

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

Joseph M. KITAGAWA

Paradigm change in Japanese Buddhism has often been discussed in terms of either the Japanization of Buddhism or the Buddhaization of Japanese religion. I have learned much from both approaches. Nevertheless, as an historian of religions, I would like to approach the subject from a slightly different perspective. I would like to attempt to understand this nebulous phenomenon as the convergence of two intertwining processes of paradigm change—one in Japanese religion and the other in the Buddhist tradition. My schema will compel me to give attention as well to two subsidiary factors—first, the impact of China as both the main source of cultural inspiration for Japan and the secondary center of Mahāyāna Buddhism (the tradition of Buddhism that penetrated Japan); and second, the mediating and tutorial role of Korea in the cultural and religious contacts between China and Japan.

It is my modest hope to try to untangle the criss-crossing web which provided both the threads and the pattern of the colorful brocade of Japanese Buddhism, woven by the combination of historical "givens" and religious creativity at several crucial phases of Japanese historical, cultural, and religious experience.

### BUDDHIST PARADIGM CHANGE UNDER KING AŚÓKA

As is true with other religions, there are three related but different levels of meaning attached to Buddhism: (1) Buddhism as religion, (2) Buddhism as culture, and (3) the Buddhist-related or oriented socio-political order. With respect to the first, Buddhism takes for granted the necessity for the human being to see the meaning of all existence in relation to Nirvāṇa, the ultimate meaning. This

spiritual insight, derived from the Buddha's own religious experience, has been expressed in doctrines, scriptures, cults, ethics, and the ecclesiastical structures of the Buddhist religion. On the second level, Buddhism nurtures and impregnates its ethos into the domain of values, ideology, the arts, and the imagination, that is, into culture. On the third level, Buddhism is related variously to actual socio-political structures and organizations. In Buddhism, paradigm change usually involves not only important changes in each of these three levels of meaning but also alteration in the balance of and the relationship among the three levels.

It is well known that Buddhism had undergone significant paradigm changes before reaching China. The significance of early Buddhism lies in the fact that it began, as E.J. Thomas astutely points out, "not with a body of doctrine, but with the formation of a [community] bound by certain rules" (Thomas 1933, p.14). In sharp contrast to the metaphysico-social principle of the Brahmanic-Hindu tradition based on three foci—the eternal cosmic dharma, the divinely-ordered social structure, and the sacred kingship—the Buddhist metaphysico-social principle affirmed that the true Dharma, which was discovered and preached by the Buddha, could be realized only in the corporate life of the Buddhist community (Saṃgha). This principle was clearly expressed in the early Buddhist creed of the three-fold refuge (*tri-saraṇa-gaṃana*): taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha. Even though early Buddhism was an insignificant regional movement of monastics and laity in northeastern India, its concern was the universal and perennial problem of existence in the world (*loka*).

Shortly after the demise of the Buddha, northeastern India was exposed to a strong Brahmanic-Hindu cultural influence. At the same time, Buddhism was gradually consolidated and institutionalized under the leadership of monastics. The oral traditions of the Buddha and his immediate disciples were codified, modified, and

interpreted. Philosophical inquiries into the nature of Dharma produced a series of doctrines, written scriptures, and ethical precepts for monastics and laity. The Buddha, who shortly after his death was "deified" in the minds of the faithful, came to be identified with the popular image of the supreme universal monarch (Cakravārtin) who was believed to be "a divinely ordained figure with a special place in the cosmic scheme" (Basham 1954, p.83).

The most far-reaching paradigm change in Buddhism took place during the third century B.C. under the influence of the newly-converted Buddhist king, Aśoka (r. 274-232 B.C.) He proudly stated in the Bairāt Buddhist Texts Edict his "great reverence for and faith in Buddha, the Dharma [and] the Saṃgha" (Sen 1956, p. 30; pp.134-135). His strong advocacy of the practice of Dharma notwithstanding, Aśoka's understanding of the term included a whole series of moral deeds—mercifulness; charity to Brahmans, ascetics, and all other human beings; truthfulness; purity of thought; honesty; gentleness; gratitude; non-injury; relieving the suffering of the aged; tolerance toward other religions; and other deeds, all of which, according to Professor Sen, form "the basic teachings of all Indian religions, with this exception that he lays emphasis on non-killing of life as was taught by Buddhism and to a much greater extent by Jainism" (Sen 1956, p. 34).

The new paradigm of Buddhism which emerged may be characterized as blending two levels and structures of meaning, the classical formula of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Saṃgha) and a second triple schema of the kingship, the state, and Buddhist-inspired morality. According to the new paradigm, the king is not only the political head; he is endowed with **religious authority**, a claim not made by any previous Buddhist monarch. In Aśoka's own words, "Whatever the Lord Buddha has said, Reverend Sirs, is of course well said. But it is proper for me to enumerate the texts which express the true Dharma and which make it everlasting" (Nikam and McKeon 1959, p.66). Not only did Aśoka thus assume as king the

prerogative to evaluate doctrines; he also exercised his authority to require monks and nuns to observe the discipline. As Rahula points out, the notion of establishing

the Śāsana or Buddhism as an institution in a particular country or a place was perhaps first conceived by Aśoka himself. He was the first king to adopt Buddhism as a state religion, and to start a great spiritual conquest which was called *Dharma-vijaya*. . . . Like a conqueror and a ruler who would establish governments in countries politically conquered by him, so Aśoka probably thought of establishing the Śāsana in countries spiritually conquered . . . by him (Rahula 1956, pp. 54-55).

At the same time, Aśoka considered it the king's religious duty to protect and honor all faiths found in his realm. Clearly, Aśoka conducted himself according to the mythological model of the idealized supreme monarch, the Cakravārtin. Many scholars have pointed out that Aśoka never mentions Nirvāṇa in his Edicts. Instead, he repeatedly mentions his pious hope to attain "heaven" in the next life (Sen 1956, p. 78).

The link between the two triads of the new paradigm, Buddha-Dharma-Saṃgha, and the kingship-state-morality, was the notion of sacred kingship modelled after the image of the Cakravārtin. Aśoka succinctly expressed the lofty ideal of king as ruler and agent of Dharma:

The king [as a ruler] will forgive those who can be forgiven; and, for that they may be induced by me to practise the Dharma; and, that they may attain (the happiness of) this world and of the next world (Sen 1956, p. 116).

As might be expected, such a new paradigm had immediate and far-reaching effects, both positive and negative, on the Buddhist tradition: (1) The new paradigm enabled Buddhism

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

to locate religious meaning in the socio-political order and socio-political institutions. (2) The model of the Buddhist path, which had been understood earlier as that of leaving the world to enter the stream in the hope of Nirvāṇa, took on the new meaning of reentering the world "for the benefit of all beings," thus giving a positive missionary impulse to Buddhism. (3) Because the religious base shifted from the "community of faith" to the concrete geographical regions of the Buddhist-inspired state, demarcated by its "boundaries" (*śīmā*), Buddhism had to come to terms with the customs, institutions, legends, and beliefs, as well as with the indigenous gods and spirits of the localities which it claimed. (4) Such a "spatialization" of Buddhist religion (*Sāsana*) on earth coincided with cosmic "spatial" speculation about multiple Buddha-lands, thus fostering the development of cosmologies as a soteriological framework. (5) The excessive royal favor and support of monastic institutions had some negative results. Says Rahula,

Allured by the high status and comforts granted to the [monastic order] by the emperor, undesirable and corrupting elements entered the order, thereby disturbing its unity and peace (Rahula 1956, p.12).

(6) Schismatic tendencies had already threatened the Buddhist community earlier. After the time of Aśoka, they became more accentuated because of the combined effect of internal and external forces. As a result, Buddhism split into the Hīnayāna (or Theravāda) and Mahāyāna traditions.

After Aśoka's time, the missionary enterprise of Buddhism established secondary centers of Buddhist expansion: Śrī Lanka for the southern expansion of the Hīnayāna (Theravāda) tradition; China for the East Asian expansion of the Mahāyāna tradition; and later Tibet for the expansion of the Tantric tradition into the Mongolian steppe. Meanwhile, the political development of northwest India from the third century B.C. to the third century A.D. brought from without non-Indian cultural and religious

influences. In the Mahāyāna tradition, these stimulated creativity in Buddhist art and the emergence of new soteriologies based on multiple Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Just as the southern Buddhist expansion followed the overseas route into southeast Asia, Mahāyāna expansion followed the overland trade route, the "Silk Road," and eventually reached the border of China.

#### CHINESE BUDDHISM—A NEW PARADIGM

Prior to the penetration of Buddhism into China in the first century A.D., the Han empire (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) had been engaged in active transcontinental trade with Europe and had extended its political influence to some of the oasis kingdoms along the Silk Road. Frederick Teggart, who has examined the relationship between Rome and China in the years 58 B.C. to A.D. 107, points out that "of the forty occasions on which outbreaks [of war] took place in Europe, twenty-seven were traceable to the policy, or change of policy, of the Han government" (Teggart 1939, p.vii). The Silk Road provided an avenue not only for commercial traffic but also for Persian, Greek, Indian, and Chinese cultural and religious contacts. It was from Buddhist communities in the Central Asian oasis kingdoms that Buddhism was introduced into northwest China.

From the beginning, it was apparent that Buddhism in China could not follow the Aśoka paradigm, which was based on (1) a "Buddhist king," the de facto earthly political counterpart of the Buddha; (2) a comprehensive "national morality" inspired by Dharma; and (3) a "Buddhist state" as an idealized and expanded image of the Buddhist community. Among the three, the most important for Chinese Buddhists was the notion of the kingship. This notion had to be heavily modified in light of the indigenous Chinese understanding of the emperor. The designation "emperor," or Huang-ti, was originally chosen by the first emperor of the dynasty preceding the Han, the Ch'in, in the third century B.C. Combining two terms which referred to divinity and mythical heroes respectively, it was based

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

on the notion of the Mándate of Heaven (*t'ien-ming*). Only by the Mandate of Heaven is the ruler—usually referred to as the "Son of Heaven"—entrusted with governing "all under Heaven," including responsibility for the "destiny of the state" (*Kuo-yün*). The importance which Chinese Buddhists attached to the protection and patronage of their religion by the ruler is exemplified by the legend they created about the dream of the Emperor Ming (A.D. 58-75). In his dream, Ming saw a radiant figure who was identified as the Buddha. As a result, he dispatched an envoy to India to bring back monks, Buddha statues, and Buddhist scriptures to China. According to Tsukamoto:

This tale of the Emperor's dream appears to have originated about A.D. 200. It was invented and propagated by Buddhists for the purpose of spreading their religion in a cultural atmosphere in which the strength of traditional ideas was very great. By pretending that Buddhism was received at the center of government by command of the Emperor, they sought to invest their religion with an authority that the people of China could not easily deny (Tsukamoto 1956, p.184).

Throughout Chinese history, Buddhism had easier access to the throne when Confucian or Taoist influence in the court was not strong. One such period was the time when "barbarian" dynasties ruled North China between the fourth and the mid-sixth centuries. Arthur Wright calls our attention to the similarity between Caesaro-papism and the relationship that developed between northern Buddhism and the monarchy. The reigning emperor of the Northern Wei dynasty, for example, was regarded as a Buddha incarnate, whereas southern Buddhism "had been content to make of the politically feeble emperors great lay patrons (*mahā-dānapatī*) and wielders of kingly power for the good of the faith in the manner of the Indian Cakravārtin-rāja." We might note, however, that southern Buddhism, too, called Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (r. 502-49) Huang-ti

p'u-sa (Emperor Bodhisattva), Chiu-shih p'u-sa (Savior Bodhisattva), and P'u-sa t'ien-tzu (Bodhisattva Son of Heaven) (Wright 1959, p.51).<sup>1</sup> After the reunification of northern and southern China by the Sui dynasty in 581, the first Sui emperor Wen-ti, made this revealing statement:

With the armed might of a Cakravārtin king, We spread the ideals of the ultimately enlightened one. With a hundred victories in a hundred battles, We promote the practice of the ten Buddhist virtues. Therefore We regard the weapons of war as having become like the offerings of incense and flowers presented to Buddha, and the fields of this world as becoming forever identical with the Buddha-land (Quoted in Wright 1959, p.67).

The Dowager Empress Wu (r. 684-705) of the T'ang dynasty claimed equally pretentious honors by allowing herself to be styled Maitreya or Kuan-yin (Eliot 1954, p.261).

Despite such serious efforts on the part of Chinese Buddhism to curry the favor of the throne, and despite the willingness of certain monarchs to accept Buddhist honors, in the long run the influence of Buddhism could not alter the traditional Chinese notion of the sovereign as the "Son of Heaven" as that notion was defined and authenticated in Confucian terms.

The Buddhist impact on Chinese moral norms and the Chinese state was equally insignificant. Two centuries prior to the entry of Buddhism, China had made a transition from

---

1. Wright 1959, p.62. Chen 1964, p.152, cites the legend that in 454, "a stone figure of the Buddha in the likeness of the emperor was set up" in the Northern Wei capital, and that "it was found to have black spots on the face and feet, corresponding exactly to similar marks on the emperor's face and feet. This remarkable coincidence recalled an earlier statement by Fa-kuo that the emperor was the present-day Tathāgata and the populace became even more impressed."



## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

feudalism to an imperial state supported by a highly developed bureaucracy. Side by side with this development in the political sphere, the Confucian tradition abandoned its ancient ethos, which had reflected the mentality of the feudal age, and developed into an urbane eclectic system referred to as "Han Confucianism," a system "that became the organizing power behind the scholar-officials and gave full expression to their interests, ideas, and ideals" (Balazs 1964, p.7). With the de facto canonization of the Five Classics, which provided the basics for the training of the scholar-officials, moral norms for Chinese society came to be dictated by the Confucian system. To be sure, this system had incorporated certain features from other schools of thought, e.g., Taoism, Legalism, and the Yin-Yang School. Historians remind us that there were times when Confucian influence in the central government waned and the vacuum was filled temporarily by Taoist or Buddhist influences. But through it all, the ruling class remained solidly Confucian in outlook. Neither Buddhism nor Taoism was able to dislodge Confucian dominance in statecraft and had little to add to Confucian virtues exactly suited to a hierarchically-organized imperial state: "respect, humility, docility, obedience, submission, and subordination to elders and betters" (Balazs 1964, p.7). Rather, Buddhists attempted to translate their moral principles into a Confucian moral framework (Nakamura 5:3-4, pp.156-171; Ch'en 1973, pp.14-64).

Although Chinese Buddhism was thus excluded from participating meaningfully in political leadership and from contributing positively to the moral norms of society, it exerted significant influence on Chinese cultural life. When Buddhism reached China, it was no longer a simple religion of mendicants and humble lay followers. It brought with it a variety of Indian Buddhist cultural forms, which had been further enriched by Graeco-Persian influences in the oasis kingdoms of Central Asia. R. Grosset tells us that:

The Aurel Stein Mission . . . found in Rawak, in the region of Khotan, around various stūpas going back to the first centuries of our era, purely Graeco-Buddhist reliefs, and in Niya, on a site abandoned about the end of the third century A.D., intaglios of Roman workmanship, as well as coins from the Kuchan dynasty that reigned between A.D. 30 and 244 over Afghanistan and Punjab. In Miran, . . . south of Lop-Nor, Aurel Stein has discovered third century Buddhist mural paintings of purely Graeco-Roman workmanship. (Grousset 1959, p.139).

When the Chinese were initially exposed to Buddhism, it is not surprising that they were more impressed by the elegant Buddhist art and architecture, the colorful pageantry of rituals, the elaborate ceremonial vestments and ornaments, than by lofty doctrines which they could not comprehend because of linguistic and cultural barriers. For the evangelizing purposes of the Buddhist missionaries:

the Buddhist imagery, with its expressive representations, whether it had to do with the human life of the Buddha Sākyamuni, with its moving episodes, or with the paradise of the coming Buddhist 'messiahs' and 'saviors,' Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara or Amitābha, was as effective as any preaching . . . moved by these pious considerations, the Buddhist missionaries borrowed their imagery from every source, especially as some came from the valley of Kabul and Punjab, with their Gandharan 'Saint-Sulpice,' while others stemmed from the 'seminaries' of Kashgaria where the most curious amalgam of images from every source was being developed, and in addition these last preachers were simple Chinese neophytes who naturally introduced into Buddhism the whole tradition of the popular religious images of Taoism (Grousset 1959, p.156).

Buddhist missionaries, eager to communicate the

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

contents of the faith, began translating scriptures and commentaries into Chinese, the language destined to become the religious language of Buddhists in East Asia. The early translators, both foreign missionaries whose understanding of Chinese was limited and their Chinese collaborators who knew little Sanskrit or Pali, appropriated many terms and concepts from the Taoist tradition to express Buddhist meanings. Buddhists and Taoists also found each other congenial aesthetically. Their influences upon each other in art, literature, and poetry greatly enriched the Chinese cultural tradition.

Even so brief an overview as I have attempted makes clear that a new paradigm for Buddhism emerged in China, replacing the Aśokan paradigm of Indian Buddhism. (1) Chinese Buddhism clung to the Aśoka-inspired image of the Buddhist king, but at the same time it had to adjust itself to the Confucian-oriented Chinese notion of the Emperor as "Son of Heaven." Monastic orders sought royal favor and in turn were controlled by the throne. (2) In China, Buddhism assumed a humbler role than its counterpart in South and Southeast Asia in reference to moral norms and the institution of the state. It did not replace but merely supplemented the dominant Confucian moral norm and the Confucian-oriented bureaucracy. (3) Chinese Buddhism accepted the monastic and lay paths as religious options rather than as graded soteriological levels. (4) A unique Chinese tradition of Gentry Buddhism developed following the model of Vimalakīrti. In the words of Arthur Wright, Vimalakīrti

was not a naked ascetic but a rich and powerful aristocrat, a brilliant talker, a respected householder and father, a man who denied himself no luxury or pleasure yet possessed so pure and disciplined a personality that he changed all whom he met for the better (Wright 1959, p. 52).

(5) In the main, Chinese Buddhism was preoccupied with the meaning of human existence in the phenomenal world. This preoccupation, as Wing-tsit Chan succinctly suggested,

contributed to the shift in outlook from other-worldliness to this-worldliness, in objective from individual salvation to universal salvation, in philosophy from extreme doctrines to synthesis, in methods of freedom from religious discipline and philosophical understanding to pietism and practical insight, and in authority from the clergy to the layman himself (Chan 1957-1958, p.115).

(6) In spite of occasional new input from Indian Buddhism, and in spite of the sincere effort of Chinese pilgrims to secure authentic and up-to-date Buddhist doctrines and practices in the land of their origin, Chinese Buddhism for the most part generated its own dynamics. These dynamics derived from the Chinese experience of trying to find **Buddhist meaning in Chinese culture and society** and from its give-and-take relationship with Confucian, Taoist, and other traditions. Characteristically, Chinese Buddhism found religious resources not only in Chinese translations of sūtras and commentaries but also in Chinese Buddhists' reflections, commentaries, and doctrinal formulations. (7) Not only did Chinese Buddhism develop its own art and culture; it made a great contribution to the total cultural life of China. (8) China became the secondary center of diffusion for the Mahāyāna tradition, extending its religious and cultural influence beyond its borders.

#### EARLY JAPANESE RELIGION

Very little of the religious situation in Japan prior to the introduction of Chinese civilization and Buddhism can be reconstructed with certainty. Our conjectures are based primarily on the scattered references to Japan in Chinese and Korean sources and on carefully scrutinized myths,

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

legends, lores, and customs of the archaic and early Japanese as recorded in such eighth-century documents as the *Kojiki*, the *Nihongi*, the *Fudoki*, and the official anthology of poems called the *Man-yōshū*.

By the term "Japanese Religion" I refer to the unnamed, unorganized, and unsystematized cluster of religio-magical views, beliefs, and practices of early Japan. Unlike Buddhism and Confucianism, which claimed "universal" validity for Dharma and the Tao respectively, early Japanese religion was derived from the "particular" experience of the Japanese archipelago. Opinions vary greatly as to how far back Japan's prehistory can be traced, but most scholars agree that its earliest phase goes back to 3000 to 4500 years before our era. More importantly, Japan's prehistory lasted until around the mid-third century A.D., that is, long after the establishment of a great civilization in China. As far as we can ascertain, various ethnic-cultural groups had drifted into the Japanese islands from northern and southern parts of the Asiatic continent as well as from South Sea areas during the prehistoric period, and they had attained a degree of self-consciousness as one people, developing a common language (proto-Japanese), before the beginning of the historic period.

Although the Japanese islands were isolated from the Asiatic continent, some Koreans sporadically migrated to Japan, crossing the strait shortly before and after the beginning of our era, a trend which continued throughout the early historic period. Evidently there were a number of tribal states in Japan, mostly in the western island of Kyushu, and some of them paid tribute to the Han court in China during the first, second, and third centuries A.D. We learn from Chinese records that there was a female shamanistic ruler, Himiko or Pimiko, whose prerogative as the head of the state of Yamatai was duly acknowledged by the Chinese court.

In talking about early Japanese religion from around

the turn of the fourth century A.D. we are on surer ground. At that time, the Yamato court began to consolidate its power in the present Nara prefecture by forming what amounted to a confederation of powerful uji (clan) groups. The Yamato rulers paid tribute to China, and in return they received the kingly title from the Chinese court. Within Japan, they claimed to be descendants of the Sun deity (*kami*). They continued to solidify their influence over other uji (clan) chieftains and assumed the prerogatives of conferring court titles, granting sacred seed at spring festivals, and establishing sacred sites and regulating rituals for the kami. Significantly, their kingly activities, which were simultaneously political and magico-religious, were usually dictated by the precarious will of the kami, transmitted to them through dreams and divinations.

The Yamato court was not idle in extending its influence to Korea. It gained a foothold on the southern tip of the peninsula during the fourth century A.D. Japanese forces fought side-by-side with the army of one of the Korean kingdoms, Paekche, against the armies of the rival kingdoms, Silla and Koguryo. Through such contacts, an increasing number of Korean artisans, artists, scholars, and technicians came to settle in Japan, and it was through Korea that Chinese civilization and Buddhism were introduced into Japan. Sometime during the sixth century the term "Shinto" was coined, to refer to the hitherto unnamed and unsystematized native magico-religious tradition, in contradistinction to Confucian and Buddhist traditions. It was assumed that the myths, symbols, and cults of Yamato's ruling house were to be accepted as the paradigm of Shinto, but actually the court-sponsored Shinto could not incorporate all the features of early Japanese religion. In fact, many such features remained outside the framework of official Shinto. They have usually been placed in the category of "folk religion." At any rate, there is good reason to retain the designation "Japanese religion" to refer to the subsequent development of religion in Japanese history, even though its earlier paradigm was destined to

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

expand by the infusion of Confucian, Taoist, Ying-yang, and Buddhist influences.

As I have stated repeatedly elsewhere, one of the basic features of the early Japanese religious universe was its unitary meaning-structure, a structure which affirmed the belief that the natural world is the original world. According to this paradigm, the total cosmos—including physical elements such as fire, water, wood, and stone, as well as animals and celestial bodies—is permeated by sacred, or *kami*, nature (See Kitagawa 1980, pp.27-42). In such a world-view, there were no rigid lines demarcating various activities such as religion, commerce, arts, and recreation. It is not surprising, therefore, that human beings and *kami* of multiple forms were believed to constitute a single community.

The term *kami* refers to all beings and things, both good and evil, which are awesome and worthy of reverence. According to the *Nihongi*, "there were numerous [*kami*] which shone with a lustre like that of fireflies, and evil [*kami*] which buzzed like flies. There were also trees and herbs all of which could speak" (Aston 1972, bk. 2, p.64). Moreover, when a mountain, for example, was called *kami*, that implied that the mountain was the sacred reality itself, not a symbol of it. Human beings were also regarded as *kami*, although later accounts tend to reserve this status primarily for monarchs and aristocrats. When Buddhism was introduced, the Buddha was understood as a foreign *kami*. In the course of time, the early Japanese recognized many types of *kami*, such as those of geographical regions, of social groups, and those who were believed to control people's health, fortune, and longevity. The early Japanese also took for granted the existence of *tama* and *mono* (souls and spirits), which were often interfused with the notion of *kami*. It was believed that *mono* (usually spirits of the fox, the snake, and the badger) were capable of possessing men and women as the *kami* did. Spoken words were

also believed to have souls (*koto-dama*), which became an important motif in the development of ritualized Shinto prayer (*norito*).

To the early Japanese, what we now refer to as religion was a matter of the "ritualization" of various aspects of life. Early Japanese religion had no fixed liturgies until it came into contact with Chinese and Buddhist ritual forms, but most rites had three basic features. The first was the practice of demarcating sacred space for the *kami*, usually marked by a sacred rope hung with paper strips. Second was the emphasis on purification. Third was a variety of activities called *matsuri*, often translated as "ceremony" or "festival." These were rites of thanksgiving, petition, paying homage, and presenting offerings of rice wine and food to the *kami*, followed by joyful celebrations. The meaning underlying *matsuri* is "to be with" or "to attend to the needs of" the *kami*, the ancestral soul, or a person of higher status. A related notion is political administration (*matsuri-goto*). The Yamato rulers were expected to attend to the needs of their solar ancestress, who communicated her will to them for practical implementation. This principle of the interrelatedness of *matsuri* and *matsuri-goto* was later articulated in terms of the unity of religion and national administration (Kitagawa 1979, pp. 30-37).

Early Japanese religion was closely related to the structure of the primary social unit, the precursor of what later came to be called the *uji*, a territorially-based cluster of families which shared the same tutelary *kami* and kinship ties. The *uji* was the social, economic, political, and religious unit. It was held together by its chieftain, whose authority over the land and the people was derived from his cultic prerogatives and economic control. With the ascendancy of the Yamato ruling house as the supreme *uji*, chieftains of other great *uji* groups were given court titles and various ranks. The growing prestige of the ruling house was reflected in the expansion of its pantheon and mythological tradition. Both pantheon and tradition gained



## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

acceptance among subordinate uji groups, thus fostering both the transition of Japan from the confederation of semi-autonomous uji groups to a kingdom and a trend toward unifying the hitherto fragmented cultic, mythological, and religious tradition of early Japan. The actual impetus for the new paradigm of Japanese religion, however, came with the introduction of Chinese civilization and Buddhism during the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.

### PARADIGM CHANGE IN JAPANESE RELIGION

As stated earlier, Chinese civilization and Buddhism penetrated Japan not directly from China but through Korea, which since the second century B.C. had been a cultural satellite of China. Although this is not the occasion to trace the relationship between Korea and Japan, we might mention in passing that there were close cultural affinities between southern Korea and Kyushu in the prehistoric period. The same type of dolmens have been unearthed in both places, and the veneration of sacred mountains and sacred rocks was shared by ancient Koreans and Japanese (Ki-young Yi 1975, pp.3-59. Professor T'aek-kyu Kim, a Korean historian, is persuaded that

. . . the foundation of the Japanese religion prior to the introduction of Buddhism has many such aspects as can be construed as the colonized and developed features of our own [meaning Korea], and the number of [kami] revealed in ancient Japanese records, their mythology, attributes of those female priests who appear in their ancient legend, status of women as revealed in their royal lineage, relations between men and women and so forth closely resemble those of Shilla [Silla]. Besides, the ancient immigrants from the Korean Peninsula to the Japanese islands exerted a great influence on the religious lives of the Japanese as exemplified by festivals, funeral services, prayers for rainfalls, etc., and it is easy to surmise that the various features of our religion based on a polytheistic

foundation were transplanted into the religion of the Japanese (Kim 1975, p.35).

During the first and second centuries A.D., there was a prosperous colony of Chinese "gentry in the area around the present North Korean city of P'yong-yang, which was an essential staging-post for the tributary envoys of south Korean and Kyushu tribal states en route to the Chinese capital" (Gardiner 1969, p.20). "It also seems possible," according to Dr. Gardiner, "that some of the Pyon-han *kuo* [tribal states of Pyon-han, Benkan in Japanese, in southern Korea] acknowledged the overlordship of the Japanese Queen Himiko in the mid-third century A.D." (Gardiner 1969, p.48). With the decline of Chinese influence over the Korean peninsula in the fourth century, three Korean kingdoms—Koguryo, Silla, and Paekche—established their respective domains and staged a series of fierce conflicts that lasted for three centuries. In this struggle, Paekche sought Japan's military assistance, and the Yamato rulers gave it. Later, Japan established contact with Silla.

From the fourth century onward, Japan's close contact with Korea brought a number of Korean immigrants to Japan. The earlier group of immigrants included prominent Koreans of Chinese descent, who came to be known in Japan as the influential families of Hata, Aya, and Fumi. During the sixth and seventh centuries, immigrants from Koguryo and Silla as well as those from Paekche settled in Japan. They and their descendants, the naturalized citizens, taught Japanese the Chinese script, Confucian literary classics, astronomy, medicine, and various technologies, all of which greatly enriched Japanese cultural life. It was a revolutionary experience for the Japanese, who had no written language of their own, to learn to read and write Chinese script; and the difficulty was compounded by the fact that the medium of instruction was Korean, the language of immigrant teachers. Even through such hazardous procedures, newly-imported knowledge quickly had a great impact on Japan. For example, the Japanese intelli-

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

gentsia learned from the Yin-Yang school not only fascinating cosmological theories but also the underlying principle that **the human mind could know** the structure and dynamics of the mysterious universe. They also learned that unlike the Japanese world-view, which was derived from their "particular" experience, there was the "universal" law of Tao that underlies Confucian ethics, political theory, and legal and educational institutions.

The paradigm of the earlier Japanese religious universe, the simplistic unitary meaning-structure, inevitably underwent changes.

In addition to Chinese civilization, Buddhism, too, was transmitted to Japan through Korea. I do not need to recount the well-known events of the controversy that followed the official presentation of the Buddhist image to the Yamato court from the king of Paekche in the sixth century A.D. We should note, however, that due to their affirmation that everything is potentially a manifestation of **kami** (sacred power), the early Japanese never developed representations of **kami** in anthropomorphic form. Thus the symbolization of the sacred or Buddhahood in a human-like image was a new revelation, which had far-reaching effects on the Japanese attitude toward sacral reality. Moreover, those court ministers who argued against accepting the statue of the foreign **kami** (the Buddha) presented their case from the perspective of the earlier "particular" Japanese religious universe, while the chieftain of the powerful and pro-Buddhist Soga **uji** was attracted by the Buddhist claim of its "universal" validity. At any rate, Buddhism was initially sponsored by the Soga chieftain as the "religion of **uji**" and not as the religion of the Yamato court.

It was Prince Shōtoku, the regent under his aunt, Empress Suiko, around the turn of the seventh century, who sensed the necessity and desirability of a paradigm change in Japanese religion. He "particularized" the two universal

principles, the Tao of Confucianism and the Dharma of Buddhism, so as to strengthen the foundation of the hierarchically-centralized national community under the sacred monarchy. Himself a devout Buddhist tutored by eminent Korean Buddhist masters, Shōtoku held a grandiose vision inspired in part by King Aśoka's triple schema on two levels--Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha on the spiritual level, and the sacred kingship, moral norm for society, and religio-political state on the empirical level--and in part by the example of Emperor Wen Ti (r. 581-604) of the Sui dynasty, who united China by domesticating Buddhism, Confucianism, and, to a lesser degree, Taoism, as arms of the semi-divine emperor (Kitagawa 1974, pp.209-226).

Shōtoku's untimely death was followed by a series of bloody power struggles in the court. However, his vision was implemented substantially by Emperor Temmu (r. 672-696), the real architect of the so-called Ritsuryō (Imperial Rescript) state. The Ritsuryō state attempted to reorient Shinto, Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist traditions to cooperate under the authority of the sovereign, who claimed the prerogative to "reign" and to "rule" the nation on the basis of the myth that the imperial house possessed a solar ancestry. Accordingly, the sovereign was now regarded as the "manifest kami" whose divine will was communicated by a series of "imperial rescripts." This type of "immanent theocracy" became the new paradigm of Japanese religion.

In order to solidify such a new synthesis of religion, society, polity, and culture, the government reorganized the court structure (Miller 1974) and ordered the compilation of two mytho-historical works, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. The government also kept records of local surveys or topologies (the *Fudoki*) and made the "New Compilation of the Register of Families" (*Shinsen-shōjirōku*). Moreover, the penal codes (*ritsu*) and the civil statutes (*ryō*), modelled after the Chinese legal system, were issued in the name of the throne. The fact that the Department of Kami-Affairs (*Jingi-kan*) was placed side by side with the Great Council

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

of State (*Dajōkan*) accorded prestige to Shinto while keeping it under the rigid control of the government bureaucracy. The government also controlled the Buddhist clerics through the "Law Governing Monks and Nuns" (*Sōniryō*).

The objective of the Ritsuryō synthesis was not to create a Chinese-style "liturgical community" with its sovereign as the mediator between Heaven, Earth, and Man, but to make the entire Japanese nation a "soteriological community," as it were, with the emperor functioning simultaneously as the chief priest, the sacred king, and the living *kami*. Accordingly, the Imperial court now became the earthly counterpart of the heavenly court of the Sun deity. The stylized court rituals, as prescribed in the *Engi-shiki* (Institutes or Proceedings of the Engi Era)—the most elaborate embodiment of the Ritsuryō paradigm—were meant to perpetuate the earthly replica of heavenly rituals as told in myths (Kitagawa 1981, pp.217-232).

It is an irony of history that even before the Ritsuryō synthesis achieved its coherence, it had begun to erode due to the changes in both the Japanese religious universe and the socio-political order. The latter change was exemplified by the Fujiwara regency, the rule by retired monarchs, and feudal regimes (*bakufu*). Nevertheless, the Ritsuryō ideal has remained as the only viable paradigm of Japanese religion throughout Japanese history—at least, until the modern period. And it is of great significance that the Meiji regime, despite its westernized modern trappings, attempted to return to the Ritsuryō paradigm by means of the emperor cult, a national morality, and a sacred national community.

### JAPANESE BUDDHISM AND ITS PARADIGM

The foregoing makes clear, I hope, that the development of the Buddhist tradition in Japan was closely intertwined with the development of Japanese religion. Some historical factors can help us understand the characteristics of Japanese Buddhism.

First, Buddhism was initially understood in Japan to be one of the components, along with the Confucian, Taoist, and Yin-Yang schools, of the superior Chinese civilization. All of these modes of belief were accepted without serious resistance by the Japanese simply because, at the time, Japan did not possess any organized intellectual or religious systems which could compete with the Chinese traditions.

Second, following the Korean example, Japan accepted Buddhism solely in its Chinese form and took little interest in its Indian origin. Thus, unlike the Chinese Buddhists, who had translated the Buddhist scriptures into their own language, the Japanese Buddhists made no effort to translate the scriptures into Japanese, at least until our own time (Kitagawa 1963, pp.53-59). To complicate matters further, the early Buddhist teachers in Japan were mostly Koreans who had only a limited knowledge of Japanese. Thus only a small group of the most gifted Japanese, mostly descendants of Korean emigres, could comprehend the intellectual content of lofty Buddhist doctrines and philosophies during Buddhism's initial period in Japan.

Third, Buddhism was initially accepted in Japan for cultural and political reasons as much as for magico-religious reasons, first by the influential uji groups and later by the Imperial court. Lavish temples were built, elegant Buddhist statues were imported or created, a series of scriptures were copied, and colorful rituals were performed mostly to gain mundane benefits, but very few efforts were made to understand the subtleties of doctrine.

Fourth, the sponsorship of Buddhism shifted from the uji groups to the Imperial court, thanks to the effort of the pious Buddhist prince, Shōtoku, who promoted Buddhism as one foundation, albeit an important one, of the "multi-value" polity explicated in his Seventeen-Article Constitution. Thus, Buddhism became a significant religious, political, and cultural institution for Japanese society. For example, the famous temple, Tennōji, established by Shōtoku in the port city of modern-day Osaka, was an

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

important center of educational and philanthropic as well as religious activities. As Anesaki states: "It was there that the embassies, missionaries, and immigrants were admitted and welcomed to the country, through the gateway of Buddhist communion" (Anesaki 1930, p. 58).

Fifth, with the consolidation of Japanese religion, society, and governmental structure that followed the establishment of the Ritsuryō system, Buddhism received generous support from the central government. But it was also rigidly controlled by the civil authorities, who acted more as a Religionspolizei than as a Schützpatronat. Since then, Buddhism has been expected to ensure the protection of the sovereign and the nation (Nakamura 1948, p. 221).

Chinese Buddhism had to be satisfied with a subordinate position because of the dominant place occupied by the Confucian and, to a lesser degree, by the Taoist traditions. In comparison, Japanese Buddhism overshadowed indigenous Shinto and established itself as the dominant Japanese religious tradition—or at least as the "half-creed" of Japan, to use Arthur Lloyd's phrase. Japanese Buddhism exerted tremendous influence at various stages of the development of Japanese religion generally, and the indigenous Shinto tradition was not immune to Buddhist influence. Even *norito*, the stylized Shinto liturgical prayers, were influenced by the format of Buddhist sūtra recitation (Tamura 1966, p. 21). Still, the development of the characteristic ethos of Japanese Buddhism cannot be understood without taking into account the impact of basic features of Japanese religion, such as the mythological legacy which authenticated the sacred monarchy and the national community, the affirmation of the sacrality of the world of nature, and the nebulous notion of the sacred (*kami*). Thus it is important to recognize the parallel processes and the convergence of development and paradigm change in Japanese religion and in Japanese Buddhism.

Space does not permit us to analyze the various stages of the transformation of Japanese Buddhism (Kitagawa 1965, pp.319-336), but I will depict some of the basic and enduring features of its paradigm.

First, Japanese Buddhism is nationalistic in character. Its nationalism emerged from the combined influence of the mytho-historical legacy of Japanese religion and the nationalistic ethos of Korean Buddhism, especially of the Buddhism of Silla. Throughout its history, Japanese Buddhism has tried to maintain a difficult balance among such motifs as mundane benefits, individual and universal salvation, and **chingo-kokka** (the "protection of the nation") (Nakamura 1948, pp.91-140; Watanabe 1958, pp.76-89).

Second, Japanese Buddhism is syncretistic, as epitomized in the Shinto-Buddhist amalgam (*Shin-Butsu shūgō*), which lasted until the late nineteenth century. Both of the main Buddhist traditions established during the Heian period, the Tendai and the Shingon schools, fostered syncretism through promoting **Sannō-ichi-jitsu-Shintō** and **Ryōbu-Shintō**, respectively. Both patronized a still more syncretistic cult, the Shugen-dō or Order of Mountain Priesthood. Moreover, Japanese Buddhism appropriated religious features of the Confucian and Japanese ancestor cults.

Third, Japanese Buddhism inclines toward magical beliefs and practices. It reflects a strange homology of the archaic Japanese legacy, Korean shamanism, magico-religious elements of the Indian and Chinese Buddhist tradition (especially its esoteric [Mikkyō] elements), and the all-pervasive influence of Onmyōdō, the Japanese appropriation of the Yin-Yang school (On magical tendencies, see Watanabe 1958, pp.89-102; on Onmyōdō, see Murayama, 1981). When Buddhism was first introduced into Japan, statues of the Buddha were believed to possess the power to bring about worldly benefits magically. Buddhist clerics were expected to recite sūtras constantly and to offer magical incantations for all conceivable occasions. Hori points out that even the Nembutsu, the practice of reciting



the holy name of Amida, was used as a form of magic (Hori 1968, pp.83-139).

Fourth, Japanese Buddhism tends to depend on the charismatic qualities of religious leaders as an efficacious soteriological means of adhering to historical Buddhist disciplines. While the Vinaya was preserved in certain officially recognized monastic centers, the history of Japanese Buddhism is full of charismatic figures who had only tenuous connections with the official Buddhist hierarchy, e.g., private monks (*shido-sō*), unordained priests (*ubasoku*), and holy men (*hi jiri*). Even in the official Buddhist circles, such saintly persons as Prince Shōtoku, Gyōgi, and Kūkai have been in effect "deified." The influence of charismatic leaders originated in the pre-Buddhist Japanese religious tradition, and was incorporated into Buddhist piety. Buddhist and Shinto ideas thus coalesced, says Eliot,

. . . and the title of Bodhisattva was conferred on departed emperors and statesmen—on those, for instance, who are described as Hachiman, the patron of soldiers, and Tenjin, the [kami] of calligraphy, and even on so recent a personage as [Tokugawa] Ieyasu (Eliot 1959, p.183).

The veneration of saintly figures such as Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren became an important feature in the schools of Kamakura Buddhism.

Fifth, Japanese Buddhism has a propensity for understanding the meaning of life and the world aesthetically rather than ethically or metaphysically. This understanding was undoubtedly grounded in the pre-Buddhist Japanese emphasis on the artistic and the poetic, but it was furthered by the importance that the cultural expression of Buddhism held from the time of the introduction of Buddhism to Japan. The aesthetic tendency was reiterated by Kūkai and subsequent Buddhist leaders.

Sixth, Japanese Buddhism affirms the sacrality of the

Joseph M. KITAGAWA

world of nature. This feature is probably the most basic to the Japanese Buddhist understanding of reality. It reflects a synthesis of the pre-Japanese notion of a cosmos permeated by *kami* (sacred) nature with the Chinese Buddhist emphasis on the phenomenal world as the locus of soteriology and the Taoist notion of "naturalness" (*tzu-jan*). According to Balazs, Taoist "naturalness" had three related meanings: (1) "nature without human intervention," (2) "the spontaneous liberty of the individual," and (3) "the 'absolute'—another name for Tao" (Cited in Wright 1959, p.29). With the articulation of the sacrality of the world of nature in terms of *Jinen-hōni* (*Tathatā*; things as they are, spontaneity, without cause) or *hongaku* (innate Buddha-nature), Japanese Buddhism at last became self-conscious as the heir of both historic Buddhism and Japanese religion.

### References

- ANESAKI, Masaharu  
1930 *History of Japanese religion*. London.
- ASTON, W.G., transl.  
1972 *Nihongi*. Rutland and Tokyo.
- BALAZS, Etienne  
1964 *Chinese civilization and bureaucracy*. H.M. Wright, transl. New Haven.
- BASHAM, A.L.  
1954 *The wonder that was India*. New York.
- CHAN, Wing-tsit  
1957 *Transformation of Buddhism in China, Philosophy East and West 7/3-4*.
- CH'EN, Kenneth  
1964 *Buddhism in China: An historical survey*. Princeton.  
1973 *The Chinese transformation of Buddhism*. Princeton.
- ELIOT, Charles  
1954 *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol.3. New York.
- GARDINER, K.J.H.  
1969 *The early history of Korea*. Honolulu.
- GROUSSET, R.  
1959 *Chinese art and culture*. Haakon Chevalier, transl. New York.

## Paradigm Change in Japanese Buddhism

- HORI, Ichirō  
1968 *Folk religion in Japan: Continuity and change.* Chicago.
- KI-YOUNG Yi  
1975 The Buddhist land ideologies of Shilla and Japan prevalent in the seventh and eight centuries as viewed from the view-point of their symbolic expression, in TAMURA and HONG 1975.
- KITAGAWA, J.M.  
1963 Buddhist translation in Japan. *Babel*. 9/12.  
1965 The Buddhist transformation in Japan. *History of religions*, 4/2.  
1974 The Japanese "kokutai" (national community): History and myth, *History of religions* 9/3).  
1979 Matsuri and matsurigoto: Religion and state in early Japan, *Religious traditions* (Australia) 2/1979.  
1980 "A past of things present": Notes on major motifs of early Japanese religion, *History of religions* 20/1-2.  
1981 Monarchy and government: Traditions and ideologies in pre-modern Japan. In A.L. Basham, ed., *Kingship in Asia and early America.* Mexico.
- MILLER, Richard J.  
1974 *Ancient Japanese nobility: The kabane ranking system.* Berkeley.
- NAKAMURA Hajime 中村 元  
1948 *Tōyō-jin no shūi-hōhō 東洋人の思惟方法* [The ways of thinking of eastern peoples]. Tokyo, vol. 2.  
(5:4) The influences of Confucian ethics on the Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras, *Liebenthal Festschrift, sino-Indian studies* 5:4.
- NIKAM N.A. and McKEON, Richard  
1959 *The edicts of Aśoka.* Chicago.
- RAHULA, Walpola  
1956 *History of Buddhism in Ceylon.* Colombo.
- SEN, Amulyachandra  
1956 *Aśoka's edicts.* Calcutta.
- TAMURA, Enchō and HONG Soon-Chang, eds.  
1975 *Shiragi to asuka hakuho no bukkyo bunka* 新羅と飛鳥白鳳の仏教文化 [The kingdom of Silla and the Buddhist culture of the Asuka and Hakuho periods]. Tokyo.
- TAMURA, Enchō 田村圓澄  
1966 *Fujiwara no Kamatari* 藤原鎌足 [Kamatari of Fujiwara]. Tokyo.
- TEGGART, Frederick J.  
1939 *Rome and China: A study of correlations in historical events.* Berkeley.

Joseph M. KITAGAWA

THOMAS, E. J.

1933 *The history of Buddhist thought.* New York.

TSUKAMOTO Zenryū

1956 *Buddhism in China and Korea.* Leon Hurvitz, transl. In  
Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., *The path of the Buddha*, New  
York.

WATANABE Shōkō 渡辺照宏

1958 *Nihon no bukkō* 日本の仏教 [Japanese Buddhism]  
Tokyo.

WRIGHT, Arthur F.

1959 *Buddhism in Chinese history.* Stanford.