

Religious Ideas in Japan: Introductory Remarks

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The JJRS proclaims itself dedicated to the advancement of inter-religious understanding and to the furthering of the study of religion, particularly Japanese religion—with a special interest, as stated on the inside of the front cover, in breaking through the language barriers which separate Japanese scholarship in religion from the international scene. It goes without saying that the present issue wants to honor this policy and tradition, but possibly with a little difference.

"Study of religion" is a broad concept. It covers all endeavors that lead to a better understanding of the multifaceted reality of religion from various standpoints and with sundry methods. Ideally, we should be able to distinguish—as is rather often done—between positive and speculative study of religion. Positive study, modelling itself after the natural sciences, would then take as its object the "facts" or phenomena of religion, observe these facts carefully, report them meticulously and, where possible, subject them to mathematical analysis. Speculative study of religion, on the other hand, would rather follow the model of the classical liberal arts and take religious ideas as its object.

I want to point out, however, that the term "religious ideas" does not necessarily refer only to ideas expressed in conceptual language in religious texts, but can cover also ways of thinking underlying, and implicit in, religious rituals, art (with inclusion of literary texts), organization, observation of taboos, etc.—in a word, all the facts and phenomena of religion. But, the time may well have come for us, students of religion, to clearly recognize that the distinction between positive and speculative is nowhere more artificial and problematic than in the study of religion. Here, it can at the most indicate two ideal poles.

Purely positive study of religion is clearly a contradiction in terms, and purely speculative study of religion, while logically not unthinkable, when not sufficiently confronted with the "facts" of religious life, soon leads to stagnation and the evils of inbreeding.

Thus, the study of religion is, of necessity, multi- and inter-disciplinary, and a journal of religious studies, even when specializing in one religion or area, must welcome in its pages treatises with all kinds of approaches and methods, as long as they lead to a greater understanding of religion. That is why the JJRS, which in general may show some slight bias for the positive pole feels no qualms about presenting the reader with this double issue on Religious Ideas in Japan. With this we do not, of course, want to settle the problem of the exact role of doctrine and conceptualization in religion. Indeed, we can very well agree that the primordial in religion is not doctrine but rather some kind of religious experience (influenced by historical circumstances), which finds a more direct expression in attitudes, symbols, rituals, myth; and still maintain that the realm of the logos has a life of its own and plays a very important and all-pervading role in the religious life of men and women.

What does the Japanese world of ideas look like? An attempt at classification might prove useful here, with some accompanying indication of how far these ideas have been introduced to the world at large.

We may first think of those religious ideas which in the past were certainly influential but are not represented today by any religious organization: Confucianism, Taoism, Yin-yang theories. It seems to me that the topic of their exact influence on Japanese life is still far from exhausted and many of the representative figures and texts still await introduction to the West.

For the "living religions" we can follow the classification of the Ministry of Education, without being blind to the artificiality of this "separation" when it comes to the lives of most Japanese.

Shinto has, of course, its *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* as a kind of sacred canon, but usually shies away from further conceptualization and systematization. Still, it might be worth our while to follow closely the endeavors of those Shinto scholars who presently advocate the elaboration of a Shinto "theology." Each of Japan's New Religions takes as its sacred scripture the "revelations" of its charismatic founder, at times, together with some Buddhist sūtra(s). Some of these New Religions, especially the now older ones, show a growing, more or less authoritative, body of interpretation and apologetics. Very little of this has yet been translated into any foreign language. As for Japan's Christianity, the following could be of interest to us: the Bible translations themselves, theological interpretations that betray an original Japanese outlook, and all attempts to relate Christianity to Japanese religion.

When we come to the world of Japanese Buddhist ideas, things become much more complicated. Its background is formed, of course, by the entire (Chinese) Canon and the whole history of Buddhist thinking, although practically every sect establishes its identity by a process of selection. Each living sect takes as its authoritative texts some sūtra(s) and the writings of the founding father. From this point then the history of Buddhism is interpreted selectively. We may all know by now that the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Foundation for the Promotion of Buddhism; established by Nemura Yehan; chairman: Hanayama Shōyū; offices in Tokyo) took it upon itself to arrange for the translation into English of the entire Chinese Tripitaka. However, translations of the founders' works, in as far as they exist, are still rather scattered over different languages. Yet translation projects undertaken by the headquarters of some sects may set the pattern for the future.

Besides this, every sect has its own traditional "theology" (*shūgaku* or *kyōgaku*), a veritable scholasticism transmitted almost unchanged since at the latest the Edo period, and some attempts at adaptation of this doctrine to modern times since the Meiji era. Needless to say, all of

this is mostly still a "closed book" to all but readers of (archaic) Japanese. As a third element in the world of Japanese Buddhist ideas we must take into account the different schools of (Mahāyāna) Buddhist philosophy, Indian as well as Chinese, which are represented in Japan each by a different sect but, at the same time, have a general impact on all. The intimate relationships of "philosophy" and theology in Buddhism does not allow us to leave them simply aside.

The above review may cover pretty well the whole field of conceptualization to which people are religiously committed in Japan, but it still does not cover the religious ideas implicit in Japanese folk religion and civil religion or underlying the various aspects of Japanese culture. The question of the relative importance to be attached to the various distinct systems of conceptualization, on the one hand, and the amorphous and inarticulated, but possibly more unified, strains of ideas, on the other, may be a serious point of contention.

When we finally take the term, "religious ideas," rather in the sense of "ideas on religion," we may first think of the philosophy of religion. Here, the most original contributions can be expected from these Japanese philosophers who do not simply follow the Western trends but endeavor to philosophize out of their own religious experience and thereby feel compelled to use Eastern categories in confrontation with the traditional Western ones. From such a stand, comparative studies that try to span East and West follow naturally. It has been said that the Japanese mind is not speculative, but this is gainsaid I believe, not only by highly speculative developments in Japanese Buddhism of the past, but also by the high quality of some Japanese philosophical speculation (especially on religion) in the present. The problem for the Japanese may rather lie in the domestication of speculative elan by philosophical rigor.

It is clear, however, that speculative ideas on religion are not a monopoly of the philosophy of religion. It is

sufficiently apparent from the writings of a Durkheim or a Max Weber that theories in the history or sociology of religion, when they show a high degree of generalization, share in this same speculative nature. This is proved again by the recent debate around the concept of secularization. On this point, both philosophy and sociology are much the poorer for their mutual disregard and alienation. But our real question here may be: Do Japanese history and sociology of religion come up with any original ideas? A field especially to be mentioned might be that of Buddhist studies. It is true that the overwhelming majority of the efforts here goes into detailed philological studies, but still a considerable part can be seen as history of ideas. Japan is considered by many nowadays as the leader in the field, but what percentage of Japanese Buddhist studies reach the rest of the world?

With this wide field of scholarship to be tapped, it is clear that a single issue of a journal cannot dream of doing justice to all the categories mentioned but must content itself with a sampling of some of them. Still, I especially regret the fact that the broad range of essays on Buddhist topics has all but excluded other aspects of Japanese religious thought from this issue.

Joseph Kitagawa, the famous historian of Japanese religion, needs no introduction, and we feel privileged at being given the opportunity of incorporating in our issue the paper originally delivered by him, on January 6 of this year, at the Hawaii Conference on Paradigm Shifts in Buddhism and Christianity. This context may be responsible for the use of the term, "paradigm change," in the title, but not for the broadness of perspective which is rather one of Kitagawa's trademarks. In order to treat the development of Japanese Buddhism as a whole, the article ranges in geography over India, China, and Japan and, in content, over religion, culture, and the political order. However, the real challenge of this paper may reside in the

fact that it attempts to understand the evolution of Japanese Buddhism neither simply as the Japanization of Buddhism nor unilaterally as the Buddhaization of Japanese religion, but rather as "the convergence of two intertwining processes of paradigm change—one in Japanese religion and the other in the Buddhist tradition."

"The Person in Buddhism" is highly typical of its author, Heinrich Dumoulin—another "household word" in the study of Japanese religion—and this in several respects: in that its interest extends to the whole of Buddhism but finally centers in Zen; in that it tackles highly speculative questions starting from very concrete data; in that it is not satisfied with Buddhist theory alone but wants to test it at the praxis; in its intellectual probity or the care taken not to let the conclusions profer anything not vouched for by the premises or facts; and, finally, in that its historical investigation aims at a clarification of the living present rather than of a dead past. The question treated here: the relationship of the unutterable or absolute to the personal, is indeed one of the basic themes of the present East-West dialogue on the theoretical level. And the most intriguing problem this essay leaves us with might be that of the relationship between theory and praxis in Buddhism. How can (especially) Zen genuinely attach great importance to the individuality of the person and to interpersonal relationships and, at the same time, keep the reality that transpires therein completely removed from its conception of the absolute?

Be it said here, in passing, that the JJRS plans to dedicate its 1985 double issue to the person and work of Father Dumoulin, who then will have reached the venerable age of eighty and seen the publication of the totally rewritten second edition of his *History of Zen Buddhism*.

Hase Shotō, in his contribution, the first part of which appeared in the preceding issue (Vol.II, nr.1, pp.77 - 93), probes for the religious motivation behind philosophical enquiry, specifically the pathos for the transcendent at work in the apparently dry and technical exercise of

epistemology in East and West. Indirectly, he challenges thereby the validity of the evolution of the Western "love of wisdom" into a purely profane discipline divorced from the religious quest. In this respect he shows himself to be a true disciple of those Kyoto pioneers who honored the Eastern wisdom tradition while fully engaging in Western philosophy. The influence of the Yogācāra tenets on Japanese speculation is hard to overestimate, I believe. In this issue, Morrell also testifies to this where he says: "Shingon shares the Yogācāra (Hossō) doctrine of consciousness only. . . ."; Tamura joins him when he quotes from a Tendai text: "The Pure Land and also Amida are namely my mind;" and Soga Ryōjin underwent its influence to the point of identifying Dharmākara (Hōzō Bosatsu) with the womb consciousness.

Robert Morrell, a frequent contributor to the JJRS in recent years (Cf. Vol.9, nr.2-3, pp.171-198; Vol.10, nr.1, pp.6-38 and 2-3, pp.195-228) presents us here with one more vignette on Kamakura Buddhism: "Shingon's Kakukai on the immanence of the Pure Land." By itself this text may look like a little historical detail, one short writing by an obscure figure of the early thirteenth century. But, taken together with the other articles, it betrays a grand scheme: a rewriting of the Kamakura religious scene, this time not as we imagine it by hindsight after the future success of the Buddhist reform movements, but as it was experienced by contemporaries and represented by writers who lived not long afterwards. Morrell comes to the conclusion that the religious figures that loomed largest at the time were Myōe, Jōkei, Jien, Kakukai, rather than Dōgen, Shinran, and Nichiren; and endeavors to rehabilitate these eminent representatives of the older Buddhist sects. Kakukai's ideas on the Nembutsu gain additional relief from Tamura's analysis and Soga's interpretations in this issue.

The text by Soga Ryōjin, "The Core of Shinshū," is meant to introduce to the reader this most original and controversial Shinshū theologian of modern times. Of him Kaneko Daiei, who might very well be the second in

importance behind Soga, has said: "Supposing that Soga-sensei had not appeared, it is doubtful whether we would have been able to truly understand Buddhism and to make Jōdo Shinshū really our own." Second son of a temple priest in Niigata prefecture, Soga was born in 1875 (8 years after the Meiji Restoration). From 1895 to 1904 he studied at the Shinshū university (which was to become the Otani university in 1911) and became a disciple of the reformer, Kiyozawa Manshi (1901-1903). Except for a teaching stint at Tokyo university (1916-1924), most of his further life is intertwined with the history of the Shinshū-Otani university. In his first term there (1904-1911) he taught Yogācāra thought there, only to be dismissed after 7 years. In 1925 he got a second chance but was "thrown out" (his own words) again in 1930 (for *Ianjū* or doubt about his orthodoxy). In 1941, however, he made his come-back and he taught again from 1941 till 1949. In 1951 he received the title of professor emeritus, and served as president of Otani university from 1961 till 1967. He died in 1971 at the age of 96.¹

For this introduction I have chosen the lectures Soga delivered in August 1940 in Fukui prefecture. I have taken the liberty of translating the first conference practically in its entirety (skipping only some rhetorical repetitions), and picking from the further five lectures some texts that can give us a better idea of the themes Soga treats in his theology and of the way he treats them. For us, outsiders, it is sometimes hard to grasp the full importance of the theological points Soga is making without further background information. But it was felt that adding explanations would have encumbered this religious text too much. I must confess, however, that Soga's prose leaves me with one big question mark: Does not the enduring

1. Up to now only one text by Soga is available to the English public, I believe. It is Soga's "Dharmākara Bodhisattva," first published in *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol.I, nr.I, pp.64-78 and later incorporated in Frederick Franck ed., *The Buddha Eye*, New York: Crossroad, 1982, pp.221-231.

strength of the theme of Future Birth in the Pure Land in Shinshū piety and theology contradict the this-worldliness of the Japanese on which both Kitagawa and Tamura insist?

In his "Critique of Original Awakening (*hongaku*) Thought in Shōshin and Dōgen," Tamura Yoshirō, the Japanese specialist in *hongaku* thought, delivers much more than he promises in his title. He presents us with an original and consistent interpretation of the whole creative period of Japanese Buddhism. At the same time, he appears to apply to Japanese Buddhism the scheme of interpretation proposed in this issue by J. Kitagawa and, as it were, to illustrate perfectly Kitagawa's conclusion: "With the articulation of the sacrality of nature in terms of Jinen-hōni or *hongaku* . . . Japanese Buddhism at last became self-conscious as the heir of both historic Buddhism and Japanese religion." In that respect, the nexus he provides between this Buddhist theorizing and the "natural Japanese way of thinking," also expressed in the Japanese arts and their theories, is most illuminating. It helps us to understand, for example, people like Suzuki Daisetz and Nishitani Keiji presenting Zen as perfect expression of Japanese religiosity—something which always struck me as rather incongruent in view of the fact that Zen Buddhism is supposed to derive its essence from India and China. We can, of course, not be blind to the fact that Tamura's view of the evolution of the Jōdo school is rather different from that of Soga Ryōjin.

The incorporation of Ariga Tetsutarō's "Hayatology" into this issue serves to widen its horizon beyond the Buddhist realm, but is first of all meant as an act of piety towards this Christian pioneer of the dialogue with Japanese religious thought at the occasion of the seventh anniversary of his death. Born in Osaka in 1899, he was baptized as a member of the Church of the Brethren in 1917. He received his theological training (with a stress on the history of dogma) at Dōshisha university (Kyoto) and later at Union Theological Seminary (1922-25 and 1935-36),

where he was the first Japanese to obtain a Th.D. From 1926 till 1948 he was on the teaching staff of Dōshisha's school of theology, but in 1948 he was called to Kyoto State University to occupy the newly founded chair for Christian studies in the philosophical department. After his retirement in 1962, he was active as the president of Shōin Junior College and Kobe Women's College (up to 1971). He died on May 25, 1977. His "Collected Works" appeared in 1981.

In his *Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews* (published in 1935) Ariga already looked for the point of convergence of Hebraism and Hellenism, and in 1969 he finally decided to publish a further elaboration of his ideas on this point in his last major work, *Kirisutokyō shisō ni okeru sonzairon no mondai* (Problems of Ontology in Christian Thought). The present article is a translation of one of its chapters. It is a witness to Ariga's search for a way out of the stark opposition between the Christian God, as interpreted from Greek ontology as immutable being, and the Eastern nothingness which formed the basis of most of his Kyoto colleagues' thinking. The present text unfortunately limits itself to Ariga's point of departure and does not do justice to his further ideas about the convergence of ontology and hayatology in Christianity.