

Some Reflections
on Japanese Religion and
Its Relationship to the Imperial System

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*Autobiographical vs. Biographical Perspectives
and Inner vs. Outer Meanings*

It is an irony of history and also probably a riddle beyond our normal comprehension and logic that a nation like Japan, which boasts rather sophisticated learning, technology and “enlightened civilization,” opted in the modern period (more particularly between 1868 and 1945) to legitimize its national identity and spiritual and physical well-being by means of a mythology-ridden imperial system. On the other hand, we must acknowledge the plain fact that Japan’s configuration of religion, national identity, and imperial system is no more puzzling or bizarre than other examples like the Dalai Lama of Tibet, believed to be the reincarnation of Avalokiteśvara, or the allegedly “infallible” Roman papacy.

All of these cases demonstrate the intimate relationships that exist between our “autobiographical” and “biographical” understandings and affirmations of experience, and between the “inner” and “outer” meanings of given historical phenomena. Thus, more often than not, the insider “autobiographically” affirms the self-authenticating “inner meaning” of his or her community or tradition. Indeed, to quote G. VAN DER LEEUW on the meaning of “community” to the insider:

[It] is something not manufactured, but given; it depends not upon sentiment or feeling, but on the Unconscious. It need be founded upon no conviction, since it is self-evident; [people] do not become members of it, but "belong to it" (1964, p. 243).

On the other hand, the outsider, who cannot share the insider's autobiographical affirmation of the inner meaning of his or her tradition, and who inevitably views other communities and traditions from without through what might be called a "biographical" perspective, is more sensitive to the "outer meaning" of those communities or traditions. More often than not, the "outer meaning" does not coincide with the "inner meaning" affirmed by, or taken for granted by, the insider. Furthermore, in many cases insiders complain that their autobiographical affirmations of their traditions, based on self-authenticating circular logic, are not understood or shared by outsiders. In contrast, outsiders often conclude that insiders' perspectives are beyond any rational thinking because they assume it is impossible for insiders to transcend their cultural truths, ideology, and rhetoric.

Attempts have often been made to analyze the phenomenon of the Dalai Lama (and to a lesser degree that of the Panchen Lama) either in terms of the doctrine of "incarnation" (Tib. *sprul sku*)—the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion of the physical manifestation of certain aspects of the Buddhahood in human form—or in terms of the doctrine of "reincarnation" (*yan srid*)—the unique Tibetan Buddhist affirmation of the monk as *lama* (*bla-ma*; "superior one"), the earthly materialization of the heavenly Buddhas or bodhisattvas. Unfortunately, however, predominantly "religious" explanations alone cannot adequately elucidate the meaning of a complex phenomenon such as the Dalai Lama, any more than an exclusively religious analysis can interpret equally complicated systems such as the Roman Papacy or the Japanese imperial institution. On this score, after many years of reflection as an historian of religions, I am now far less confident of purely "religious" explanations. Furthermore, on the notion of "religion" itself, I am inclined to agree with Mircea ELIADE's feeling that "it is unfortunate that we do not have at our disposal a more precise word than 'religion'" (1969, Preface). In so doing, I am not questioning the integrity of the insider's "autobiographical" affirmation of the "inner" religious meaning of his or her tradition, be it the institutions of the Dalai Lama, the Papacy, or the Japanese imperial system. (The "inner meaning" of any tradition, affirmed by

the insiders, is based on what Robert M. Grant [in KELLY 1976, p. 2] calls a “never ending process,” which in the case of Christianity begins with gospel, goes to tradition, moves into Scripture, renews tradition, etc.). I am simply saying that the insiders have to recognize—which convinced Tibetan Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and nationalist Japanese are reluctant to do—that there is another side to the phenomenon, namely, the outsiders’ “biographical” views of the “outer” meaning of the same phenomenon. On the other hand, outsiders who approach any tradition or community “biographically” (in the sense in which we use this term) from without often recognize only the “outer” meaning of the reality, without realizing that the insiders’ autobiographical understanding of the inner meaning of the tradition itself is part of the reality they seek to understand (GOLDMANN 1966, p. 17; this seems to me to be the pitfall of many modern, especially Western or Westernized, social scientists, historians of religions, neo-Marxists, etc.).

I once wrote elsewhere that:

[I]t is a peculiar Western convention to divide human experience into such pigeonholes as religion, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, culture, society, etc. Obviously this type of convention is a very provincial usage, even though many Westerners still assume that such a provincial Western mode has universal validity, partly because they are not aware of other . . . ways of dividing human experience. Actually people everywhere live and breathe in their respective “seamless whole” — what to us looks like a synthesis of religion, culture, social and political orders, to use the Western convention of divided categories.¹

By saying this I am not denying the legitimacy of such notions of philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, culture, and so on. These are, however, parts of the “seamless whole” mentioned above; in other words, the spheres of human experience designated by these categories are not independent or separable from the seamless religious / cultural / social / political synthetic life. As a student of religions, I am fascinated by the multi-dimensional, dialectical relationships that exist between such a synthesis and what has come to be depicted as “religion” in Western tradition. Among other things, (1) what we call “religion” usually constitutes spiritual and ecclesiastical traditions; (2) it inspires culture as well as social and political orders;

¹ See KITAGAWA 1988, p. 10. This theme is more fully developed in my volume *The Quest for Human Unity: A Religious History*, (1990).

(3) it serves as invisible glue to the disparate elements of life and the world; (4) it serves as the agent of metaphysical intuition in the sense of defining the kinds and levels of realities (including ultimate reality), and as such (5) it provides “cosmic legitimation” to the particular religious / cultural / social / political synthesis (i. e., the seamless whole). In short, institutions such as that of the Dalai Lama, as the embodiment of Tibetan Buddhism, and that of the Papacy, as the pivotal externalization of Western European Christianity, signified to the respective “insiders” the cosmic legitimation of their form of religious / cultural / social / political synthesis. And it is my hypothesis that the Japanese imperial institution, likewise, has provided “cosmic legitimation” to successive religious / cultural / social / political syntheses throughout Japanese history.

Japanese Religion and the Imperial System

I find it curious that so many people—and I do not mean only ardent adherents of Shinto or nationalistic Japanese but also many Westerners, including social scientists and some historians of religions as well—have such definite ideas as to what Japanese religion and the imperial system are all about. As far as I can tell, both have many different “faces” and dimensions because both have undergone a series of changes due to mutual causal relationships, or whatever, which have produced multiple models of the relationship between Japanese religion (or rather, the religious / cultural / social / political synthesis) and the imperial system throughout Japanese history. It is to be stressed again that our primary concern in this paper is the types of relationships that existed between them, rather than an examination of Japanese religion or the imperial system as such (even though they inevitably impinge on our discussions).

The early Yamato ruler as primus inter pares

Despite the numerous hypotheses advanced thus far, we cannot be certain about the origins of the Japanese people or their culture, society, and polity. The two earliest historical, or mytho-historical, writings, the *Kojiki* (The Records of Ancient Matters) and the *Nihongi* or *Nihon-shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan) were compiled in the eighth century, after Japan was already exposed to the impacts of Sino-Korean civilization and Buddhism; the same is true of a series of local topologies, called *fudoki*.² Of course, this is not an occasion to

try to settle many such knotty historical issues, such as whether Japanese culture during the early centuries of the common era had developed from its indigenous resources or from the imposition of an "invading tribe" from outside (see EGAMI 1964; LEDYARD 1975), whether the early Yamato Kingdom was situated in Kyūshū or in present-day Nara Prefecture (see NAGANUMA 1968; WHEATLEY and SEE 1978; KAKUBAYASHI 1983), or whether we can determine the acceptable title for the ruler of early Japan in view of the country's fluid political structure at the time (KAKUBAYASHI 1989). But by piecing together archaeological and other evidence, coupled with available Chinese and Korean sources (see esp. TSUNODA 1951, pp. 8–16), we can at least reconstruct a few main features or broad outlines of early Japan. Evidently, the country was divided into a series of independent political units subdivided into a number of social units later called *uji* (lineage group, or clan). Chinese observers called the larger units *kuo*, and in the course of time came to exercise a loose authority over them; scholarly opinions vary widely as to whether this authority was primarily political or magico-religious in nature (a federation of some independent political units was portrayed in Chinese sources as ruled by a shamanic woman).³

As early as the first century A.D., envoys of Wa, one of the *kuo* in western Japan, paid tribute to the Chinese court of Later Han. In the third century an envoy of Yamatai (sent by its female ruler, Himiko) paid tribute to the Wei court. Shortly afterward, another envoy from Yamatai was dispatched to the court of Western Chin. The growing strength of early Japan was such that in the mid-fourth century Japanese forces occupied the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. In addition, we learn from the sixth-century Chinese record, the *History of the Liu Sung Dynasty* (*Sung Shu*), that five self-styled Japanese monarchs sent envoys to the Sung Court (KITAGAWA 1966, pp. 8–11). If our conjecture is not altogether wrong, the so-called Yamato kingdom prior to the sixth century A.D. was little

² Unfortunately, many of the local topologies have been lost. But fortunately for us, we have two examples translated into English: AOKI 1971 and MORITA 1976 and 1977.

³ As regards the identity of Himiko (Pimiko), prominently mentioned in the Chinese sources (the *Wei Chih* particularly), most scholars assume that Himiko was the personal name of a female-shamanic-ruler. But KAKUBAYASHI cogently argues that it was a title, and can be given, as indeed it was given, to a male ruler as well. He thinks that the prominence of the female shamanic ruler in question was such that in the course of time it came to be used almost as her personal name (1983, pp. 128–34).

more than a confederation of semi-autonomous *uji*-based social and political units, and its ruler—or the head of the ruling family (later called the imperial house)—was in essence a *primus inter pares*, controlling, and yet controlled by, other powerful *uji* chieftains rather than being an absolute monarch. It is not certain when the Yamato ruler appropriated the title *ten'ō* 天王 (lit., “heavenly king,” as opposed to the later *tennō* 天皇). The rulers and other influential persons were also called *ōkimi* (great chief).⁴

As far as we know, the rulers of the Yamato federation were very astute in manipulating and coordinating several factors—military, diplomatic, political, religious, etc. Certainly they were effective military strategists, and successfully conquered many *uji* groups, by force or trickery, in various parts of the country. At the same time, they cleverly presented themselves to Chinese monarchs as unrivalled political and military rulers of Japan. They took advantage of the power struggle in China, as exemplified by the success of Himiko, the shamanic ruler of Yamatai, in persuading the court of Wei (A.D. 220–265) to confer a kingly title upon her to secure her allegiance to them rather than to the rival state of Wu (222–280). Once the monarchical-sounding title was given to the Yamato ruler, she or he exercised the royal prerogative of conferring court titles and ranks upon the chieftains of other *uji* groups.⁵

The Yamato rulers claimed magico-religious, semi-political leadership in distributing sacred seeds for rice in the spring, and expected the maidens of prominent *uji* groups to offer the first fruits and saké in the autumn. The Yamato rulers often called themselves *hi-no-miko* 日(靈)御子(卑弥呼) (prince / princess endowed with spiritual power or *hi* 靈). Significantly, the ruling *uji* and other *uji* groups shared similar outlooks, such as the conviction that magico-religious acts themselves were the most legitimate technology of agriculture and other productive enterprises. They assumed that the “process of birth and becoming” (*musubi* 結び) in the world of

⁴ For more on the relation of the *ōkimi* to agriculture, see WAIDA 1976, p. 321.

⁵ KAKUBAYASHI (1983, pp. 133–34) points out that both Chinese characters designating “sun” and “fire” were appropriated for the Japanese sound “hi,” and this fact led the ruling dynasty to claim that the rulers are descendants of “the Sun,” and that its dynastic ancestor, Amaterasu, represented the solar deity. I am also in agreement with Kakubayashi that the gender (male or female) of Amaterasu was not firmly settled before the sixth century. Subsequently, however, Amaterasu came to be widely considered a female *kami*; hence the popular Western translation, the “Sun Goddess.”

nature and the deceased ancestors possessed the same indwelling spiritual power. Those who could control these essential spiritual powers therefore gained credibility in no small degree as political leaders in early Japanese society. The Yamato kingdom was thus an agricultural society ruled by a spiritual-magical-religious-political authority (IENAGA 1957, pp. 36–7).

With the political and cultural changes on the continent in the sixth and seventh centuries, Japan was exposed to a heavy influx of Chinese civilization (especially Confucianism, Taoism, and the Yin-yang school) and Buddhism through Sinified Korea (at least initially). Stimulated by China's unification by the Sui dynasty in A.D. 581, there was a concerted effort on the part of Japanese leaders to centralize and unify their political structure—which created the first major form of the religious/cultural/social/political synthesis referred to as the *ritsuryō* (imperial edict) system—as well as to transform the magico-religious-and-political ruler of the Yamato federation (characterized earlier as a *primus inter pares*) into a full-fledged monarch/sacred king.

The Ritsuryō Synthesis and the Sacred Kingship

As I alluded to earlier, the turbulent era in China between the fourth and sixth centuries, with its power struggles among the rival kingdoms of Eastern Chin, Northern Wei, and the southern dynasties, came to an end with its unification under the rising Sui dynasty (581–618). The Sui dynasty was quickly succeeded by the T'ang dynasty (618–907). The rapid political development on the continent inevitably affected the course of events in Japan, although, in contrast to Korea, Japan enjoyed relative peace internally, partly due to the protective barrier of the sea—and in this respect it was not unlike Tibet, which was protected by snowy mountains.

It must be remembered that historically there was nothing abrupt about the introduction of Chinese civilization and Buddhism to Japan. If anything, both Chinese civilization and Buddhism penetrated Japan slowly over the years, primarily brought over by a large number of immigrants from the continent (mostly from Korea but to some extent from China as well). In contrast to the internalized Buddhism of the Korean and Chinese immigrants-cum-naturalized-Japanese, the public, political demonstrations of Buddhism, such as the presentation by the king of Paekche (one of the principalities in Korea) of Buddhist statues to the Yamato

court in the mid-sixth century, represented an “official” introduction of Buddhism. I am inclined to agree with Ienaga’s view that the *Nihongi* account of the pro- and anti-Buddhist controversies reflects the later chronicler’s views, in that it has less to do with a divergence of religious perspectives and more to do with the power struggle between the Soga and Mononobe *uji* chieftains in the court (ASTON 1972, pp. 66–7). The text itself suggests that both Buddhism and the indigenous Shinto religion were respected in Japan. For example, its portrayal of Emperor Yōmei as one who “believed in the Law of Buddha and revered the Way of the [Kami]” (ASTON 1972, p. 106) suggests a non-eristical relationship between the religions and probably accurately describes the religious outlook of the majority of Japanese people in the sixth and seventh centuries (IENAGA 1944, pp. 93–101). If I may go a step further, most people in Japan at that time probably thought of the Buddha as just another kami. And yet it was the coming of Buddhism that provided the occasion to create the term *shintō* (Kami Way) to refer to the unorganized, pre-Buddhist, indigenous cults of Japan.

In the main, unlike many Japanese and foreign scholars who feel that there was a substantial rupture between the Yamato kingdom and the *ritsuryō* synthesis established in the seventh century, I am persuaded that the basic cultural “grammar” of the Yamato kingdom was solidly ingrained intact into the very foundation of the *ritsuryō* state, even though undoubtedly many of the Confucian, Taoist, Yin-yang, and Buddhist concepts, terminologies, and ingredients were appropriated to enrich and expedite the legal, educational, economic, social, political, artistic, cultural, and religious life of the Japanese. In such a situation there were new, recognizably “Sinified” influences in many domains of Japanese life.

Prince-regent Shōtoku (573–621) envisaged a strong and unified Japanese nation under monarchical rule, and actively sought Chinese models of learning, law, and institutions to help him achieve these ends. He sent able and ambitious young officials and monks to Sui China to become familiar with the Chinese system. Upon their return, they became instrumental in writing new Japanese codes for which they cited many Chinese precedents and utilized many Chinese legal terminologies. The most notable of these codes would be the *ritsu* 律, which were “prohibitive and disciplinary regulations of a penal character, but not, strictly speaking, a penal code,” and

the *ryō* 令, “which included both an administrative code and a civil code” (SANSOM 1958, p. 111).

In spite of external similarities between the Japanese and Chinese legal systems, however, their aims and objectives were diametrically opposed. In sharp contrast to the Chinese case, in Japan the ruler was not expected to be the moral exemplar for the people. Indeed, Japan depended on legal codes to avoid as much contact as possible between the sovereign and the masses. Thus, the so-called seventeen-article constitution promulgated by Prince-regent Shōtoku in 604 unabashedly states:

You should endeavor to obey the imperial commands, realizing that *the lord is Heaven while the subject is Earth*. When heaven covers and earth upholds the seasons will be regulated and all force will circulate. Should the earth try to overspread heaven, the order will be ruined. Similarly, when the lord speaks, the subject should listen, and when the superior acts, the inferior should obey (CHAN 1969, pp. 252–53; italics mine).

Some changes in terminology at the time reveal the extent of the earthly leader’s superiority over the masses; indeed, his nearness to heaven. For example, the term *tennō*, originally used by the Taoists to refer to the highest heavenly deity, was appropriated as the official title of the Japanese sovereign shortly before the promulgation of the seventeen-article constitution, thereby replacing the older nomenclature of *ten’ō* (KAKUBAYASHI 1989, pp. 33–6). It is also interesting to note that from A.D. 645, when the Taika (Great Change) Reform inaugurated the establishment of the *ritsuryō* state, the sovereign issued *senmyō* (imperial proclamations) on important occasions, as opposed to *choku* (edicts); the former alone had the connotation of “revealed words issued by the manifest kami” (kami by definition were physically and qualitatively apart from mere mortals; see KITAGAWA 1974, p. 221). No wonder the *ritsuryō* system is usually referred to as the “imperial rescript” state. Clearly the Confucian “universalistic” notion of *tao* 道 (*michi*) was completely domesticated in the seventh century to uphold the “particularistic” principles of traditional Japan. Thus, such pet ideas in Japan as the family-nation and the harmonious relationship between the sovereign and the people, etc., were nothing but self-serving propaganda lines usually made from a one-sided perspective (the ruler’s; KAKUBAYASHI 1989, pp. 85–8).

Elsewhere I have repeatedly characterized the *ritsuryō* form of the

religious / cultural / social / political synthesis as an example of "immanent theocracy." Parenthetically I might add that the *ritsuryō* synthesis in Japan and the reign of the Dalai Lama in Tibet present many pertinent similarities. Basically, what the *ritsuryō* synthesis envisaged was the establishment, not of the nation as a "liturgical community" with its sovereign, the Son of Heaven, serving as the supreme mediator between Heaven and Earth as in China, but of a "soteriological community" based on three major principles, namely, (1) the interdependence of *ōbō* 王法, "Sovereign's Law" (based on the homology of the indigenous Way of the Kami and the continental Confucian, Taoist, and Yin-yang traditions), and *buppō* 仏法, "Buddha's Law"; (2) Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism (*shin-butsu shūgō* 神仏習合); and (3) the belief in Japanese deities as manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in India (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹).

By far the most crucial feature of the *ritsuryō* synthesis was the sacralization of the imperial institution, based on the notion that the sovereign was (a) the ruler of the nation, (b) the supreme priest, and (c) the living kami. It should be noted that each of the three natures of the sovereign authenticates the other two, if one follows a circular logic (which is usually acceptable to the "inner meaning" of many traditions). In short, the *ritsuryō* government affirmed "birth" as the supremely significant factor, disregarding virtues or ability,⁶ and accepted the propositions that the sovereign was both a genealogical descendant of the sun deity, Amaterasu-ōmikami (whose gender was now considered female), and was himself the Manifest Kami; the former allowed him to rule the nation by her divine commandment, the latter insured his veneration by the people. Furthermore, the sovereign, like other *uji* chieftains, had priestly duties to perform for the national community. In short, sacralization of the imperial institution was believed to provide the necessary "cosmic legitimation" to the *ritsuryō* form of the religious / cultural / social / political synthesis in Japan from the seventh century onward.

Stylized court rituals, established as earthly replicas of heavenly rituals (KITAGAWA 1974, p. 222), supported such rhetoric. In A.D. 645 the government established the principle of *saisei-itchi* 祭政一致 (unity of religious rites and government administration). Three years

⁶ It is interesting to note that an edict of 682 specifies that "in selecting men for office the considerations are to be first birth, then character, and then capacity." SANSOM 1958, p. 69.

later it was decreed that all high-ranking government officials were to assemble at 4:00 a.m. on every working day outside the southern gate of the imperial court, to be admitted to the inner court exactly at sunrise in order to pay homage to the sovereign, who, it will be remembered, was believed to be the descendant and living representative of the sun deity. Only then were they expected to attend to their respective administrative duties.

Evidently, the architects of the *ritsuryō* synthesis had their own well-designed paradigm, emulating in part the multi-value system of the Sui-Chinese model, which they endeavored to actualize in the seventh century (and which was restored as a model of polity for modern Japan in the nineteenth century). For instance, in spite of the superficial similarities between the *ritsuryō* and the Tang Chinese government structures, the *ritsuryō* system had a specifically Japanese nature in the sense that the central government under the throne was divided into religious and civil branches, i. e., the Department of Kami or Shinto Affairs (*Jingi-kan*), presided over by the Head of Kami Affairs who was in charge of all official religious ceremonials (*matsuri*), stood side by side with the Great Council of State (*Dajō-kan*), presided over by the Chancellor (*Dajō-daijin*), who was responsible for political administration (*matsurigoto*). The underlying assumption was that religious ceremonials (*matsuri*) and political administration (*matsurigoto*) were two sides of the same coin, following the aforementioned principle of *saisei-itchi* (see KITAGAWA 1979; or 1987a, pp. 117–26). In addition, the Yin-yang system penetrated deeply into both the Department of Kami Affairs and the Great Council of State. However, it should be noted that the Yin-yang Bureau (*On'yō-ryō* or *On'myō-ryō*) in Japan is different from its Chinese counterpart. As Felicia BOCK rightly points out:

The Yin-yang Bureau of Japan [unlike its prototype in China] combined under it the observation of the heavens, the recording and interpreting of heavenly movements, signs, and portents. . . . The Yin-yang Bureau had to dovetail its arts and practices into the traditional annual and occasional rites of the Kami religion as well as into those of the established Buddhist ceremonies (1985, p. 10).

Further, she observes that the Japanese Yin-yang Bureau's innovation of combining magico-religious features (e. g., geomancy and divination techniques, fortune-telling, exorcism of evil spirits) and semi-scientific arts of calendar making and of ways of observing the heavens, stars, and planets, became extremely popular "because they

did not upset timeworn native customs or conflict with Buddhism" (p. 21). Incidentally, it was the duty of the Yin-yang Bureau to present a *hitogata* 人形 ("human likeness"; these two characters were later more commonly pronounced *ningyō*, as in the case of *ningyō shibai* or "puppet show") to the sovereign every month. The sovereign then rubbed his or her august body with the *hitogata*, so that his or her "defilement" would be transferred to it; subsequently it was thrown into a river by a Yin-yang master (ONO 1985, p. 435).

Thus the governmental leaders, concerned as they were with the crucial importance of the heredity principle, were determined to establish historical continuity between the sovereigns of the *ritsuryō* regime and earlier Yamato rulers, even trying to claim a genealogical line traceable back to the heavenly deities mentioned in their tribal mythologies. In such an endeavor the court chroniclers learned to "read history backward," compiling in bygone days what I once characterized as "a past of things present,"⁷ utilizing the familiar techniques of historicizing myths and of mythologizing history. Their efforts are epitomized in the two official mytho-historical writings, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. The government also "edited" the local topologies of various provinces,⁸ issued a "New Compilation of the Register of Families" (TSUNODA 1958, pp. 87-88), and promulgated various legal codes, such as the *Taihō* and the *Yōrō* Codes, all from the perspective of the *ritsuryō* synthesis.

A Crisis for the Imperial Institution and the ritsuryō Paradigm

In 710 the first permanent capital was established in present-day Nara. This capital was modelled after Chinese capitals. The capital-centered cultural development in eighth-century Japan was once succinctly portrayed by Langdon WARNER as follows: "The Japanese were at work weaving their own brocade on *patterns similar* [to that of T'ang China] *but not the same*" (1952, p. 6; italics mine). In retrospect, it becomes evident that the two features which gave the Nara period its characteristic flavor were "imperial institutions" and "Buddhism." It was a remarkable fact that never before or after in the history of Japan did the monarchy reach such a zenith as in the eighth century. No wonder Emperor Shōmu boasted: "It is We

⁷ Obviously this was a twisted form of Augustine's famous formula: "A present of things past." See AUGUSTINE 1952, Bk. 11, p. 95.

⁸ See footnote 2.

who possess the wealth of the land; it is We who possess all power in the land. . . ." (cited in TSUNODA 1958, pp. 104–5).

Most Nara monarchs, including a few female sovereigns, were devout Buddhists as well as superstitious and arbitrary rulers. Partly thanks to their extravagant support, Buddhist institutions gained much wealth and power. Actually, the government tried to promote only elitist, orthodox, and conservative forms of Buddhism, as exemplified by the six authorized Buddhist schools (for their main tenets, see TAKAKUSU 1947), ostensibly recognized as such for the protection of the nation and the monarchy. And those Buddhist clergy members who complied with the approved party line were well compensated with a generous subsidy and ecclesiastical rank advancement. As might be expected, the government was determined to control the activities of all Buddhist monks and nuns by enforcing the "law governing monks and nuns" (*sōniryō* 僧尼令; CHAN 1969, pp. 258–59). But this law was not effective in preventing a large number of (formerly) rustic healers, magicians, and fortune-tellers from claiming to be "unauthorized" Buddhist clerics (*ubasoku* 優婆塞), and in fact it was from them rather than from the government-authorized elitist priests that the general populace came to learn about Buddhism (HORI 1958). Moreover, some of the priests from the authorized schools at Nara, too, came to exercise their magical skills in healing, exorcism of evil spirits, etc.

There were ample reasons for real anxieties on the part of government leaders: the moral laxity of priests; intrigues; entanglement of politics and religion; and the unprecedented growth of wealth and influence of Buddhist institutions that were well-supported and protected by the pious monarchs. Take, for example, the enigmatic case of the monk Genbō, a highly intelligent and respected priest of the Hossō School, who returned to Japan in 735 after nineteen years of study in China. Two years later he was invited to be in charge of the "inner temple" (the chapel inside the imperial court, called *nai-dōjō* 内道場). It so happened that the imperial consort (Miyako, originally from the powerful Fujiwara family) was reputed to be having troubles with her gallbladder, but it was reported that she was quickly cured by the magical and medical arts of Genbō. There is no available proof to substantiate the rumor of his dalliance with Miyako, but he was nevertheless banished in 745 to Kyūshū, where he died the following year (ISHIDA 1962, p. 153).

Equally perplexing was the case of the monk Dōkyō, another

talented priest of the Hossō School. It was alleged that he was the great-grandson of Emperor Tenchi (d. 671), although his lineage is very unreliable. He was considered to be highly gifted in the study of Sanskrit, Buddhist philosophy, music, and the art of healing. Around 761 he cured by chance the ex-emperor, Shōmu, and was soon invited to take charge of the *naidōjō* chapel. He steadily gained power in both ecclesiastical and political circles. Consequently, by the decrees of Empress Shōtoku (daughter of Emperor Shōmu; she once served on the throne, 749–756, as Empress Kōken), he became Chief Minister and Master, and was in 766 given the unusual title of “King of the Law” (*hō-ō* 法王) as well. It must be remembered that Shōtoku herself had taken tonsure, and she reasoned: “Since the reigning monarch is ordained, the Chief Minister [in the Council of the State] should also be an ordained priest.”⁹ In this situation, a major crisis was caused, and also averted, by alleged oracles of the kami.

It so happened that an “oracle” of Usa Hachiman (believed to be the deified figure of the fifteenth emperor, Ōjin) was conveyed to the court. It suggested that the “King of the Law” (Dōkyō) should ascend the throne, succeeding the ordained Empress Shōtoku. This “oracle” advocated a major change in the hereditary-based imperial system that provided “cosmic legitimation” to the *ritsuryō* synthesis. According to accepted history, the empress was tormented. But there is no way to verify—and whether it was true or not really makes no difference—the persistent rumor recorded in various books that the empress and Dōkyō were intimate, even sharing the same pillow (see NAKAMURA 1973, pp. 65–6, 277–78). Far more important than their possible romance was the complex reality of political intrigue, which caused Dōkyō’s unprecedented upward mobility as well as his abrupt downfall (SANSOM 1958, pp. 90–91). For the empress is said to have been instructed in a dream to send a junior government official to Kyūshū to substantiate the divine oracle. Fortunately for the *ritsuryō* state, the young official returned to the capital and reported that the so-called divine message from Usa Hachiman was a “false oracle,” and that the throne was to be occupied only by the physical descendants of Amaterasu-ōmikami. After Dōkyō’s fiasco there were no more major challenges to the principle of the *ritsuryō* state for several centuries, but the religious / cultural / social / political

⁹ Shōtoku’s two edicts concerning Dōkyō are cited in TSUNODA 1958, pp. 105–6.

synthesis itself came to be modified by a series of “sub-paradigms” that, to be sure, remained within the basic *ritsuryō* framework.

Sub-paradigms within the Ritsuryō Synthesis

In 794 Emperor Kanmu established the second permanent capital, also modelled after the Chinese capital, in present-day Kyoto. Although we cannot go into the study of the historical development from the ninth to the mid-fourteenth century in this essay, we might briefly depict three sub-paradigms that modified, and yet remained within, the *ritsuryō* framework. They were the regency of the (non-royal) Fujiwara family, the rule by retired monarchs, and the feudal regimes. These sub-paradigms all affirmed the *ritsuryō* principle that only the sacred emperor “reigns over” the religious / cultural / social / political synthesis, while suggesting that the system would function better if someone other than the reigning sovereign should “rule” the nation.

1. *Regency*. I have discussed elsewhere the phenomenal rise of the Fujiwara family from the mid-seventh century, when the patriarch of the family, Fujiwara Kamatari, assisted the reform-minded imperial prince in the *coup d'état* that directly prepared the ground for the establishment of the *ritsuryō* synthesis (KITAGAWA 1982; 1987a, pp. 98–116). Throughout the generations none of their leaders was engaged prominently in military affairs; rather, the Fujiwara acquired power and wealth from expanding landholdings and from their status in key government positions in civil and religious branches. In addition, they frequently intermarried with the imperial family and even claimed mythological connections with them. When a child emperor was enthroned in the mid-ninth century, the emperor's maternal grandfather, Fujiwara Yoshifusa (804–872), maneuvered himself into a position to be appointed as the regent (*sesshō*). A little later, Yoshifusa's adopted son, Mototsune (836–891), became both the *sesshō* 攝政 and *kanpaku* 関白 (chief counselor) to the imperial family, a combination of appointments which made Mototsune and his successors in the Fujiwara family permanent regents, regardless of the age or health of the reigning emperor. Thus, from the mid-tenth until the mid-eleventh centuries, the emperors “reigned over” Japan, but the nation was effectively “ruled” by the *sesshō-kanpaku* system of the Fujiwara oligarchy. Even then, leaders of the Fujiwara family shared the sentiment of Michinaga (966–1027), who said matter-of-factly: “Great as are our power and

prestige, nevertheless they are those of the Sovereign, for we derive them from the majesty of the Throne" (SANSOM 1958, p. 157).

2. *Rule by retired monarchs (insei 院政)*. It was strange, but understandable, that from the eleventh century some emperors intentionally began to retire from "reigning" on the throne in order to "rule" the nation without heavy ceremonial duties. Unlike the Fujiwara regents, who claimed their prerogative to "rule" the nation as relatives on the maternal side of the reigning monarchs, the retired emperors assumed their roles in "ruling" the nation as patriarchal heads of the imperial family. Retired emperors were traditionally provided with modest living quarters in the rear of the imperial residence, facing northward.¹⁰ However, beginning with Shirakawa (r. as emperor, 1072–1086; as *insei* ruler, 1086–1129), emperors who intentionally retired from being the actual "rulers" (referred to later as *jisei-no-kimi* 治世の君) retained greater privileges, their quarters becoming *de facto* the court and administrative offices, called *in-no-chō* 院廳 or *go-in-chō* 御院廳, and their ordinances (*insen* 院宣) carrying the same authority as imperial ordinances.

Unlike reigning monarchs, whose actions and policies were checked and double-checked by a series of government bureaus and advisers, the *insei* rulers, both retired-emperors (*jō-kō* 上皇) and retired-and-cloistered emperors (*hō-ō* 法皇), had few restraining factors; thus they tended to be dictatorial, their personal ambitions for influence, power, and profit encouraging them to take advantage of the sacred prestige derived from the *mitsuryō* system. Often the *insei* rulers fought among themselves, as in the case of the Hōgen armed conflict that took place in 1156, in which the forces of Toba, the cloistered ruler supported by the newly-enthroned Go-Shirakawa (r. 1155–1158) and the courtier, Fujiwara Tadamichi, attacked the ex-emperor Sutoku (r. 1123–1141), who was supported by Tadamichi's brother, Fujiwara Yorinaga. Although this conflict was a minor military affair, it was significant in two senses. First, the august ex-emperor Sutoku was banished, like a common criminal, to the island of Sado in the Japan Sea. Second, both sides sought the help of the rising power of warriors. Indeed, we could even say that the Hōgen conflict marked the official recognition of the power of the warriors.

¹⁰ Thus the warriors assigned to protect retired monarchs are called *hokumen-no-bushi* (warriors facing northward).

The *ritsuryō* state witnessed an increasing number of manors (*shōen*) owned by prominent families and religious institutions growing apace with government-owned public lands. Usually these properties were guarded by Kyoto-appointed officials with the help of armed samurai (those who serve, or *saburau* 侍ふ). There were also some *sōhei* 僧兵 (monk soldiers), ostensibly to guard the properties of religious institutions. In those days most nobles stayed in Kyoto but received income from their properties in the provinces. There were, however, some families, originally of royal lineage, such as the Taira and Minamoto, who settled in the provinces and became leaders of the warriors. It was they—the Taira and the Minamoto leaders—whose aid was solicited by both parties in the Hōgen conflict.

The *sōhei* were also a significant factor. They garnered the reputation of combining a fierce fighting ability with a “divine aura” that had the influence of magical potencies on superstitious courtiers and imperial families. Even the dictatorial Go-Shirakawa, whose *insei* rule dominated the political scene during the “reigns” of five nominal emperors, felt helpless when confronted by the *sōhei* from Mt. Hiei (where the Tendai Buddhist monastic center was located, ironically to assure the spiritual well-being and peace of the capital), who carried the portable shrine of Hiei’s guardian deity. In order to restrain the arbitrary power of monk-soldiers, Go-Shirakawa allied himself with the Taira at some times and with the Minamoto at others. In turn, the leaders of the respective groups vied with each other for dominant power as the *samurai-daishō* 侍大將 (military head) in the court. After years of bloody battles Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199) established the first feudal regime (Bakufu or Shogunate) in Kamakura, not far from present-day Tokyo.

3. *Feudal Regime* (Bakufu). Even before Yoritomo received the coveted title of shogun (generalissimo) from Go-Toba (another retired emperor who succeeded Go-Shirakawa in *insei* rule) in 1192,¹¹ he had already demanded and received the court’s permission to appoint land stewards (*jiū* 地頭) and constables (*shugo* 守護; later to become military governors) throughout the nation in places where rebellion or unrest was suspected or observed. SANSOM is of the opinion that handing over such authority to Yoritomo “was most

¹¹ Following the death of Go-Shirakawa, Go-Toba started his *insei* by appointing Minamoto Yoritomo to the rank of *Seii-taishōgun* (generalissimo, shortened to shogun). In 1196, one of his consorts, Ninshi (daughter of Kanezane) was banished from the court, and Kanezane, who was not trusted by Yoritomo, was stripped of his position of *kanpaku*. See ISHIDA 1968, p. 68.

displeasing to Go-Shirakawa, but he gave way out of fear” (1958, p. 318). On the other hand, there is evidence that Go-Shirakawa was quite amenable to granting such authority to Yoritomo, because his *insei* rule desperately needed Yoritomo’s military force, whereas Yoritomo needed the prestige of the court in order to cement the allegiance of warrior families under him. This was a typical case of antagonistic cooperation; *insei* and Bakufu, lacking natural affinity and affection, needed each other for their respective survival. In fact, as Sansom notes, Yoritomo was “careful to observe the proper forms of respect and obedience in his communications to [the *insei*]” (p. 317).

Just as the court system developed a two-tiered structure comprising the reigning monarch and the actually ruling ex-emperor or regent, the Bakufu, too, organized such a structure, as illustrated by the Hōjō family, which as *shikken* 執權 (regents or deputies) exercised the real rule of the Bakufu under the titular shoguns (either of the Minamoto lineage or of the infant sons of court nobilities). Parenthetically, I might add that having infants of a court noble family as a titular shogun in Kamakura—thus making the Bakufu a new form of regency to the imperial court—was favored by some members of the Fujiwara family.¹²

Many of the Hōjō *shikken* proved to be unusually able statesmen, and SANSOM rightly observes that as individuals “they lived frugal and modest lives, [and] the country as a whole was at peace” (1958, p. 383). The fact that they patronized Zen Buddhism is well known, and they were no doubt influenced by the new philosophical system called Neo-Confucianism, brought back from China by Zen masters. Thus, although the Hōjō inherited some of the first Minamoto shogun’s respectful attitude toward the court, accepting, in one sense at least, the “inner meaning” of the Kyoto-based *ritsuryō* synthesis, they were not blindly bound by it, for in a real sense they lived in close connection with the world of the warriors (*buke-shakai*), which was not an integral part of the *ritsuryō* state. For example, the Hōjō

¹² This view was articulated by Fujiwara no Jien (1155–1225), a noted poet and a Tendai abbot, author of the *Gukanshō* (Record of foolish random thoughts), translated by Delmer M. BROWN and ISHIDA Ichirō (1979). Jien was the son, brother, and uncle of the eight Fujiwara regents who held office during his lifetime. He wrote the *Gukanshō* at the time when Kujō (Fujiwara) Yoritsune, then two years old, became the shogun (1192–1199) at Kamakura. Jien was persuaded that this was in keeping with the mission of the Fujiwara family, which was destined to assist the imperial family from the time of mythology.

attitude toward the imperial system was essentially pragmatic, critical, and not absolutistic. Thus, although they respected the imperial lineage, they would not unquestionably follow the emperor's or ex-emperor's policies if they believed those measures were arbitrary and not beneficial to the well-being of the nation. In short, they were persuaded that those who govern must be approved and supported by the governed; this was an important guiding principle of the warrior society. The Jōkyū (or Shōkyū) rebellion of 1221 was initiated by the ambitious and manipulative ex-emperor Go-Toba and his party against the warrior regime in Kamakura. There is evidence to indicate that the imperial court, which was ultimately defeated, was overconfident in assuming that the edict of the sacred monarchy had enough magical alchemy to arouse a pro-imperial and anti-Kamakura mass movement among warriors. In this respect, the imperial court greatly underestimated and misunderstood the new mood of the nation, as represented by the warriors.

Other groups were not so readily predisposed to the warriors' view, however, and there is evidence of a perceived division of loyalties. For example, at the time of the Jōkyū war the Suwa family, the hereditary priestly family in charge of the Suwa shrine in present-day Nagano Prefecture and warrior-subjects (*gokenin* 御家人) of the Kamakura regime, wondered whether it should oppose the edict of the ex-emperor and fight on the side of Kamakura. Allegedly a divine "oracle" urged the family to oppose the ex-emperor, and, thus convinced, they led the Kamakura forces (ISHIDA 1968, p. 104).

The end of the war brought victory to the warriors and greater credibility to their new way. Consequently, the ex-emperors Go-Toba and Juntoku were dealt with harshly by order of the Hōjō *shikken*; they were both arrested and banished, the former to the island of Oki, and the latter to the Tosa district of Shikoku.¹³ Ex-emperor Tsuchimikado and the infant reigning emperor (who was on the throne for only three months) were also removed and sent to distant places. Such drastic measures were taken against members of the imperial family "for the sake of the people," according to Hōjō Yasutoki. He cited numerous instances of injustice in the areas which were owned or controlled by ex-emperors:

There were rōnin [warriors without masters] everywhere, and robbery and piracy were rife. Therefore, the people could enjoy no

¹³ Go-Toba died at the age of sixty on Oki.

peace of mind, and the highways were almost deserted by travelers.
... If the Court had all the country under its control, unhappiness
would become universal [TAKEKOSHI 1930, pp. 187-88].

Clearly the traditional image of the sacred king, the combination of *uji* chieftainship and magico-religious aura, was greatly weakened. But the feudal regime, too, was debilitated, largely through crises caused by Mongol invasions.

Mongol Invasions

Although historically people in Japan talked about "foreign invasions" of their island, most people were inclined to dismiss such an eventuality as a practical impossibility. However, when Khubilai, the great khan of the Mongols, overpowered the Sung dynasty to become the emperor of China in 1259 and subsequently established his capital in Peking, people in Japan suddenly realized that the oceans surrounding the Japanese archipelago might not protect their country from Mongol ambition. Indeed, several messengers from the Mongol khan, urging Japan to surrender to his authority, started to arrive after 1266. Although the Mongol attempts at invasion of Japan in 1274 and 1281 were unsuccessful, thanks largely to typhoons (known in Japan as *kamikaze* or "divine winds"), Japan could not relax its defense against possible Mongol invasions until about 1286. Thus, the threat of the Mongol invasions, real and imagined, loomed over the psyche of the Japanese.

In response to this threat, the Kamakura Bakufu had to devote much of its wealth to defense, which in turn required heavy taxation that was destructive of the lives of people in Japan, especially those in the western parts of the nation. Inevitably, the Hōjō could no longer count on the absolute fidelity of their *gokenin*, who in the past had supplied faithful land stewards and military governors in various parts of the nation. Particularly disturbing to the Kamakura regime were "new types of warriors," who exploited the loosening of Kamakura's political influence over manors and thereby gained power and wealth for themselves by making "private deals" with the land stewards outside of the official framework of the Kamakura Bakufu. Certainly this annoyed the military governors, who were appointed by the Bakufu. These "new warriors," such as the Kusunoki, for example, paid no allegiance to the Hōjō and often supported the imperial cause against the Kamakura government, as we shall see presently (ISHIDA 1968, pp. 155-56).

Imperial Rule and Two Monarchical Lines

In the meantime, the imperial family itself was embroiled in a series of dynastic succession controversies, going back to the rival claims of the two sons of Go-Saga (r. 1242–1246, but *insei* ruler until his death in 1272): Go-Fukakusa (r. 1246–1259) and Kameyama (r. 1259–1274). The issue at stake was not the question of who was to become sovereign *per se*, but who was to become the “chief retired emperor who was the real ruler” (*jisei-no-kimi*). Since Go-Saga originally owed his ascension to the throne to the Kamakura Bakufu, he was reluctant to designate a *jisei-no-kimi* successor prior to his death without their consent. Accordingly, the Kamakura bakufu, in consultation with the chief consort of Go-Saga, designated Kameyama, who was then reigning on the throne. In order to become *jisei-no-kimi*, Kameyama had to retire from the throne and appointed his son, Go-Uda, as the next sovereign.

This turn of events made Go-Fukakusa, who had preceded Kameyama on the throne, deeply depressed, and he almost took tonsure. In order to placate him, the Kamakura Bakufu persuaded the reigning Go-Uda to designate Go-Fukakusa’s son as the next emperor; thus the son became Fushimi (r. 1287–1298). In fact, the Kamakura Bakufu endorsed a “principle of alternation” between the two lineages of Go-Fukakusa (first known as the Jimyō-in 持明院 line, later known as the Northern Court, or Hokuchō) and Kameyama (first known as the Daikaku-ji 大覚寺 line, later as the Southern Court, or Nanchō).¹⁴ As might be expected, the principle of alternation paved the way for explosive controversies concerning succession.

In 1321, Go-Uda (r. 1274–1287, but *insei* ruler until 1321) received the Bakufu’s endorsement to pass on the power of *jisei-no-kimi* to the then-reigning emperor, Go-Daigo, as opposed to a retired emperor, as tradition dictated. This marked the end of the *insei* rule, which had lasted over two centuries from the time of the ex-emperor Shirakawa (ISHIDA 1968, p. 152). Go-Daigo was then 34 years old, and thus more mature than many of the youthful titular monarchs. Moreover, the strong-willed emperor was convinced that his mission was to restore the “direct imperial rule” in accordance with the original *ritsuryō* paradigm, therefore rejecting such “impure” features as regency, *insei*, and the feudal regime. His opposition to the

¹⁴ SANSOM 1958, pp. 478–81. He uses the nomenclatures of “Senior Line” and “Junior Line” to explain the dynastic succession disputes.

practice of alternative succession between two monarchical lines was partly based on his interpretation of the *ritsuryō* principle, but also on his personal ambition to have one of his children succeed him on the throne. However, Go-Daigo was strongly advised by Kamakura to abdicate in favor of a member of the rival court. Angered by this advice, in 1331 he decided to undertake a military campaign to eliminate the Bakufu itself. In this attempt Go-Daigo was supported by loyal, trustworthy advisers, a few courtiers, some monk-warriors of religious establishments and other warriors, including “new samurai,” who were not in allegiance with Kamakura.

Although the Hōjō regime had steadily weakened from the time of the Mongol invasions, it still possessed enough residual power to arrest Go-Daigo and banish him to the island of Oki in 1332. However, Go-Daigo managed to escape from exile and make a comeback. Much to the surprise of everyone, his clumsy campaign became instrumental in ending the feudal regime in Kamakura in 1333 (the main factor in the downfall was undoubtedly the defection of such key Kamakura military leaders as the Ashikaga and the Nitta).¹⁵

Historians have hotly debated the relative merits and pitfalls of the so-called “Restoration of Direct Imperial Rule of the Kenmu Era” of 1334–1336. My own reaction is very simple: Go-Daigo and his advisers may have meant well, but they simply assumed (wrongly, in my opinion) that their own affirmation of the *ritsuryō* paradigm—the “inner meaning”—had universal validity. They did not realize that others did not accept the validity of the courtier-based direct imperial rule, in particular the warriors, who had their own views concerning justice (especially distributive justice), the social and political order, well-being, etc. No one should be surprised, then, that the disgruntled military leader, Ashikaga Takauji, should rebel against the imperial regime. Although Takauji temporarily retreated to Kyūshū, before leaving Kyoto he managed to receive an edict from Kōgon, the ex-emperor of the rival (i. e., Northern) monarchical line. In 1336 Takauji’s forces marched into Kyoto and proceeded with the enthronement of Emperor Kōmyō (son of Kōgon of the Northern line). Go-Daigo, who had been hiding at Mt. Hiei, was

¹⁵ ISHIDA 1968, pp. 172–73 and 199–200. Even though many historians assume that Ashikaga Takauji rebelled against *the* emperor (Go-Daigo), it is quite plausible that he chose the Northern emperor over against the Southern emperor. The fact that he had the edict (*insen*) from the Northern court supports the view that Go-Daigo and Takauji were involved in “family conflicts” between two branches of the imperial family.

pressured to transmit the three imperial regalia to Emperor Kōmyō, thereby “officially” ending the Kenmu regime. Two months later, however, Go-Daigo (reputed to have somehow recovered the imperial regalia) escaped from Kyoto and went to Mt. Yoshino (not far from Nara) where, accompanied by a few faithful courtiers, he held imperial court. The lonesome but stubborn Go-Daigo passed away in 1339 at Yoshino. The Southern and Northern courts were united in 1392 when the Southern emperor Go-Kameyama (r. 1383–1392) left Yoshino for Kyoto and transferred the imperial prerogatives (including the sacred regalia) to the Northern emperor, Go-Komatsu (r. 1382–1412).¹⁶

The Kingly Style of the Ashikaga Shogunate

In 1338 Ashikaga Takauji received the title of shogun and started the second feudal regime in Japan. Despite many similarities between the first and second feudal regimes, there are some differences, too. For example, unlike the Kamakura regime, which considered (in principle at least) all warriors to be directly controlled by the shogun, the Ashikaga regime was designed to control local feudal lords (daimyos), who in turn claimed the loyalty of their own retainers. In the main the first two shoguns of the Ashikaga regime had to face and to guide an unsettled, divided nation. The stability of the regime was firmly established, however, during the rule of the third shogun, Yoshimitsu, who established the headquarters of the Bakufu in the

¹⁶ It looks as though the Kamakura regime had two phases. The earlier phase was represented by Minamoto Yoritomo, who like the Taira leaders before him operated within the *ritsuryō* framework. For example, he, like Taira no Kiyomori, tried to arrange for his daughters (unfortunately one of them died young) to become imperial consorts, and he was tempted by *ritsuryō*-oriented court ranks. The second phase of the Kamakura regime was represented by the Hōjō *shikken*, who lived more in the world of warriors even though they did not reject the *ritsuryō* paradigm outright. Incidentally, in comparison with the Taira and the Minamoto leaders who had been adherents to the *ritsuryō*-oriented Buddhist schools, the Hōjō (beginning with Hōjō Masako, who had married Minamoto Yoritomo) venerated the newly-recognized Zen Buddhism and were guided by Neo-Confucian philosophy and ethics. It was the characteristics of the second phase of the Kamakura regime which were inherited and expanded by the Ashikaga Shogunate. It so happened that the victory of the Mongol Yüan dynasty in China drove some of the prominent Zen monks from the Southern Sung China to migrate to Kamakura Japan, where they were warmly welcomed. Interestingly enough, the famous Japanese Zen Master, Musō Soseki (1275–1351), served as spiritual adviser to the Hōjō leaders, Emperor Go-Daigo, and the first Ashikaga shogun. In fact, following his advice, Ashikaga Takauji built the famous Zen temple Tenryū-ji in Kyoto, ostensibly for the repose of the soul of Emperor Go-Daigo.

Muromachi district of Kyoto.¹⁷ Although there were *kanrei* 管領 (or *kanryō*) who served as the highest-ranking officials immediately under the shogun, ultimately the Ashikaga regime was, in principle, based on the shogun's dictatorship. In order to maintain his despotic authority, Yoshimitsu made every effort to lessen the power of various influential *shugo*. Although the imperial court conferred the highest *ritsuryō* rank, *dajō-daijin* 太政大臣, on Yoshimitsu in 1394, when he was just thirty-seven years old, he summarily resigned from this rank the following year on the grounds that he was taking tonsure. In spite of his departure from official rank, however, he declared his intention to maintain his rulership of the nation. By that time, nobles in the imperial court knelt before him in deference to the new *de facto* monarch.

There were many other signs to substantiate the Ashikaga rulers' kingly pretensions, in competition with the imperial family as if another dynasty on equal footing. For example, when Yoshimitsu's grandson, Yoshitsugu, became a young adult, the ceremony celebrating this felicitous event (*genpuku-shiki* 元服式) was held inside the imperial residence, and Yoshimitsu's wife (Hino Yasuko) was conferred the title *junbo* 准母 (technically, "substitute mother of the emperor"). And when the Ming ruler sent his messengers in order to establish official trade with Japan, Yoshimitsu received the Ming messengers, who addressed him as the "King of Japan," at his Kitayama Palace (which, incidentally, had within its compound the Golden Pavilion, or Kinkaku-ji). He took it for granted that the Ming court in China would treat him as a monarch, and he himself signed his reply to the Ming emperor, "King of Japan." There was a persistent rumor—and I am persuaded that it was true—that upon his death he was conferred the title of "retired emperor" (*dajō-tennō* 太上天皇; ISHIDA 1968, pp. 209, 211, 213–14).

The "monarchical" dictatorial Ashikaga rule was understandably resented by ambitious *shugo* (military governor) daimyos, so that the sixth Ashikaga shogun, Yoshinori, notorious for his oppressive measures, was assassinated in 1441 by a disgruntled daimyo. Yoshinori was succeeded by his eight-year-old son, Yoshikatsu, who died two years later, whereby Yoshikatsu's younger brother, Yoshimasa, then eight years old, became the eighth shogun. In such circumstances the shogunate's authority was ignored in many cases, and many

¹⁷ That is why the Ashikaga Shogunate is often called the Muromachi Bakufu.

ambitious daimyos consolidated their own domains, often overtaxing peasants, who in desperation resorted to a series of riots. The young and pleasure-seeking shogun Yoshimasa was completely uninterested in the people's welfare and indulged in expensive building projects (including the now famous Silver Pavilion, or Ginkaku-ji). Also, because he had no heir for many years, Yoshimasa persuaded his younger brother Yoshimi, who had taken tonsure, to be laicized (in the expectation of succeeding him as the next shogun). Fortunately, or unfortunately, his wife belatedly gave birth to a son, Yoshihisa, in 1465, thus preparing the way for conflict between Yoshimasa's brother and Yoshimasa's son. This conflict added fuel to the bloody power struggle between the two leading daimyos who dominated the national political scene, Hosokawa Katsumoto and Yamana Mochitoyo; these latter started the devastating Ōnin War between 1467 and 1477, which served as the prelude to a period of *sengoku* (warring states), when social and political disunity were widespread. The nominal Ashikaga Shogunate, however, lasted until 1573. And, as SANSOM astutely observes, "it is only a seeming paradox in this destructive, subversive age that the arts should have flourished in Japan as never before" (1943, p. 368).

Erosion of the Ritsuryō Synthesis

Little need be added to the obvious fact that during the period from the commencement of the Ōnin War in 1467 to the mid-sixteenth century, the authority of the Ashikaga Shogunate steadily declined. (By that time the imperial court had also fallen into decay.) Few, if any, at that time realized that the decline of the Ashikaga regime marked by implication the erosion of the overarching *ritsuryō* paradigm itself, the three main principles of (a) mutual dependence of the Sovereign's Law (*ōbō*) and Buddha's Law (*buppō*), (b) institutional syncretism between Shinto and Buddhism (*shin-butsu shūgō*), and (c) the belief that Japanese deities were manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in India (*honji-suijaku*). In retrospect over centuries, we might conclude that the first principle was modified the most, the second principle underwent some changes, and the third principle maintained superficial continuity, partly because the terminological changes hardly touched the piety of the masses. In affirming the first principle, the architects of the *ritsuryō* system on the one hand established a "formula" that could potentially assimilate the major features of civilizations then known to them, without

specifying the contents to be coalesced. On the other hand, they recognized that the “cosmic legitimation” of the whole *ritsuryō* synthesis depended on the sacralization of the imperial system. Ironically, historical realities depicted primarily the technical dimensions of the imperial system, in the sense of dividing the functions of the throne into “reigning” and “ruling,” thus developing such phenomena as the Fujiwara regency, *insei*, and the feudal regime, all of which insisted on “ruling” the nation without touching the prerogatives of the throne to “reign over” the nation. It is also interesting to observe in connection with the feudal regime, specifically, that the Minamoto shoguns basically affirmed *in toto* the *ritsuryō* paradigm; Hōjō *shikken* lived in the world of the warriors without rejecting the *ritsuryō* framework; and the Ashikaga Shōgunate considered itself as *de facto* another monarchy side by side with the *ritsuryō*-oriented imperial dynasty.

Obviously, the second principle, i. e., institutional syncretism between Shinto and Buddhism, rested on the superstitious devotions of monarchs, nobility, warriors, and the masses. The fact that prominent religious institutions became owners of manors, protected in part by monk-soldiers, compelled them to maintain rapport with various powers that be, e. g., the Fujiwara regents, retired emperors, and feudal regimes. Also, there is much wisdom in ISHIDA’s observation that Japanese religion during the long period between the seventh and sixteenth centuries had three successive emphases, namely, (a) on *kyō* 教 (doctrines), as represented by the philosophical schools of Nara Buddhism and the two esoteric schools of the Tendai and the Shingon during the Heian period, (b) on *jō* 淨 (faith), as epitomized by the Pure Land pietism that became influential during the thirteenth century, and (c) on *zen* 禪 (practice), as exemplified by the Zen schools that came to be articulated in the Kamakura and Ashikaga periods (1968, p. 227). It is pertinent to recall that it was Zen masters who originally introduced Neo-Confucianism from Southern Sung China during the thirteenth century. But Neo-Confucianism, which originally was subservient to Zen, became its equal partner during the later Ashikaga and Sengoku periods (and was destined to be independent of Zen still later, in the Tokugawa period).

As to the third principle, there were some attempts on the part of Shinto leaders in the Kamakura period to reverse the common formula of *honji-suijaku* (the notion that the “original identity” of

Japanese deities were the buddhas and bodhisattvas in India) by asserting that the “original identity” of the buddhas and bodhisattvas were Japanese deities. But most people in Japan, eclectic as they always were, never paid much attention to the third principle of the *ritsuryō* paradigm.

At any rate, it took three strongmen—Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616)—to unify the disunited Japan. The first two, Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, gave lip service to the throne but rejected the first cardinal *ritsuryō* principle, that the Sovereign’s Law and the Buddha’s Law were mutually dependent. Both men therefore had no compunction about burning the powerful Buddhist temples and killing a large number of monks. Significantly, it was during the time when these three strongmen were trying to unify Japan that Roman Catholicism came to Japan with Iberian traders. It is fascinating to note that Nobunaga came in contact with the Portuguese traders and the Jesuits, Hideyoshi was exposed to Spanish traders (from the Philippines, originally from New Spain or Mexico) and the Franciscans, and Ieyasu came to depend on the Dutch and the English Protestants, notably Will Adams.¹⁸ Be that as it may, the first Japanese religious/cultural/social/political synthesis, known as the *ritsuryō* system, gave way to chaotic disunity of the nation in the sixteenth century.

The Tokugawa Synthesis and the Sacred Kingship

The enormous task of national unification, commenced by Oda Nobunaga and achieved to a great extent by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, was firmly cemented by Tokugawa Ieyasu, who emerged as the man of destiny, and who established the feudal regime in Edo (present Tokyo) in 1603. His was the third shogunate, following the Kamakura (first) and Ashikaga (second) regimes. In a way, the Tokugawa regime accomplished the ideal the architects of the *ritsuryō* state had dreamed about in the seventh century but could not quite successfully achieve, that is, a tightly knit, hierarchical religious/cultural/social/political synthesis, a form of “immanent theocracy”—not under the emperor, who according to the *ritsuryō* paradigm “reigned”

¹⁸ This colorful page of Japanese history is well known in the West thanks to the popular TV program called “Shogun.”

and "ruled" as the Manifest Kami, but under the shogun, based on the Neo-Confucian principles of natural laws and norms implicit in human, social, and political order, all of which are in turn grounded in the will of Heaven. Running through the Tokugawa synthesis was a sense of moral order that holds the balance of the total system. Obviously, its "inner meaning" is derived from the principle that the Way of Heaven was the natural norm, and the way of government based on benevolent rule (*jinsei*) was to actualize this moral order. This required each person to fulfill the true meaning of his or her given role in society.

SANSOM correctly points out that it was not the conscious intention of the founder of the Tokugawa regime to develop a water-tight system of government. Ieyasu "was determined to secure obedience, and it was his method to give direct orders rather than to govern by legislation" (1961, p. 401). But in the course of time, his shogunate developed a series of laws and legislations in order to create a viable socio-political order for the maintenance of order and peace in the nation. The Tokugawa form of government, known as the *baku-han* system, was a combination of national administration (Bakufu) under the shogun and local administration by daimyos in their fiefs (*han*). The general population was rigidly divided into hierarchical classes based on occupation (warrior, farmer, artisan, and merchant classes), plus special categories such as imperial and court families, ecclesiastics, and physicians. Accordingly, one's birth dictated one's status as well as duties to the nation and family, and interhuman relations. In this situation, the shogunate formulated a series of administrative principles as well as rules and regulations (*hatto*) that dictated the boundaries and norms of behavior of various groups.

Clearly the Tokugawa rulers inherited Nobunaga's and Hideyoshi's policy of *rejecting the first principle of the ritsuryō paradigm*, namely, the mutual dependence between the Sovereign's Law and the Buddha's Law. They barely tolerated the imperial institution despite their lip service to the contrary, and they defined the sovereign's role very narrowly. On the other hand, the Tokugawa regime *supported the second and the third ritsuryō principles*, i. e., the Shinto-Buddhist institutional syncretism and the notion that Japanese deities and the Buddhas as well as bodhisattvas had the same nature.

Briefly stated, the Tokugawa religious policy was to control and utilize all religious groups, except Roman Catholicism. Actually, the

regime initially winked at Roman Catholic missionary activities because of its pragmatic interest in foreign trade, but it soon took stern measures to persecute Catholicism and eliminate it from Japan. Moreover, all contacts with Western powers (with the exception of non-Catholic Holland) were forbidden by means of the “national seclusion” (*sakoku*) policy that went into effect in 1639. At home, every family was registered in a Buddhist temple, which was to serve as the official agent of thought control. Thus, the regime’s anti-Catholic policy brought about an unprecedented universal Buddhist parochial system in Japan. On the other hand, Buddhist and other religious groups were rigidly controlled by the Commissioners for Temples and Shrines, or *jisha-bugyō* 寺社奉行 (SANSOM 1963, p. 22). The Tokugawa endorsement of the third *ritsuryō* principle might be succinctly exemplified by the statement by the first shogun, Ieyasu: “Japan is called the land of Buddha and not without reason. . . [kami] and Buddha differ in name, but their meaning is one” (quoted in ELIOT 1935, p. 434). It is also interesting to note that the regime’s Confucian advisers tended to be indifferent to traditional religious terminologies, as illustrated by the statement of a scholar-statesman, Arai Hakuseki (1657-1735), that kami were essentially human (for more on Hakuseki, see ACKROYD 1979).

Inasmuch as the regime depended on Neo-Confucianism, more particularly on the Chu Hsi tradition (known as *Shushigaku* in Japanese), the Tokugawa form of the religious / cultural / social / political synthesis was greatly colored by the perspectives of Japanese Confucianists. For the most part they used the expression *tenka* 天下 (lit., “under Heaven”) to refer to the Japanese nation as a whole, and *kuni* 国 or *kokka* 国家 (lit., “nation” or “nation state”) to refer to the daimyos’ fiefs. Also, their use of the term *tenka* implied their preference for the Confucian terminology of “Son of Heaven” (*tenshi*) rather than the traditional *ritsuryō* usage of *tennō*, meaning “emperor,” rooted in the homology of the indigenous and Taoist notions. However, because the Tokugawa shogun—rather than the *tenshi* in Kyoto—had the responsibility of governing the *tenka* (nation as a whole), the shogun was respectfully referred to as the *taikun* (the “Great Master”), whereas each *kuni* (fief) was administered by a *kokkun* 国君 or *kokushu* 國主 (“Master of the Fief,” meaning daimyo). In principle, all of them were entrusted their respective domains by Heaven (*ten*), and as such they were to guide the people according to the principle of *tokuji* 徳治 (virtuous rule).

I might also add that, since the warrior class, being the top of the social hierarchy, was expected to assist the shogun and the daimyo in their "virtuous rule," warriors or retainers, referred to as *shin* (subjects), were encouraged to acquire learning and moral disciplines in addition to martial arts, as seen in the bushidō (code of warriors). Thus, in Tokugawa Japan warriors were the *Kultur-träger*s, comparable to the learned gentry in traditional China. Under the masters and the *shin* were the hereditary occupational classes—farmers, artisans, merchants—who together were referred to as *min* or *shomin* (common people). These occupational classes were expected to serve the needs of the fiefs and the nation through their respective *tenshoku* (Heavenly-given occupation). In short, the three main components—*kun* (masters), *shin* (subjects), and *min* (people), whose respective duties and social status were determined presumably by the natural law derived from the Way of Heaven—constitute the Tokugawa synthesis.¹⁹ As to the Tokugawa shogunate's attitude toward the imperial family, opinions vary widely, largely because their relationships were intricate, ambiguous, and often contradictory. I am personally struck by the fact that, in comparison with the Minamoto shoguns, who were very deferential to the imperial court (more specifically to retired emperors), and the Ashikaga shoguns, who evidently regarded the imperial family as another dynasty on the same standing as themselves, the Tokugawa shōguns, being *taikun*, were inclined to look down upon the imperial family. It is well known that in theory the Tokugawas recognized the imperial prerogatives but expected the emperors to abide by the shogunate's "Rules for the Palace and the Court" (*kinchū kuge sho-hatto* 禁中公家諸法度). I agree with SANSOM's observation in this respect:

It will be seen that although attention is paid to the dignity of the Sovereign and his nobles, they are deprived of almost all but ceremonial functions. . . . All from the Emperor down are at the mercy of the Shōgun and his officers. Nevertheless the Emperor is regarded as the fountain of honour, but it is a fountain of which the Bakufu directs the flow (1963, p. 18).

Significantly, upon the demise of the first shogun, his advisers persuaded the imperial court to confer upon the deceased Ieyasu the divine title of "Tōshō Dai-gongen" (technically, Bhaiṣajyaguru or the Buddha Yakushi, who manifested himself temporarily as the

¹⁹ This section of my essay is greatly indebted to HORIE 1962, pp. 290–301.

Great Sun God of the East), presumably in contradistinction to the Sun God, the imperial ancestress enshrined in the Grand Shrine of Ise.²⁰ Ieyasu was officially buried at Nikkō by Tenkai, a priest of a syncretic Tendai-Shinto amalgam (*Sannō-ichijitsu shintō* 山王一実神道).²¹

In the later Tokugawa period, when Japanese Confucian scholars, many of whom were emotionally anti-Buddhist, allied themselves with scholars of the National Learning school and with reawakened Shinto leaders, Confucian scholars began to be more attentive to the principle of the sacred monarchy, a principle that had been barely tolerated during much of the Tokugawa period. The term *kokka*, which had earlier meant the daimyo's fief, then came to refer to the Japanese nation as a whole. It is a matter of record that after the opening of Japanese ports to foreign trade in the mid-nineteenth century, nationalistic Confucianists cooperated with the royalist cause, spearheaded by the spokesmen of Restoration (*fukko*) Shinto, and helped to topple the declining Tokugawa shogunate.

The Meiji Synthesis and the Sacred Kingship

The combined effect of internal and external factors persuaded the last shogun to surrender his power in 1867, and monarchical rule was resumed under the teen-age emperor, Meiji, the following year. The Meiji form of religious/cultural/social/political synthesis attempted to establish a synthesis of two previous syntheses, namely, the *risuryō* synthesis formulated in the seventh century, and the Tokugawa synthesis commenced in the seventeenth century. The architects of the Meiji paradigm were as astute and daring as were their seventh-century *risuryō* predecessors. They were shrewd enough to realize that the first *risuryō* principle, mutual dependence between the Sovereign's Law and the Buddha's Law, was a thing of the past once it had been rejected by the Tokugawa synthesis.

²⁰ TSUNODA 1958, pp. 342–43, quotes Ogyū Sorai's flowery statement made a century after Ieyasu's death, praising the wisdom of the "Sun God of the East."

²¹ It was believed that upon death Ieyasu was to govern the activities of buddhas and the kamis, and that was why the Tōshōgū at Nikkō was built in a semi-Buddhist Shinto architectural style called "Gongen-zukuri." Also, within the compound of Tōshōgū are found the Five-storied pagoda and the chapel dedicated to Bhaiṣajyaguru. During the Tokugawa period, the Imperial Court in Kyoto sent its official emissaries annually to Nikkō to venerate the soul of Ieyasu. See KOIKE 1977, p. 174.

Now the Meiji leaders ventured to reject the second *ritsuryō* principle, the institutional syncretism between Shinto and Buddhism, as well, by issuing in 1868 an edict to separate Shinto and Buddhist institutions. However, they did not touch the third *ritsuryō* principle, the idea that the identities of Japanese deities were originally those of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in India, partly because such an idea had been so deeply ingrained in the eclectic religious universe of Japan, and partly because it was impossible to legislate nebulous religious doctrines of any sort.

The Meiji leaders recognized that nationalism in Japan, supported by cultural narcissism, National Learning, Restoration Shinto, and nationalistic Confucianism, had developed in the cultural setting of national seclusion imposed by the Tokugawa regime. The Meiji leaders were willing to pursue the policy of establishing *de facto* “psychical and mental seclusion,” even though Japanese ports were now open to foreign trade, by restoring (*fukko*) the “inner meaning” of the ancient *ritsuryō* state, combined with affirmations of the ideas of progress and novelty (*ishin*), in order to create a unified, modern nation with simultaneous roots in its inherited tradition. In this enterprise the architects of the Meiji paradigm rejected the historical separation of “reign” and “rule” and stressed the emperor’s direct “rule”—regardless of who actually formulated the imperial policies. As far as they were concerned, “reign” was nothing but an integral part of the emperor’s “rule,” an important symbolic feature to unite the populace (i. e., the nobility both old and new; and *shin* and *min* now combined as *shinmin*, or “subjects”).

The Meiji leaders also recognized the ascending curve of historical “rulers” of Japan, i. e., from Fujiwara regents, to retired emperors, to warrior leaders—the Minamoto, Ashikaga, and Tokugawa dynasties—and wanted to elevate their imperial ruler even higher than these earlier rulers, so that the Meiji emperor, who actually had all the trappings of a modern monarch, was now “deified” in accordance with the ancient mythological *ritsuryō* model, too.

Significantly, following the scenario prepared by the architects of modern Japan, the young emperor pledged in his Charter Oath that evil customs of the past shall be discarded and justice shall be based on the just laws of heaven and earth. Also, adhering to his pledge that knowledge shall be sought throughout the world, the Meiji regime actively sought practical knowledge and technology from the modern West. But the aim of modern Japan was not only

a renovation (*ishin*), a rejecting of “evil customs of the past” and an acceptance of creative new ideas from the rest of the world; it was also a restoration (*fukko*) of inherited tradition. In fact, the Meiji regime preserved (to be sure under a new guise) much of the administrative structures of the Tokugawa regime. Basically, Meiji policies sought to strengthen the “economic prosperity and strong defense” as well as to preserve the Confucian values that had provided the rationale for the Tokugawa version of immanent theocracy. Simultaneously, they sought to restore the principle of a sacred monarchy and *saisei-itchi* (unity of religion and state) of the *ritsuryō* version of immanent theocracy. All these features from the past and newly imported Western knowledge and technology were now packaged as the unifying framework of the modern Japanese nation.

It was the irony of history that the architects of the Meiji synthesis, who were not particularly sensitive to religious issues, were involved in almost insurmountable religious problems from the beginning. To start with, the Meiji regime inherited the anti-Catholic policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate, but the government had to modify its anti-Christian stance in order to improve Japan's position in negotiating better treaties with Western powers. The lifting of the ban against Christianity opened the door to missionary activities by various Christian groups. Even then the Meiji regime tolerated only a modicum of religious freedom (KITAGAWA 1987c; 1989, pp. 305–32). The government's “weak-kneed religious policy,” as it was interpreted by anti-Western leaders, was resented by diehards among nationalists and Shinto and Confucian leaders, who envisaged a restoration of the ancient *ritsuryō* paradigm and thus wanted a return to the Way of Kami (*kannagara*). Under their pressure, the government initially wanted to establish an eclectic national religion, but after a clumsy attempt to formulate the *daikyō* (Great Teaching), the government resorted to a, till then, unheard of concoction of “non-religious State Shinto,” which was to be adhered to by every Japanese subject, regardless of his or her personal “religious” affirmation and affiliation (KITAGAWA 1987b). In order to suggest that State Shinto was non-religious, the government established a category of *kyōha* 教派 (sect) Shinto and recognized thirteen such groups. State Shinto, which essentially consisted of the imperial cult and patriotism, found its effective agent through compulsory education (especially in the *shūshin* 修身, or ethics, course) and conscripted armed service.

The Meiji leaders (in a way reminiscent of the contradictory

attitudes of their sixth- and seventh-century ancestors, who on the one hand were intoxicated with and unduly idealized the Chinese civilization they knew mostly through books alone, yet who on the other hand regarded themselves as a "superior" race), whose intention was only to utilize the practical aspects of Western knowledge and technology, also admired the unseen Western powers as possessors of universal norms. In this situation the Meiji regime, partly because of its paranoia over treaty revisions with Western powers, initially promoted "Westernism" (*ōka-shugi* 欧化主義), although the government's support quickly waned once the treaties were improved. The short-lived popularity of Westernism also revealed the frivolous lack of consistency and integrity on the part of the intellectual leaders of the so-called Japanese Enlightenment (KISHIMOTO 1956, pp. 241-42). Still, the short-lived Westernism left many far-reaching consequences, two of which are worth mentioning.

1. The exaggerated claim of Western superiority and universality was bought at face value by some prominent modern Japanese leaders. Moreover, it was during the era of Westernism that numerous new words, concepts, idioms, and symbols penetrated Japan through a Japanese-Western linguistic mix. Not only were words and expressions borrowed by the Japanese in great number; as ICHIKAWA astutely suggests, "even the structure of the Japanese language" itself was destined to be modified (1931). I would even go so far as to say that after the early Meiji era the Japanese language developed into a new linguistic form (in a way somewhat analogous to the modern Hebrew that has developed in Israel), for many of the new idioms, concepts, and ways of thinking rejected pre-modern linguistic forms in favor of Westernized meanings and connotations (this fact often gives rise to the illusion among young Japanese people, as well as Westerners interested in things Japanese, that the modern Japanese language is the most trustworthy tool for unfolding the meanings of pre-modern Japanese experience and the pre-modern *mundus imaginalis*). Today, even the most anti-Western people in Japan do not question how Westernized their language itself is. Many old symbols and rituals, for example, have taken on new "Westernized" meanings. It is fascinating to note that conservative Meiji leaders thought they were "restoring" the meaning of the imperial institution in accord with the ancient *ritsuryō* paradigm as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which was to provide "cosmic legitimation" to their form of the religious / cultural / social / political

synthesis, without realizing, however, that they were now applying a Westernized concept of “ideology” to the imperial institution primarily to advance and cement the this-worldly socio-political nation-state, which they hoped could become as strong and as rich as any Western nation was. (In this respect, their insistence that State Shinto was non-religious robbed the State-Shinto-supported imperial institution of any supra-political or “cosmic” significance.)

2. The second important legacy of Westernism was the way the pragmatic architects of modern Japan became intoxicated by the West-inspired notion of “progress,” which in their own minds was integrally linked with a Western goal of “colonial imperialism.” In the main, their interest in things Western had several dimensions. Firstly, they wanted to utilize pragmatic Western knowledge and technology to strengthen their policy of “economic prosperity and strong defense.” Secondly, they promoted Westernism to obtain more favorable terms in Japan’s treaties with Western powers. Thirdly, they were persuaded that the only way to keep Western powers at arm’s length was to learn enough Western “know-how” to build up Japan’s defenses. And fourthly, they wanted to emulate Western colonial imperialistic power, so that Japan would quickly become the leading imperialistic nation in East Asia (*tōyō no meishu*)—and by implication, eventually a world power. The modern “Empire of Great Japan” drew most of its inspiration from Western imperialism and very little from Japan’s own past. Japanese leaders relentlessly pursued their imperialistic goal, as seen in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the forceful annexation of Korea (1901), and Japan’s role as an ally of Western nations in World War I. In all this, the imperial institution provided the most useful “ideology” (in the Western sense) for uniting and cementing the national fabric of a straitjacket imperial state.

It became crystal clear by the end of World War I that the real ruling powers behind the imperial institution were (a) the triumphant military clique (*gunbatsu*) and (b) the financial clique (*zaibatsu*), which now became a sophisticated and able partner of the international capitalist economy. Meanwhile, in the period after World War I, demands for universal suffrage increased, industrial workers began to organize unions, labor strikes—in which Christian socialists played important roles—became frequent occurrences, and a small Marxist group began to attract students. All these trends were regarded as dangerous for imperial Japan. Understandably, the emperor cult,

State Shinto, the Japanese Spirit (*yamatodamashii*), and nationalistic ethics (*shūshin*) were trumpeted as invisible weapons against all dangerous ideas and movements invading Japan from outside. Particularly important in this respect was the Peace Preservation Law (*chian-iji-hō*), as pointed out by MURAKAMI in his discussion of "Persecution under the Emperor System." According to him, thought control under the Peace Preservation Law:

... was extremely severe. Organizers of societies which repudiated private property and plotted against the national policy were subject to harsh penalties, including the death penalty. As the revolutionary movements subsided, the revised Peace Preservation Law became a tool for the oppression of religion. The government invested a large amount of time and energy in observing those religious organizations which either held or potentially held heretical doctrines, *in the light of the emperor system*, and carried out thorough investigations and suppression. ... the government justified its control over religion by claiming the *legality and authority of the emperor system* (1980, p. 95; italics mine).

Clearly the imperial institution was manipulated by chauvinistic, militaristic, nationalistic leaders to suppress all liberal thinking and expression, the rights of freedom of the press, thought, and assembly, as well as the freedom of conscience and religious belief. In 1936 Japan joined Germany in an anti-Communist pact, and in 1939 the Religious Organizations Law was enacted to safeguard the sacred aura of the imperial system and State Shinto above all religious groups. In the words of MURAKAMI:

When the Religious Organizations Law was presented to the Diet, Prime Minister Hiranuma Kiichirō's statement before the Diet, "In our country the way of the *kami* (Shintō) is the absolute way, and the people of the nation all must respectfully follow it. Teachings which differ from this and conflict with it are not allowed to exist" was no mere threat; for five years thereafter it was enforced boldly with the authority of the state (1980, p. 109).

Today, as one reads the statements of Japanese leaders during the 1930s concerning the sacred imperial institution and the non-religious super-religion that was State Shinto, one wonders how fairly intelligent human beings could seriously utter those notions with straight faces. We should remind ourselves, however, that any tradition (national, religious, or cultural), if it finds itself the only and unrivalled system in one community for any length of time

(the tradition of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, Christianity in Europe, etc.), will be tempted to assume that its “inner meaning”, based on its self-authenticating circular logic and affirmed autobiographically by those within that community, should have universal validity even to those who do not share that “inner meaning.” Thus the self-authenticating logic of prewar Japanese leaders concerning the imperial system and State Shinto—“the imperial system is inviolable because State Shinto says so, but State Shinto is in turn authenticated by the sacred imperial system, etc.”—is a perfect example.

At any rate, it was an irony of history that Western colonial control of much of Asia, some of which went back four centuries, was ended by an Asian nation that had emulated the Western colonial powers. Perhaps it was an even greater irony of history that the imperial throne, which had been mercilessly manipulated and utilized by various ruling forces in Japan since 1868, turned out to be the only viable authority that could surrender the huge body of armed forces at the end of World War II. Thus ended the third form of religious/cultural/social/political synthesis in Japanese history.

Reflections on Postwar Japanese Religion and the Imperial System

It is not my intention to have a full-scale discussion here of the postwar religious situation in Japan nor of the significance of the imperial system today (for a fuller treatment of the subject, see KITAGAWA 1987a, pp. 273–85). I simply would like to point out a few striking, though for me obvious, postwar features that seem to have far-reaching consequences: (a) Japan’s defeat and surrender to the Allied Powers, as well as the occupation of Japan by foreign nations, were undoubtedly the most traumatic of experiences for many people in Japan. Although the Allied Occupation of Japan was not very long (only up to 1952), it changed the direction of Japan in many important respects; for example, it destroyed at one stroke the Meiji form of religious/cultural/social/political synthesis; (b) invariably, the leaders of the Occupation (especially its American members, who really determined all the important policies) assumed the correctness of the “inner meaning” of the American religious/cultural/social/political synthesis, and “suggested” to the obedient Japanese government that it enact many policies that made sense primarily in terms of American experience; (c) reactions of people in Japan to these foreign-inspired policies were based in part on

their own ancient and modern traditions and in part on their perception (seen, of course, from their perspective) of what was feasible, desirable, and correct in the postwar Japanese situation.

We should be aware, however, that the Occupation had two "faces," that is, it represented higher authority vis-à-vis the Japanese government, but it took orders from Washington. Therefore, we can summarize by saying that the postwar situation in Japan revolved around four main "factors": (a) an invisible but most powerful Washington, (b) an Occupation authority that directly ruled Japan, (c) a captive (at least during the time of the Occupation) Japanese government, and (d) the Japanese populace.

Among all the changes brought about by the American Occupation policies two features especially concern us here: one is related to the religious foundation of the Japanese nation; the second is the status of the imperial institution. These measures, enforced by the Occupation, were designed to alter overnight the religious, cultural, social, and political principles that had been held by the ancient, feudal, and modern (Meiji) regimes. First and foremost, the newly-declared principle of religious liberty was diametrically opposed to the historic principle, operative until 1945, that every Japanese person must pledge his or her supreme loyalty to the throne and the nation. Second, State Shinto, which was concocted by the Meiji regime as a non-religious super-religion, was completely dismantled. Third, the important principle of separation of religion and state, which had been hammered out by American experience, nullified the historical Japanese principle of the unity of religion and government (*saisei-itchi*). It was on the basis of this principle, supported by many legal, cultural, social, and political measures such as the aforementioned Peace Preservation Law and the Religious Organizations Law, that all religious traditions in Japan, including Sect Shinto denominations and Buddhist, Christian, and other semi-recognized religious groups, were implicated in, and utilized by, government militaristic policies. Given the historical precedents, one can see the far-reaching effect of the principle of separation of religion and state on the long-range transformation of Japan.

Related to the religious policy of the Occupation was its treatment of the imperial institution. We are told that during the last years of World War II, the then prime minister, Konoe Ayamaro (often erroneously pronounced as Fumimaro), scion of the historical Fujiwara household that was the residual symbol of the *ritsuryō* paradigm,

proposed Japan's surrender to the Allied Forces on the condition that, if such an offer should be accepted, the postwar Japanese polity would be based on the historical imperial institution. Such a suggestion was of course derived from the "inner meaning" of the Japanese mental, spiritual, and religious universe, cultivated over time by the leaders of various ruling regimes. This proposal has never been fully discussed by Russian authorities, to whom the suggestion was first made, nor by American authorities, who no doubt knew something about Konoe's proposal.

In the meantime, Japanese leaders were praying for the miracle of a "divine wind" (*kamikaze*), which had once saved Japan in the thirteenth century from Mongol invasions and which might save Japan again. Instead, a newly created atomic bomb was dropped on Japanese soil, thus facilitating an unconditional surrender. The Allied Powers, at the insistence of Washington, decided to maintain the "imperial system" in order to use the imperial institution to expedite a smooth transition from prewar to postwar conditions in Japan under the Occupation Forces. To many people in Japan (and this is precisely why Washington wanted to preserve the imperial institution), the simple fact that the imperial institution was kept, for whatever reason (e. g., as a symbol of the unity of the democratic national family or whatnot), meant continuity with traditional Japan.

It sounds astonishing, but it is true, that even at the end of a devastating Pacific war, "the leaders of Japanese militarism expected to continue to rule the people, preserving the previous system and defending the national polity [including the imperial system and the State Shinto, etc.]" (MURAKAMI 1980, p. 118). Thus they found it very comforting to learn that the Occupation Forces would keep the imperial institution, even if the throne had a different meaning to the foreign rulers than the meaning they attributed to it. Such a sentiment was shared by a large number of conservatives and rural folk, and by members of families that had lost sons during the war, all of whom had felt comfortable in the prewar world of State Shinto and deified emperors. To them postwar Japan was not qualitatively different from prewar Japan, except for the fact that Japan had gambled and lost the war. Their view was eloquently expressed in the statement of an army general, Matsui Iwane, made shortly before his execution as a war criminal at Sugamo Prison: "Looking back," he stated, "I have no regrets as I meet my death, nor have I anything to feel ashamed of before all creation, or before

the [*kami*] and Buddha. My deepest regret is that I was unable to realize Sino-Japanese Cooperation and a new life for Asia [referred to as the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere]" (Quoted in HANAYAMA 1955, p. 256).

In sharp contrast to conservative Japanese, progressive elements among the Japanese, especially intellectuals, had mixed reactions to the Occupation's decision to retain the imperial institution. Their ambivalence, ignored by the Occupation authorities and not understood by the conservatives (or by post-Occupation Japanese political leaders, who preferred to cater to the conservative majorities who gave them votes) is, however, worth noting. As one example, let me quote a statement by SAIGŌ Nobutsuna (and I will give a rather literal translation to express his sentiment more fully). He says:

Just as a mummy, which has been sealed hermetically in a coffin, [deteriorates rapidly when it] is suddenly exposed to outer air, the imperial institution, which had survived for a long time in the lonely isolation of this island kingdom, had its tragic end when confronted by the stormy world history that had begun to invade our country since 15 August 1945 (end of the war). Looking back, we are dumbfounded by the swiftness of changes to our world. It is simply amazing that the mystical imperial institution that, supported by mighty power, had been bending over us, has suddenly disappeared into thin air. It is little wonder that the joy of liberation has filled our hearts as if we had a physiological reflex action.

But I am persuaded that this is the opportune moment to reflect calmly on the myth of the imperial system. I personally think it is too soon to conclude that the age of ancient mythology is over. Even though the imperial institution now wants to have such new labels as "the symbol of the people" or "the center of admiration [by the multitudes]," we dare not forget that such labels themselves are in reality nothing but mythological notions, only redressed and beautified externally. Such modern beautified notions about the imperial institution would not have been viable without a foundation rooted in the very mythological tradition (SAIGŌ 1949, pp. 1-2).

I believe that *most* postwar Japanese reactions to the imperial institution are situated somewhere on the line of a continuum between the very conservative and the very progressive positions. Both the conservatives and the progressives often ignore the fact that the imperial institution was not simply a mummified figure sealed hermetically in the coffin of ancient history, but was an institution

which has been “re-mummified” several times, especially by the architects of the Meiji regime. At least the Occupation Forces and Washington realized that the imperial institution was a harmless, ancient mummy, but that, if preserved in its modernized form, it might again be manipulated by narcissistic, ultra-conservative politicians. Hence the American pressure on the Japanese government to have the Emperor proclaim on New Year’s Day, 1946, his now-famous declaration of humanity, rejecting the myth-shrouded notion of a deified imperial system as a fanciful notion. The import of this event was not fully recognized in Japan, however. After the war, when the alleged coffin of history was opened, people found not simply a benevolent ancient *uji* chieftain decorated by mythological traditions, but a modern monarch, whose military uniforms are kept under traditional robes. And if voters should continue to support the imperial institution, one wonders what such an institution would mean to future generations in Japan.

It would indeed appear that Japan has become, for all intents and purposes, a modern, secularized nation, bent on becoming a highly technological and consumer society, in which there is no room for immanent theocracy of any sort. I have recently read with keen interest Jean BOUDRILLARD’s comments on “After Utopia: The Primitive Society of the Future,” in which he portrays America as a nation which has no roots except in the future. He also feels that the other nations share fragmentation and uprootedness. And he comments: “The unintelligible paradox of Japan is a powerful example of this. Having freed itself from the ancestral terrain, it floats, culturally weightless, as an economic power house on the world scene” (1989). And I have been wondering what he would say about the imperial institution in Japan today.

Epilogue—An Autobiographical Perspective

My essay on Japanese religion and its relationship to the imperial system is inextricably bound up with my own childhood memories. I became aware of the persistence of these memories as I was listening to the television news about the demise of Emperor Hirohito (posthumously called the Shōwa Emperor) in January 1989, and the heated discussion as to whether or not the president of the United States should attend his funeral in Tokyo. As I heard the report mingled with debate, I found myself recalling the death of

Hirohito's father, the Taishō Emperor, on 25 December 1926. At that time, now over sixty years ago, I was just a young child, enrolled in primary school in what is now Kashiwara City in Nara Prefecture.

The Kashiwara region is one of the oldest districts of Japan and an important site in Japanese legend, for it is here that the legendary first emperor, Jinmu, is said to have established the Japanese nation (the Yamato kingdom). The people of the Kashiwara region have traditionally been proud of the legends of Jinmu and of the early Yamato kingdom, partly because many of the hallowed historical places mentioned in ancient chronicles are accessible spots located within easy walking distance. Early poets rhapsodized about these places, such as Mt. Kagu and Asuka River, imbuing them with great beauty and significance, even though in reality Kagu is nothing but a sleepy, tiny flat hill and Asuka at best an insignificant brooklet. Then and now, the local people prefer to live psychically close to the sacred aura of these physical places that has been created by hazy mythological traditions.

In their own way, these legends permeated my primary school experience, perhaps most memorably in the figure of our school principal. He was a simplistic, genial, and conservative self-styled patriot, a person of minor bureaucratic type rather than an educational administrator. He was no doubt temperamentally suited to negotiate with the governor of the prefecture, the head of the *gun* (county), the mayor of the city, tax officers, the police chief, etc., on behalf of the primary school. For the most part his bureaucratic skills made up for his shortcomings as an educational administrator.

I have been told that the principal was dismissed from his office a few years later because of the "unforgivable offense" of mispronouncing a word of the Imperial Rescript on Education. This important edict was promulgated in 1890 by the Meiji emperor as the guiding principles for modern Japanese education. It was expected that the edict would be "reverently read" on several occasions each year at every school within the realm.

The school principal preserved the edict not only by reading and implementing its program but by guarding the text. One of the supremely important duties of the principal was to guard constantly the little iron treasure house situated in the school yard, in which an official copy of the edict, as well as portraits of the emperor and empress, were kept. These portraits were displayed ceremonially on important occasions so that people could make obeisance to them.

In the Japanese school system, then, the office of the principal was constituted by duties to and reverence for the emperor. Perhaps this is why our principal was moved to give a series of public discourses on the uniqueness of the Japanese *kokutai* (lit., “national body,” referring to the mystical nature of the Japanese polity or nationhood; see KITAGAWA 1974) and the importance of loyalty to the emperor and patriotism, during the period of official national mourning (*ryōan* or *go-ryōan* (御) 諒闇) for the Taishō Emperor.

The gist of my school principal’s rambling thoughts, as I recall, boil down to the following points:

- 1 The glory of the Japanese *kokutai* was based on its “imperial institution” (*tennō-sei*), derived from the history of the unbroken blood line of emperors (*bansei-ikkei*) in the one-and-only imperial house. This lineage can be traced back to its mythological ancestress, Amaterasu-ōmikami (often—erroneously—referred to as the Sun Goddess) who, according to the chronicles, had given her divine commandments to her direct descendants to reign over and rule the Japanese nation in perpetuity.
- 2 As far as my principal was concerned, the Japanese imperial institution did not depend on the moral virtues, superior learning, or political abilities of emperors as individuals. (Parenthetically I might add that even though our principal did not say so publicly, we all understood that the Taishō Emperor was not well for some time prior to his death and thus had to delegate all of his imperial duties and functions to his son Hirohito, whom we called the *sesshō-no-miya* 攝政の宮, or prince-regent.) Rather, the most important feature of the imperial system, we were told, was the transmission of the eternal “imperial soul” (*tennō-rei* 天皇靈) from one holder of the chrysanthemum throne to the next holder during the portion of the enthronement ceremony called the *Daijō-sai* (a stylized festival in which the new emperor offers the first fruits of the rice harvest to the imperial ancestress and other heavenly deities; see HOLTOM 1972; ELLWOOD 1973). Only when the imperial soul is duly incorporated into the body of the new emperor or empress can he or she receive the three sacred imperial regalia, i. e., the sword, the mirror, and the comma-shaped jewels.
- 3 The throne, according to our principal, had four main features. Its holder is: (a) a “living kami” by virtue of his or her divine

prerogatives based on the imperial lineage (which, as we have noted, originates with the mythological ancestress, Amaterasu-*ōmikami*); (b) the “chief priest” of the nation, who usually delegates the imperial-ecclesiastical duties to a variety of religious functionaries; (c) the only legitimate and final “ruler of the nation”; and (d) the “head of the family-like national community,” something akin to the enlarged *paterfamilias* of the ancient Roman family. Accordingly, as our principal remarked, every Japanese subject was duty-bound to display absolute loyalty to the emperor as the ruler as well as to render supreme filial piety to the emperor as the head of the family-type national community.

These themes, first heard by me in Kashiwara immediately after the death of the Taishō Emperor, namely, the inviolable nature of emperorhood and the necessity of supreme patriotism to the throne and the nation, quickly developed into a national cult. The themes were repeated loudly and publicly on numerous occasions in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s by all branches of the government (both national and prefectural), the army and navy, schools, and patriotic organizations. Throughout those years newspapers contained frequent reports of scholars, writers, and students, as well as religious figures and free thinkers, being sentenced on the charge of *lèse majesté*. The national atmosphere became particularly stifling in the 1930s as the authoritarian, militaristic, jingoistic, emotionally anti-foreign nationalists became increasingly more vocal and politically influential.

Indeed, every individual who was educated in Japan before World War II was subjected to, and personally witnessed the intensification of, the emperor cult and the exaggerated propaganda of patriotism. If my memory is correct, schools in Japan in those days—especially primary and middle schools—devoted less and less energy to education and more and more time to military training and ritual obeisance to Shinto shrines and/or imperial portraits. Needless to say, all of us students were required to memorize our holy writ, the Imperial Rescript on Education, which said in part:

Know ye, Our subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting; . . . Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character

of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education. Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; . . . always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the *prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth*. . . .

The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors . . . *infallible for all ages and true in all places*. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may all attain to the same virtue. (Official translation, cited in TSUNODA 1958; italics mine)

It may be worth recalling that between 1868 (when the boy emperor, Meiji, began his rule) and 1945 (the end of World War II), the Japanese government, with its highly organized corps of bureaucrats in all its ministries, tried to brainwash—persistently and rather blatantly—all Japanese with the uniqueness of *kokutai*, based on the sacred imperial institution. Its rhetoric embraced various areas, chiefly education, military conscription, and State Shinto. I have already given an account of my own experience in regard to the “reverent reading” of the Imperial Rescript on Education and the stylized obeisance to the imperial portraits. Schools also promoted patriotism and civic morality by teaching “ethics” (*shūshin*). As to military conscription, universal conscription was cleverly presented to the people as a gift from the emperor, granting *every* healthy youth the privilege of serving either in the army or the navy; this was in stark contrast to pre-Meiji days, when only sons of the warrior class (the samurai) could bear arms. Indeed, until 1945, patriotism and the emperor cult always received strong emotional support from the members of the provincial ex-servicemen’s associations (*zaigō-gunjin-kai*). But by far the most thoroughgoing indoctrination of patriotism and the emperor cult was attempted and carried out by the government in its creation and promotion of State Shinto, which was Shinto transformed into a non-religious patriotic cult to be observed by every Japanese man and woman regardless of his or her own personal “religious” commitment and affiliation.

I have always been intrigued, no doubt in large part because of my scholarly interest in the history of religions, by the close relation-

ship that has existed between Japanese religion (especially the Shinto tradition, including the modern concoction called State Shinto, imperial court Shinto, shrine Shinto, folk Shinto, etc.) and the imperial institution. Over the years, I have read many theories as to how Japanese religion and the imperial state system developed independently and/or jointly, whether or not the imperial system is an *esse* or *bene esse* to Japanese religion (especially to Shinto tradition), etc., etc. I do not claim that the knotty issue of the relationship between Japanese religion and the imperial system is as yet resolved in my mind, but I have nonetheless tried briefly to share some of my reflections on these fascinating problems.

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