily powerful clerics and religious institutions of having become, by reason of their accumulation of such forms of power, corrupt, degenerate, and/or secularized, is to imply, incorrectly, that there was once a time in Japanese history when clerics and religious institutions did not have "secular" (political and economic) power. If we are to insist on using such morally judgmental language, then we must describe Japanese clerics and religious institutions as having been from the first corrupt, degenerate, and secularized. There has been a tendency in the field of Japanese Religious Studies to preserve religion from the muck and mire of politics and economics, as is evidenced by a preoccupation on the part of some scholars with keeping religion – especially Buddhism, and most especially the Zen tradition – "pure."

Although it is true that clerics and the monastery-shrine complexes possessed political and economic power from the first, it is not true that the very possession of that power made them corrupt, etc., unless, that is, one wishes to make the argument that it is ipso facto wrong for clerics and religious institutions to wield such power. It certainly does not appear that the early and medieval religious communities and their supporters believed that to be the case. Furthermore, Japanese clerics of the early and medieval periods who did not recognize a disparity between, on the one hand, the ideals of their tradition which, for example, disallowed the bearing and use of arms, and, on the other hand, the practice of maintaining armies of "monk-warriors," were not necessarily being disingenuous or hypocritical. Cultures have the ability to gear their discourses in such a way as to make seemingly contradictory phenomena perfectly compatible.

The Approach of Japanese Scholars

Lastly, we might mention several factors that might help to account for the reasons why some Japanese scholars' works manifest the problems

raised above. Perhaps the most obvious reason is that Japanese scholarship of the past century has been greatly influenced by Western ways of doing scholarship. Japanese universities are "shaped like" European and American universities: the academic disciplines in Japanese universities are generally the same as those in Western universities. This is pointedly the case with regard to the study of religions. For instance, Kishimoto Hideo, who was one of the fathers of the discipline of religious studies in Japan and whose views have had a great influence in that field, accepted premises "stemming from the intellectual tradition that traces its origins to Comtean positivism" (REID 1986, p. 149). Like many Western scholars, Kishimoto was a positivist who accepted the hard distinction between subject and object (and thus, by extension, between religion and politics).

Also, some Japanese historians appear to accept the premise that religious institutions were, as a rule, oppressors of the populace in the early and medieval periods, and therefore they write in a condemnatory style vis-à-vis those institutions. Even if those scholars' claim as to the oppressive nature of the monastery-shrine complexes is true, it might, I suggest, be possible to demonstrate that the monasteries were certainly no more, and possibly less, oppressive than either the court or the shogunate. Besides, as was mentioned earlier, many people in medieval Japan evidently preferred to live under the authority of the monastery-shrine complexes rather than under that of the shogunate. At any rate, in pre-Tokugawa Japan the monastery-shrine socioeconomic structures had as much right to exist as had those of the *bushi*. Other Japanese scholars tend to underestimate the amount of power that the monastery-shrine complexes possessed, especially during the Kamakura period, and, consequently, they neglect to study them.

Japanese scholars of religion, like their Western counterparts, are also influenced by various classical materials, such as the aforementioned *Hasshū kōyō*, and they transmit views contained therein.

In the Tokugawa period, when a number of important scholarly works on the history of Japan were written, it was commonly assumed that only members of the *bushi* class had the right to wield political and military power, and this attitude was read back into history with the result that some Tokugawa historians were condemnatory of rich and powerful clerics and religious institutions as usurpers of forms of power that they had no right to possess. Furthermore, in the Tokugawa period Buddhism came under attack by Neo-Confucians, National Learning scholars, Imperialists, and others, and the negative image of Buddhism and its history that was generated by those critics continues to color Japanese scholarship

on religions in pre-modern Japanese societies.

Moreover, the works of some Japanese scholars on premodern Japan reflect the shape that the Japanese religious world had in the earlier part of this century, a shape that was imparted to the Japanese mindscape by Meiji thinkers toward the end of the nineteenth century. As I understand it, for ideological reasons those Meiji thinkers redefined the structure of the Japanese religious traditions by separating the Shinto and Buddhist traditions and by inventing at least one new religion (State Shinto), with the result that the shape of the Japanese religious world from that time forward was dramatically different from what it had been in the preceding dozen or more centuries. In Meiji'esque style, some scholars appear to accept the taxonomy according to which the Japanese landscape/mindscape was dotted with a number of autonomous, distinct traditions (Buddhism, Shinto, etc.) from time immemorial. This view is particularly pronounced in the treatment of Shinto which is often portrayed romantically and unquestioningly as the original, indiginous religious tradition of Japan, as having been concerned primarily over the centuries with the wellbeing of the imperial house, and as having survived the vagaries and ravages of the centuries quite unscathed. Thus the Meiji ideologues' victory has been much greater than ordinarily imagined.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there appears to be a consensus on the part of a number of modern scholars, both Japanese and Western, that there are serious problems in the study of pre-modern Japanese religions. In the words of James Foard, "what we have had is indeed a taxonomy or a classification system... [which,] like the category 'religion' itself, is a product of the academy, and hence is the academy's responsibility" (1985, p. 11). Happily, it appears that a number of the aforementioned issues are now beginning to be addressed.

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