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56-58

JAPANESE RELIGION
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THE STORY OF JAPANESE RELIGION

The long history of religion in Japan has been dominated by three major historical themes. As an introduction to this section, let us look at them in order. First, there is the theme of tension and accommodation between indigenous, native Japanese religion and spiritual influences coming in from outside Japan. The most obvious indigenous religious tradition is that which has come to be identified as Shinto, and the major outside influence has been Buddhism. But the actual situation is more complex than that. The tension and accommodation pattern undoubtedly goes back to prehistoric times when migrations from north and south brought about various religious patterns and practices that had to be reconciled. In early historic times, Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist elements moved into Japan seeking reconciliation with the native kami. In more recent times, a Japanese religious synthesis made up of all these factors blended together—Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Shinto—has in effect stood over against new outside visitors such as Christianity and Western secularism.

Throughout this history Japan has swung from a welcome of outsiders as attractive contributors to a rejection of them as threats to Japanese integrity. In the end, though, Japan has managed with remarkable skill to preserve both sides of the dilemma. It has accepted innovations from without but succeeded in making them thoroughly Japanese, and it has done so without allowing indigenous traditions to be wholly submerged and lost.

This is partly due to the fact that Japan, unlike many countries, has never had an alien faith imposed by outside conquerors; the many foreign influences that have reached its shores have come peacefully as gifts, and the country has had time to accept, adjust, or reject them in its own way. Also, Japan's particular pattern of accepting religious pluralism has allowed the many paths of faith to maintain their identity while subtly smoothing off their rough edges until they are compatible with the function of religion in Japanese society.

Second, Japanese religion has been dominated by tension between strong, charismatic individuals on the one hand and the role of religion in providing social coherence on the other. Scholars have sometimes expressed this in terms of an archaic contrast between **ujigami,** or kami protecting the clan (*uji*) or community, whose role enforces the cohesion and continuity of established patterns of society; and the **hitogami** or visiting "outsider" god (often manifested through shamans) who brings innovation, strange messages, and nonordinary phenomena. Throughout Japanese religious history, especially on the Buddhist side and later among the New Religions, charismatic persons, sometimes called **hijiri** or holy men, have brought new messages. Kobo Daishi, Shinran, Nichiren, Nakayama Miki, and so forth, have all challenged conventional faith and started new movements based initially on individual conversion rather than on communal adherence.[1] In time, however, like all enduring religions, their causes have become institutionalized, firmly established in family and community groups. The interaction between established community religion and innovative charismatic figures has been a long-term dynamic in Japanese religion.

Third, in Japan as elsewhere there has been far-reaching and often creative tension between religion as contact with ultimate reality and means of salvation, and religion as a social and cultural system. Religion plays several roles at once: offering contact with the ultimate, bestowing salvation, legitimating the social and political order, and providing themes and inspiration to artists and architects, writers and poets. The tensions and opportunities presented by these several roles are common to religion throughout the world, but in Japan they have been especially subtle because Japanese religion has, insofar as possible, embraced them all as one. For example, despite the role of charismatic figures mentioned above, Japanese religion has generally encouraged individuals to make contact with the ultimate and find salvation in a way appropriate to their family and community roots, and it has placed severe sanctions against spiritual deviants. Despite possible tensions between religious faith and aesthetics, Japanese religion has tried to relate the two very closely. A thousand combinations of the sacred and the aesthetic in Japan, from temple gardens to the noh drama, testify to this spirit.

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[1] See Ichiro Hori, "On the concept of Hijiri (Holy Man)," *Numen*, 5, no. 2 (April 1958), 128-160; no. 3 (September 1958), 199-232.

Archaic Japanese Religion

Although remains from the Stone Age going back many thousands of years have been found in Japan, the earliest culture that appears to have much relation to historic Japanese civilization is the Jomon, dating from around 8000 B.C.E. to about 200 C.E. It is classified as neolithic, possessing sedentary village life and rudimentary agriculture. The Jomon people gradually moved from a hunting, fishing, and gathering economy, largely along the seashore, to planting such tubers as yams.

Like many neolithic cultures, Jomon religion emphasized fertility. Female clay figures, perhaps goddesses or earth mothers, have been found at Jomon sites, as have male phallic representations at household shrines. Serpents, also associated with fertility, frequently decorate pottery, suggesting a snake cult. Other aspects of Jomon religion are indicated by clay masks that may have been employed by shamans.

Finally, Jomon culture produced the remarkable clay figures known as *dogu*—bizarre but exquisitely crafted, half-animal, half-human figures with peculiar slit eyes that have reminded some of ski masks. It would be strange if these figures did not have some magical or supernatural meaning, but since the Jomon peoples left no written records we can only speculate. We may note, however, that already the brilliant fusion of the religion and the artistic, which has characterized Japan so well, had arisen. Broadly speaking, Jomon culture and religion were probably comparable to that of Polynesia and Melanesia at the time of initial European contact.

A more advanced stage appeared in Japan during the next major prehistoric period, the Yayoi, dating from about 200 B.C.E to 250 C.E. Wet rice agriculture was introduced from Southeast Asia and gradually spread northward from Kyushu during this period. Metal was also introduced, probably from Korea. The earliest metal objects were of ritual rather than practical use: swords, spears, mirrors, and bells that probably served as sacred objects in shrines have been found buried with important persons.

Yayoi religion was centered on agricultural rites and shamanism. The *niiname,* the harvest festival that has been so important to Shinto and the rites of the imperial house down through the centuries, has its roots in this era. Female shamanesses, especially, had important roles both among the common people and as oracles on matters of state.

We get a vivid portrait of conditions in Japan at that time from the accounts of travelers from China. They tell us that people ate raw vegetables from bamboo or wooden trays, clapped their hands for worship rather than kneeling, were fond of liquor, long-lived, and generally honest. These chronicles tell us that the country was formerly ruled by a man, but more recently (apparently in the third century C.E., after a period of turmoil) by a woman named Pimiko. She was a shamaness who lived in seclusion with a thousand female attendants and a single male who mediated between her and the outside world. The narratives suggest that this sorceress queen remained unmarried and "bewitched the people."[2]

This was about the time that the Kofun era, 250–552 C.E., began. Kofun means "great tomb" or "tumulus" and refers to the most striking relics of this age, immense earthen monuments built for rulers and great men. These edifices were often a keyhole shape and surrounded by a moat. The goods found in these tombs give us a colorful picture of the life of the upper classes of the time. On the flanks of the artificial hills were clay figures, called *haniwa,* charmingly and skillfully executed and representing retainers intended to follow the deceased to the other world. Dancers, warriors, animals, and even figures thought to be shamanesses all share the same hollow oval eyes and tiny expressionless mouths that give these statues an odd, timeless, immortal quality, as though each were an archetype of the activity in which he or she was engaged. Within the tomb the body was surrounded by sacred mirrors, swords, and jewels (three items that are still the sacred regalia of the Japanese emperor) and by remarkable paintings and accoutrements, such as "soul boats" apparently designed to ferry the spirit to the other world.

All these objects show considerable continental influence. The comma-shaped jewels (*magatama*), important as holders of sacred power, are comparable to Korean models; large bronze ritual bells called *dotaku* are reminiscent of similar items in China's splendid Bronze Age. In fact, metalworkers of early Japan appear largely to have been Korean immigrants, and, as in many archaic societies, the blacksmith's art had sacred connotations: metal swords could fend off evil spirits and metal mirrors hold benign ones.

After a time of turmoil Japan was unified under the Yamato house, progenitors of the present imperial line, around 350 C.E. One theory is that a new wave of immigrants who were horseriders arrived around that time via Korea (although they may have originated farther north) and seized military power over the more sedentary older population; the leader of their chief clan was, in the later terminology, *tenno* or emperor, though actually he was no more than a first among equals or a paramount chief in a society of largely independent clans.[3] Each clan was under the patronage of the clan kami. This deity's priest was the chieftain. Frequently a female relative such as a sister or wife of the ruler would serve as shamaness giving oracles from the clan kami and other gods and spirits. But gradually the roles of chieftain and priest separated, with priests serving at specific shrines. Shamanesses called *miko* or *ichiko* delivered divine messages both at shrines and among the common people.

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[2] See Ryusaku Tsunoda and L. Carrington Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories,* Perkins Asiatic Monograph no. 2 (South Pasadena, Calif.: P. D. & Ione Perkins, 1951). A selection of this material can be found in R. Tsunoda, W. T. de Bary, and D. Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), I, 5–14.

[3] For a lively contribution to the debate on Japanese prehistory and the role of the horse people, see Gari Ledyard, "Galloping Along with the Horseriders: Looking for the Founders of Japan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies,* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1975), 217-254.

The world of clans and kami was modified irreversibly by the sixth and seventh centuries through the introduction of Buddhist and Confucian thought, as well as by the subsequent consolidation of state and society on a Chinese pattern with Buddhism as a state-patronized religion. But the world of archaic Japan did not wholly disappear, nor has it to this day. Its worldview is perpetuated in the rites of Shinto—both those of the court and of the ordinary shrine. Beneath the facade of continental bureaucracy the old loyalties and power structures of clan and family continued (and continue) to broker the real power in Japanese political and social life.

Before moving to the new world of Japanese religion after Buddhism, we would do well to pause for a moment to review what the old but still living world of clans and kami was like. This is the worldview reflected in the classic mythology of the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki.*[4] There a three-story universe comprised the "high plain of heaven" (*takama-no-hara*), where the sovereign deities lived; the "manifest world" (*utsushi-yo*), earth as we know it; and the underworld (*yomotsukuni*), abode of the dead and of unclean spirits. Kami were everywhere and able to move easily between these three levels; in particular, heavenly kami descended from above to give divine kingship to the people and fertility to the fields.

This pattern is evidenced in the sequence of agricultural rites. In the spring, fecundating kami were believed to descend into their shrines on high places, such as mountaintops, or by the seashore. They would be met by processions of worshipers who would greet them, lead them joyously into the fields, and dance to celebrate their divine labors as they planted and transplanted rice. In the fall would come the niiname or harvest festival, the greatest event of the ritual year, when the kami of the fields would be honored for the bounteous ingathering and seen off until the coming year. The niiname, commemorating as it did the turning of the seasons, also had New Year's overtones; masked visitors, like mummers or Halloween trick-or-treaters, would go from house to house.

The harvest festival also had, and still has, close links with sacred kingship. The emperor, like other rulers throughout the archaic world, had important magical responsibilities for fertility as well as for political stability. The same kami who descended from the high plain of heaven to bring forth the child of the harvest also mated with earthly kami to produce a kingly lineage. All this is consummated ritually at the harvest festival celebrated by the emperor as high priest each fall. The most significant performance of that rite, called the *daijosai* or "great food festival," is celebrated by a new emperor the year after his accession. In an elaborate and ancient ritual, rice and wine from special fields are twice presented by the new sovereign to the deities in the middle of the night as a sort of holy communion. This rite, still performed as the climax of an imperial accession, is today perhaps the most archaic state ritual still intact in the modern world.[5]

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[4] The standard translations of the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* are Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), and W. G. Aston, *Nihongi* (London: George Allen & Unwin, reprint, 1956).

Another vital aspect of ancient Shinto was its emphasis on purity versus pollution. Shinto shrines, like the kami they housed, were immaculate—places set apart and approachable only by the pure. Anything ritually impure—contaminated by disease, death, or blood—was prohibited; persons entering the clean, austere precincts of a shrine (in this period usually just an open-air altar in a sacred place, or at best a temporary shrine in the harvest fields) would first cleanse themselves with water. The spiritual importance of cleanliness, and of pure sanctuaries that the pollution of the world cannot touch, has had a deep, longstanding impact on Japanese values and culture.

The Coming of Buddhism

The traditional date for the introduction of Buddhism to Japan corresponds to 538 or 552 C.E. We are told by the *Nihonshoki* that in that year a Korean king sent the Japanese emperor a Buddhist scripture and image with a letter extolling their merits. The permeation of the Buddha's **dharma** ("teaching," "truth"), and equally of Confucian thought (which may have arrived even earlier) was certainly a more gradual process than such an exact date would suggest, but the date does indicate approximately the time Buddhism began to be politically significant. The chief early source of mainland (Chinese) culture was Korea; therefore, with Buddhism came not only the envoys of Korean rulers but also immigrant Korean craftsmen. Thus, in addition to Buddhism's philosophy and faith, a technology and art much in advance of Japan's had come to Japanese shores in the sixth century.

The historical periods within which the new continental culture, including Buddhism, was slowly and often painfully assimilated are called the Asuka (552–645) and the Hakuho (645–710). The Asuka period began with disputes over the new Buddhist faith: some factions wanted Japan to adopt it, but others were opposed. The Buddhist cause was taken up by the powerful Soga family but was opposed by the Mononobe and Nakatomi houses, who had traditional Shinto priestly roles. The argument deteriorated into a civil war out of which the Soga prevailed. Soga no Umako completed his seizure of power in 592 by arranging the assassination of the emperor. He placed his own niece on the throne as the Empress Suiko. She was a devout Buddhist and appointed as her regent the imperial prince, Shotoku (573–621).

Prince Shotoku was among the most brilliant and influential rulers in Japan's history. His era was a turning point in the emergence of three important elements: a mature Japanese culture, Buddhism as a national religion, and a consolidated state. The prince sought to use Buddhism as a unifying ideology

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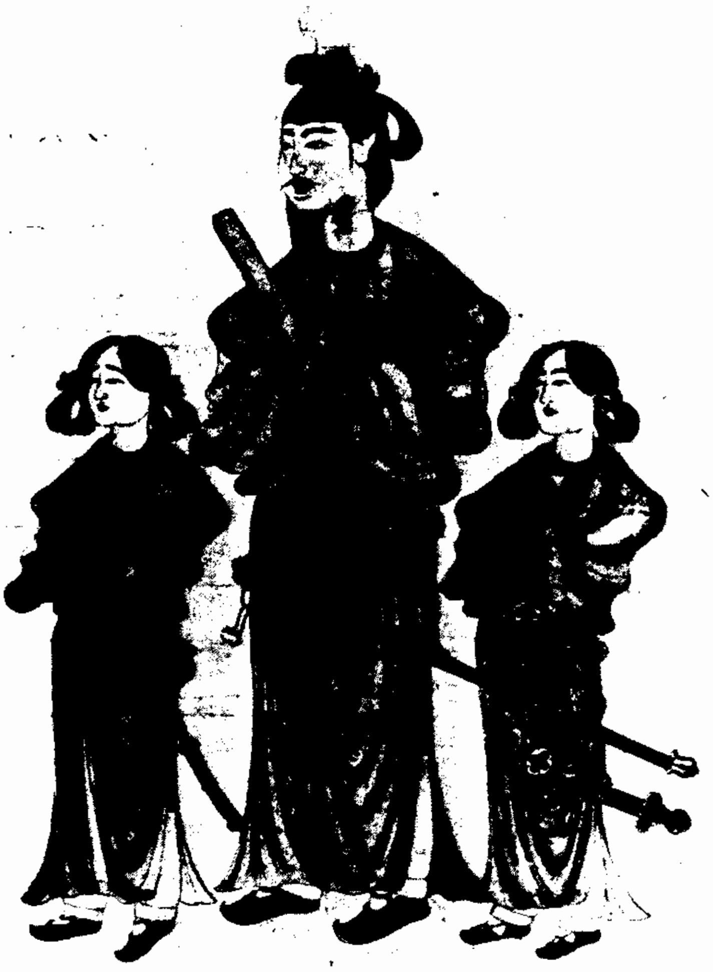
5. See Robert S. Ellwood, *The Feast of Kingship: Accession Ceremonies in Ancient Japan* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1973).



Prince Shotoku (573–621).

transcending the individual clan, since as an imported religion it was the special possession of no contentious chieftain but only of the imperial house and the national government. In this era and after, the Soga assiduously patronized Buddhist arts and architecture as well as learned monks to enhance their own prestige.

Shotoku founded the first major national temple, the famous Horyuji Temple outside of Nara, in 607. Although most of the present edifices were built later than Shotoku's time, Horyuji remains a treasure house of early Buddhist art. In 604, by traditional dating (some scholars would put it much later), the so-called "Seventeen Article Constitution" attributed to Shotoku was issued.[6] Though not a constitution in the modern sense, it was a set of lofty ethical principles for government servants—largely Confucian in inspiration, though Buddhism is mentioned. The importance of this document lies in the extent to which it shows that Confucian and Buddhist ideas had become normative in Japanese intellectual life, and that a state and civil service based on them was

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[6] The Seventeen Article Constitution can be found in Aston, *Nihongi*, pt. 2, pp. 129–133.

Miroku Bodhisatta, Nara Period.

at least an ideal to strive for. This constitution, whether by Shotoku or a later hand invoking his memory, was a first step toward the rationalized, bureaucratic administration undergirded by religion that Shotoku wanted.

Shotoku tried hard to give balanced attention to Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism. His own Buddhism was a practical, layman's faith indifferent to doctrinal quibbles and monkish squabbles. His interests are shown by the three sutras (Buddhist scriptures) on which he is said to have written commentaries: the *Lotus Sutra,* with its theme of universal salvation; the *Vimalakirti Sutra,* emphasizing the path of the lay devotee; and the *Srimala Sutra,* chanted for the protection of the nation by Buddhism. Shotoku appreciated not only the nation-building and cultural potentials of Buddhism but also its philanthropy: the temples he had built contained schools, hospitals, and orphanages under the care of monks and nuns, as well as rich halls of worship.

An enduring legacy of this period is the magnificent Buddhist sculpture in those seventh-century temples. It is still inspiring today—one can only imagine how it must have seemed to the Japanese when it represented the arrival of a culture and faith much more sophisticated than anything that had been known before. Consider, for example, the Miroku (Maitreya, the coming Buddha of the future) in Horyuji Temple and its near-relative in Koryuji Temple in Kyoto. These seventh-century figures are based on Korean models and were probably constructed by Korean master artists resident in Japan. Nevertheless they point to the spirit that was to emerge in the greatest Japanese religious art.

The Miroku figure is clad only in a light and simple robe. He is in seated meditation on a stool, but the feeling is not one of heavy, ponderous concentration. Rather, one senses a state beyond even that—a condition of infinite awareness so sublimely perfected that it has the appearance of casual ease. Yet his is a calm state worn with the easy grace that only the enlightened attain in this cosmos of anxiety and woe. The coming Buddha sits with one leg laid lightly across the other and rests his head gently on the fingers of one hand; his eyes are alive yet downcast in quiet inwardness. With clean, sure lines and exquisite simplicity the sculptor suggests the poise and equilibrium that, especially in Mahayana Buddhism, are the hallmark of transcendent spiritual achievement.

As we move down the centuries of Japanese religion we will find the same statement—that the eternal is best found in the simple grace of the natural—reiterated time and again, whether in the rustic Shinto shrine or in the Zen art that finds the Buddha-essence in a gnarled tree or in a Zen master's half-stern, half-laughing face.

Buddhism continued to be favored under the Soga rulers during the first half of the seventh century, although the quality of that rule after Shotoku's death diminished. Later Soga rulers engendered increasing popular opposition for their high-handed ways and favoritism toward the foreigners they brought in to serve their cultural revolution. In 645 resentment came to a head. Nakatomi Kamatari, later given the surname Fujiwara, overthrew the Soga regime. The Fujiwara clan were to become all-powerful a little later in the Heian period: the coup of 645, then, heavily influenced the course of Japanese history for many centuries. The first major result of the new administration was the Taika Reform of 646, which attempted centralization of the nation in an absolute monarchy working through a rationally organized bureaucracy. Land was transferred to the crown, which was then to redistribute it equitably. The reform was only partially implemented, and then only with modest success, but the precedent it set was also to have lasting consequences.

The Emperors Tenchi (r. 661–671) and Temmu (r. 671–686) and the Empress Jito (r. 686–697) were, despite somewhat troubled times, strong sovereigns who promoted Buddhism and government authority. Temmu and his widow Jito also assured that the court Shinto rites, dear to their Nakatomi supporters, were updated and given parallel status to Buddhism; the Nakatomi family's senior branch became chief court-Shinto chaplains and chief priests at the Grand Shrine of Ise around this time—positions they held until 1872.

It was during this period that such court-Shinto observances as the practice of sending an imperial princess to the Grand Shrine of Ise as priestess emerge from the mists of myth and assume their historic forms. Indeed, the Ise Daijingu or "Grand Shrine," located near the east coast of Japan and dedicated to two goddesses (Amaterasu, deity of the sun and ancestress of the imperial line, and Toyouke, goddess of food), appears to have come into national importance as the main imperial shrine around this time, too. The Emperor Temmu also ordered the production of the *Kojiki,* the invaluable collection of ancient myths and scraps of history that presents the court's understanding of Japan's origin and destiny, though the book was not completed until 712. (It was supplemented in 720 by the *Nihonshoki,* a much fuller chronicle of Japan from the first descent of the gods to the reign of Jito.)

The seventh-century reforms were institutionalized in the Taiho Code, promulgated in 702 by the Emperor Mommu. Supplemented by commentaries to form a legal system called *ritsuryo* (laws and regulations), it not only explained the new bureaucratic structure modeled on the Chinese but also regulated priests, monks, and nuns (showing their ultimate subordination to the state) and provided for various state Shinto rites, such as the seasonal cycle culminating in the niiname or harvest festival, the accession daijo-sai or food festival celebrated by a new emperor, and the sending of the princess to Ise Shrine. The emperor and the Nakatomi priests had central roles in these rites as celebrated in the palace shrines, indicating the state character of Shinto. Of particular interest is the fact that this Japanese constitution has one high bureau not found in the Chinese models, the *jingi-kan* or shrine office. It was dominated by the Nakatomi clan and it administered Shinto affairs, especially the court rites, independently of any other bureau.

The Nara Period (710–794)

In 710, the first permanent capital of Japan was established at Nara, a new city designed after the capital of the splendid T'ang dynasty then ruling in China. Until then the capital had been a more or less temporary settlement that was moved after the death of each emperor because of the Shinto taboo against death pollution. With the ending of that practice a city could be built that reflected the full power of Japan's emerging Buddhist culture. Nara became an entire city of opulent palaces and lavish temples, spaced by lovely parks.

The visitor to Nara today can see something of that wonder. Walking through the famous Deer Park of Nara—with its scattered pagodas, temples, and tame deer—and up the pathways of stone lanterns leading to the vermilion-porched Kasuga Shrine, home of the patron kami of the great Fujiwara clan, is like stepping into a fairy-tale past. Not far away, in the Todaiji Temple, the Great Buddha (Vairocana Buddha) of Nara looms over fifty feet high, surrounded by many smaller buddhas like the central light of ultimate reality reflected in innumerable universes.

The realities of Nara during its golden age were not as idyllic as its living remains suggest, but before we come to that story let us examine the nature of Buddhism in Nara. Our focus will be on Buddhism because the Nara period represents a time when, perhaps more than at any other, Buddhism was the leading edge of cultural and social advance. Several different traditions of Buddhist teaching were welcomed in Japan, whether brought by imported Chinese, Korean, or Indian priests or by Japanese sent to study in China at government expense. These include the six sects of Nara Buddhism, though actually they were little more than intellectual schools sometimes based in particular temples. Two were Theravada teachings, now extinct as schools in Japan. Two others, of Mahayana background, are also now extinct as separate institutions: the Sanron (Madhyamika) and Ritsu (Vinaya) schools. The former was more philosophic, whereas the latter emphasized monastic discipline and correct lineages of ordination. During the Nara period certain Ritsu priests were prominent and gave lay ordination to members of the imperial family.

The most significant of the Nara schools, however, were the Hosso and the Kegon schools. Though small today when compared with the great Buddhist denominations that arose later, they remain the custodians of temples of great historic and artistic interest in and around Nara. Hosso, to which Horyuji and Kofukuji Temples in Nara belong, is the Japanese version of Yogacara or Vijnanavada, the "mind only" school of Mahayana Buddhism that teaches that all apparent reality is projected out of consciousness in accordance with patterns of perception embedded in it. The Kegon or Avatamsaka school, based on the *Garland Sutra,* is housed at Todaiji as well as in other temples. It emphasizes the infinity of universes, the interrelatedness of all things, and the worship of Vairocana (the figure portrayed by the Great Buddha)—a cosmic budda representing unlimited absolute reality itself.

Beyond the schools, however, Buddhism was developing in a different way out in the countryside. Popular Buddhist teachers and wonder-workers, often called *ubasoku* from the Sanskrit word for disciple, wandered about combining Buddhism—often superficially understood as a magical means to marvelous power—with native shamanism. They were not properly ordained, especially by strict Ritsu standards, but they and their admirers often considered them something far better than an ordinary ordained monk, namely, a *bodhisattva.* Their mystic path was called *bosatsu-do,* the "way of the bodhisattva." Like a bodhisattva who lives only for wisdom and compassion, they went from village to village consoling the sick, counseling the oppressed, performing divination and miraculous healings, and leading the populace in such practical works as building bridges and irrigation systems. Often these charismatic figures also spoke out on behalf of the common people, alluding to the grasping and hypocrisy of the upper classes and the orthodox monks who ministered to them.[7]

Such pointed sermons found ready audiences, for the social problems of the Nara era ran deep. Far from sharing in the splendors of Nara civilization, the lower classes only became poorer and more oppressed as the eighth century wore on. Rationalized government brought with it regimentation and heavier taxation. Temples themselves became wealthy landowners and were no less assiduous than lay nobles in collecting rents. In those days only sons and daughters of the aristocracy could aspire to ecclesiastical office or the convent. In short, the gulf between rich and poor, between those who enjoyed the splendid Buddhist culture and those whose labor supported it, became greater. It is not surprising, then, that the peasantry turned to an alternative form of Buddhism that was more congenial to the familiar shamanistic religion of the country.

By mid-century it was apparent that these two levels of Buddhism and of society would have to be reconciled. Edicts attempting to control the irregular clergy successively failed. The pious Emperor Shomu, desiring to build the Great Buddha as a national cathedral, found that donations of money and labor from outside the capital were in short supply. In a dramatic gesture Shomu appointed a man called Gyogi Bosatsu (670–749), an established leader and spokesman for the countryside shamanistic Buddhists, chief priest of the nation. This was despite the fact that Gyogi was not regularly ordained and had earlier (in 717) been arrested for preaching to peasants the heretical doctrine that one could be saved through good works. In exchange for his sudden elevation, Gyogi won his followers over to the Emperor's cause, and according to tradition he also visited the Grand Shrine of Ise and obtained the blessing of the great kami Amaterasu on the building of the Great Buddha. The temple was completed in 749, the year of Gyogi's death, and the Emperor Shomu himself took monastic vows, abdicating in favor of his daughter Koken.

Here was the beginning of a scandal that brought discredit on Nara Buddhism. Koken abdicated in 758 in favor of a young prince, the Emperor Junnin. She then, according to accounts, became romantically involved with the court chaplain, an ambitious priest called Dokyo, who had been trained in both shamanistic and orthodox circles. Dokyo convinced the former Empress to depose Junnin, whom she later had strangled, and regain the throne herself as the Empress Shotoku. Dokyo then plotted to seize imperial power for himself, but his conspiracy was thwarted by a timely oracle from the kami Hachiman at his main shrine in Usa on the island of Kyushu.

By now it was evident that the government ought to be separated from the steamy religious atmosphere of Nara. In 784 the new Emperor Kammu moved the capital out of Nara. After a ten-year hiatus in Nagaoka it was settled in Heian, modern Kyoto, in 794. The vivid Nara period was at an end.

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[7] See Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 38–45.

Two final points about this period should be made. First, not all irregular, shamanistic Buddhists were wholly reconciled to the political and religious "establishment." Those who remained outside were the first of a lineage of quasi-independent persons of spiritual power who depended more on charisma and shamanlike initiations than on legitimate ecclesiastical office. One example from this period is En-no-Shokaku, legendary founder of the order of yamabushi ("mountain adepts"), colorful practitioners of shugendo. Considering, as did indigenous shamans before them, the mountains of Japan to be "other worlds" where gods and buddhas dwelt and where supernatural powers could be obtained, they went into the mountains to practice such rigorous austerities as standing under cold waterfalls for hours to meditate and being hung by the heels over high cliffs in order to acquire power, to combat evil spirits, and to heal and divine. They usually belonged to lively bands or orders that would spend part of the year in the mountains to meditate, to initiate new members, and to practice mystic rites, and then descend to the villages to ply their magical trades. Buddhism of a tantric (esoteric) sort, like that of Tibet, fitted easily into this tradition since it also put great stock in words of power (*mantra*) and harsh initiatory disciplines to train the adept, whereas its sweeping Mahayana philosophy provided an intellectual undergirding for the practices. The yamabushi were nominally affiliated with one of the major Heian denominations, Shingon or Tendai (themselves deeply dyed with tantrism, Shingon most explicity). But, for most practical purposes, the yamabushi priests were free agents. In many parts of Japan they were mainstays of popular religion, whether as magical healers or pilgrim guides, and down to modern times they can still be found.[8] In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this charismatic tradition received a vigorous revitalization in the New Religions, many of whose founders were influenced by shugendo and experienced initiations comparable to the yamabushi practitioners.

A second point to note is that Shinto, although perhaps lacking the glamour of Nara Buddhism, was not eclipsed but survived and, indeed, played a vital role in legitimating Buddhism as well as actions of the government. The traditions claiming that Gyogi sought and received approval from Amaterasu at the Ise Grand Shrine for the construction of the Great Buddha, and that a word from Hachiman at Usa countered the schemes of Dokyo, are significant. Further, during the Nara period the foundation appears to have been lain for synthesizing the two religions, so Shinto kami were made to be guardians, pupils, or manifestations of the great buddhas and bodhisattvas of the alien faith. Thus Amaterasu the sun goddess, for example, was identified with Vairocana as the

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[8] See H. Byron Earhart, *A Religious Study of the Mount Haguro Sect of Shugendo* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1970).

''Great Sun Buddha'' (Dainichi), who is the supreme expression of the universal essence.

The Heian Period (794–1185)

The Heian period was the golden age of classical Japanese culture and imperial court society. Its great ideal, among the upper classes, was *miyabi,* courtly elegance and taste, that elusive quality of utter grace and refinement so well illustrated in Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*). This book, considered the greatest masterpiece of Japanese literature, portrays life at court—a life that centered on refined aesthetic sensitivity, poetic expertise, and proper ritual decorum.

The Heian state was nominally ruled by the emperor, but real power was held by the Fujiwara family. The most powerful Fujiwara rulers became virtual dictators. They perpetuated their power by marriage: Emperors customarily made Fujiwara women their consorts and abdicated after producing an infant heir for whom the chief Fujiwara minister could serve as regent. The greatest of the Fujiwara statesmen, Michinaga (966–1027), was, whether in or out of office, the real power in the country throughout no less than eight such brief imperial reigns. Michinaga lived a regal life, complete with a private temple designed to reproduce the wonder of a Buddhist paradise; it had jeweled nets on the trees and peacocks around the pond. ''My aspiration,'' he allegedly said, ''is fully satisfied like a full moon in the sky.''

Others were less well pleased with Fujiwara domination, and when the Heian era finally ended, with it ended effective rule by that house. The Heian state was weakened and finally felled by complex struggles on the one hand between the Fujiwara and retired emperors who increasingly strove to exercise power as the era wore on, and on the other between the capital and the restive warlords in the provinces. In fact it was the growing gulf between the court and the warrior class (who came to realize they held the true economic and military might) that precipitated the end of the Heian period.

The old court at Heian, for all its flaws, has ever since held a nostalgic charm for the Japanese. In more warlike or crassly materialistic ages, its leisurely pace of life, humanistic values, and elegance have hovered brightly at the back of the national mind. Always more of a dream than a reality, the old capital's meaning was never better expressed than in a few lines by the great haiku poet Basho in the seventeenth century:

I am in the Old Capital
Yet still I yearn for the Old Capital—
Ah, the Bird of Time. *

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*The last line speaks of the *hototogisu*, the Japanese cuckoo, here written with characters meaning "bird of time." Like the Western nightingale, the hototogisu is a bird of rich, poetic associations, whose call evokes feelings of pathos, yearning, and unattainable beauty.

Characteristically, Heian religion appears in the literature and general culture more as bits and pieces, and as instruments of mood and feeling, than as systematic philosophy or practice. The miyabi or "courtly elegance" spirit was more emotive than logical. Theoretical inconsistencies involved in relating, as the Heian world did, to several religion or value systems at once—Buddhist, Shinto, Confucian, Taoist—bothered it not at all; they accepted anything that added to the present a nuance of depth or allayed a superstitious fear. Thus we find in Heian literature and history a melancholy Buddhist awareness of the transitoriness of beauty and love, plots turning on such Shinto observances as the sending of an imperial princess to Ise where she would serve as priestess, the keeping of a Taoist calendar and directional taboos, and the rhetoric of Confucian ethics in state documents. There were exceptions, of course. We are told of one Ise princess, a devout Buddhist, who bemoaned the peril her service of Amaterasu might bring to her ultimate salvation since no Buddhist worhip was allowed in the Saigu, the ritually pure lodge near the Grand Shrine of Ise where the vestal priestess lived. Among priests there were theologians quite capable of rigorous thought and trenchant argument, but the Heian nobility for the most part (and, we must suppose, the illiterate peasantry who have left few traces) seemed satisfied with their syncretistic spirituality of diverse strands.

Institutionally, Heian religion was dominated by two great Buddhist denominations, Shingon and Tendai. Each was founded by a powerful charismatic individual and was headquartered on a particular mountain. Thus these two schools represented styles of Buddhism that went far toward accommodating the new religion to the old shamanistic spirituality.

Shingon was founded by Kukai (773–836), called posthumously Kobo Daishi, a brilliant monk whose life spanned the transition of the center of power from Nara to Heian. Originally trained for government service, Kukai's interests turned toward religion in the course of his education. As early as 797 he produced his first major work, the *Sango shiiki.* Endeavoring to harmonize Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, this book is a foretaste of Kukai's lifelong concern to reconcile various religions, as well as the diverse schools of Buddhism, on deep levels of profundity.

Around the same time, however, Kukai discovered the *Mahavairocana Sutra,* a work of tantric or esoteric Buddhism that emphasizes that Vairocana is the central deity and personification of the essence of the universe, the *dharmakaya* ("truth body"). For Kukai this teaching represented the crown of Buddhism and the perspective from which all other teachings were to be appreciated and interpreted. Vairocana was also shared with the Kegon school, but Kukai's school, called Shingon or "True Word," goes further in its instruction about spiritual practice and achievement. Kukai believed that an adept could, through mystic means, become one with the essence of the universe and so achieve Buddhahood "in this body, in this lifetime" (*sokushin jobutsu*).

The means for doing this centered on the esoteric "three secrets" he taught: *mudras* (hand gestures), *dharani* (chants aligned to the tantric spiritual beings), and yogic meditations, including evocations of those powerful allies. Furthermore, Shingon makes great use of complex **mandalas**, rituals, and works of art. The two basic mandalas, or symbolic arrangements of cosmic buddhas, are the womb and diamond mandalas representing universal essence at work, that is, wisdom lived out in compassionate action.

Art, like ritual, is of great importance to Shingon because it is a vehicle for the realization of buddhahood. It is not surprising, then, that Shingon made extremely important contributions to the continuing development of Japanese religious art and, even more significant, to the spiritual attitudes that down to the present have shaped artists' approaches to their craft. For, in this perspective, art becomes meditation since artists must themselves be in touch with their buddhahood. Furthermore, Japanese art has always been, through a kind of secularization of the Shingon principle, highly medium-oriented—as much concerned to portray the ''essence'' of the mood or ink itself as of the subject it is made to depict.

Shingon's emphasis on sacred art had another consequence of tremendous import: the popularization of Buddhism among the common people. Shingon art portrayed extremely deep and esoteric matters, but these same pictures and statues became the ''books'' of the illiterate. Commoners might not have understood the doctrines behind the strange and powerful figures who increasingly graced local temples and wayside shrines, but they could feel elevated by the sense of wonder and mystery they conveyed. Moreover, esoteric buddhas and bodhisattvas stepped out of the mandalas, so to speak, to become elements within folk religion: Jizo, friend of children, travelers, and the dead; Kannon, bodhisattva of compassion; and Amida, savior of those who call upon his name.

It is characteristic of Shingon that it operated at once on many levels, from unsophisticated peasant faith to that of erudite monks, while providing the nobility with eloquent preachers and spectacular rituals. This was entirely in accord with the syncretizing thought of Kobo Daishi who strove to unite all religions and all aspects of human experience into one vast but coherent system. Kukai's writings include the *Jujushinron,* a remarkable survey of all known religions and schools of Buddhism arranged according to levels in the quest for total enlightenment. Thus Kegon, because it was based on the interrelatedness of all things and on Vairocana as the universal essence, is next to the top; Shingon, offering not only this intellectual teaching but also, through its tantric techniques, the means to realize them, is seen as the supreme school. But the listing indicated that Kukai saw other sects and devotional practices that fell short of the highest not as heresies or rivals but as lower stages on the way—imperfect but valuable in their appropriate time and place. In another major work, *Sokushin jobutsugi,* Kukai outlines how this is done: making manifest Vairocana as one's true nature through practice of the ''three secrets.''[9]

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[9] See Yoshito S. Hakeda, trans., *Kukai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

The second sect dominating Heian Buddhism was Tendai. Tendai was the Japanese form of the school of Buddhism known in China as T'ien T'ai, after a mountain of that name in southeast China where it flourished, particularly under the great monk and scholar Chih-I (538-597 C.E.). It was brought to Japan by a monk named Saicho (767-822, posthumous name Dengyo Daishi) in 806, and was located at the monastery he had already established on Mt. Hiei just northeast of the city of Heian (Kyoto)—a location that gave him and his order great influence in the capital.

Tendai offers a particularly expansive Mahayana vision. Its fundamental concern is to reveal the deep unity of all Buddhist practices and teachings and all of existence. To this end it ranks the Buddhist sutras on various levels according to their revelation of ultimate truth, with the *Lotus Sutra* placed at the top as the supreme statement of the Buddha's wisdom. This powerful scripture emphasizes the universality and eternity of buddhahood or nirvana and suggests that it is not limited in space or time, that all may find it, and that the historical Buddha and all other buddhas are but conditioned manifestations of this ultimate reality that showers the entire earth like rain. The various spiritual teachings and practices are equally partial and equally valid, being seen by the wise as but a single "way." Under the spacious umbrella of this perspective many forms and schools of Buddhism flourished: Zen, Pure Land (or Amidism), an esotericism similar to that of Shingon, Vinaya (Ritsu) with its emphasis on monastic discipline, devotion to Kannon the great bodhisattva, and much else. As we shall see, many of these movements nourished by Tendai later took independent courses to become mighty sects in their own right.

As one might expect, Tendai's accommodating stance made possible a relation to Shinto as well. Ichijitsu ("One truth") Shinto, the school founded under Tendai auspices and centered at the Sanno Shrine at the foot of Mt. Hiei, emphasized that buddhas and kami can be identified with one another, each representing common lines of spiritual force. Although the full development of this theory, like the corresponding Shingon-influenced Ryobu-shugo ("Unification of both sides") Shinto, did not come until much later than the time of Saicho, its roots go back to earlier practices and attitudes, and it was greatly influenced by the *Lotus Sutra*'s concept of absolute and relative expressions of buddhahood. This theory related the buddhist pantheon to the indigenous Shinto deities as **honji suijaku** ("original nature—trace manifestation").

Tendai was scarcely behind Shingon in supporting the Heian period's love of spiritual diversity, esotericism, and pilgrimage. Like Shingon, it supported a love of lavish ritual and quasi-magical piety. It also established its easy relation to Shinto and supported the mountain priests who practiced shugendo. We will later look at some of these features of Tendai in more detail.

Although the Buddhism of Shingon and Tendai dominated the Heian period, and much of Shinto was even brought under its influence, the Heian period tells another story, too. Under the aegis of governmental support, and sustained by ongoing popular religious traditions relating to kami and local shrines, more orthodox forms of Shinto continued, as they have up to the present. Although this Shinto may have lacked the spectacular visibility of the dynamic new Buddhist sects, it showed a remarkable power of endurance.

Little is known about popular Shinto in the Heian period. Court Shinto, however, was theoretically the ritual foundation of the state. It centered around four major institutions: (a) the *toshigoi* or spring prayers for a good harvest; (b) the rites of the Grand Shrine of Ise, especially the *shikinen sengu* or ritual rebuilding of the shrine every twenty years; (c) the *saigu* or sending of an imperial princess to Ise to serve as high priestess at the Grand Shrine; and, most significant of all, (d) the already mentioned daijo sai or harvest festival celebrated by a new emperor as the keystone of his accession rites.

Heian Shinto rites were slow and stylized, lacking the drama of Buddhism. However, they were extremely important, for they kept alive archaic religious patterns. Moreover, through these rituals, with their characteristic emphasis on simple offerings and sacred purity, the nation showed itself as it wanted to be seen by the kami.

The Kamakura Period (1185–1333)

The Gempei War (1180–1185) brought Fujiwara rule to an end. It was not simply a battle among factions of the old Heian aristocracy. In contrast, a series of conflicts involved segments of the newly arisen samurai or *bushi* (warrior) class, and ultimately led to political dominance by this class. In the process, the old Heian aristocracy's power was eclipsed. The way was now opened for a strong feudal system in which provincial landed barons (*daimyo*) ruled over their own samurai retainers and vassals.

The victory of the Minamoto (Genji) clan over the Taira (Heike) clan in the Gempei War signaled not only the defeat of the Taira and the Fujiwara but also the coming to power of a whole new class. Perhaps symbolic of this, the Minamoto leader Yoritomo (1147–1199) moved the capital from Heian to Kamakura. Though in terms of contemporary geography and travel this may not seem significant, by twelfth-century standards it was a major geographic shift that represented a new direction in politics, social order, religion, and culture. It symbolized a revolution and new day, releasing energy for the blossoming of a variety of new cultural forms.

In the meantime a new governing structure was established at Kamakura (eventually under the Hojo clan) called the *bakufu* and ruled by the chief military ruler of the country (*shogun*). Although the ruling house changed after the Kamakura period, this structure, and the de facto rule of feudal militarists continued well into the nineteenth century. Throughout this time the imperial house continued to exist and even nominally to rule, but by and large the country was in the hands of a new and different group.

Religiously the situation was also quite new in spite of the continued existence of the Heian Buddhist denominations and Shinto. But the power of Heian

Buddhism and its aristocratic patrons was now eclipsed, giving opportunity for new movements to flourish. At the same time the social, political, and religious turmoil was seen as proof that life itself might be coming to an end—or at least that impermanence (*mujo*), karmic retribution (*inga*), and the degeneration of time itself (*mappo*) were seriously jeopardizing the human search for order, purity, and salvation.

New religious movements in the Kamakura period flourished because of these conditions. Zen Buddhism was established by Eisai (1141–1215) of the Rinzai school and Dogen (1200–1253) of the Soto school. Both had been Tendai monks who became dissatisfied and sought a "truer" form of Buddhism in China. The Zen they brought back, with its strict discipline and emphasis on absolute loyalty to a master, was immediately attractive to the warrior class, which quickly became its major patron.

Nichiren Buddhism, a second major new Buddhist movement, was founded by another former Tendai monk, Nichiren (1222–1282). This teaching, emphasizing salvation via faith in the *Lotus Sutra,* gained strong support among the masses.

The third major new movement of the early Kamakura period was **Pure Land** Buddhism. Although the scriptures, teachings, and practices of Pure Land Buddhism had long been present in Japan—especially as one possibility within the eclecticism of Tendai Buddhism—only now did they become embodied in sectarian groups solely devoted to them. As taught by Honen (1133–1212) and the Jodo (Pure Land) sect inspired by him, and his disciple Shinran (1173–1262) and his Jodoshin (True Pure Land) sect, Pure Land teachings increasingly pervaded Japanese religion, from high courtiers of Heian to peasant villagers. Helping in this task were later men and groups such as Ippen (1239–1289) and the Ji (Time) sect. The message of Amida Buddha's saving grace was taken around the country by itinerant preachers. Such missionaries had great appeal. They provided a message of paradisal existence beyond this sin-laden and degenerate world, and they offered an "easy path" of dependence on the "other power" of Amida Buddha.

Both Honen and Shinran had been Tendai monks who became dissatisfied with its aristocratic, elitist, and esoteric tendencies. They increasingly moved to establish new Buddhist centers and to take the "gospel" of Amida's grace and mercy directly to the people. The most important Pure Land theme was that the cosmic Buddha Amida had already, in effect, saved all beings by his infinite compassion and mercy. The second theme follows directly from this: human beings need only call on Amida in faith to bring about the salvation he has already won for them. This calling is "**namu Amida butsu,**" or "praise to Amida Buddha," called the **nembutsu,** and is the central practice of most Pure Land groups.

Although there are theological exceptions—especially in the teachings of Shinran and in more contemporary Pure Land circles—the popular view of salvation focused on rebirth in Amida's Pure Land after death. Amida came to receive the soul at the moment of death. Subsequently, in the paradisal Pure

Land, one had easy access to nirvana, total release from the wheel of birth and death. In the popular mind, however, rebirth in the Pure Land was a sufficient goal in itself.

The sectarian developments in Pure Land Buddhism were built on the factors mentioned above, but they were related to other issues as well. Not only were the times ripe for moving out from under the umbrella of Tendai and establishing separate movements, but these and other sectarian developments in the Kamakura period also depended on strong, charismatic leaders who gathered about them loyal followers who then sought to perpetuate that leader's teachings. Furthermore, the message of these leaders often claimed to be the only true way, and this fostered separatist movements adhering exclusively to that particular group. Finally, many of these movements preached a kind of "priesthood of all believers" within which the distinctions between monk and layman were largely erased. In such a context a sectarian orthodoxy and orthopraxy could be established outside the normal transmission lines of institutional (monastic) Buddhism—one could, as it were, "set up shop" on one's own.

While various Pure Land movements increasingly dominated the Kamakura period, other movements already mentioned continued to grow. Prominent among these was Nichiren's Hokke (Lotus) sect. One of the more colorful figures in Japanese religious history, Nichiren was something of a militant zealot who claimed for himself and the *Lotus Sutra* (*Myohorenge-kyo*) sole authority and power by which individuals as well as the nation might be saved. Like the Pure Land groups, he put great stock in the idea of a degenerate age and, in fact, saw all other Buddhist groups of the day as examples of it. Nichiren was not, however, merely a variation on the Pure Land theme. Not only was the object of faith and the character of the practice different, but also the content of salvation was more clearly a mode of realization in this life rather than one of rebirth in the next. However, salvation for Nichiren was inevitably related to a collective, national salvation—an eschatological vision in which Japan, under the cosmic Buddha, would usher in a new Buddhist age and be the home of a new historical Buddha. It is easy to see how some of the millennialist religious movements of contemporary Japan, for example Soka Gakkai, find their inspiration in Nichiren.

Unlike both the Pure Land and the Nichiren sects, Zen represented a normative, monastic Buddhism that had little mass appeal and relatively little to do with a Buddhism of faith, devotion, and calling on other powers. Zen was more representative of the traditional "hard path," "self-power" forms of Mahayana Buddhism. In fact its very name means "meditation" and, more specifically, a particular form of seated meditation (zazen) that is best practiced in monasteries. Its ideals were more in keeping with the traditional Buddhism of Nara and Heian days insofar as enlightenment and the bodhisattva realization were its religious goals. Yet Zen was not simply another form of Heian Buddhism; it was just not the same kind of Kamakura alternative as represented by the Pure Land or Nichiren groups.

Zen thrived under the blessings and patronage of the new rulers, at Kamakura and later at Kyoto. By the end of the Kamakura period Zen was firmly entrenched with an extensive, strong temple system and close ties to both the old Heian aristocracy and the new military ruling class. Though Zen never garnered the numbers that the more popular movements did, it nonetheless wielded increasing influence in Kamakura society—religiously, culturally, educationally, and even politically. These developments continued only as Japan moved into its next period when Zen became, in effect, the state relgion.

Although the three Buddhist sects just discussed dominated the religious scene of the thirteenth century, other paths were also developing. Primarily, these were ways related to warrior codes and to the arts.

The way of the warrior, initially called *yumiya no michi* ("way of the bow and arrow") or *kyuba no michi* ("way of the bow and horse"), and in later history called bushido ("way of the warrior"), indicated primarily the ideals and values of the feudal samurai: loyalty, bravery, discipline, duty, and a fearless willingness to meet death in the service of these ideals and one's superiors. This life-defining code presumed an honoring of buddhas as well as kami, and its prestige and popularity grew throughout the Kamakura and subsequent periods.

In the arts, the idea of a "way" was particularly important in late Heian and early Kamakura poetry. In the hands of such famous court poets as Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241) or such priest/poets as Saigyo (1118–1170), there was a clear and explicit notion of a "way of poetry" (*kado*) that carried religious meaning. In fact, poetry in Japan had long had a sacred, even magical, character to it, but by the Kamakura period it was a sophisticated, clearly defined, Buddhist-influenced way in which aesthetic ideals such as **yugen** (sublime mystery) and *sabi* (solitariness) carried religious meaning.

Such sentiments, and the Heian courtly sophistication in the arts generally, continued on through the Kamakura period. The ideal of the Buddhist hermit or recluse related artistic (especially poetic) endeavor to spiritual experience and practice. One can see this at the end of the Kamakura period in the writings of Yoshida Kenko (1283–1350). In his *Essays in Idleness* (*Tsurezuregusa*) he clearly represents these forms of religio-aesthetic sensitivity and the model of the recluse literati. On the one hand he displays a continuing nostalgia for Heian sophistication when he says: "They speak of the degenerate age, yet how splendid is the ancient atmosphere, uncontaminated by the world, that still prevails within the palace walls." On the other hand he represents the bittersweet tension of the detached recluse in a world of attachment to beauty when he says: "A certain hermit once said, 'There is one thing that even I, who have no worldly entanglements, would be sorry to give up, the beauty of the sky.' I can understand why he should have felt that way."[10]

Still another important development in the Kamakura period was taking place in Shinto. As we have already seen, in the Heian period rationalizations had appeared to reconcile Shinto and Buddhism. These theories focused on the idea of honji suijaku (''original essence, manifest traces'') in which the buddhas and bodhisattvas represented spiritual ''essences'' of which Shinto kami were ''manifest traces.'' During the later Kamakura period, however, moves were afoot to purify Shinto of its Buddhist overlay and to see in Shinto, rather than Buddhism, the superior spiritual essences. Perhaps stimulated by the idea that the national kami had helped drive out the Mongols in 1274 and 1281 through a divine wind (*kami kaze*), this movement sought to reassert the superiority of Shinto and the uniqueness of ancient indigenous patterns.

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[10] Donald Keene, trans., *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenko* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 22–23.

Such Shinto views are clearly evident in the writings of Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293–1354) who was concerned to reassert the divine descent of the imperial line as well as the divine uniqueness of Japan and the superiority of Shinto. It is also evident in the Yui-itsu Shinto movement that spanned the medieval period. Such sentiments in Shinto indicated a growing national self-consciousness that became increasingly strong in later years and stood behind not only attempts to restore the emperor to power but also sentiment for establishing a theocracy based on an ''imperial way'' (*kodo*).

The Muromachi Period (1336–1573)

Looking at the broad sweep of Japanese religious history, the Muromachi period represents less of a change from the Kamakura period than the Kamakura period was from the Heian period. The dominant Buddhist groups and movements of the Kamakura period, especially Zen and Pure Land Buddhism, continued to gain in strength and support. In fact Zen grew to such lengths among the upper and ruling classes that it became a de facto state religion. Pure Land movements grew as well.

But after the repulsion of the Mongols, the Kamakura shogunate was in a weakened state in the early fourteenth century. Strong rival clans and determined moves to restore the emperor to power brought it to an end in 1333. For the next three years the Emperor Godaigo ruled a shaky coalition with a weak hand, and by 1336 a new bushi clan—the Ashikaga—had established a new shogunate and moved it to the Muromachi section of Kyoto. Once again the bushi were in control and a military-based government ruled in a feudal society, though the site of this government had returned to Kyoto.

The Muromachi period was definitely a troubled time. Although the first half of the period was governed by relatively strong and able leadership, the second half degenerated into civil war, beginning with the Onin Wars of 1467–1477 and continuing with a period of Japanese history known as the *Sengoku jidai* (''Age of warring provinces,'' 1467–1568). Kyoto and the Ashikaga rulers remained symbolic centers in these later years, but the country was essentially partitioned among the great landed barons of the time, who continually vied for power.

This history, however, is only a part of the larger tale of the Muromachi period. Religiously and culturally there is a different, though related, story. From this perspective we not only look at patterns of religious expression that persist in spite of the turmoil, but we also focus on Kyoto, and the Ashikaga family as cultural/religious patrons, to the arts and literature, and to the growing influence of Zen.

The Ashikaga, like many others of the bushi class, were neither country bumpkins nor unwashed soldiers. They were representative of a class which now sought to emulate the older courtly aristocrats. In addition they brought to Kyoto the general bushi interest in Zen Buddhism. Under the relatively strong leadership of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408) Kyoto became a thriving center for religion, art, and culture.

Zen Buddhism was instrumental in the development of what stands out as the distinctive religious feature of the Muromachi period. Under the leadership of such Zen priests as Muso Soseki (1275–1351) Zen established a strong temple system in the Kyoto area that became the hub of religious, artistic, educational, and even political activities. Zen imported and produced art and literature, taught the children of the upper classes in temple schools, fostered interest in the Chinese classics, and provided its own monks as the scribes and advisers to commercial/political interests in the government. In all this, however, it is the unique relation of Zen to the arts that stands out.

Zen's relation to the arts in the Muromachi era was based on several features. The primary feature lies in the nature of Zen experience itself. For much of Zen, and for much of the Taoist tradition that influenced Zen's early development in China, religious experience was closely associated with aesthetic experience and was naturally expressed in artistic/literary forms. Therefore, although Buddhist art as iconography and symbol has played a part in Zen as in other sects, Zen went beyond iconography and symbolic expression. In Zen even secular subjects could express religious experience. The whole range of the arts, especially calligraphy, monochrome ink painting, poetry, and the tea ceremony, was open to Zen as potentially religious.

Zen had become a vehicle for Sung dynasty Chinese culture and learning. On its temple walls and in its temple halls these arts were displayed and practiced. Monks and priests were often poets and painters as well, and professional painters and poets who were not monks found a ready place and patron for their work.

Zen's understanding of the discipline and practice of artistic creativity made art a natural ally of meditation itself. For Zen the arts were "ways" of spiritual significance, especially as practiced within a Zen context. Calligraphy (*shodo,* the "way of the brush"), painting (*gado,* the "way of painting"), and many others forms were adjunct disciplines to meditation. Within such a context many of Japan's greatest artists flourished. Although not all were equally and intimately involved in Zen practice, all were influenced in some degree by the general Zen taste or style of the day. Among the most prominent of these were Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443) and Komparu Zenchiku (1394–1481) in the noh theatre, Sogi

(1421–1502) in *renga* or linked verse, Noami (1397–1471) and Shuko (d. 1502) in the tea ceremony, Ikkyu Sojun (1394–1481) in Zen poetry, Shubun (d. 1450) and Sesshu (1420–1506) in landscape painting, and Soami (d. 1525) in garden design.

Finally, Zen was in a very favorable position vis-a-vis the ruling powers. The Ashikaga shoguns and family were firm patrons of both the arts and Zen. This, of course, gave Zen a unique opportunity to pursue and spread its artistic interests. Muromachi Zen and its aesthetic influences permeated the culture of the times and brought both Zen and its art to a pinnacle of popularity.

The danger in this, of course, was that artistic interests would overtake religious ones. In fact, as early as the first half of the fourteenth century the great priest Muso Soseki admonished his monks to keep their Zen practice pure and not "befuddle their minds in non-Buddhist works or devote their efforts to literary endeavors" lest they be considered mere "shaven-headed laymen." Although many Zen practitioners were able to balance the religious and the artistic quite well (including Muso himself), in the later Muromachi period Zen became increasingly unexceptional religiously and produced few notable leaders.

In the meantime, of course, other religious activities and developments were taking place. In 1549, Catholic missionaries under St. Francis Xavier arrived in Japan. Although they met with initial success, by the mid-seventeenth century the Christian presence had all but been stamped out by anti-foreign and anti-Western sentiment.

Within sectarian Buddhism, the "easy-path" devotional sects continued to rise in power and popularity. Nichiren Buddhism, for example, continued its activities until a suppression at the hands of religious and political opponents in 1537 took much of the wind out of its sails. Pure Land Buddhism, especially the True Pure Land sect, became increasingly popular, well organized, and widespread. Under Rennyo (1415–1499) especially, the centers in Kyoto flourished, and the Pure Land message was taken into the northern and eastern provinces to form new sectarian groups such as Ikko ("single-mind" sect).

Shinto and folk religion, long the mainstay of Japanese faith, continued to operate in age-old ways at shrines and in homes and villages throughout Japan. Sentiments for a "purified" Shinto, which had already surfaced during the Kamakura period, continued to grow. One Shinto spokesman Yoshida Kanetomo (1435–1511). The following statement indicates the direction his thinking was going to assert the national tradition and the unique and sacred imperial way (kodo):

> During the reign of Empress Suiko, Prince Shotoku [573–621] stated in a memorial that Japan was the roots and trunk of civilization, China its branches and leaves, and India its flowers and fruit. Similarly, Buddhism is the flower and fruit of all laws, Confucianism their branches and leaves, and Shinto their roots and trunk. Thus all foreign doctrines are offshoots of Shinto.[11]

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[11] Tsunoda et al., *Sources*, I, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

Although Shotoku seems not to have actually said such a thing, Yoshida not only wanted to say it but also wanted to find such sentiments in the heroic golden age of Japan's early years. Furthermore, it must be understood that "Shinto" in this view is not merely a shrine system with rituals and festivals but indicates the all-important sense of a sacred national polity (*kokutai*) and tradition, a divine descent for the imperial line, and the sacred uniqueness of Japan within the world.

As one pursues the story of Japanese religion in this period or in any other, it is important to remember that in the actual religious life, as lived out in daily life, these distinctions between Buddhism, Shinto, purified Shinto, and so forth tend to break down. Most Japanese were in some degree involved in all of them, and these distinctions are better thought of as strands woven inextricably together. The noh plays help show this for the Muromachi period. Within their plots and their aesthetic ideals one can find most of the elements of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century religious life—all the way from shamanistic exorcism to Pure Land theology, and from Zen priests to demons and ghosts.

The Tokugawa Period (1600–1868)

In contrast to the Muromachi period the characteristic marks of the Tokugawa period were unity, order, and stability. Though changes certainly took place, compared with the previous era it represented some two hundred and fifty years of calm under a relatively strong central government. Religiously speaking, there was a general shift away from Buddhism and Buddhist culture to Confucianism, Shinto, and a growing secular culture.

Although the history of the transition from civil war in the sixteenth century to centralized order in the seventeenth century is complex, in essence it has to do with the emergence of particularly strong and determined regional barons in the later sixteenth century who increasingly exercised control over the other feudal lords and over the last vestiges of power in Kyoto. These barons, although generally of the samurai class, represented a new breed of tough, provincial, even "lower class" men who gathered power by their own strength and wit—practical men bent on unifying the country and stabilizing it.

Chief among these barons were Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616). Each built on the advances of the previous one until by 1600 a new shogunate could be established—the Tokugawa shogunate and government at Edo (Tokyo). With determination and sometimes ruthlessness these men and their supporters took control of the whole land, including not only the holdings of other barons but also such power centers as the Tendai Buddhist headquarters near Kyoto.

Two symbols of the times are castles and the city of Edo. The castle was a new architectural structure at this time and represented not only a practical form of defense in times of civil war but also the sense of individual, autonomous strength that characterized the new breed of rulers. Simultaneously, however, the Japanese castles evidenced older patterns of aesthetic, decorative taste and thus symbolize the continuance of previous cultural features as well.

The move to Edo, too, symbolized these new times and new rulers. Eschewing both Kyoto and Kamakura, these rulers moved to yet another city—young, provincial, and bustling—that was in many ways far removed from the older centers of cultural, religious, and political/economic power. The move to Edo signaled a major turning point toward the modern era in Japan's history and away from an earlier, more traditional culture. Although the Tokugawa period did not see the modernization of Japan or Japan's entry into the ranks of a modern nation state, it certainly prepared Japan for that development. Especially, it witnessed the dramatic rise of the merchant class to a position of economic, if not political, power.

The Tokugawa shogunate maintained a relatively stable government until 1868. In order to do so, it entered deeply into the daily lives of the people through hierarchical structures, and controlled them by means of law and maxim. It tended to resist the new or the innovative and be very protective of its control, especially against foreign influence. Japan resisted foreign trade until well into the nineteenth century.

Religious history took a decided turn. Buddhism had tended to dominate in previous centuries. Now, Confucianism began to come to the fore under state patronage. This orientation is particularly important to trace since it became both the dominant religio-philosophic teaching of the period and an ideological tool in the hands of the Tokugawa rulers. Confucian and Neo-Confucian ideas permeated the thinking, planning, and action of the Tokugawa rulers as it did the intellectual/educated elite of the times. It was pervasive within an important class of people and filtered down to the masses through the laws and maxims of the government.

Of course Confucianism had long been present in Japan, though somewhat ''hidden'' because of its lack of any clear institutionalized structure. From early times, however, it had infused the Japanese value system with the virtues of loyalty and filial piety. Later it was studied in the temple schools of Zen Buddhism. With the new times and new rulers in Edo, however, Neo-Confucianism came into its own in Japan. It promoted a vision of ''paradise'' as an ordered, just society, and it instilled values of loyalty, sincerity, order, and stability. For the Tokugawa elite this was a life-defining ''way'' that satisfied not only the quest for intellectual/religious meaning but also the quest for hierarchical order, political/social loyalty, and the rule of moral law. The spirit of this new orientation is graphically represented in a comment by one of its early heralds, Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), a Neo-Confucian scholar and an important adviser to the Tokugawa government:

> The Way of Taoism and Buddhism is the Way of quiescence and nonstriving, and of entering the original undifferentiated state of nature. But man is born into the world of today; how can he put himself in his original state where "no thought"

> is said to reign. Such arguments based on withered trees, dead ashes, and old faggots are of the same sort—all weird, perverted talk. The Way of Confucianism is different from this, and consists in nothing but moral obligations between sovereign and subject, father and child, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and friend and friend. These and the five virtues [loyalty, filial piety, sincerity, decorum, justice] are rooted in the mind and in the principle of mind in the nature of man.[12]

This not only exemplifies the central message of Neo-Confucianism (especially as based on the Chinese Neo-Confucian philosopher Chu Hsi, 1130–1200) but it also suggests the growing anti-Buddhist sentiment of the period as well. Although Neo-Confucianism owes much to Taoism and Buddhism in China, it tended to eschew those influences in seventeenth-century Japan. As a life-defining "way" of human action, it focused very strongly on moral obligation and behavior.

Such a focus was perfect for the Tokugawa government. It looked to Neo-Confucianism to rationalize and inspire its policies. In a sense, the government and the educational system it fostered became a Neo-Confucian "church," that is, the primary institutional locale and embodiment of this religio-philosophical system.

Exemplary of this were the laws promulgated by the government that set out the duties, ethical maxims, and obligations of the varying classes in the society—all designed to establish and maintain heirarchical order and stability and to instill Neo-Confucian values. As early as 1615, in fact, laws such as the following were issued:

> 1. Drinking parties and wanton revelry should be avoided.
> 2. Offenders against the law should not be harbored or hidden.
> 3. All innovative ideas or factional conspiracies should be reported to the government.
> 4. Restrictions on the type and quality of dress to be worn should not be transgressed.
> 5. The *samurai* of various domains shall lead a frugal and simple life.[13]

Based on such laws—written or unwritten—the duties and obligations of various groups were set. Earlier notions of a particular way of the warrior (bushido), for example, were now codified and preached. People such as Yamaga Soko (1627–1685) were saying:

> The business of the *samurai* consists in reflecting on his own station in life, in discharging loyal service to his master, in deepening this fidelity with friends, and in devoting himself to duty. Though these are also the fundamental moral

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[12] Ibid., I, 348.

[13] Ibid., I, 327-329.

> obligations of everyone in the land, they have no leisure to fully pursue this Way. Therefore, the *samurai* confines himself to this Way and becomes a model for the people.[14]

In fact, the ideal samurai was, in this "religion," the paradigmatic model for both orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

Other classes, however, had their own particular obligations and "ways." The merchant class was instructed in *chonindo* ("way of the merchant"), which consisted in diligent labor, frugality, honesty, loyalty, and obedience to superiors. Peasants, too, were expected to adhere to these obligations. "Salvation" in this religion consisted in fulfilling the moral duties and maintaining the social order.

While Neo-Confucianism developed new schools and new emphases during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, another aspect of Japanese religion was slowly and steadily evolving. This had to do with a resurgence of Shinto nationalism. We have already noted such views in earlier centuries, especially as tied to ideas of an "imperial way" and the sacrality/superiority of the national tradition and structure (kokutai). These sentiments had long been a part of Japanese thinking, but especially during the second half of the Tokugawa period they blossomed into increasing dominance. The central features of this movement included affirming and honoring the divine emperor and the imperial line; the indigenous, ancient traditions of mythology and literature; and the sacrality and superiority of Japan's unique structure. On the other hand this same movement fostered hostility toward all foreign (even Chinese) ideas.

One of the first people to herald this development in the Tokugawa period was Yamazaki Ansai (1618–1682), a Neo-Confucian thinker who sought to merge those teachings with Shinto ideas. For Yamazaki this meant a reassertion of uniquely Japanese ideas of inner devotion merged with Confucian notions of outer decorum. For Nakae Toju (1608–1684), the founder of the Wang Yang-ming school of Neo-Confucianism in Japan, it meant a theistic understanding of the ultimate Neo-Confucian principles (*ri*) underlying all life.

One particularly important direction this movement took was to reassert interest in the study of Japan's own classical, literary tradition. Whereas Neo-Confucianism had already stimulated interests in classical, quasi-scientific, and language studies, this new direction focused much of that interest on Japan's own past. Kada Azumamaro (1669–1736), for example, was a Shinto priest who petitioned the government to start a school for "national learning" (*kokugaku*) and thereby to stimulate study of ancient Japanese poetry and literature.

Others took up this same cause. Under such people as Kamo Mabuchi (1697–1736), Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), and Hirata Atsutani (1776–1843) the movement came to full flower. Its main concern was the study of the ancient Japanese classics (mythology, literature, and poetry) but its agenda was to discover and instill the unique Japanese spirit and to "purify" Japanese institutions and ideas of all foreign influences. In its later forms this movement, and much of Japan with it, became increasingly anti-foreign, including anti-Buddhist and anti-Confucian as well.

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[14] Ibid., I, 390.

The sentiments of these "national learning scholars" (*kokugaku-sha*) are well summed up in the following comment by Hirata:

> People all over the world refer to Japan as the Land of the Gods, and call us descendants of the gods. Indeed, it is exactly as they say: our country, as a special mark of favor from the gods, was begotten by them; therefore the difference between Japan and other countries defies comparison. Ours is the Land of the Gods, and each Japanese is a descendant of the gods.[15]

These and similar views led to a religion of the state—a "civil religion," a theocracy, a life-defining way called the imperial way. Although the Tokugawa period did not see the full institutionalization of this way, it set the stage for later developments up to World War II.

Other religious factors, of course, functioned during the Tokugawa period—albeit upstaged by the developments in Neo-Confucianism and Shinto nationalism. For example, it is clear that the fortunes of Shinto increased during the period, but the fortunes of Buddhism declined. Institutional Buddhism came steadily under the direct control of the Tokugawa rulers, though popular Buddhist ideas and practices continued to play a key part in the religious life of the masses. Buddhism also suffered, however, from internal stagnation and failed to produce either creative leadership or compelling answers to the challenges of Neo-Confucianism and Shinto revivalism. The traditional and medieval artistic ways were eclipsed in the Tokugawa period. Although there were exceptions to this, particularly in the tea cult following Rikyu (1522–1591) and the haiku poetry of Basho (1644–1694), not only were such arts now understood as either Confucian ritual or mere entertainment, but also other cultural/artistic forces were becoming prominent, particularly the bourgeois culture of the merchant class, which took a decidedly secular turn.

Finally, the later Tokugawa period evidenced a growth in popular, peasant religious movements focused on charismatic leaders. These movements—including Shinjaku (mental culture) founded by Ishida Baigan (1685–1744), Hotoku (returning virtue) founded by a peasant named Ninomiya Santoku (1787–1856), and Tenrikyo (heavenly wisdom teaching) founded by Nakayama Miki (1798–1887)—borrowed from the various religious patterns of Japan and adapted them to their particular situation. It remained for a later period in Japanese history to witness the culmination of such movements in the New Religions of the later nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

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[15] Ibid., II, 39.

The Meiji Period (1868–1912) and Beyond

Although the Meiji period is short, it makes up for its brevity in political/social significance. Whereas the Tokugawa period set the scene for Japan's coming-of-age as a modern nation-state, the Meiji period saw it happen. A variety of factors brought the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate, but among these were internal governmental weakness, liberal pressures to reform the political structures more in line with Western ideals of democracy, kokugaku pressures to restore ancient Japanese imperial institutions, and foreign pressures to open Japan to international trade and political involvement. Unable to handle these pressures, the Tokugawa shogunate fell at the hands of younger members of the samurai class who were calling for a "return to antiquity" (*fukko*). In a relatively bloodless coup these people restored the emperor to power in 1868.

The emperor's position, however, remained symbolic. The actual rulers after the coup ironically became the progressive wing of the reform movements, less interested in restoring ancient ways than in modernizing Japanese economic, political, military, and social structures. Throughout the 1870s this faction carried the day, and by 1889 Japan had established a constitutional and parliamentary system while maintaining the imperial symbolic center.

In the process of these changes feudalism—including the shogunal system itself—collapsed. Class privilege also began to crumble as Japan moved toward more popular democratic principles. International trade and the growth of the great merchant houses in Japan also hastened these changes. Industrial families like Mitsubishi gained power and prestige and took an active part in the political realm.

The Western-influenced reformers, however, remained Japanese samurai at heart and relatively authoritarian in their rule. Japan moved toward true constitutional democracy, but much of that movement was in name only. Even after 1889 Japan was governed by a very few nonelected officials who invoked imperial will as their basis for authority. Especially in the 1880s, in fact, the reform movement took a decidedly conservative, nondemocratic turn. The Imperial Edict on Education of 1890 exemplifies these traditionalist sentiments. It opens with the following:

> Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue. Our subjects are ever united in loyalty and filial piety, and have illustrated the beauty thereof from generation to generation. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education.[16]

As is clear in the rest of this document, and from subsequent history, this signals a reassertion of the Shinto/Confucian-inspired ideals so prevalent in the

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[16] Ibid., II, 139.

Tokugawa period. With the divine emperor at the center and loyal subjects ranged around, the sacred national structure (kokutai), the imperial way, and the return to antiquity (fukko) could all be realized in this theocratic vision of the new nation-state.

Such views grew increasingly strong throughout the Meiji period and beyond. In fact, they received official sanction by being declared a "nonreligious" form of Shinto in the constitution of 1889, and were made central to a governmental system that ostensibly abided by the separation of religion from government. Whether "Shinto" is the best name for this civil religion may be disputed. This "nonreligious" religion of the state, however, was based on the idea of the unity of government and ritual (*saisei itchi*), the imperial way, and the sacrality of the national structure. Moreover, it brought with it Confucian ideals of filial piety and loyalty and such samurai values as self-discipline and a "sacred martial spirit."

The early twentieth century saw the further development of these ideals, often used to inspire and rationalize military excursions into neighboring countries. Movements such as the Amur Society, formed in 1901, sought the extension of the imperial way beyond Japan's own borders. In 1930, for example, this group announced that "We stand for Divine Imperial Rulership (*tenno shugi*). Basing ourselves on the fundamental teachings of the foundation of the empire, we seek the extension of the imperial influence to all peoples and places, and the fulfillment of the glory of our national polity (kokutai)."[17] By World War II this view was voiced in the desire to bring the "whole world under one roof" (*hakko ichi-u*). In fact, Japan's involvement in the war was inspired in part by such ideas. For example, the Imperial Declaration of War of 1941 states:

> The basis of the Imperial Way lies in truth, in sincerity, and in justice. Its range is wide and there is nothing it does not embrace. It expels evil, subjugates injustice, absolutely maintains the tenets of justice, and itself occupies a position which can never be violated. The august virtue of the divine imperial lineage has not a single instant when it did not arise from these three virtues. In other words, they form the national character of Japan, and, at the same time, the national trait of the people. It is in the service of these virtues, and not mere arms themselves, that Japan must resort to war.[18]

While this "imperial way" was the dominant and characteristic feature of Meiji and subsequent religious history through World War II, other religious patterns continued to emerge. Christian ideals were particularly influential among intellectuals of the early Meiji era, and Buddhism remained active—albeit officially out of favor. Traditional Shinto, as distinct from the imperial way discussed above, remained important in the daily lives of the Japanese as did other smaller sectarian groups that had begun in the nineteenth century and were slowly developing in the twentieth. In fact, it is to such groups that we now turn as we look to religious developments in modern (i.e. post-World War II) Japan.

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[17] Ibid., II, 258.

[18] Ibid., II, 292.

MODERN JAPAN

The period since World War II has been marked by political stability, economic growth of unprecedented proportions, social change, and abundant religious activity. Although traditional sectarian Buddhism and Shinto, and a small but influential Christianity, have been active, the major story about modern Japanese religious history lies with the many New Religions that have grown up and flourished, especially since the war, thanks to the disestablishment of the imperial way, and true religious freedom.

New religious groups large and small have garnered impressive support across Japanese society. Although several groups, for example Tenrikyo, date back into the nineteenth century, many either came into existence or were revived since 1945. Though they generally may be typed as Buddhist, Shinto, or eclectic in their teachings and practices, they are probably better distinguished by their separation from the traditional religions, their tendency to win mass or popular appeal, their formation of communities around charismatic leaders, their this-worldly eschatologies, and their interests in practical, immediate benefits. Similarly, it might be more useful to indicate some of the factors that led to their eruption on the scene than to try to assign them to some typology or to list their many names.*

The New Religions have flourished, in part, because of a vacuum of religious meaning. This vacuum was caused by many factors, but primarily by a postwar stagnation of the major religions of Japan, the general secular turn of much of Japanese life, the loss of national identity after World War II, the loss of a sense of continuity and connection with the past, and the breakdown of traditional family structures due to urbanization. These factors have tended to undercut the deep-meaning structures by which the Japanese have known who they are both culturally and religiously. The New Religions have filled this vacuum for many people and provided important connections and continuities between old and new in Japanese life.

One example is Soka Gakkai, a large and powerful group whose presence in Japan (and elsewhere) has at times been controversial. Finding its inspiration in Nichiren Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra,* this group has taken the old and sought to adapt it to the modern situation. It is a popular religious movement that appeals to the broader middle or lower classes of Japan. It emphasizes practical, concrete, and immediate benefits; the importance of charismatic leaders; communal experience and structures; and a relatively easy accommodation with an urban, industrialized, materialistic society.

Other groups shift the focus and emphasis a bit. Some lean toward traditional Shinto and folk religious patterns. In these cases one often finds shamanistic women, spirit-possession, magico-religious practices, sacred mountains, and concern for purification and healing.

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*See Appendix, pp. 149–51, for brief descriptions.

These groups are perceived as dynamic, modern, and directly related to individual personal life. They are often evangelical in their concern to reach out for new members, and they provide for those members an important sense of collective identity and belonging. However "new" they may be, they remain uniquely Japanese and make connections with traditional religious patterns. They provide valuable links with the past as they meet religious needs in the present.

The New Religions, however, are only one of the more obvious places to look for religious meaning and expression in modern Japan. Not only might one look at traditional Buddhism, Shinto, Confucianism, and Christianity as they are present and active in today's Japan, but perhaps more in keeping with a "cultural perspective" on Japanese religion, one might look in less obvious places as well.

A recurring theme in Japanese religion has been the literature and the arts. In modern Japan this is particularly true of certain forms of literature, film, and architecture. Authors such as Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), Mishima Yukio (1925–1970), and Tanazaki Junichiro (1886–1965) have evoked in their work not only the "ghosts" of ancient Japanese religious values but also the whisperings of deeper realities and values by which the human condition in general is probed and expressed. Contemporary architects such as Kurokawa Kisho and Isozaki Arata have sought to express ancient religio-aesthetic values such as emptiness (ku) and spatial/temporal intervals (*ma*) of spiritual significance.

The religious character of these artistic forms may be less obvious than some institutionalized sectarian practice, but they nonetheless carry religious meaning and entail involvement in a life-defining "way" of religious/spiritual significance. In every culture, and certainly in Japan, the religious dimension of being human cannot be confined to the more obvious religions; rather, it permeates a culture's life and is often found in unlikely places. As the modern world and Japan continue to develop and change, one will need to be open to changes in religious expression and prepare to see such expression in surprising places.

SCENES FROM THE PAST

The Coming of Buddhism

It was long ago and ways were simple. The people of Japan were fishermen, hunters, and farmers gathered into numerous uji or clans. The clan chieftain was the priest of his people; he presided at a shrine to the tribe's ujigami or patronal kami located in a pure place, perhaps on a high hill or across a clear rushing stream from the village where his people dwelt. The shrine would not the forest eaves, one can find temples dedicated to one Buddhist mystery and way to salvation after another. Here is a shrine to Amida, the buddha of faith who has promised that all who merely call upon his name will be brought into the Western Paradise or Pure Land. Over here is a temple of Kannon, the many-armed bodhisattva of compassion whose countless acts of mercy not only work concrete good but also let a glow of transcendent wonder fall through answered prayer into the lives of those mired in the world of darkness and despair. Over there is an incense-laden temple of Fudo, the Immovable One—the fire-surrounded, fierce-visaged Myoo or Mysterious King whose wrath is not demonic but rather directed against enemies of the Buddha's truth; he holds the sword of discrimination and a lasso with which to ensnare error.

Finally, we come to a temple of Dainichi, the Great Sun Buddha favored by Shingon. This is a temple for mystics and philosophers, for Dainichi personifies the ultimate essence of the universe itself, the dance of the atoms and galaxies. His meditations sustain the rise and fall of all worlds. Between this massive image and the worshiper is a deep pit containing a table for the flower and incense offerings of Buddhism; it represents the gloomy world in which buddhas, bodhisattvas, and priests must labor for the salvation of all sentient beings.

Shinto is not excluded from the Tendai umbrella. At the foot of Mt. Hiei, near Lake Biwa and on the far side from Kyoto, rest the lovely white and vermilion buildings of the Sanno (Mountain King) Shrine. The Sanno Shrine is dedicated to the primordial divinity who ruled that mountain long before Buddhism arrived on Japanese shores and whose protection is still sought on behalf of the monastery. Moreover, in the broad view of Tendai, all divinities ultimately are temporal manifestations of the same unity, so the Mountain King kami was said to be both a Japanese form of that which in India was the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, as well as one form of the great Shinto goddess at Ise, Amaterasu.

Princess and Priestess in Pilgrimage and Sacred Place

An extremely important recurring theme in Japanese religion is pilgrimage—physical movement to a religiously important place. A pilgrimage is transformative, giving the pilgrim fresh grace and spiritual status. Indeed, the pilgrim is frequently transformed into a mediator who represents the sacred to the community and the community to the sacred.

An interesting early Japanese institution known as the saigu (abstinence palace) reflects this pattern.[21] From ancient times until the fourteenth century the accession of a new emperor was accompanied by the selection of an imperial princess to serve as priestess at the saigu near the Grand Shrine of Ise dedicated to Amaterasu. The latter was and remains the premier shrine in the land—a kind of Shinto national cathedral. In the Heian era, when the institution of the saigu was most important, the shrine was considered so sacred that only members of the imperial house and its priests and envoys could worship there. Later, as we shall see, the situation was quite different, though the Grand Shrine's sacred and national significance was not diminished.

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[21] This discussion is based on Robert S. Ellwood, "The Saigu: Princess and Priestess," *History of Religions,* 7, no. 1 (August 1967), 35-60.

The progress of the princess to Ise had all the forms of a pilgrimage and so was a slow and graduated affair. She was selected by divination and, after that selection, a delegation of governmental shrine officials proceeded to her house, purified it, and placed green branches to indicate its new role as a sacred dwelling.

Entering a preliminary abstinence hall the princess had to purify herself in a colorful ceremony in which she went in procession to the banks of the river in an ox-cart, accompanied by twenty-two runners, twenty-four companions in carriages, and numerous bearers. There, a high-ranking Nakatomi priest of the governmental shrine office held a *nusa* or sacred wand with streamers, and the sacred princess knelt by the edge of the stream to cleanse her hands and lips.

While the princess was dwelling in this first hall another preparatory house, the *nonomiya* or palace in the fields, was being built in accordance with the ancient belief that buildings used for sacred purposes should be constructed anew for each new use. After a year or less the princess moved to the nonomiya in a purifying and processional rite similar to the entry into the first preliminary hall. Then, after a year at the nonomiya, long and elaborate preparations began for the princess's great pilgrimage to lonely Ise and its solemn shrines.

The procession to Ise took place during the ninth month. It was the occasion of national observance appropriate to a sacred and special season. Solemn rites of purification were held. The whole month was known as an "abstinence month" when impurity in all things must be avoided. Taboos were fixed, burial and reburial were forbidden, and such non-Shinto, Chinese imports as the Taoist worship of the north star were proscribed.

When the princess finally reached the Grand Shrine, she lived with an entourage in a simple residential compound a few miles from the shrine. There the same annual cycle of Shinto rites as those of the Heian court was kept. Three times a year, however, the princess left the saigu to go up to the Grand Shrine to preside over great rituals connected with the Ise deities. Her ceremonial duties were relatively light—chiefly just receiving and holding a great purificatory wand. She was not so much a priestly performer in these solemnities of prayer and offering as a sacred, silent presence in the midst of the rite.

What was the meaning of this strange mode of life? Behind it lies the Japanese image of the miko or shamaness—a pure woman who lives secluded in a holy place, far from humanity and close to the gods. In early times highly placed women like this were confidantes of rulers and gave oracles on matters of state. Furthermore, the saigu was intended to represent the court and the capital of Heian before the great ancestral and national deities at Ise. But it was not to be the court as it was, compromised by the corrosions of alien religions and various pollutions. It was the court as it would like to be seen by those clean and ancient spiritual powers, the kami who had guided Japan in the divine age long before Buddhism and elegant civilization had been heard of—pure as a young priestess.

Later Pilgrims to the Grand Shrine

Many centuries later, after times had changed, the Grand Shrine attracted a new kind of pilgrim. Ise still represented a pilgrim's goal. It was, in Victor Turner's phrase, "the center out there;" a place having no geographical relation to the concentrations of political, economic, or even ecclesiastical power; a place isolated and holy, whose access required planning and a journey marked by watchfulness but increasing purity; a place where the transformative powers of the holy seem especially close to earth.[22] As an ancient Japanese scripture puts it: "Ise, of the divine wind, where repair the waves from the eternal world, the successive waves."[23]

Ise has always seemed a place like this. In the Nara and Heian eras, its lovely but lonely groves knew only the footfall of priests and princely envoys, so awesome was its sanctity. But later, especially in the Tokugawa period, the same sanctity brought thousands upon thousands of people of all walks of life to the Grand Shrine. *Ise-mairi,* going up to Ise, then became a national passion. Everyone, it was felt, ought to go at least once in one's life; *Ise-ko* (Ise clubs) were set up in innumerable towns and villages to pool the meager resources of their humble adherents to allow one person, chosen by lot, to go each year to pray for all and bring back an Ise charm or talisman.

Why Ise? No doubt its ageless mystery, the opportunity to register a covert protest against the Tokugawa shoguns by honoring the shrine of the legitimate imperial house they had rendered impotent, and clever promotion by priests all combined to set countless pairs of feet on the Ise road. For the Tokugawa masses pilgrimage was one of the few modes of escape from long hours of hard work in a regimented society, and they took full advantage of it.

Ise pilgrimage was scarcely a totally solemn affair. The great Tokaido road south from Edo that branched off to Ise, and the other highways to the sacred shrines, were lined with lively inns that catered to the pilgrim's every comfort and desire and entertained them with song and dance. In Ise city itself the thing to do after a day visiting the holy sites was to watch a lively dance performed by charming girls in one of the huge inns or teahouses. Even the three-mile road between the inner and outer shrines was lined with beautiful kimono-clad entertainers who would sing and dance for a handful of coins.[24]

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[22] Victor Turner, "The Center Out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12, no. 3 (February 1973), 191-230.

[23] Aston, *Nihongi,* I, 176.

[24] For a readable and accessible account of the Ise pilgrimages, see chap. 9 of Oliver Statler, *Japanese Inn* (New York: Random House, 1961). See also Winston Davis, "Pilgrimage and World Renewal: A Study of Religion and Social Values in Tokugawa Japan," *History of Religions,* Part I, 23, 2 (November 1983), pp. 97-116; Part II, 23, 3 (February 1984), pp. 197-221.