

Buddhist Contributions to the Japanese Ethic

A people's ethic can be treated in its more general nature as a view on world and life or in its more specific aspects of concrete human behavior. Behavior is necessarily determined by the view on life and world of which it is the tangible reflection in man's daily life, requiring concrete decisions and acts in which the human subject is involved as a person and as a responsible human being.

The Japanese ethic is not easy to analyze. It is part of the totality of culture and it participates in the complexity of its phenomena. Japanese culture is in itself a living reality, tracing its origins back to a dim and distant past, going through a series of transformation processes during so many centuries up to the present day and crossfertilized by so many Asian continental and Western influences.

Moreover, in searching for the Buddhist contributions to the Japanese ethic, I must try to isolate "one" particular section of the Japanese reality and define the influence of "one" religious stream on the ethical sphere of Japan. This is more difficult than to sift out how the main streams of Japan's religions and ideologies "all together" have stamped Japan's ethic.

Here I give an attempt to clarify how Buddhism has contributed to the Japanese view on world and life with their ultimate questions, and reference will be made to the concrete behavior of the Japanese people.

I. *Japanese religion and ethics: discrepancy between faith and action?*

Before entering into the specific subject of the Buddhist contribution to the Japanese ethic, I must touch briefly on a rather unusual phenomenon often mentioned by scholars of Japanese religion and culture. It seems that in the process of their development, the Japanese religions, though giving man a view on world and life, have not emphasized his concrete deeds. In other words, religion and ethics have different foci. Japanese religions move more on the level of the inner sphere of man's problems and take care of his worries and anxieties by remolding his mind; they aim at the realization of inner peace and security in facing the problems of life. The Confucian ideology takes care of man's behavior and thus functions as an ethic in the strict sense of the word. In this context, Christianity, stressing the integration of religious and ethical principles, seems to be for Japan a religion with a structure different from that of Buddhism and Shinto.¹ If this division of labor between religion and ethics is right, then we come necessarily to the conclusion that Japan experiences a discrepancy between faith and action.

It seems to me, however, that this opinion does not fit completely into the picture of Japan, past and present. Though it is true that a metaphysical basis for concrete ethics is largely lacking in Shinto, it was mainly during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867) that Confucianism acted overtly as a guide in ethical matters. The reason is that it suited the state ideal which the Tokugawa regime wanted to bring about, namely, creation and maintenance of a stable political and social order based on a firm ethical code.² Overrating the historical role given to Confucianism by the Tokugawa shōgunate can lead one to conclude too hastily that the Japanese have no other moral sources. I think that the Japanese ethic is much more; it is a composite totality of religious and ideological factors. Even those ideological factors

¹ Charles A. Moore, ed., *The Japanese Mind: Essentials of Japanese Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967), p. 297; Kishimoto Hideo, "Some Japanese Cultural Traits and Religion", *Idem.* p. 113-117.

² Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 615-619.

that are regarded as purely humanitarian have at least their remote origins in a religious ground.

Was it not precisely Hōnen (1133-1212), famous originator of the Japanese Pure Land Buddhist sect, who hammered untiringly away on the necessity of a good moral life against those who abused Amida's mercy as a pretext to give in to sin?³ And what about the role of Shinran (1173-1262), Hōnen's most brilliant disciple and originator of Japanese True Pure Land Buddhism, who, as he became more and more aware of his own sinfulness and of the decadent character of his time, became also more and more anxious about his own salvation. Has his influence not determined the concrete life of millions of Japanese even today?⁴ In the same way, many New Religions (*Shinkōshūkyō*) link faith and ethics closely together and urge their adherents to stick to modes of behavior consistent with the faith content of their religion. They teach also that religion, if not connected with daily life so that they become one, is without any value. It is in this sense that we have to understand, for example, the social involvement of Rissho Koseikai (Society to Establish Righteousness and to Foster Fellowship). In the same way we have to understand the attempt of Soka Gakkai (Value Creating Association) and its political arm Kommeito (Clean Government Party) in their interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism to deal with Japan's social and political problems, whatever resistance this may have provoked among other Japanese.⁵

Neither does the distinction — that religion and ethics are two separate domains — apply to the modern trends of Japanese Buddhism in general. Many forces are at work to bring Buddhism into the midst of life. There is no other explanation for the endeavors of modern Buddhist thinkers to go back to the core message of the Buddha and to point to its relevance for the responsibility of the modern Buddhist man; today's Buddhist thinkers have a serious sense of solidarity with the conditions of Japanese

³ Henri de Lubac, *Amida* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955), p. 188-190.

⁴ Alfred Bloom, *The Life of Shinran Shonin: The Journey to Self-Acceptance* (Leiden: Brill, 1968).

⁵ Alfred Bloom, "Buddhism, Nature and the Environment", *The Eastern Buddhist (New Series)* (Kyoto), V/1 (1972), p. 116.

society and the whole world.⁶ We may therefore conclude that the domain of Japanese religion includes also the concrete ethical aspects of life and that Japanese religion and ethics are not that strictly separated from each other; they are rather interwoven.

II. *Background of the Japanese Ethic as View on World and Life*

Here "background" means a kind of matrix or a basic layer wherefrom the Japanese religions have unfolded themselves and through which all of them are molded; it goes without saying that this background has close connections with the fundamental attitudes of Shinto, historically Japan's first religion.

This background is basically an encompassing view of reality, a persistent characteristic of the Japanese that can be found all throughout their history. There is no splitting up of reality into many logical categories; the Japanese certainly react spontaneously in refusing to accept strict dichotomies or dualisms. This applies not only to their view on Absolute Reality, be it the *Kami* (the gods of Shinto) or the Buddha, but also to the domain of knowledge, where strict rational thinking is avoided. Applying this to the category of the "Holy", the net result is, as Nakamura states, that the Absolute is anchored within this phenomenal world and that "this-worldliness" is of the utmost importance.⁷

We can see this already in Japanese mythology. All mythology refers to a stage of consciousness that renders reflective what before was only "lived"; this reflective character, however, is not scientific or philosophical, for it does not fully objectify reality. Rather, it participates very intensively in the "lived reality" so that the things expressed in it must be felt much more than understood.⁸ Japanese mythology, necessarily eschewing strict rationality, displays few of the workings of a metaphysical imagination and gives a resounding priority to things of this world; there is

⁶ Heinrich Dumoulin, "Buddhism in Modern Japan", in his *Buddhism in the Modern World* (New York: Collier Books, 1976), p. 223-239, esp. p. 228-231; also his *Christianity meets Buddhism* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1974), p. 59-62.

⁷ Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1968), p. 350-372.

⁸ Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1972), p. 245; Hubertus Halbfas, *Religion* (Stuttgart/Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1976), p. 51.

no ontological gulf dividing man and *Kami* into fundamentally different categories; man and *Kami* are basically the same; the *Kami*-ity dwells in man and everyone is a potential *Kami*.⁹ From this it follows that the Japanese are basically interested in this-world-as-such, they are deeply involved in this-their-world and appreciate it immensely. No wonder, then, that Western technology, with its priority on the unfolding of the possibilities of this world, was eagerly accepted in the Japan of the Meiji era (1868-1912), and it meshed very well with the Japanese consciousness; it is not at all miraculous that technology brought about in Japan a high degree of modernization in a very short time.

Reflecting further on Japanese mythology, we do not find ideas of a basic alternative to values: this phenomenal world is a harmonious reality; human life fits into the larger context of nature, man need not divorce himself from his natural surroundings. As a matter of fact, present-day Japanese also long to live in harmony with nature and the realities offered by man's natural surroundings and they find their own experience to be natural and good. There is a deep appreciation of nature in Japan and of things in terms of their facilitation or inhibition of human life; people are concerned only to isolate harmful effects from the rest of their life.¹⁰ As there is no basic alternative to values, there is also no idea of an Absolute Reality strictly separated from man or firmly fixed in its transcendence. One should not wonder that even today the question "Do you believe in the existence of God as a person?" sounds strange to the Japanese because of its purely Western and predominantly Christian content; the only answer that can be expected from a Japanese who has only vague ideas about Christianity is "I do not know."¹¹

The same applies to the realm of concrete ethics. Mythology shows that good and evil are not opposed in an elemental dualism. The basic layer of Shinto sees man as fundamentally good, for he is a child of the *Kami*. Hence, from its early beginnings up to now the Japanese consciousness of sin lacks depth. Words like

⁹ John C. Pelzel, "Human Nature in the Japanese Myths", in Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively, eds., *Personality in Japanese History* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), p. 44, 49; Sokyō Ono, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Tokyo: Bridgeway Press, 1962), p. 103.

¹⁰ Pelzel, "Human Nature in the Japanese Myths", p. 46.

¹¹ Fernando M. Basabe, *Religious Attitudes of Japanese Men: A Sociological Survey* (Tokyo: Sophia University/Tuttle, 1968, p. 109-121.

tsumi (offense, abomination, sin), *kegare* (defilement), and *ashi* (bad) have to be understood as a lack of harmony and beauty that can be restored in various ways by purification in whatever way, be it through ritual cleansing or polite apologizing. Man's nature is good; he is a being destined to succeed; his natural dispositions are also good and are not suppressed unduly, and there is little inclination to severe asceticism. In early Shinto all evil was considered to be caused primarily by external factors and present-day Shinto holds that evil comes from without, like an intruder.¹²

Japanese society has also promoted the realization of harmony through a heavy stress on the group. It is undeniable that the Japanese individual thinks of himself as part of a greater whole so that in fact the rules of the group to a large degree determine individual life. The observance of group norms has to be respected in terms of a mutuality defined much more by the sensibilities of the total group than by rational categories. In other words, Japanese society is such that it does not demonstrate a sharp distinction between the individual-subject in relation to the group-object. Moore calls this "anti-individualism",¹³ a term I would like to complete by the nuance of a "certain impersonalism". I would also add immediately that this impersonalism is being remedied little by little, especially since the Second World War, through Western and Christian influences.

This is a roughly drawn outline of the general basic layer of Japan. Although great changes have taken place and are still occurring throughout this country, especially because of the presence of Western technology, the Japanese ethic has kept a continuity with the past. In using the word "past", I did not intend at all to exalt bygone golden ages; it would be wrong indeed to suffer from a nostalgia for things that once existed but have now faded away. "Past" refers here to basic realities that are embedded much more in the unconscious than in the conscious level of man. It is from this basic layer that man's view on life, his concrete behavior and his culture is molded throughout history, included the multiple cross-fertilizations from outside. Man him-

¹² Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p.13; Ono, *o.c.*, p. 106.

¹³ Moore, "Editor's Supplement: The Enigmatic Japanese Mind", in *The Japanese Mind*, p. 299-300.

self constantly reshapes and recreates in reference to this basic layer and fed by new ideas that themselves will be remolded by this basic stratum. This point could be further elaborated through a study of religious transformation in Japan, but I have to limit myself here to the Buddhist contribution to the Japanese ethic.¹⁴

Buddhism itself was once a foreign religion to Japan. After its introduction by Korean immigrants, it was accepted by the powerful Soga-clan, worked its way up into the imperial court and was favored in the beginning of the seventh century by Prince Shōtoku Taishi (574-622). Traditional Japanese religious history grants an extremely great role to Shōtoku Taishi, but recent studies reduce his role with regards to Buddhism to more moderate proportions.¹⁵ From its arrival on, Buddhism was transplanted in Japanese soil and through a process of japanization became a truly Japanese Buddhism, modifying and deepening the Japanese ethic. Its contribution in this area can be discerned in different aspects of Japanese thought and concrete behavior, only some of which can be treated here.

III. *Buddhist Contribution to Japanese Views on Ultimate Reality*

Buddhism acknowledges the presence of the Ultimate Reality within this phenomenal world. Introduced for the first time in the sixth century and practised by the Soga-clan and Korean immigrants, Buddhism seems to have been at that time little more than a Buddhism adapted to Central and East Asian shamanism and ancestors belief; statues of the Buddha and *Miroku* (*Maitreya*) were simply accepted as new *Kami* added to the local ones. This initial Buddhism left the Japanese ancestors belief and shamanism intact; it was thus rather an extension of very early Shinto, adding to it the glitter of a kind of savior figure, like for example *Miroku*.¹⁶ As the Japanese background reveals that the Absolute Reality is anchored within this world, that *Kami* and man are

¹⁴ For a further elaboration, Ernest D. Piryms, *Japan en het Christendom: naar de Overstijging van een Dilemma* (Tiel/ Utrecht: Lannoo, 1971), Vol. I, p. 3-287; Vol. II, p. 266-306; summarized in "Japan and Christianity: Towards the Overcoming of a Dilemma", *The Japan Missionary Bulletin* (Tokyo), Vol. XXVII (1973), p. 652-658, 702-709; Vol. XXVIII (1974), p. 57-62; also in *Oriens Studies* nr. 3, 1974.

¹⁵ A most vigorous thesis, demythologizing Shōtoku Taishi, has been elaborated by J. H. Kamstra, *Encounter or Syncretism: The Initial Growth of Japanese Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 350; Kitagawa, *o.c.*, p. 24.

basically the same, and that the *Kami*-ity dwells in every Japanese, the way was paved for the acceptance and transformation of several aspects of the Buddhist Ultimate Reality.

Let us consider first the view on life after death. Buddhism gradually gave its own color to life hereafter. The early Japanese had but dim ideas of realms in the universe, vaguely linked up with the hereafter — the High Plain of Heaven is very similar to Japan, itself a small-scale reflection of the macrocosmos. One of the first notable Buddhist influences, broadening the Japanese understanding of life after death, came about through worship of the earliest Buddhist statues. The *Tushita* Heaven (Heaven of the Satisfied), a paradise connected with the cult of *Miroku*, refined Japan's naive ideas on life hereafter. A further development can be seen in the *Tenjukoku Mandara* (the Mandara of the Land of Long Life in Heaven), preserved in the Hōryū complex in Nara; it is a portrayal of the hereafter wherein Prince Shōtoku's existence after death is depicted. The medieval devotional Buddhism of Hōnen and Shinran developed more fully the idea of the Western Paradise or the Pure Land, a special place reserved by the merciful *Amida* for those who invoked confidently his name and where anyone could enjoy eternal bliss. The Pure Land and the True Pure Land Buddhist movements contributed immensely to Japan's religious development, deeply shaping the life of millions of people and bringing them hope for a continuous afterdeath existence with *Amida*.

The most important point here, however, is the Absolute Reality itself. As Nakamura points out, cultural development makes man more sensitive to metaphysical and philosophical questions. Though the Japanese in general show a lack of metaphysical interest, one cannot say that it is completely absent. It is thus quite natural that they could not cling forever to an easygoing religion but went spontaneously in search of some deeper truths and realities and Buddhism gave its answers.¹⁷ But it is also a matter of fact that the Japanese interpreted the Buddhist view on the Absolute Reality in the framework of their own inner-worldly way of thinking and placed the Buddhist Ultimate Reality right in the midst of this world, refusing to grant it a strictly

¹⁷ Nakamura, *o.c.*, p. 361.

transcendent character. The Buddhist attitude towards this was one of acceptance. Some examples may clarify this.

The Kegon school (introduced in 726), teaching a cosmic harmony under the universal Buddha-Vairocana, in its monistic-naturalistic doctrine satisfies the fundamental Japanese mentality.¹⁸ It emphasized that the Absolute is identical with all the phenomena of this world and, vice versa, that all phenomena of this world are identical with the Absolute; there is thus sameness in difference and difference in sameness. This metaphysical thesis of Kegon persists undiminished in Japan today.¹⁹

The story of the casting and the dedication of the great statue of Buddha-Vairocana under the impulse of emperor Shōmu (701-756) in Nara is a concrete illustration of the thesis of the Kegon doctrine. The statue represents the Absolute Reality which is the total reality and thus includes everything. *Kami* Amaterasu consulted before the erection of the statue, gave her consent, letting it be known that in fact, she and the Buddha were the same. Though it is difficult here to distinguish reality from legends added later by writers with political motivations, the story reaffirms the inner-worldliness of the Absolute Reality: Amaterasu is one of the most important *Kami* of *Shinto* to whom the Japanese are intimately related because of the *Kami*-nature dwelling in each of them.²⁰ We find in Amaterasu's affirmation of her identity with the Buddha possibly the first indications of the *honji-suijaku* doctrine to be touched on further below.

The Absolute Reality can be attained by everyone. Shōtoku Taishi is supposed to have lectured on two sutras and written commentaries on three: the *Hokkekyō*, the *Shomangyo*, and the *Yuimakyō*.²¹ Some scholars raise doubts about the historicity of these assertions.²² Such, however, is not our problem here. The

¹⁸ Dumoulin, *Buddhism in the Modern World*, p. 218-219; E. Dale Saunders, *Buddhism in Japan: With an Outline of its Origins in India* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972), p. 127-132.

¹⁹ Heinrich Dumoulin, *A History of Zen Buddhism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 40-42.

²⁰ Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation: The Historical Development of the Honji-Suijaku Theory* (Tokyo: Sophia University/Tuttle, 1969), p. 164-165.

²¹ The *Nihongi* mentions only two lectures on, respectively, the *Shomangyo* and the *Hokkekyō*; see W. G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972), Vol. II, p. 135.

²² Kamstra, *o.c.*, p. 407-417.

point is the nature of these three sutras: all of them are mahayanistic and stress a Buddhism that opens the way to salvation for everybody. The Hokkekyō deals with the universality of salvation (not only monks but also lay people); the Shōmangyo refers to the position of the Buddhist woman, the Yuimakyō to that of the Buddhist layman. Thus the main trend of Japanese Buddhism since its earliest promotion in this country is a lay Buddhism for everyone. This accorded with the original Japanese propensity to see man linked with the *Kami*-ity. It is only natural, therefore, that the *sokushin-jōbutsu* idea (to become a Buddha alive in the human body) became widespread in Japanese Buddhism. This is in sharp contradistinction to Indian Buddhism which holds that man should go through endless lifecycles of transmigration in order to reach salvation. According to Japanese Buddhism, man can reach salvation even in this life. This conviction runs through Tendai — and Shingon Buddhism, that originated in the ninth century. It runs also through the teachings of the great personalities who truly popularized Buddhism in medieval Japan. Shinran meant that the joy of being together with Amida is possible here and now; Nichiren said that through the invocation of *Namu Myōhō Rengekyō* (Adoration be to the Lotus sutra of the Good Law), the hidden Buddha within man realizes himself and that man becomes a Buddha here and now.

One of the major developments within Buddhism is the doctrine of the three bodies or the three aspects of the Buddha (*trikaya*). Passing over the first two, the body of transformation (*nirmanakaya*) and the body of compensation (*sambhogakaya*), I give attention only to the body of the Law (*dharmakaya*) for its importance in the context of the Buddhist contribution to the Japanese ethic.²³ It is a kind of cosmic and spiritual body, identical with the Absolute Reality and with the essence of everything. On the one hand, it represents the cosmos; on the other, it constitutes the fundamenal unity immanent in all things of this phenomenal world. In this sense, the Buddha nature is nothing else than the ultimate nature of all beings; the only difference is that the Buddhas are conscious of their true nature, while the other beings are still living in ignorance of it. The body of the

²³ On the three bodies of the Buddha, see W. M. McGovern, *An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism* (Varanasi: Sahityaratan Malakaryalaya, 1968), p. 46-61.

Law is thus the Ultimate Reality of Mahayana Buddhism.²⁴ This Ultimate Reality manifests itself in all beings, and man's major task is to overcome his ignorance to see this Buddha nature in himself; when this ignorance is overcome, man attains Buddhahood which means salvation. Zen has contributed very much to the spread of these ideas in Japan. Following the line of Suzuki's thought, we can say: the Buddha nature is present in a sleeping or resting condition in every man; when man becomes conscious of his Buddha nature, then the latter awakens and man is enlightened, free and absolute.²⁵ The all-pervading *Kami*-ity of Japan's background served as the fertile stratum wherein the philosophy of the Buddha nature and Buddhahood could take root.

IV. *The Buddhist Contribution to the Japanese View on Nature*

Japan has a strong inclination toward nature; Japan's relationship with nature is one of familiarity and identity. Even after the Japanese had lost their sense of awe toward nature, they never looked upon it as a mere thing but as a reality they are involved in,²⁶ and Japanese culture has always attempted to keep man in unity with nature. This attitude includes a keen sensitivity to the changes taking place in nature. Hence, there is a longing for oneself to be integrated into the natural course of this world. But that does not mean merely that the Japanese love only individual things in nature; what they love is the stream of existence which pervades and permeates things to the ground of their being, or just the beauty and harmony embracing all things.²⁷

I would like to draw an illustration of this point from Japanese Zen Buddhism. Dōgen (1200-1253), originator of the Soto sect of Zen, stressed that this world and its content are Buddhahood itself. "These mountains, rivers, and earth are all the sea of the Buddhahood." Also the ever-changing character of the pheno-

²⁴ François Houang, *Le Bouddhisme: de l'Inde à la Chine* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1963), p. 35.

²⁵ Horst Rzepkowski, *Das Menschenbild bei Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki: Gedanken zur Anthropologie des Zen-Buddhismus* (St. Augustin: Steyler Verlag, 1971), p. 25-50.

²⁶ Masatoshi Doi, "Religion and Nature", *Japanese Religions* (Kyoto), 6/3 (1970), p. 9.

²⁷ Hans Waldenfels, "Japan's Spiritual Climate and Christianity", *Concilium*, (New York: Paulist Press), 19(1966), p. 163.

menal world, its impermanence itself, is Buddhahood. "The impermanence of a person's body and mind is verily the Buddhahood. The impermanence of the country and scenery is verily the Buddhahood. Death and life are the very life of the Buddha."²⁸ We should understand also Dōgen's and the Soto sect's view on *zazen* in the same light. In contradistinction to Eisai (1141-1215) and the Rinzai sect of Zen, Dōgen and his followers give priority to *zazen* instead of to the *kōan* that asks for mental effort. *Zazen* requires mental, physical, and moral discipline at the same time and involves the total man. In that way Buddhahood is realized during man's whole life, day by day, through unselfish action and strenuous work. Life within this world, the use of nature, work, and meditation — all contribute to the realization of Buddhahood. Japanese Zen Buddhism did not follow early Buddhism in its other-worldliness; this ever-changing world, the unceasing temporal flux of this world's course is nothing else than Buddhahood; the unchanging reality is fixed in the changing world itself; and this completely conforms to the Japanese background.

The Japanese are sensitive to nature's and man's frailty and contingency. As Basabe observes, deep within the Japanese character lurks a spirit of resignation to the sad realities of life; but it is not a resignation colored with bitterness and frustration.²⁹ These that happen are just nature's unchanging development. Buddhism has sharpened this keen awareness of contingency and brokenness. The expression "*kirei ni akirameru*" — to be resigned with beauty, peacefully and without bitterness — testifies to this Buddhist influence and renders a spirit of equanimity amidst the ups and downs of life. Something similar appears, I think, in the famous *mono no aware* as found in the poetry of the *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Myriad Leaves; eighth century) and the *Genji Monogatari* (Tales of Genji; ca. 1010); these words express a gentle sadness and superb sensitivity to things. While it is true that the present-day Japanese no longer use the word *aware*, its meaning is certainly still very much alive. Expressions frequently used in the Japanese language indicate this same sensitivity, equanimity, and peaceful surrender, and they can be considered as expressive of a certain philosophy of life. *Mi no hodo wo shire* — to be aware of your situation in life, man has to be

²⁸ Nakamura, *o.c.*, p. 351-353.

²⁹ Basabe, *o.c.*, p. 82-84.

content with what he is; *kurō wa hito ni tsukimono* — man and pain are inseparable; *tsuku ni murakumo, hana ni kaze* — the moon is clouded, and the flowers are scattered by the wind; *ue wo miru na, shita wo miyo* — do not look at those above you but on those below you, or one has to keep the position this world and nature have given to him. All this, proper to Japan, seems to be very different from the attitude of the Westerner who challenges nature passionately and actively to conquer and dominate it.³⁰

V. *Ultimate Reality has many Names*

Anyone who looks at Japan with Western eyes is often baffled to learn that so many Japanese participate concurrently in both Shinto ceremonies and Buddhist practices. The Ultimate Reality has for the Japanese many names, indeed. *Kami* and Buddhas are mixed up in many ways. Moreover, present-day Shinto and Buddhism are multi-colored, displaying various Taoist, Confucian and Christian influences. I refer here only to Shinto and Buddhism. In early Japan any group or clan (*uji*) had its own *Kami*; the members of each clan had thus a kind of exclusive relation to their *Kami*. Even Amaterasu, the sun goddess, enjoyed nationwide prominence because she was first of all the principal *Kami* of the imperial group, the first among all the others. Buddhism, as a religion seeing the Buddha nature in everything and opening up Buddhahood to everyone, exercised a certain spontaneous pressure upon Shinto so that in time the *Kami* came to transcend the strict clan framework.

The facts related to the construction and dedication of the great statue of Buddha-Vairocana indicate, as mentioned above, that the trend to identify *Kami* and Buddha had set in. The tenets of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism, the first attempts of the ninth century to spread Buddhism on a larger scale than ever before, were the fountainheads of later systems like Sannō Ichijitsu Shintō (The One Truth Shinto of the Mountain King) and Ryōbu Shinto (Dual Shinto) wherein the gate was opened to the identification of various *Kami* with Buddhist deities. The doctrinal elaboration of both systems was not the work of Saichō (767-822) and Kūkai (774-835), the respective founders of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism; this elaboration was the product of the Kama-

³⁰ *Idem.*, p. 82-83.

kura period (1185-1333) by means of the *honji-suijaku*-theory. The basic ideas of this theory are of Indian and Chinese origin. In brief, Japanese Buddhist intellectuals of the Kamakura period argued that at the basis of each *Kami* there is a Buddhist hypostasis or original substance called *honji*. This *honji* is a Buddhist deity and, ultimately, the cosmic Buddha. In order to assist human frailty, the Buddhist deity has left manifest traces (*suijaku*) in Japan in the concrete form of the *Kami*.³¹ This process of fusion of Shinto and Buddhism, or of the *Kami* and the Buddhist deities, was the final result of a long process that ended in a certain subordination of Sinto to Buddhism. The fusion process was also stimulated by the tradition of the *ubasoku* (ascetics and healers) and the *yamabushi* (those who sleep in the mountains). They were the shamanistic people who united in themselves Shinto and Buddhism and who lived very near to the common people.

In the late Kamakura period and the Muromachi period (1336-1467) there emerged gradually an opposite trend — a speculative self-reflection within Shinto, of which Yoshida Kanetomo (1435-1511) was a good representative. He simply turned upside down the *honji-suijaku* theory and developed his Yui-itsu Shinto (Primal Shinto), which holds that the *Kami* are the original substances or *honji* and the Buddhist deities are the *suijaku* or the manifest traces of the *Kami*.

The fusion of Shinto and Buddhism was not a melting together of the two religions or organizations. It was a much more subtle ideological confluence elaborated doctrinally by intellectuals who reflected systematically on the Absolute Reality and at the same time answered to the intuition of the simple people by giving many names to the same Ultimate Reality. All this made it possible for the two religions to coexist.

The Meiji government embarked on a campaign against this historical fusion and tried, even violently, to separate the two religions. However, notwithstanding all legal injunctions, the *honji-suijaku* ideas remained very much alive and are still at work today.

³¹ Matsunaga, *o.c.*, p. 187-209, 211-284.

VI. *The Buddhist Contribution to Concrete Japanese Behavior*

The Japanese ethic strongly stresses harmonious relationships among men. Now, the question arises whether this harmony is not emphasized to such an extent that it becomes sometimes purely extrinsic without affecting man intrinsically; or to put it in terms of religious anthropology, is this harmony not the result of man's personal and societal behavior focused on problems of decorum and shame (shame culture) without real guilt — and sin-consciousness (guilt culture)? I put the problem quite sharply by means of two opposites because I think that too many people defend too excessively a one-sided point of view. There are indeed some who contend that the Japanese are a people living in a shame culture. In the Japanese background, sin-consciousness is surely shallow, but has it not been deepened to some extent by Buddhism? Benedict analyzes Japan as a shame culture in which failure to obey the commands of good behavior invokes shame; the primacy of shame means that everyone watches, above all, for the judgment of public opinion upon his deeds.³² It is often said that Japanese behavior is determined entirely by accepted customs and ceremonial attitudes. What visibly disturbs harmonious relations among men and directly evokes aversion is "wrong". It has even been said that the Japanese seem to have been unable to tackle the problem of evil throughout their whole history.³³ Tada describes Japanese moral behavior as an extrinsic reality, exclusively tied up with the opinion of others; public opinion is the norm by which human behavior is judged; the Japanese are afraid of being laughed at by their fellowmen; they live in constant fear of shame.³⁴

Others oppose this view strongly, insisting that sin — and guilt-consciousness can be seen in Japan's religious history as well as in daily life. Kōsaka shows in his analysis of Japan's religious history from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth that much good evidence is available to counter Benedict's interpretation: sin

³² Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (London: Secker and Warburg, Ltd., 1947), p. 222-227.

³³ George B. Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 54.

³⁴ Fr. Uyttendaele, "Shame and Honor", *The Japan Missionary Bulletin* (Tokyo), Vol. XVIII (1963), p. 665-668.

is Shinran's theme: Japanese Buddhism is intertwined with relief of individual souls suffering from the consciousness of guilt.³⁵

I think it unwise to press a one-sided view; instead of considering the matter by way of exclusion, it would be better to think along inclusive lines that accept a relationship between shame, guilt and sin. Though shame is a real factor in Japanese life, it does not necessarily preclude an inner consciousness of guilt and sin. Moreover, as Doi points out, shame itself is not just a matter of face, but is something delicate and internal; and many Western writings on Japan testify to a unique cultural prejudice that it is shameful to be a shame culture.³⁶

The Buddhist contribution to the sin and guilt-consciousness of the Japanese could be better understood if we refer, with Dumoulin, to the Buddhist view on suffering and its roots in ignorance about oneself, thirst, desire, and *karma*.³⁷ Suffering as man's foremost characteristic bears a certain analogy to the Christian view on brokenness that results from original sin and personal fault, and it is based on human experience. Indian Buddhism knew a number of forms of sin and penance.³⁸ Shinran's extreme consciousness of sin led him to the conclusion that he was incapable of any good act, and in this sense he underestimated man's capacity for self-determination. However, Amidism did not give in to complete amorality.³⁹ Amida's mercy could not be abused to indulge in sin.

VII. *The Buddhist Contribution to Social Awareness*

The last aspect of Japanese concrete behavior here treated, but briefly, is the Buddhist contribution to Japanese social awareness and activity. While some say that Buddhism, until recently,

³⁵ Masaaki Kosaka, "The Status and the Role of the Individual in Japanese Society", in Moore, *o.c.*, p. 248-251.

³⁶ Albert M. Craig, "Introduction: Perspectives on Personality in Japanese History", in Craig and Shively, *o.c.*, p. 21; for a more extended discussion of this subject, see Ernest D. Piryns, "Japanese Morality and Christianity", *Bulletin-Secretariat pro Non-Christianis* (Roma), XII/1-2 (1977), 34-35, p. 1-12; see also Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1977).

³⁷ Dumoulin, *Christianity meets Buddhism*, p. 121-128.

³⁸ Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique: Manuel des Etudes Indiennes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1953), Vol. II, p. 597-605.

³⁹ Dumoulin, *o.c.*, p. 125; see also *supra*, note 3.

had not engaged to any extent in social work,⁴⁰ not a few facts prove otherwise. The reason is quite clear: Buddhism entered continuously into the inner-worldly view on the Absolute of the Japanese background, and this could not happen without practical effects on the social behavior of the Japanese. They developed their world unremittingly, and so did and does Japanese Buddhism. Of course, there were times in Japanese religious history when Buddhism did not influence Japanese social life very much, notably during the Tokugawa period when the norms of human behavior were derived explicitly from Confucianism. But to say that Buddhism generally did not engage in social activity is quite amiss.

In other times Buddhism went directly to the people by means of social activity. Many examples could be quoted from the beginning of the Taika era (645) until the end of the Kamakura period (1333). People like Gyōgi (670-749) and his followers, the *ubasoku*, or representatives of the shamanistic Shinto-Buddhist faith, Dōsho (629-700), Kukai (774-835), Eison (1201-1290), and Ninshō (1218-1303) and so many others were builders of bridges, boats, roads, water-tanks, ponds and canals. A tremendous number of harbors and lodging places were constructed by Buddhist priests. The Ritsu school was particularly popular among the common people for its social welfare works, and this is all the more remarkable for the Ritsu sect originally belonged to Hinayana Buddhism, which is not very interested in social activity. Dōgen's Soto Zen stressed human activities very much for the realization of Buddhahood.⁴¹ Moreover, Buddhist efforts in the field of health care were outstanding. While the Japanese government introduced the best of Chinese medicine from the seventh century to the ninth, it was done primarily for the benefit of the imperial family and nobility; medical care for ordinary people was provided almost exclusively by Buddhist priests-practitioners from the seventh century to the fifteenth, mainly in temple clinics; from the sixteenth century on, medical practice passed gradually into the hands of secular professionals, though many of them continued to shave their heads and wear the Buddhist mantle. The Gokurakuji temple in Kamakura maintained a hospital and lepro-

⁴⁰ Joseph Spae, *Japanese Religiosity* (Tokyo: Oriens Institute, 1971), p. 122

⁴¹ Nakamura, *o.c.*, p. 504-507

sarium that are said to have accommodated about fifty-seven thousand patients in a twenty year period.⁴² In more recent times the New Religions of Buddhist lineage walk very clearly along the paths of a strong social awareness. In this respect they are continuing the Buddhist philosophical idea that the cosmic reality is interwoven with everything and with all aspects of human life. If there is a compenetration of the Absolute Reality in everything, and if everyman is the bearer of the Absolute Reality, then man himself is deeply connected with the totality of mankind and thus has social responsibilities.⁴³ Modern Buddhist religion without any serious social concern is unthinkable in Japan today. As a matter of fact, social concern and action are necessary corolaries of the pragmatic and realistic Buddhist principle of salvation that man must be useful for himself and for others.⁴⁴

The Buddhist contribution to the Japanese ethic is manifold and rich. I have tried to analyze this contribution with reference to the Japanese background. And though I had to link this background very closely to Shinto (as its first religious manifestation), I was primarily concerned with this background in its deeper sense as the underlaying basic layer with multiple dimensions that has fashioned and is still fashioning Japanese religions and concrete life. This basic layer is a living and ongoing reality that does not change overnight. The richness of Buddhism was grafted onto it and gave it great depth.

ERNEST D. PIRYNS, C.I.C.M.

⁴² Masayoshi Sugimoto and David L. Swain, *Science and Culture in Traditional Japan. A.D. 600-1854* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1978), p. 103-147

⁴³ Dumoulin, *Buddhism in the Modern World*, p. 230-231.

⁴⁴ Dumoulin, *Christianity meets Buddhism*, p. 114-118.