

The Mobilization of Doctrine

Buddhist Contributions to Imperial Ideology in Modern Japan

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In response to Shintoist criticism of Buddhism in the early 1930s, a group of prominent Buddhists and Buddhologists wrote articles on Buddhism and Japanese spirit for a special issue of Chūō Bukkyō in 1934. They highlighted historical connections between Japanese Buddhism and the state, and drew correspondences between Buddhist doctrines and various Shinto and Confucian concepts that were central to discourses on Japanese culture and the imperial system in the early-Shōwa period. In drawing those doctrinal correspondences, they aligned Japanese Buddhism with main components of the imperial ideology at that time.

Keywords: Buddhism—emperor—imperialism—ideology—
Japanese spirit

ON 30 DECEMBER 1933 Miyai Kanejirō of the Shinto Reform Association (*Shintō kakushin-kai* 神道革新会) sent a letter to Ōtani Kōshō, head abbot of Nishi Hongan-ji, in response to an article Ōtani had published earlier that month in *Chūgai nippō* (中外日報) about Buddhism and the Japanese spirit. With seven questions Miyai prodded Ōtani to clarify how Shin Buddhism construed the *kokutai* (国体),¹ *Yamato damashii* (大和魂),² and overall Japanese spirit (*Nihon seishin* 日本精神). Miyai

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¹ Usually rendered as “national essence,” “national polity,” or “national structure.”

² This term has been rendered as “Yamato soul,” “the soul of Japan,” and “original Japanese spirit.”

closed his letter with the accusation that Shin Buddhists “laugh that the talisman from the Ise Shrine (*Jingū taima* 神宮大麻) is like the rice offered to the Buddha at the family altar and refuse to humbly accept it,” and that they “do not worship the heavenly ancestors of the nation” but rather “collect thousands of yen from good men and women to construct luxurious temples in which they enshrine and then bow three or even nine times to that blackie from the degenerate country India.”³

Editors of the journal *Chūō Bukkyō* 中央仏教⁴ moved quickly to defend Buddhism from this attack, which they characterized as part of a second *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈. Raising the specter of the persecution of Buddhism nearly seventy years earlier, they solicited articles on “Buddhism and Japanese Spirit” for a special issue of the journal. Forty-five Buddhists of varying prominence contributed essays.⁵ As a corpus these essays provide a window on the ideological positioning of Buddhism vis-à-vis discourse on “Japanese spirit” and the imperial system at the beginning of 1934, in the midst of what Shinto ideologues termed the Shōwa Restoration.⁶ With several exceptions noted later in this article, the contributors advanced similar, overlapping arguments that served to align Japanese Buddhism with the main components of imperial ideology in the 1930s.⁷

Buddhism and the Protection of the Realm

In his polemic text, Miyai portrayed Buddhism as an alien tradition that renounces worship of the “heavenly ancestors,” and he questioned whether Buddhism accords with Japanese spirit and the *kokutai*. To ward off this attack, the Buddhist apologists in *Chūō Bukkyō* countered primarily with historical and doctrinal arguments. As for the former, most of the writers cite historical patterns of Buddhist support

³ Quoted in editors’ introduction, *Chūō Bukkyō* 18/3 (March 1934), p. 4.

⁴ *Chūō Bukkyō* is the predecessor of the journal *Daijō Zen* 大乘禪.

⁵ This group consisted of priests, sectarian leaders, Buddhologists, administrators of Buddhist educational institutions, military figures, government officials, and several others.

⁶ Although their arguments echo earlier and later formulations, there were no monolithic Buddhist stances throughout the early-Shōwa period. More often than not the imperial discourse of Buddhists was formulated *occasionally*, that is to say, in response to specific historical occasions, whether government crackdowns on new religious movements and leftists in the 1920s, Marxist denunciation of Buddhism in the early 1930s, Shintoist criticism in 1933, full wartime mobilization after 1937, or impending defeat in the early and mid 1940s.

⁷ Though “ideology” has been defined in myriad ways, I am using this term in the sense of a set of ideas promulgated by holders of power to foster unified allegiance to the state and mask social and economic conflicts.

for the emperor and the “state,”⁸ especially in terms of the “unity of the emperor’s law and the Buddha’s law” (*ōbō buppō ichinyō* 王法佛法一如). They praise Shōtoku Taishi and the *Seventeen Article Constitution* he purportedly authored for providing a Buddhist foundation for the early Japanese state; the political role of Nara Buddhism following Emperor Shōmu’s construction of Tōdai-ji as the “realm-protecting temple of the four heavenly kings of golden light” (*konkōmyō shūtennō gokokuji* 金光明四天王護国寺) and associated branch temples (*kokubunji* 国分寺) in outlying regions; and imperial patronage of sutras and rituals believed to protect the realm. Imanari Jikō⁹ argues that “with the *Sutra of the Wisdom of the Benevolent Kings* (*Ninnō hannya-gyō* 仁王般若經) and the *Sutra of the Sovereign Kings of the Golden Light* (*Konkōmyō saishō-ō-gyō* 金光明最勝王經) serving as realm-protecting sutras (*gokokukyō* 護国經), Japanese Buddhism was always centered on the imperial household and functioned as a prayer-oriented Buddhism (*kitō buppō* 祈禱佛法) directed toward the protection of the nation and prosperity of the people” (IMANARI 1934, p. 149).

Moving forward to the Heian period, contributors to the special issue commend Saichō and Kūkai for “Japanizing” imported Buddhism and building Enryaku-ji and Tō-ji as, respectively, the “place for [practicing] the Way and [thereby] pacifying and protecting the realm” (*chingo kokka no dōjō* 鎮護国家の道場)¹⁰ and the “temple for teaching the sovereign and protecting the realm” (*kyōō gokokuji* 教王護国寺). They lift up Shingon and Tendai rituals done for the protection of the state, such the *gosaie* 御齋会.¹¹ Joining several peers in celebration of *honji sui-jaku* 本地垂迹 theories, TAKAI Kankai¹² even contends

⁸ I use this term here for convenience’ sake, fully cognizant of the anachronistic character of this usage.

⁹ Imanari Jikō 今成慈孝 (1871–1961), whose Zen name was Kakuzen (覺禪), was head priest of the Sōtō temple Kōken-ji in Fukui. He started an organization called “Third Culture Association” (Dai san bunka kyōdan 第三文化協団) and published a monthly journal entitled *Daijō-bunka* 大乘文化. He wrote on the *Kojiki*, Dōgen, Shinran, and the relationship between Zen and the *nenbutsu*. This and the following biographical sketches of the Buddhist contributors are based on the table of contents of the special issue of *Chūō Bukkyō* and information in *Nihon Bukkyō jinmei jiten* 日本仏教人名辞典 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1992), *Bukkyō nenkan* 仏教年鑑 (Tokyo: Bukkyō Nenkan-sha, 1938), *Sōtōshū gensei yōran* 曹洞宗現勢要覽 (Tokyo: Sōtōshū Gensei Yōran Kankōkai, 1952), and *Bussho kaisetsu jiten* 仏書解説辞典, vol. 12, Ono Genmyō, ed. (Tokyo: Daitō Shuppan-sha, 1974).

¹⁰ Joseph KITAGAWA translates this expression as “chief seat of religion for ensuring the safety of the nation” (1966, p. 60).

¹¹ Performed in the palace from the 8th to the 14th of the first month as part of the annual calendar of rituals and ceremonies, this ceremony included a lecture on the *Sutra of the Sovereign Kings of the Golden Light* and prayers for the security and ease of the emperor (*gyokutai an’on* 玉体安穩).

¹² In 1934 Takai Kankai 高井親海 (1884–1953) was Principal of Chizan Vocational School,

that *Ryōbu Shintō* 両部神道¹³ led Japanese to the point where they could claim that they themselves are kami and buddhas (1934, p. 46). Many of the forty-five authors also celebrate Kamakura Buddhist contributions to “Buddhism for the protection of the realm” (*gokoku Bukkyō* 護国仏教), citing Eisai’s notion of the “propagation of Zen for the protection of the realm” (*kōzen gokoku* 興禪護国), Nichiren’s ideal of “establishing the correct [Dharma] and securing peace in the realm” (*nisshō ankoku* 立正安国), and Shin leader Rennyō’s notion of “taking the emperor’s law as fundamental” (*ōbō ihon* 王法為本).¹⁴

Religious Inter-marriage and Parenting Japanese Spirit

As a further historical counterargument to Miyai’s accusation that Buddhism is a foreign religion alien to if not subversive of Japanese spirit, the *Chūō Bukkyō* apologists contend that over the centuries their tradition not only protected the emperor and the state but also helped cultivate Japanese spirit. In ascribing this role to Buddhism, they employ metaphorical constructions derived from gender stereotypes and familial relations. INOUE Ukon¹⁵ makes Buddhism out to be maternal and passive and thus complementary to the paternal and active character of Shinto and the Imperial Way (*kōdō* 皇道) (1934, p. 175). ŌTA Kakumin¹⁶ tells his readers that

Through a karmic connection Japan received a daughter from another home as its wife. With a sincere heart this wife worked hard to take care of our home, having children and then grandchildren. Our home, not her original home, has been foremost in her mind. Indeed, from early on, more than a daughter from another home, she has been our wife and mother.
(1934, p. 194)

a Shingon institution. In 1943 he became a professor at Taishō University, and in 1946 he was appointed head abbot of the Chizen branch of Shingi Shingon Buddhism.

¹³ *Ryōbu Shintō* refers to the Shingon linkage of buddhas (or bodhisattvas) with Shinto kami, the former viewed as the original ground (*honji* 本地) and the latter as the residual traces (*suijaku* 垂迹) of the former.

¹⁴ In setting forth these and other historical connections between Buddhism and the state, the writers virtually ignore Tokugawa Buddhism. In all likelihood this omission derives from official portrayals—since early in the Meiji period—of Tokugawa Buddhism as a degenerate arm of the Tokugawa shogunate, an ostensibly anti-imperial system based on the foreign philosophy of Neo-Confucianism.

¹⁵ Inoue Ukon 井上右近 (1891–?) was an Ōtani-ha (Higashi Hongan-ji) priest who wrote on Shin Buddhism, Shōtoku Taishi’s *Sangyō-gisho*, and Japanese intellectual history.

¹⁶ Ōta Kakumin 太田覚眠 (1866–1944) was a Shin priest who spent much of his career pursuing missionary activities in Russia.

Others portray Buddhism as the bride of Shinto, and Japanese spirit as the offspring of this union. TANIGUCHI Jōzen¹⁷ depicts Japanese spirit not as the offspring but as the groom, who took Buddhism to be his *hanayome* 花嫁, a “flower bride” who became the “womb of Japanese culture” (1934, p. 101). Pure Land Buddhist KUBOKAWA Kyokujō¹⁸ outlines Buddhism’s life history of having been born in India, adopted by the Chinese, and brought up in China to become “elegant” Mahayana Buddhism; although nearly getting rejected by her Chinese family on several occasions, thanks to matchmaking by the Paekche king Syōng Myōng 聖明王, this *hanayome*, in the form of Pure Land thought, ultimately married into the imperial line (1934, p. 19). Reversing the flow of brides, Ōta likens Japanese spirit to a mother who sends her daughter—who is Japanese spirit as well—to Manchuria as a bride for the Chinese. He elaborates: “For both peoples this is a spiritual marriage and, in terms of the friendly relations between them, this is cause for celebration” (ŌTA 1934, p. 195).

Marshalling another generative argument, TAKAI Kankai declares that “Japanese spirit is the innate nature specific to the Japanese people, and Buddhism and Confucianism fostered its growth. Through the education it received from Buddhism and Confucianism, Japanese culture matured from a child into an adult” (1934, p. 48).¹⁹ Finally, TANIGUCHI Jōzen concludes that conservative Shintoists’ rejection of Buddhism as foreign is on a par with demanding a divorce from one’s spouse (1934, p. 102), and ŌTA sees this rejection as no different from throwing one’s parents out of the house (1934, p. 202).

By means of these metaphorical constructs, the writers in the journal domesticate Buddhism and grant it a place in Japan’s great family (*daikazoku* 大家族), one of the central ideological constructs in 1930s discourse on the imperial system and Japan’s *kokutai*. Portraying Buddhism in the familial vernacular of the time, they bestow upon the religion a passive, female status, whether as daughter, bride, or mother. This ascription of female gender to Buddhism is not surprising, for by

¹⁷ Taniguchi Jōzen 谷口乗禪 (1891–?) left his position of head priest of a Shingon temple and retreated to a hermitage near Tateyama to engage in religious practice, study sutras, and contribute articles to *Chūō Bukkyō*, *Daihorin* (大法輪), and other Buddhist publications.

¹⁸ Kubokawa Kyokujō 窪川旭丈 (1874–?) was abbot of Kōmyō-ji, a prominent Pure Land temple. He wrote on, amongst other things, the fivefold transmission (*gojūsōden* 五種相伝) of Pure Land doctrine. Through his career he held various administrative positions in the Pure Land sect, and he served on committees convened by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance.

¹⁹ Takai tills agricultural metaphors as well, describing Buddhism and Confucianism as the fertilizer that enabled the seed of early Japanese spirit to grow into a flourishing mature form (TAKAI 1934, p. 48).

1934 the emperor was securely positioned in the role of national patriarch, having been progressively masculinized by his handlers since the early Meiji period as, amongst other things, the head of the military.²⁰

Defining Japanese Spirit

In tandem with historical appeals to patterns of *gokoku Bukkyō* and the ancient marriage of Buddhism into Japanese culture, the *Chūō Bukkyō* authors formulate doctrinal retorts to Miyai as well, primarily by highlighting—and making—connections between Buddhist doctrines and “Japanese spirit.” Their discourse draws on an extensive linguistic repertoire, juggling such related terminology as “Shinto,” the “Imperial Way,” the “imperial household,” “*kokutai*,” and “*Yamato damashii*.” Though most of these expressions go undefined, several writers do provide direct or indirect definitions of “Japanese spirit.”

WATANABE Shōyō²¹ makes the case that “Japanese spirit” consists, most fundamentally, of “a true and sincere heart (*magokoro* まごころ), and [early on] it took as its practical expression the veneration of Amaterasu and the other heavenly ancestors (*tenso sūkei* 天祖崇敬); over time it turned into loyalty to the ruler and love of country (*chūkun aikoku* 忠君愛國), then dutiful and courageous service for the public (*giyū hōkō* 義勇奉公); it later advanced further to become the sacrificial offering of oneself (*kenshin gisei* 献身犠牲)” (1934, p. 77). KOHŌ Chisan²² echoes Watanabe in arguing that Japanese spirit consists primarily of loyalty to the ruler and love of country, and that both of these virtues are based on ancestor worship (1934, p. 61). FURUKAWA Taigo²³ defines Japanese spirit as, most crucially, “the spirit of understanding and revering our *kokutai* and eternally advancing and developing this nation” (1934, p. 227), and he sets forth its ten main components: 1. loyalty to the ruler and love of country; 2. reverence toward the kami and worship of ancestors (*keishin sūso* 敬神崇祖); 3. an

²⁰ For an excellent treatment of the gendering of the emperor, see FUJITANI 1996, pp. 171–82.

²¹ Watanabe Shōyō 渡辺小洋 (1888–?), also known as Watanabe Tokusen 渡辺徳仙, was a Sōtō priest who founded the National Spirit Society (Kokumin Seishin Kyōkai 国民精神協会) and served as a Sōtō missionary. He wrote on Zen, the *Heart Sutra*, the *Kannon Sutra*, imperial edicts concerning Buddhism, and the national anthem and national flag.

²² Kohō Chisan 孤峰智琰 (1879–1967), a Sōtō priest, was Vice-Secretary (*fuku kan'in* 副監院) of Sōji-ji in 1934.

²³ Furukawa Taigo 古川確悟 (1875–?), also known as Shōun Taigo 祥雲確悟, was a Sōtō priest who served as a professor at the Army Officers Academy in 1934. He wrote on such topics as Confucianism, Shakyamuni, Dōgen, New Buddhism (*shin Bukkyō* 新仏教), marital restrictions for monks, and world religions.

indomitable spirit (*makeji damashii* 負けじ魂); 4. actively striving to develop; 5. being this-worldly and optimistic; 6. loving moral principles; 7. fully embodying the martial spirit; 8. loving peace; 9. being richly endowed with the power of assimilating things; 10. loving nature (1934, p. 227). He further argues that Buddhist selflessness, compassion, and requiting blessings (*hōon* 報恩) comprise three main facets of Japanese spirit as well (1934, p. 228).

TAKAI Kankai holds up four essential components of Japanese spirit: 1. seeing loyalty and filial piety as one and the same (*chūkō ippon-shugi* 忠孝一本主義); 2. worshiping ancestors (*senzo sūhai-shugi* 先祖崇拜主義); 3. viewing the imperial household as the core of the culture (*kōshitsu chūshin-shugi* 皇室中心主義); and 4. maintaining the Japanese soul while assimilating material culture from foreign lands (*wakon yōsai-shugi* 和魂洋才主義). He also claims that a distinguishing feature of Japanese Buddhism is the central role it has played in cultivating three of these four components: Buddhist funerals and memorial services, in concert with *obon* お盆 as a Buddhist form of filial piety, have secured for Buddhism the central role in ancestor worship; historical Buddhist support for the state and the interdependence of the emperor's law and Buddha's law (*ōbō buppō sōi* 王法佛法相衣) have inculcated in the Japanese greater recognition of the centrality of the emperor; and the open, integrative character of Mahayana Buddhism, especially as seen in the *Lotus Sūtra* and *honji suiijaku* theories, has contributed directly to the assimilative attitude of Japanese (1934, pp. 47–48).²⁴

Doctrinal Correspondences with Imperial Ideology

Most of the other forty-five writers join Takai in drawing correspondences between facets of imperial ideology circulating in the 1930s and specific Buddhist constructs. For example, they identify the emperor with Amida; the *kokutai* with thusness (*shinnyo* 真如; Skt. *tathatā*); Japan, the *kokutai*, and the Great Way of Shinto (*kannagara no daidō* 惟神大道) with the Pure Land; the Way of following kami (*shinzui no michi* 神隨の道) with the *Lotus Sūtra*; the cosmogonic activity of the

²⁴ Several writers emphasize Buddhist contributions to the fine arts, with Kohō Chisan stating that 80% of the national treasures in Japan are Buddhist (KOHŌ 1934, p. 61) and Katō Totsudō highlighting Buddhist elements in ordinary lives, including *Obon*, the *iroha* mnemonic poem, visits to family graves during the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, local temples with their annual cycles of rituals and ceremonies, and such common Japanese expressions as *danna* 旦那, *kigen* 機嫌, *teishu* 亭主, and *baka* 馬鹿 (KATŌ 1934, p. 2). Punning, UEMURA Kyōnin 上村教仁 offers a Japanese version of the Three Treasures (*sanbō* 三宝): the Buddha-dharma (*buppo* 仏法), guns (*teppō* 鉄砲), and wives (*nyōbō* 女房) (1934, p. 171).

imperial ancestors with Buddha's mission of constructing a spiritual kingdom (*seishin ōkoku no kensetsu* 精神王国の建設); the imperial mission (*tengyō* 天業) with bodhisattvas' work to liberate others; *Yamato damashii* with a buddha's mind of perfected wisdom and compassion (*hichi'enman naru busshin* 悲智円満なる仏心); the august *kokoro* (心 heart or mind) of the sacred emperor who looks out for the well-being of his subjects-as-children (*sekishi* 赤子) with the compassionate heart of the Buddha who responds to all suffering sentient beings as his children; the sincere mind (*sekishin* 赤心) of the imperial subject who merges with the august *kokoro* of the sacred ruler with the sincere mind of the Buddhist practitioner who takes refuge in the Buddha.

TADA Kanae²⁵ claims that the *kokutai* is the revelation of the Pure Land, and that “the emperor, occupying the most sacred position, inherits the benefits derived from the virtues of imperial ancestors and directs them to the people. The Pure Land is the source of the vow-based activity of seeking wisdom above and liberating sentient beings below. This activity of [Mahayana] vows pulses through the *kokutai*” (1934, p. 116). KUBOKAWA argues that

Like heaven and earth the imperial throne is never-ending; that is, it stands as an infinite and eternal reality, as the essence of the universe. To yearn for that eternal reality, to long for the essence of the universe, to receive its great compassion, and to become one with its great light is the highest ideal of human life and the epitome of religious faith. Shinto preaches the “Great Way of the kami” and Buddhism teaches about the “Pure Buddha Land,” both of which entail our pursuing the true daily life in which we unite with the eternal reality [called the imperial throne]. (1934, p. 16)

KATŌ Totsudō²⁶ also identifies purportedly core Japanese personality traits of aversion to wastefulness (*mottainai* 勿体ない), gratitude (*arigatai* 有難い), and sympathy (*ki no doku* 気の毒) with the Three Mental Attitudes of laity set forth in the *Upāsakaśīla-sūtra*: the mind of poverty (*hinkyūshin* 貧窮心), the mind of requiting blessings (*hōonshin* 報恩心), and the mind of merit (*kudokushin* 功德心) (1934, pp. 11–12).

²⁵ Tada Kanae 多田 鼎 (1875–1937) was an Ōtani-ha Shin priest and a follower of Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903).

²⁶ Katō Totsudō 加藤咄堂 (1870–1949) was a Buddhologist. He was active in attempts to revitalize Japanese Buddhism, and to that end he gave public lectures, started the Central Buddhist Organizations Federation (*Chūō Bukkyō dantai rengō-kai* 中央仏教団体連合会) in 1924, and published several journals. He wrote on the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, the *Vimalakīrti-nīrdeśa-sūtra*, and the *Hekiganroku* koan collection.



Correspondences with Confucianism and the Three Regalia

The *Chūō Bukkyō* writers line up Buddhist and Confucian constructs as well. Tsuboi Shōkō declares that “The Buddha-dharma does not diverge from secular law (*sehō* 世法); in fact, it is the foundation of the Five Relationships and the Five Constant Virtues” (1934, p. 130).²⁷ Ishikawa Jōshō²⁸ links the Six Perfections to the Three Universal Virtues of wisdom (Ch. *chih* 智), benevolence (Ch. *jen* 仁, also rendered as “humanity”), and courage (Ch. *yung* 勇) extolled in the *Doctrine of the Mean*: “giving” corresponds to benevolence; “morality,” “patience,” “exertion,” and “concentration” to courage; and Buddhist “wisdom” to Confucian wisdom. He also connects the Ten Good Acts to these three Confucian virtues, equating not taking life and not coveting with benevolence; not stealing, not engaging in illicit sex, not lying, not using flowery language, not slandering, not equivocating, and not giving way to anger with courage; and not holding false views with wisdom (1934, p. 271).²⁹

Several of the writers link the three Confucian virtues to the imperial regalia, a move reminiscent of the attribution of Confucian and Buddhist moral significance to the Three Regalia by Ise Shinto and Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293–1354). KATŌ Totsudō quotes Kitabatake:

The mirror possesses nothing of its own, but with an unselfish spirit illuminates all things. There is nothing, good or bad, that is not reflected in it, and its virtue is to reveal all forms with perfect fidelity. The mirror is the source of honesty. The virtue of the jewels is gentleness and yielding, and they are the source of compassion [*jihī* 慈悲]. The sword, which is the font of wisdom [*chie* 智慧], has as its virtue strength and resolution.

(1934, pp. 5–6)³⁰

Bringing in further Buddhist elements, KATŌ equates the mirror with the wisdom of the great, perfect mirror-wisdom (*daienkyōchi* 大円鏡智; Skt. *ādarsā-jñāna*), the jewel with the gem that grants wishes and dispels

²⁷ The Five Relationships (*gorin* 五倫) are between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. The Five Constant Virtues (*gojō* 五常) are benevolence (*jin* 仁), duty or righteousness (*gi* 義), propriety and proper ritual (*rei* 礼), wisdom (*chi* 智), and loyalty (*shin* 信).

²⁸ Ishikawa Jōshō 石川成章 wrote on physical geography, natural science, and Zen.

²⁹ Most of the writers who mention Confucian values explicitly in their essays take pains to note that in Japan loyalty takes precedence over filial piety (or they are fundamentally one; *chūkō ippon* 忠孝一本), and in several cases they claim that this divergence from the Chinese view is attributable to Japanese Buddhism.

³⁰ This passage was translated by Paul VARLEY 1980, p. 77.

evil (*manihōju* 摩尼宝珠), and the sword with the sword the Buddha used for subjugating demons (*gōma no riken* 降魔の利剣) (1934, p. 6). The abbot of Kiyomizu-dera, SHIMIZUDANI Zenshō,³¹ writes,

Is not Japanese Spirit the wisdom, benevolence, and courage symbolized by the Three Regalia? Wisdom, benevolence, and courage are *Yamato damashii*, and... the supreme authority who rules the Japanese state must be a great figure of divine character who has perfected the intellect, emotion, and will (*chi-jō-i* 智情意).

The one who has perfected this is the bodhisattva who has fully practiced the Six Perfections. (1934, p. 118)

TANIGUCHI outlines his view of the correspondences between the regalia, the three Confucian values, and Buddhism (as well as Platonic Ideas) in two schematic diagrams (1934, pp. 99, 102) linked by *Yamato-damashii* (see figure above).

Judging from his schema, Taniguchi deems Japanese spirit and *Yamato damashii* to be inclusive of the three Confucian virtues, the Three Regalia, and virtually all of Japanese Buddhism, though he does not explain how his multifaceted reification of Japanese spirit might be instantiated in individual Japanese subjects.

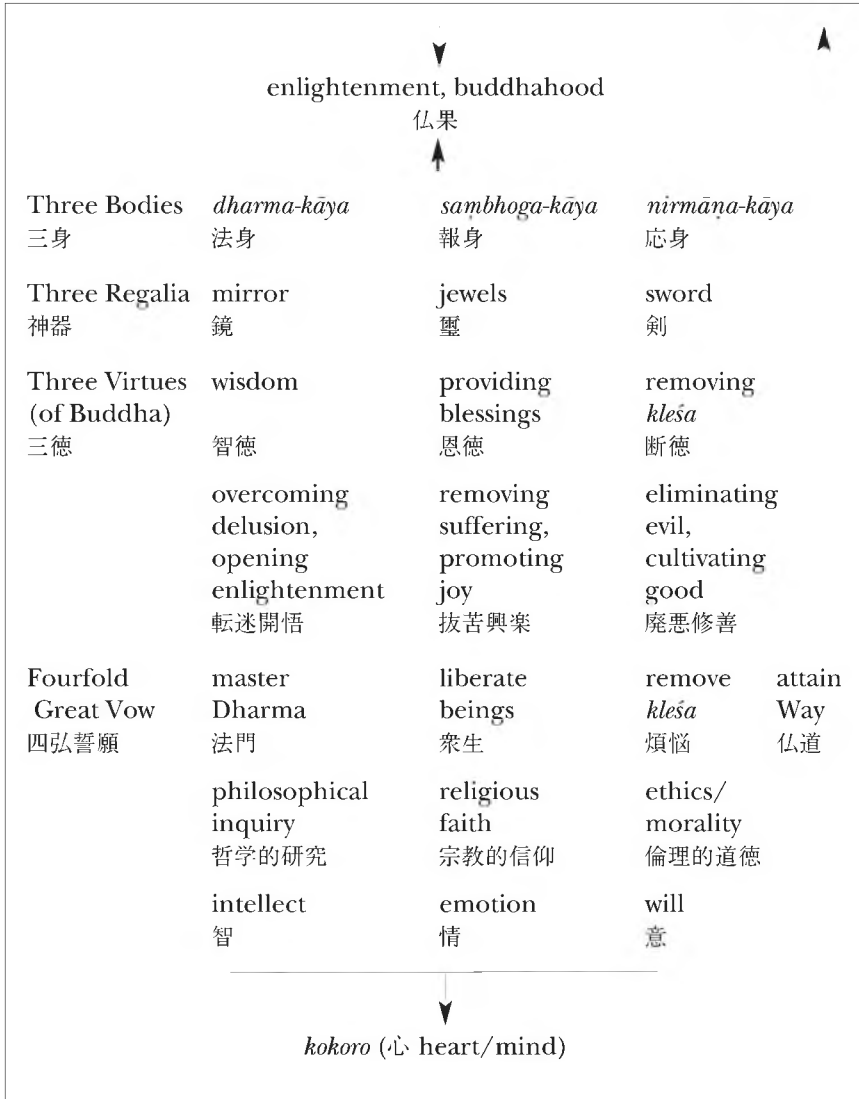
In a similar chart Kubokawa links the Three Regalia with, amongst other things, the three bodies (Skt. *trikāya*) of the Buddha, the three virtues of the Buddha, and the Fourfold Great Vow (see below).

About his chart KUBOKAWA comments, “The functioning of the three virtues of the Buddha follows the same track as our Japanese spirit, which gives expression to the Imperial Throne in the form of the Three Regalia and consummates the imperial mission that is coeval with heaven and earth” (1934, p. 18).

Zen master HARADA Sogaku³² parallels Kubokawa and Taniguchi in arguing that the Three Regalia, “when categorized in terms of personality, correspond to wisdom, benevolence, and courage; and when categorized psychologically, they correspond to intellect, emotion, and will” (1934, p. 290). In terms of Buddhism, HARADA views the Three Regalia as corresponding to the three sections of the Eightfold Path (morality, concentration, and wisdom), the three bodies of the Buddha, and the three virtues of the Buddha (1934, p. 290).

³¹ Shimizudani Zenshō 清水谷善照 (1881–?) was a Tendai priest. Throughout his career he actively fostered worship of Kannon. In 1920 he founded an organization to coordinate the thirty-three temples constituting the Kannon pilgrimage circuit in the Kansai area.

³² Harada Sogaku 原田祖岳 (1871–1961) was a Sōtō priest who did koan practice with Rinzai masters and laid the groundwork for the modern Zen movement, Sanbōkyōdan.



No-self, Blessings, and Requiring Blessings

In drawing correspondences between Buddhist doctrines and elements in the imperial ideology, the writers lift up several doctrines above the rest. First, many of them focus on the doctrine of no-self, linking or equating it with such constructs as *magokoro* (真心 sincerity; literally, true heart or true mind), the imperial way, and “obliterating the self and serving the public” (*messhi hōkō* 滅私奉公). As mentioned earlier, FURUKAWA claims that the notion of no-self, together with com-

passion and requiting blessings, is one of the three main characteristics of Japanese spirit (1934, p. 228). In his essay, Waseda University professor ITO Shizuyasu writes,

Magokoro is something absolute that transcends benefit and cost, gain and loss, and it is the *kokoro* of taking absolute refuge in one's sovereign and nation (*kunkoku* 君国). This *kokoro* of taking absolute refuge is the *kokoro* of no-self. When one empties oneself, rids oneself of self-concern, serves the public, and gives oneself completely to the sovereign and the nation, one realizes the virtue of no-self. No-self is none other than the great self (*daiga* 大我). To eliminate the self and be faithful to the public is to give great life to the self. The Great Way of No-Self is the Great Way of Heaven and Earth. Ultimately, the Imperial Way, or King's Way (*ōdō* 王道), is precisely this Great Way of No-Self. And this Great Way of No-Self, this spirit of absolute refuge, is the fundamental spirit of our Japanese Buddhism and the ultimate principle of the Mahayana.

(1934, p. 74)

Many of the writers also focus on the notion of *on* 恩, past favors or blessings and the indebtedness incurred because of them, particularly as conveyed by the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Blessings or Four Debts (*shion* 四恩), which in most texts consist of blessings from and indebtedness to the ruler, one's parents, all other sentient beings, and the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). For example, MASUNAGA Reihō³³ writes,

As far as I can determine, the life of a single human being depends upon the power of countless other people. Through the sincerity of those many people we are living. We must realize this immense *on* and feel our responsibility toward society. The world of *on* is the world of the heart (*kokoro*) that looks back at the foundation of one's existence. What is it in our actual lives that leads us to feel this *on*? It is none other than the family (*ie* 家) as the primary unit in society. The family is an existence with the absolute significance of continuing the parents-to-children transmission from the past into the future. In this respect the nation and society become one with our lives.... We come to realize the importance of transcending the world of self-interest, relativity, and self-attachment and live in

³³ A Sōtō priest, Masunaga Reihō 增永靈鳳 (d. 1981) was working in 1934 as a lecturer at Komazawa University, his alma mater. A prolific writer, Masunaga published on Dōgen, Sōtō Zen, Zen history, Japanese spirit, sutras, and Zen records. His translation of Dōgen's *Zuimonki* is entitled *A Primer of Sōtō Zen* (Honolulu: East-West Press, 1971).

the world of *on*. We Japanese must take this perspective as our most conclusive view of human life (*jinseikan* 人生觀). Emerging from this [world of *on*] is also the spirit of worshipping ancestors and revering the great people of our nation.

(1934, p. 257)

Similarly, IMANARI Jikō claims that Buddhism, by introducing the doctrine of cause and effect across past, present, and future (*sanze inga setsu* 三世因果説), “taught the Japanese monistic inevitability in terms of the harmonious vertical and horizontal relationships between the people in society, including the sovereign, parents and children, and others.... On the basis of cause and effect through past, present, and future, the Four Blessings become the inevitable expression of peoples’ life aspirations, and necessarily emerging from this is the unity of loyalty and filial piety as well as the worship of ancestors” (1934, p. 147). IMANARI also writes, “Because Buddhists believe in the Four Blessings and make no mistakes about their ordering, they do not become anti-social or anti-state and they do not oppose the imperial household. For this reason, they inevitably practice social morality” (1934, p. 148).

In part what Masunaga and Imanari are expounding is the requiting of blessings (*hōon* 報恩; sometimes rendered as “repayment of debt”), a concept that appears repeatedly in the forty-five articles. After setting forth the ten main characteristics of Japanese spirit listed earlier, FURUKAWA argues that “The notion of requiting blessings nourished such elements of Japanese spirit as loyalty to the ruler and love of country, reverence toward gods and worship of ancestors, and love of morality, peace, and nature” (1934, p. 228). ŌTA argues similarly that “Japanese spirit is the merging and unification of Japan’s spirit of loyalty and filial piety and Buddhism’s spirit of requiting blessings” (1934, p. 194). KUBOKAWA claims that

The standard for praxis in Mahayana Buddhism is the philosophy of requiting blessings. All of the unremitting practices (*gyōji* 行持) of the Mahayana bodhisattva—seeking wisdom above, liberating sentient beings below, making the Fourfold Great Vow—are held together by the philosophy of requiting blessings. The path in which we Mahayana Buddhist citizens “guard and maintain the prosperity of our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth”³⁴ is none other than the path of exerting ourselves to base our national defense, diplomacy, and industry on the requiting of blessings, to contribute to

³⁴ This expression is from the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education.

everlasting world peace, and to construct an eternal land of joy
for humankind. (1934, p. 21)

SUGITANI Taizan³⁵ argues that Buddhism constitutes a “doctrine of requiting blessings” (*hōon-shugi* 報恩主義) that contributed directly to the uniquely Japanese notion of the nation centered on loyalty and filial piety (*chūkō chūshin no kokka kannen* 忠孝中心の国家観念), and “conduct that is based on the belief that one ought to know one’s blessings and requite them with virtue (*toku* 徳) takes the form of loyalty to the ruler, filial piety toward one’s parents, and the civic morality of serving the public (*hōkō hōshi* 奉公奉仕)” (SUGITANI 1934, pp. 67–68).

This 1930s emphasis on blessings and indebtedness was nothing new, for the concept figured prominently in Buddhist reflection during the Meiji period and before.³⁶ For example, drawing on Rennyō’s claims that “the emperor’s law is foundational and benevolence and duty come first” (*ōbō ihon jingi isen* 王法為本仁義為先) and that one should “on one’s brow wear the emperor’s law and within the depths of one’s heart treasure Buddha’s law,” Nishi Hongan-ji head abbot Kōnyō articulated in 1871 the hope that Shin priests and laity “will not err in regard to the dharma-principle of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths; that in this life they will be loyal subjects of the empire and reciprocate the unlimited imperial blessings [*on*]; and that in the life to come, they will attain birth in the [Pure Land in the] west and escape eternal suffering.”³⁷ In his stance Kōnyō links the doctrine of *on* to the theory of two truths (*shinzoku nitai* 真俗二諦), to the doctrine of the unity of the emperor’s law and Buddha’s law (*ōbō buttpō ichinyō* 王法佛法一如), and to Rennyō’s validation of imperial law as fundamental (*ōbō ihon*), a linkage that appears in several of the 1934 articles by later Shin figures as well.

D. T. Suzuki

One of the contributors to the special issue was D.T. Suzuki, whose cultural nationalism has recently been called into question (see SHARF

³⁵ In 1934 Sugitani Taizan 杉谷泰山 (1867–?) was employed as an educational consultant for the Mitsui family. Prior to that he served on the faculty of the Second Higher School. Sugitani wrote on and translated works by Fichte and Schopenhauer.

³⁶ Winston DAVIS sketches the appropriation of the doctrine of *on* in the Meiji period not only by conservative Buddhist thinkers but also by the New Buddhists, who “emphasized not the ‘return of *on*’ due to the emperor or the nation but that owed to the Three Treasures and to ‘all sentient beings,’ that is, to society itself” (1992, p. 170).

³⁷ Quoted in ROGERS and ROGERS 1990, pp. 8–9. The quote was partially adapted for terminological consistency in this article.

1995, FAURE 1993, and VICTORIA 1997). Interestingly, compared to his peers in the journal, Suzuki comes across as a moderate. In his three-page essay he points out that all countries, India and China included, have their own respective spirits (*seishin* 精神); that Japanese spirit “broadly encompasses things” and hence should not be construed in narrow, exclusivistic ways; that Japanese spirit is something moral while religion properly exists in a different realm unrestricted by morality; and that Shinto ideologues need to reflect on the xenophobia that can occur when *kannagara no michi* is lifted up as a kind of stimulant in times of crisis. Although Suzuki’s article does not express resistance to the whole enterprise of the special issue of the journal (that stance emerges only in the piece by Ichikawa Hakugen), at no point in his article does SUZUKI (1934) mention the emperor or the imperial system, and he concludes his essay by contrasting xenophobic versions of Japanese spirit with the subsumptive and magnanimous version he is sketching.³⁸

Contributions to Imperial Ideology

While the pressure on Japanese Buddhism in the 1930s does not appear to have been severe enough to merit the label “second *hai-butsu kishaku*,”³⁹ the *Chūō Bukkyō* writers’ response to that pressure might merit the label “second *honji suijaku*,” or simply, the second, third, or fourth round of ongoing syncretism in Japanese religious history. In this modern instance, the writers linked Buddhist doctrines to Shintoist and Confucian notions circulating in the charged air of early-Shōwa Japan. While heirs to a long history of interreligious amalgamation in Japan, they drew correspondences, in general, not between buddhas (or bodhisattvas) and kami, but between buddhas and one kami, or, more broadly, between Buddhist doctrines and an imperial ideology of recent provenance.⁴⁰

From the Meiji period, government officials, particularly in the Ministry of Education and the Home Ministry, as well as Shinto

³⁸ It is worth noting here, however, that Suzuki’s argument that Japanese spirit is moral and not religious echoes the contemporaneous claim that (State) Shinto is not a religion (*hishūkyō-setsu* 非宗教説); this claim shielded the formulators of State Shinto from charges of infringement upon religious freedom and contributed to the universalizing and naturalizing of the Shinto-based imperial ideology.

³⁹ I argue this case in an upcoming article, “Buddhism and the ‘Spiritual Mobilization’ of the Japanese, 1912–1945.”

⁴⁰ Given the centrality of the emperor in 1934, some of the writers imply that the emperor occupies the position of “original ground” (*honji*) and the Buddhist elements are the “residual traces” (*suijaku*).

thinkers, military figures, and local leaders had participated in the formulation of a set of doctrines, cultic practices, moral values, and institutional structures serving to elevate the emperor as a sacred locus of citizens' allegiance and obedience in a rapidly modernizing and militarizing state. By the time of Miyai's attack on Buddhism in 1933, the conceptual framework lifting up the emperor had become dominant and was fast on its way to becoming hegemonic. As Carol GLUCK has outlined, "The 1930s, the decade in which the term '*tennō-sei*' [天皇制 imperial system] was coined, was also the one in which its ideological orthodoxy rigidified" and took on an "increasingly coercive nature" (1985, p. 281).

It is important to note here that the reigning imperial ideology, though increasingly rigid and coercive, was neither monolithic at any time nor unchanging through time. In an observation that holds for imperial Japan, Terry EAGLETON writes, "Ideologies are usually internally complex, differentiated formations, with conflicts between their various elements which need to be continually renegotiated and resolved" (1991, p. 45). That being said, as expressed in imperial edicts, edification campaigns, ethics textbooks in the schools, and other sources, the core of the imperial ideology consisted of several recurring themes, foremost of which were notions of the cosmogonic and axiological function of the imperial ancestors; an unbroken dynastic lineage stretching from Amaterasu to the current emperor; the emperor's status as a "manifest" or "living" kami; Japan as a "great family nation-state" (*daikazoku kokka* 大家族国家) led by the patriarchal emperor; an enduring national essence or *kokutai*; the emperor's solicitude as expressed through imperial edicts and government policies; and such values as obedience, loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice, and service on the part of imperial subjects.

Preeminent in this ideological formation was the notion of benevolent emperors bestowing favors or benefits on indebted subjects who were educated to respond to those blessings by expressing gratitude, loyalty, and a willingness to sacrifice themselves for the emperor (or the "public," i.e., the state).⁴¹ The emperor's benevolent concern and blessings were termed, respectively, *jīn* 仁 or *jīn'ai* 仁愛, and *on* or *on-taku* 恩沢; and the grateful response was conveyed by such constructs as "loyalty to the emperor and love of country" (*chūkun aikoku*), "obliterating the self and serving the public" (*messhi hōkō*), and "offering oneself courageously to the state and thus guarding and maintaining

⁴¹ Insofar as it centers on a kami providing benefits to grateful and worshipful humans, this construct trades on historical patterns of *genze niyaku* 現世利益 (this-worldly benefits) in Japanese religious life.

the prosperity of the Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth.”⁴²

The Buddhist authors in the 1934 special issue of *Chūō Bukkyō* generally accepted this notion of a symbiotic interrelationship between the emperor’s blessings and his subjects’ gratitude, and they validated and valorized it by highlighting Buddhist doctrines congruent with it: the Four Blessings, the requiting of blessings, and no-self. They valorized other main components of the imperial ideology as well, expounding on (and celebrating) the *kokutai*, *Yamato damashii*, and Japanese spirit as requested by Miyai, and, additionally, the imperial mission, ancestor worship, the Three Regalia, the three virtues in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the emperor as national patriarch of the “great family nation-state.” Simply put, they plugged Buddhism into the core of the imperial ideology.⁴³

Reification and Legitimation

Though the net effect of their essays on other Japanese is impossible to measure, at the very least their statements buttressed the philosophical claims and social values codified in the main “texts” of the imperial ideology, such as the 1882 Imperial Rescript to Soldiers, the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, and ethics textbooks (*shūshinsho* 修身書) in the schools. In responding to Miyai’s call for Ōtani Kōshō to clarify his view of the *kokutai*, they contributed to the ongoing reification of the *kokutai* as the essence of Japan, a process that found its fullest expression three years later in the consummate text of the imperial ideology, the Ministry of Education’s *Kokutai no hongī* (Fundamental principles of the national essence). Their discourse also contributed to the ongoing construction of what by the end of the decade stood as a de facto state religion, which, in the language of Clifford GEERTZ (1973 p. 93), provided *models of reality* (the emperor, as the religious ultimate, reigning over Japan—the land of the gods [*shinkoku* 神国]—in an unbroken lineage stretching back to the cosmogonic activity of the divine imperial ancestors) and *models for human action* (in terms of obedience, loyalty, filial piety, love of country, self-sacrifice, the requiting of blessings, and proper ritual praxis).

⁴² This last expression, *giyū hō ni hō shi motte tenjōmukyū no kōun o fuyoku su* (義勇公ニ奉シ以て天壤無窮ノ皇運ヲ扶翼ス), appears in the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education.

⁴³ Several writers, albeit in the minority, clearly advocated the road down which Japan would head later in the decade. In his article, Zen master HARADA Sogaku wrote, “It is my hope that we implement fascist government for ten years, and then, after training citizens well, return to constitutional government” (1934, p. 293).

Expressed differently, the majority of these Buddhists helped legitimate the imperial system. In the words of Peter BERGER, “Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference” (1990, p. 33). With few exceptions the forty-five Buddhist writers not only supported Shintoist arguments about the sacred ontological status of the imperial household and the cosmogonic role of the imperial ancestors, but shored up those arguments by deploying conceptual resources in Buddhist ontology and cosmology as they linked, for example, the emperor with Amida, and Japan with the Pure Land.

The Malleability of Buddhist Constructs

By setting forth arguments that contributed to the legitimation of the central imperial system and its foundational ideology, the *Chūō Bukkyō* Buddhists could refute claims by Miyai and other Shintoists that Buddhism was a subversive, foreign “other” within the gates of Japanese culture and the national polity. In their alignment of Buddhism with the reigning ideology, however, the writers either ignored transcendent or universalist elements of the tradition (such as compassion and the bodhisattva ideal) or gave those elements a parochial reading, a reading that stands in contrast with alternative readings by, for example, postwar Japanese Buddhist thinkers and contemporary “engaged Buddhists” in the West.

Without doubt, certain concepts—such as compassion, *on*, no-self, dependent co-arising, and karma—can lend themselves to multiple interpretations and ethical stances. In a sense, these doctrines are ethically neutral, or simply malleable,⁴⁴ and other, non-Buddhist factors have guided Buddhists’ interpretations of the doctrines and thereby shaped their particular ethical stances. This point finds clear support when we compare, for example, how Japanese Buddhists in the 1930s and “engaged Buddhists” in the 1990s interpret doctrines like *on* and no-self. The former group of thinkers used these doctrines to set forth an ethic of obligatory self-sacrifice for an increasingly hierarchical and totalitarian state, while the latter group has used them to articulate an ethic of egalitarian interrelationship in democratic communities inclusive of other species. While early-Shōwa Japanese Buddhists and contemporary “engaged Buddhists” may have tapped the same doc-

⁴⁴ This may hold for certain mental states, too, whether *satori* (awakening), *samādhi* (concentration), or *sati* (mindfulness).

trines, the ethical reflection of the former was highly influenced by the religious and political milieu in the early 1930s, just as views of the latter are saturated with originally non-Buddhist notions of democracy, human rights, political and legal equality, and the value of environmental sustainability. It seems worthwhile to consider the extent to which these ethical stances derive from resources inherent in Buddhism and the extent to which they are influenced by, if not derived from, non-Buddhist sources.⁴⁵

While hardly a phenomenon limited to Japanese Buddhism, the multivalency of Buddhist concepts and the grafting of Confucianism or Western liberal thought onto Buddhism prompt the question of whether any components of Buddhism point inexorably to specific moral stances and preclude other, divergent, and perhaps even contesting stances. As seen in biblical traditions, even such apparently universal, deontological resources as the Ten Commandments gain conflicting interpretations, and this is also the case with arguably the nearest Buddhist equivalent, the Five Precepts (Skt. *pañca-sīla*).

Further Conclusions

The Buddhist apologists in *Chūō Bukkyō* portrayed Buddhism as a young, passive, acquiescing female who is married to an older, active, directive male in the form of the emperor, and they tied Buddhist doctrines into the ethos being spun around the emperor in the 1930s. Both the image of an acquiescing Buddhism and the overall discourse of the apologists reflect what Ichikawa Hakugen and others in the postwar period have termed the “accommodationism” (*junnō-shugi* 順応主義) of Japanese Buddhism, as well as its “realism” or “actuality-

⁴⁵ Many “engaged Buddhists” draw from non-Buddhist traditions and then look in Buddhist sources—texts, practices, institutions—for support of their eclectic stances. The search in Buddhist sources for elements that support stances deriving largely from non-Buddhist sources (a kind of eisegesis as opposed to exegesis) has been critiqued cogently by Ian Harris in a series of articles in *Religion* and the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. In light of his and similar critiques, engaged Buddhists might ask themselves, “How *Buddhist* are our stances? How true are our ethical arguments to Buddhist sources, textual and otherwise?” In raising this issue I am not assuming that there is a true or pure Buddhism, nor that, even if there were such a thing, one would have to stay wedded to it without reinterpreting it on the basis of extra-Buddhist ideas. Both reinterpretation of Buddhist ideas and assimilation of non-Buddhist ideas (and practices) have occurred throughout Buddhist history, and most Buddhists, with the exception of “critical Buddhists” in Japan and other voices in the minority, have not taken major issue with this practice. Even so, contemporary reinterpreters might grant their ethical argumentation more rigor by noting when they have incorporated extra-Buddhist ideas rather than reading things into Buddhist sources or bending Buddhism to fit their stances.

ism” (*genjitsu-shugi* 現実主義) in the sense of the valorization of actuality by equating actual phenomena with true reality. Perhaps SUGITANI Taizan was most correct when he claimed that Japanese Buddhism is a “doctrine of harmonious obedience throughout the realm” (*tenka wajunshugi* 天下和順主義) (1934, p. 65) and that one of its chief characteristics is its ability to fuse with other things (*yūgōsei* 融合性)” (1934, p. 66).⁴⁶

Of course, the accommodationist mobilization of doctrine in the 1930s was nothing unprecedented: the *Chūō Bukkyō* apologists were continuing a long tradition of cooperation between Buddhist institutions and the Japanese state, in large part by tapping and stretching the religio-political lexicon that this cooperation had engendered over the centuries. In drawing their doctrinal correspondences, these writers in effect offered a twentieth-century version of “the unity of the emperor’s law and the Buddha’s law” and a theoretical grounding for a new “Buddhism for the protection of the state.”

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⁴⁶ Ironically, while in this passage Sugitani avers that Buddhism is not a doctrine of militarism or “invasionism,” he also writes that Japan

takes as an ideal the co-existence and co-prosperity of self and other. Truly, this is none other than the bodhisattva path of the perfected benefiting of self and other (*jiri rita enman no bosatsudō* 自利利他円満の菩薩道). Japan’s efforts to bring about the independence of Manchuria have been for the sake of co-existence, co-prosperity, and peace in Asia. Peace in Asia will soon promote the welfare of China. [But] China does not fully comprehend our country’s Mahayana spirit, and because the League of Nations has little understanding of the situation, our country had no choice but to withdraw from the League (SUGITANI 1934, p. 66).

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