RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ETHOS OF MODERN JAPAN[1]

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Introduction

THE MODERN PERIOD OF JAPANESE HISTORY HAD ITS BEGINNING IN the middle of the nineteenth century through the combined pressures of internal and external factors in an intricate combination. The decline of the power and authority of the Tokugawa feudal regime that had ruled Japan from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the power struggle among the influential *daimyō* (feudal lords), the contradictory features of the socio-economic framework of the feudal system, the general apathy among the populace, the infiltration of Western knowledge, the emotional appeal of the so-called "National Learning" (*koku-gaku*), and the advance of Western powers in the Far East are but a few obvious examples of the many forces that together brought forth a new era in the history of Japan. It was no longer possible or desirable for Japan to maintain her policy of national seclusion which had been enforced by the Tokugawa regime; she was destined to chart a new course in the stormy seas of the modern world.

Before we go into the discussion of modern Japan, however, a few words must be said about the Tokugawa regime. It is well known that Japan, under Tokugawa rule, was divided into over 250 fiefs of different sizes and values, and each fief was ruled by a feudal lord (*daimyō*). The Tokugawa ruler was both the *shōgun* (military dictator) and the most important *daimyō;* as such he controlled nearly one fourth of Japan directly, and ruled the rest of the nation indirectly through other *daimyō*. The Tokugawa regime also enforced the division of the populace into four main social classes, namely, the warrior (*shi*), the farmer (*nō*), the artisan (*kō*), and the merchant (*shō*), and restricted the upward mobility of the people within the framework of their prescribed classes. In addition to the above-mentioned four social classes, the Tokugawa system

[1]This article is an abbreviated summary of the modern section of *Religion in Japanese History*, a forthcoming book by the author. This book is based on the Lectures in History of Religions sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies, 1962-63, at various universities in the United States.

recognized the imperial and courtier families and ecclesiastics as special categories.[2] The backbone of society was undoubtedly the warrior class, which was expected to play the role of preserver and transmitter of culture.[3] Next only to the warrior, the farmer enjoyed prestige, because agriculture was considered to be the basis of the national economy.[4] The political stability, established by the Tokugawa regime, encouraged the growth of industry and commerce, which meant that the living standards of artisans and merchants rose correspondingly. In the course of time, successful merchants became increasingly influential, overshadowing the lower warriors. In all classes of society, the importance of the family tie was emphasized. The regime also imposed the system of neighborhood units called *gonin-gumi* ("the five-man unit"). All the families of each of these units were responsible for the welfare and behavior of every member of the households involved.

The foregoing makes it clear that Japanese society under the Tokugawa rule had two main foci, namely, the nation (society) and the family (house-hold), both of which were regarded as sacred entities. As such, the nation demanded absolute loyalty, while the family demanded absolute filial piety. It was taken for granted in this connection that the nation was embodied in the figure of shōgun, and the family in the figures of the parents; but should a father oppose the *shōgun*, the children were expected to demonstrate their loyalty by deserting their father. Thus, as Bellah has rightly pointed out, the "religion of filial piety" did not compete with the "religion of loyalty." The former reinforced the latter.[5] Normally, however, nation and family were considered to be in a state of harmony, and the relations of these two foci were defined by Neo-Confucianism, which was the official "theology" of the Tokugawa regime. In this respect, many scholars hold that the architects of the Tokugawa regime depended heavily on Chinese

[2]The Tokugawa regime controlled the activities of the court and courtiers through the so-called Ordinances for the Imperial and Courtier Families (*Kinchū narabini Kugeshū Shohatto*). The regime also regulated the activities of religious groups and institutions by means of the Ordinances for Temples (*Jiin Hatto*).

[3]As early as 1615, the Shogunate issued its Ordinances for the Military Houses(*Buke Shohatto*), the thirteen general principles governing the life and activities of the *daimyō* and the warrior class.

[4]While there were many poor peasants during the Tokugawa period, "the upper strata of peasants were in many respects, not least in respect to standard of life, much nearer to the middle ranks of the warrior class than to the majority of peasants." Thomas C. Smith, "The Land Tax in the Tokugawa Period," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XVIII, No. 1 (November, 1958), p. 14.

[5]Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion* (Glencoe, Ill., 1957), pp. 81-82.

political norms, for "the Confucian concept of a human order established in harmony with immutable natural principles seemed to justify the rigid social cleavages and political absolutism of the Tokugawa system."[6] There is every indication that the Tokugawa rulers were attracted by the Chinese model for society, and thus depended heavily on Neo-Confucianism as the source of guiding principles in the socio-political realms. And yet, what the Tokugawa regime acquired from the Neo-Confucian tradition was ironically not a social model as such, but a semi-religious affirmation of an "immanental theocracy," implying that "the order of heaven is not transcendental substance but is inherent in the conditions of human existence. This is the regulative principle to be recognized and realized."[7] This regulative principle, be it noted, was not law in the Western sense. In the framework of immanental theocracy, "there are only duties and mutual compromises governed by the ideas of order, responsibility, hierarchy, and harmony."[8] These insights were appropriated by the Tokugawa regime as the principles of its social engineering. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, Neo-Confucianism was reinterpreted and transformed so as to fit into the social structure and political institutions of Japan. A leading Japanese Neo-Confucian scholar, for instance, found no contradiction between the native cult of Shintō and the *li* (reason or principle) taught by Chu Hsi (1130-1200).[9] While Japanese Neo-Confucian scholars thus reformulated the teachings of the Chinese masters and worked out philosophical ideals, it was the warrior-administrators who translated philosophical ideals into practical measures for governing the nation. The result was, as Hall points out, that the basic political institutions of the Tokugawa regime actually "owe little or nothing to Chinese models,"[10] except the underlying semi-religious affirmation of an "immanental theocracy."

It is an irony of history that the very success of the Tokugawa regime in preserving domestic peace over the years destroyed the

[6]Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston, 1958), p. 616.

[7]William S. Haas, *The Destiny of the Mind—East and West* (London, 1956), p. 140

[8]Jean Escarra, *Le droit chinois* (Paris and Peiping, 1936), p. 17.

[9]Hayashi Razan, a leading Japanese Neo-Confucian scholar and adviser to the Tokugawa Shōgunate, went so far as to state: "The Way of the Gods [Shintō] is nothing but Reason (li). Nothing exists outside of Reason." See Hajime Nakamura, *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Tokyo, 1960), p. 581.

[10]John Whitney Hall, "The Confucian Teacher in Tokugawa Japan," *Confucianism in Action*, ed. David S. Nivison and Arthur F. Wright (Stanford, 1959), p. 292.

foundation of the feudal regime itself, and that the Tokugawa rulers failed to cope with the social and economic dislocations that inevitably developed. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the once powerful Tokugawa Shōgunate having lost its grip, many *daimyō* sensed a need to reform the political structure of the nation. Some tried to strengthen the Shōgunate in Edo (present day Tokyo), while others looked toward the imperial court in Kyoto for leadership. The political climate in mid-thirteenth century was further aggravated by external factors, namely, the demand of the Western powers to open Japan's ports to foreign trade. Reluctantly, the Shōgunate concluded a treaty with the United States in 1854 and similar treaties with other Western powers in 1858. Meanwhile, caught in a network of impossible internal and external problems, the last Tokugawa *shōgun* surrendered his power to the throne in 1867. Thus ended the feudal regime; monarchical rule was resumed by the Emperor Meiji as of January 25, 1868. The city of Edo was renamed Tokyo ("Eastern Capital"), and the imperial government was established there.

The Meiji Era

With the restoration of imperial rule, at least in principle, sweeping changes were introduced by the new regime. The real policy makers of the regime were less than one hundred relatively young royalists who, motivated by different purposes, agreed on the importance of developing a modern nation-state with a strong defense system and an industrial economy. The government adopted in 1868 the so-called "Charter Oath," which promised that deliberative assemblies should be established, evil customs of the past should be discarded, and knowledge should be sought throughout the world.[11] In 1870, the government issued the Regulations for Dispatching Students Abroad, whereby able Japanese students were sent to Europe and America to acquire up-to-date knowledge of medicine, science, law, business, and national defense. Also, the government established at home Westernized educational institutions, a postal system, a census, telegraphic service, railroads, banks, courts of justice, the patent bureau, income tax, electricity, a constitution, and parliament. The new regime attempted to do away with outmoded practices of the past, such as the system of tolls, discrimination against the *eta* ("untouchables"), and the tra-

[11]For the Charter Oath, see George B. Sansom, *The Western World and Japan* (New York, 1962), pp. 317-20.

dition of wearing swords. Even Christianity, the "forbidden religion" during the Tokugawa period, was now tolerated.

Notwithstanding these modern and Westernized features and the new system of administration, the Meiji government inherited one significant characteristic of the Tokugawa feudal regime, namely, its "immanental theocracy." This in spite of the fact that the architects of the Meiji government were passionately anti-Shōgunate in principle and outlook. In a real sense, they were not conscious of their own inner contradictions, because while they envisaged the establishment of a modern nation-state, their instincts longed for a semi-divine nation, a paternalistic and authoritarian state, that could, however, utilize the fruits of the modern civilization of the West.

The paradoxical character of the Meiji regime may be illustrated by the examples of military conscription and compulsory education. As early as 1873, a Universal Military Conscription Ordinance was put into practice. It is to be noted that military conscription was offered as a "gift" of the throne, welcoming all able-bodied males of twenty years of age, not only the sons of warrior families but also those of farmers, artisans and merchants. While military service was not popular at first, it became in the course of time an important channel for upward social mobility, so that until World War II the peasantry in times of crises often supported the military rather than civilian leaders. Equally significant was compulsory education which made Japan the first nation in Asia to have a literate populace. The educational system was designed to meet the needs of the growing nation, that is, the training of a small number of government officials and a large number of technicians. It also aimed at providing minimum training in reading and writing for the general populace. From the standpoint of the government, education was a matter of great necessity for the training of faithful and obedient subjects of the empire rather than for the development of individual personalities for participation in a full life. It was taken for granted that the fundamental educational goal was the orientation of students toward the "Imperial Way" (*kō-dō*), which was set forth in the Imperial Rescript on Education.[12] Ultimately, education was regarded as a tool of the government, teaching its subjects "what to think" rather than "how to think."

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[12]See *ibid.*, p. 464.

Nevertheless, during the first two decades of the Meiji era, Japan was receptive to the influence of Western thought and civilization, particularly in the government and private universities, and in educational institutions established by various Christian missionary societies. While the government was interested only in the technological and material aspects of Western civilization, the new elite, consisting of young intellectuals in urban areas, could not help but imbibe the spirit of "modernity" that was the driving force of Western civilization. Conspicuous among them were such famous modernists as Fukuzawa Yukichi, Mori Arinori, Nishi Amane, and Katō Hiroyuki who advocated the slogan of *bummei-kaika* ("civilization and enlightenment"). What the new elite of Japan sensed in "civilization and enlightenment" was the modern European conception of civilization as secularized salvation, signifying "a liberation from the fetters of barbarism just as religion aims at deliverance from the powers of evil."[13] Thus, much as modern Europeans rejected the medieval notion of the state as subservient to the church, Japanese intellectuals during the early Meiji era reacted emotionally against traditional values and ideologies. They rejoiced in being emancipated from the "immanental theocracy" of the Tokugawa feudal period, and envisaged the creation of a new social and political order along the lines of Western models. In the new Japan, so it was believed, anybody — regardless of his status and class — could attain to a high position, based solely on his ability and merit. Indeed, the motif of *risshin-shusse* ("success and advancement in life") was a real gospel for the youth of Japan where social classes had been frozen for so long under the feudal regime.

The Meiji government was also motivated by the motif of *risshin-shusse,* in this case, however, implying "advancing Japan in the family of nations." Thus, the government was preoccupied with advancement and progress along the lines of national prosperity and defense (*fukoku-kyōhei*)—"more facts, more wealth, more strength, more manufacturers, more men, ships, and guns."[14] Realizing how much more advanced the Western nations were than Japan in global competition, Japanese leaders made feverish attempts to catch up with others in the art of international power politics. Internally, the last two decades of the Meiji era witnessed the growth of conservatism and ethnocentric nationalism. The government, which became increasingly bureaucratic, controlled the

[13]Haas, *op. cit.,* p. 296.
[14]Sansom, *op. cit.,* p. 313.

press and often interfered with activities of political parties. The arms of the government also suppressed socialist and labor movements. Nevertheless, government leaders congratulated themselves on Japan's victory over China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-05), as well as her annexation of Korea (1910). The apparent success of Japan in the arena of international politics strengthened the Meiji regime's affirmation of the principle of "immanental theocracy," which in turn helped to create a new myth, namely, Japan's divine mission to extend her "Imperial Way" abroad.

The Eras of Taishō and Shōwa

The Emperor Meiji, who witnessed in his lifetime the growth of Japan from her feudal past to a powerful empire, died in 1912, succeeded by his son, Yoshihito (the Emperor Taishō) whose reign, 1912-1926, is referred to as the Taishō era. The Emperor Taishō's sickness, however, necessitated that his son, Hirohito (1901-), assume control of the affairs of state as Prince Regent in 1921. In 1926, Hirohito ascended the throne, and the Shōwa era began.

The year 1912 was a crucial turning point in the history of Japan as well as in the history of the world. Across the Pacific Ocean, Woodrow Wilson took over the presidency of the United States which now became a new world power, surpassing many of the old nations in Europe. Also in 1912, the People's Revolution overthrew the yoke of the Manchu Dynasty in China. Ironically, the Japanese leaders failed to understand the depth of the nationalistic aspirations of the Chinese people during the twentieth century, and continued to follow their expansionist policies in Asia. When World War I started in 1914, Japan eagerly sided with the Allies, and received most of what she demanded at the Versailles Conference. Also, during World War I, Japan presented to the Chinese government the infamous Twenty-One Demands, which aimed at economic and political domination of China by Japan. After World War I, Japan was engaged in the ill-fated Siberian Expedition, at first with the Allied Powers but later all alone, due to the insistence of the military clique at home. The enormous expenditures for keeping troops in Siberia between 1918 and 1922 ended with no gain for Japan, however.

During World War I, the financial clique (*zaibatsu*) enjoyed unprecedented prosperity, and their political influence increased accordingly. As far as the masses were concerned, the slow rise in wages could hardly keep up with the rocketing prices. The go-

vernment had to face a series of difficult problems, notably the "rice riots" in 1918, the labor strikes in 1919, the financial panic in 1920, the steep fall of the stock market in 1922, the great earthquake that almost disrupted the national economy in 1923, and the monetary crisis in 1927. In spite of these difficulties or because of them, during the first half of the 1920's the general populace had a taste of a liberal democratic atmosphere. Japan assented to the Five Power Naval Treaty (1921) and disbanded four divisions of the army (1925). It was but natural that young idealists had high hopes for the League of Nations. On the other hand, events during the 1920's also gave impetus to the growth of ethnocentric and fanatic nationalism. In 1922, the League for the Prevention of Communism (*Sekka Bōshi-dan*) was formed, anticipating the emergence of the Communist Party in Japan during the same year. Not content with the mass hunt and arrest of the Communists by the government in 1923, the so-called patriots carried on their own zealous campaign against Communism and other foreign ideologies. With the formation in 1924 of the National Foundation Society (*Kokuhon-sha*) through the initiative of Hiranuma Kiichirō, then vice president of the Privy Council, nationalists gained prestige, and thereby increased their influence among the conservative masses.

Events in the 1930's and early 1940's are familiar stories. By this time, nationalism had become increasingly fascistic and jingoistic. It was, in the words of Yanaga, "authoritarian, anti-parliamentarian, anti-democratic, opposed to disarmament, and suspicious of the League of Nations. It was also a Pan-Asiatic movement, unafraid and unhesitant regarding the use of force."[15] In this situation, even if the militarists were aware of the seriousness of the war in Manchuria, which they had started and which they insisted on calling the "Manchurian Incident" and not a war, the general public was unaware that it was only the beginning of a chain of ominous events. Following it came the wholesale assassination of parliamentarians and financiers (1932), Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations (1933), an attempted coup d'etat by a group of fanatic young army officers (1936), the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (1937) that precipitated a full-scale China War, Soviet-Japanese border clashes (1938 and 1939), and Japan's participation in the Tripartite Pact (1940). In 1941, Japan took the fatal step of entering World War II.

[15]Chitoshi Yanaga, *Japan Since Perry* (New York, 1949), p. 495.

From the middle of the 1930's, all liberal thinking and expression — be it in religion, philosophy, art or culture — were condemned under suspicion of being a threat to the Japanese way of life. Freedom of the press, thought and assembly, as well as freedom of conscience and belief, were violated. Gradually, a sense of "fear" developed among the people, who no longer dared to speak their minds openly, even to close friends. Newspapers, magazines and radios repeated the same nationalistic slogans. Peoples' thoughts, values, patterns of behavior and even the meaning of life were prescribed and interpreted by militarists and jingoists. To the ultranationalists and militarists, individuals were nothing more than cogs in the huge machine of the nation. Japan became a great fortress from which war emanated relentlessly until VJ Day, 1945.

Culture and Religion

In discussing the cultural and religious development of modern Japan, we have to remind ourselves that the establishment of the Meiji regime was not only a "renovation" (*ishin*) that implied a rejection of the past. It also was a "restoration of monarchial rule" (*ōsei-fukko*) implying a reversion to the policy of eighth-century Japan. The effort of the Meiji government to maintain a precarious balance between these two contradictory objectives had disastrous consequences in the spheres of culture and religion, to say nothing about the domain of politics.

Following the ancient Japanese model of "unity of religion and government" (*saisei-itchi*), the Meiji regime in 1868 established the Department of Shintō and issued the Separation Edict, separating Buddhism from Shintō (*shinbutsu hanzen-rei*) on the ground that Buddhism-Shintō coexistence, practised for nearly ten centuries, was contrary to the indigenous Japanese way of life. Thus, all Buddhist priests who had been connected with Shintō shrines were returned to secular life unless they were willing to be reordained as Shintō priests. In 1871, all temple lands were confiscated by government order, and all Buddhist ceremonies that had been performed in the imperial household were abolished. In such a situation, a popular anti-Buddhist (*haibutsu-kishaku*) movement erupted. For example, in the Toyama district, the 1,730 Buddhist temples that had existed in 1870, were reduced to seven overnight.[16] While it was not the explicit intention of the

[16]For other examples of anti-Buddhist activities, see Taijō Tamamuro, *Meiji Ishin Haibutsu Kishaku* ("The Extermination of Buddhism Movement at the Time of the Meiji Restoration") (Tokyo, 1939).

government to exterminate Buddhism, some government officials and zealous Shintō priests aroused anti-Buddhist sentiments among the masses. Meanwhile, the government adopted the policy of promoting the emperor cult as the most important ingredient of Shintō. For example, the government erected a Shintō shrine inside the imperial palace in honor of the imperial ancestors and the *kami* of the Shintō pantheon. Later, a special shrine was established inside the palace for the worship of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, the tutelary *kami* of the imperial clan. Besides, the cult of the Emperor Jimmu, the alleged founder of the nation, was created, and the custom of celebrating the current emperor's birthday as a semi-religious national holiday was instituted. The emperor was no longer just a person who held the *charisma* of the imperial office. He was elevated to the exalted status of a "living *kami*" — an eminence which had been claimed but never achieved by ancient Japanese monarchs.

The "back to the pristine past" movement greatly encouraged the growth of Shintō, but failed to provide the necessary impetus for the establishment of the modern nation-state, which was the second of the twin objectives of the Meiji regime. Outrageous attempts on the part of the Shintō leaders to turn the clock backward were resisted by the modernists, for the mood of the time was not altogether in favor of returning to the past, however important the past might be. The complex development in education, legislation, culture and religion during the Meiji era grew out of the tension between the "immanental theocracy" and "modernity." It goes without saying that these two elements were essentially irreconcilable. The advocate of the pristine Japanese tradition were motivated by the desire to find the model of society and culture in the past — the way of the *kami* (*kannagara*). "Back to the Emperor Jimmu!" they cried. The advocates of modernity, on the other hand, placed their faith in the present and future, in the new and the novel. To them, the Meiji era was the beginning of a permanent revolution along the path of enlightenment and civilization. The advocates of both principles, however, shared the same two qualities, namely, patriotism and utilitarianism, and thus a compromise was achieved between them by means of pragmatic, nationalistic principles. How such a compromise was achieved may become evident when we follow the checkered development of education during the early Meiji era.

When the new regime came into being in 1868, one of its urgent tasks was the formulation of an educational philosophy and system. Prior to the Meiji era, it was taken for granted that the Confucian system provided the foundation and framework of education. This assumption was challenged in 1868 by the royalists who were determined to instill the "Imperial Way" in the minds of youth, so that there arose a conflict between the the Confucian teachers (*kangaku-sha*) and the national scholars (*kokugaku-sha*). Around 1870, however, the advocates of Westernized education (*yogaku-sha*) began to play a dominant role in educational affairs. It was through their initiative that the government inaugurated in 1872 a system of universal education, based partly on the French and partly on the American educational systems. The cause of Westernized education experienced a set-back around 1881 when the conservative clan oligarchy maneuvered to squeeze out the pro-modernists from the positions of influence. Immediately, Westernized text books were censured, the Confucian classics were made required reading, and the curriculum came under the rigid control of the government. Furthermore, moral teaching (*shūshin*) was stressed as the most important subject in primary education.[17] In 1886, the government tried to control the entire educational system by issuing the Primary School Ordinance, the Middle School Ordinance, the Imperial University Ordinance, and the Normal School Ordinance. Through these ordinances, the government asserted the supremacy of the state, while welcoming only those elements of Western knowledge and technology that were useful to Japan. The logical consequences of the compromise, commonly referred to as *wakon-yōsai* ("Japanese spirit and Western kowledge"), was the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890. In this famous document, traditional Confucian and Japanese virtues were uplifted as the foundation of education. And, "should emergency arise," so states the Rescript, "offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth."

Even such a brief survey of educational development during the early Meiji era demonstrates how the tension between the two contradictory objectives of the new regime — "renovation" that implied rejection of the past and "restoration" that implied the

[17] Cf. Robert K. Hall, *Shūshin*: The Ethics of a Defeated Nation (New York, 1949).

preservation of and return to the past — was gradually solved by nationalistic, utilitarian principles. Even then, the National scholars, Shintō leaders, Confucian teachers and other conservatives were alarmed by the popularity of Western civilization and the rapid growth of trade and industry. It was understandable, therefore, that they were more than willing to rally behind the bureaucrats who attempted to utilize every means in order to solidify the nation around the throne. Indeed, the religious policy of the Meiji regime was forged under the combined efforts of the conservative leaders of society and of the bureaucratic oligarchy in their attempt to make legitimate the principle of "immanental theocracy" by elevating Shintō as the national religion.[18]

The policy of making Shintō the national religion, however, came under attack by the leaders of other religions as well as by secular intellectuals who felt the necessity for freedom in religious beliefs. Also, the Iwakura Mission, which was sent abroad in 1871 in an effort to revise the treaties with Western Powers, recommended that the Meiji government adopt a policy of religious freedom in order to impress foreign governments. In this situation, the government conceded that it would alter its religious policy, as far as its terminology was concerned, while preserving its substance. Concretely, the government interpreted Shintō, especially the practice of emperor worship, as a patriotic cult and not a religion. Article 28 of the Constitution, promulgated in 1889, stated explicitly that "Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief." At the same time, the government banished religious instruction of any kind from all schools, public and private, although "moral teaching if applicable to all religions, could be given," in accordance with Ordinance 12.

The intention of the Meiji regime was clearly twofold. On the one hand, it attempted to satisfy the popular demand for religious freedom by offering a nominal guarantee for it in the Constitu-

[18]As early as 1872, the Meiji regime divided the cultic and religious aspects of Shintō by assigning the former to the Board of Ceremonies and the latter to the Department of Religion and Education. In 1877, the Home Ministry, replacing the Department of Religion and Education, was assigned to administer religious affairs. In 1900 the Home Ministry established within itself the Bureau of Shrines and the Bureau of Religions. Three years later, the Bureau of Religions was transferred to the Department of Education, while the Bureau of Shrines remained in the Home Ministry. These offices were abolished after World War II, however.

tion. On the other hand, the government continued to allow special privileges to Shintō by creating an artificial term, "State Shintō," and calling it a cult of national morality and patriotism, applicable to all religions. This strange religious policy was nothing but an ingenious (and dangerous) attempt at superimposing "immanental theocracy" on the constitutionl guarantee of religious freedom. What is often forgotten is the simple fact that, despite the "orthodox" interpretations by Shintō and government apologists to the contrary, "State Shintō" was essentially a newly concocted religion of ethnocentric nationalism. To be sure, it was based on the historic tradition and framework of Shintō, but in this new devlopment — or distortion — of Shintō, the religious autonomy of Shintō was denied. It was the political authority, rather than the religious elite, which determined the policies and activities of State Shintō. In sharp contrast to historic Shintō, which never developed doctrinal orthodoxy and thus remained tolerant of various types of beliefs and practices, State Shintō allowed no deviation from its norms.[19] The government was determined to propagate its gospel of ethnocentric nationalism through various channels, including the army, navy, and educational institutions. In the course of time, the clever manipulation of the emperor cult by the bureaucrats, with the wholehearted support of extreme nationalists, exalted the throne in the eyes of the people, while in reality the throne was deprived of its political authority and became nothing but a convenient umbrella for the despotic oligarchy in power.

"Immanental Theocracy" vs. Religions

The architects of modern Japan who imposed "immanental theocracy" in the form of State Shintō had to take into account, however, the religious aspirations of the people. While it is well nigh impossible to discuss fully the development of non-Shintō religions in the modern period of Japan, we might perhaps sketch briefly how these religious groups have encountered the problems of "immanental theocracy" and "modernity."

(a) *Sect Shintō*— It is interesting to note that the Meiji regime, recognizing the existence of religious elements within the Shintō tradition, divided Shintō into two categories, namely, "State

[19]For example, a learned historian, Kume Kunitake, was expelled in 1892 from the Tokyo Imperial University because of his published article to the effect that Shintō was a survival of a primitive cult.

Shintō," which was not considered a religion, and "Sect Shintō denominations, which were classified as "churches" or "sects" (*kyōkai* or *kyōha*). While State Shintō enjoyed the support of the government, the Sect Shintō denominations had to depend on private initiative for organization, propaganda, and support. There were thirteen such denominations that were recognized by the government during the period between 1882 and 1908. Many of these denominations developed out of the tradition of popular confraternities established by laymen during the latter part of the Tokugawa period for the purpose of worshipping certain *kami* in the Shintō pantheon or some aspects of nature that were considered sacred. The three most important denominations — the Kurozumi-kyō, Konkō- kyō, and Tenri-kyō — had been founded by charismatic personalities. In sharp contrast to the State Shintō that was destined to be manipulated by the temporal authority, these Sect Shintō denominations, superstitious and shamanistic though they were, have continued to meet the religious needs of the masses to this day.[20]

(b) *Buddhism.*—The complex development of Japanese Buddhism in the modern period cannot be understood without taking into account a series of events and problems that threatened as well as stimulated the Buddhist tradition. Nevertheless, it is safe to state that the first phase of the Meiji era was a shocking experience for Buddhists. It is to be noted that Buddhism in Japan had always enjoyed the favor and support of the ruling class. During the Tokugawa period, Buddhism enjoyed the prerogatives of a *de facto* state religion, collaborating with the Shōgunate in its civil administration and thought control. Now, suddenly, the Meiji regime rejected Buddhism in favor of Shintō, and the popular anti-Buddhist movement arose in various parts of Japan. Confronted by hitherto unknown hardships, Buddhist leaders reacted in three different ways through (i) internal, spiritual awakening, (ii) philosophical and philological endeavors, and (iii) by catering to the wishes of the ruling regime.

(i) It is noteworthy that at a time when many were lamenting the loss of the external power and prestige of Buddhism, there were Buddhist leaders who were more disquieted by the loss of Buddhism's inner spirit and religious influence. Some of the enlightened Buddhist leaders also argued in favor of the separation

[20] For fuller account of Sect Shintō denominations, see D. C. Holton. *The National Faith of Japan* (New York, 1938), and William K. Bunce, *Religions in Japan* (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo, 1955).

of religion and state and the principle of religious liberty. The influence of the spiritual awakening was also felt in the movements of lay Buddhists that developed subsequently. (ii) Side by side with the spiritual awakening, Japanese Buddhists became concerned with the need for scholarly endeavors, both in the philological and philosophical domains. Indeed, Japanese Buddhism in the modern period was greatly stimulated by its encounter with Western civilization directly or indirectly. Prior to the Meiji era, Japanese Buddhists depended solely on the Chinese edition of the Buddhist scriptures. Some modern Japanese Buddhists began to consider the importance of learning Sanskrit, Pali and Tibetan, and able Japanese students were sent to European universities for linguistic and philosophical studies. (iii) On the other hand, a great many Buddhists wanted to restore the prestige of Buddhism by wooing the ruling oligarchy, which depended on Confucian, Shintō, and other conservative leaders, that might uphold the principle of "immanental theocracy" in order to defend the nation from the "dangerous" elements of "modernity."[21] Many Buddhists took an active part in the anti-Christian movements, and advocated emperor worship. To be sure, there were some Buddhists, especially laymen, who tried to face squarely the problems of "modernity." But, in the main, Buddhists from the Meiji era to the end of World War II tended to uphold the *status quo*, and collaborated very closely with ethnocentric nationalism.[22]

Space does not permit us to discuss educational, social, and philanthropic works sponsored by Buddhists, as well as many novel movements that emerged within the Buddhist fold. Unfortunately, while Japanese Buddhism in the modern period had many able and dedicated priests and scholars, they were removed from practical ecclesiastical affairs, so that they made little impact on the total life of Buddhists.

(c) *Christianity.*—Turning to Christianity, one can readily understand that Christianity entered the modern Japanese scene

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[21]The most concise and reliable description of Buddhism in the Meiji era is found in Hideo Kishimoto (comp.), *Japanese Religion in the Meiji Era*, trans. John F. Howes (Tokyo, 1956), Part II, "Buddhism," pp. 101-69.

[22]There were some notable exceptions. For example, in 1899, the *Shinbukkyō-dōshi-kai* ("Fellowship of New Buddhists") was organized mostly by able young lay Buddhists. This group advocated such aims as the elimination of superstition, anti-clericalism, rejection of government interference in religious matters, and the promotion of learning and morality. There were even a few Buddhists in the active socialist and anarchist movements, and some who at least worked closely with members of such movements. Some outstanding Buddhist laymen were also openly critical of the government's policies during the Russo-Japanese War.

as a part of Western civilization. When the edict against Christianity was lifted in 1873 by the Meiji regime, European and American missionaries, representing Greek (Russian) Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and various Protestant denominations, started vigorous evangelistic activities. There were also ardent Christians among Westerners employed by the Japanese government as teachers in government schools. Inevitably, people in Japan experienced mixed feelings of fear and fascination toward Christianity — a forbidden faith under the Tokugawa regime — which now presented itself along with Western thought and civilization. Christianity faced a series of difficult problems. Christianity was uncritically equated with Western civilization by the people in Japan as much as by many missionaries. The prestige of Christianity was undercut by other Western ideas that were also introduced to Japan, such as Darwinism, socialism, and atheism. Japanese converts to Christianity were persecuted overtly or covertly by Buddhists, Shintōists, Confucianists and others. For these and other reasons, Christianity in modern Japan did not spread very quickly, but it attracted a small group of intellectuals and "through them the ethics and ideals of Christianity had a much more profound influence on Japanese thought and life than one might assume from the fact that less than one per cent of the population became professing Christians."[23] Christian churches also initiated many kinds of social, medical, philanthropic and educational works, and contributed much to the betterment of women's status in society.[24]

The promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) provided anti-Christians with a convenient weapon with which to attack Christianity. In all schools, both the faculty and students were expected to pay obeisance to the Imperial Rescript. It so happened that Uchimura Kanzō, the leader of the so-called Non-Church Movement and then Lecturer at the First Junior College, refused to participate in this cult, and was dismissed from the college. This incident solidified the anti-Christian camp, which accused Christians of being unpatriotic. But the violent anti-Christian campaigns subsided after a decade or so. In the twentieth century, the real question in Japan was not "Christianity versus Buddhism," or any other

[23]Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: Past and Present* (New York, 1946), p. 143.

[24]While the general ethos of Japanese Christianity in the modern period has been "urban" and "bourgeois," many of the early socialist leaders at the turn of the century were Christians. The Christian socialists staged the anti-war movement prior to and during the Russo-Japanese War, planted the seed for the trade union movement, and organized the agrarian movement, too.

religious system for that matter, but rather "religion versus non-religion." For the most part, Japanese Christians managed to adjust to the social and political climate of the nation, even though their faith never completely lost its "foreignness."[25]

With the opening of the Manchurian War in 1931, the situation became tense again. In October, 1931, students of St. Sophia University, Tokyo, refused to pay homage at a Shintō shrine. Combined pressures from the ultra nationalists once again raised the issue of obeisance at the State Shintō shrine as the non-religious, patriotic duty of all Japanese. In 1936, the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in the Vatican instructed the Papal Delegate in Japan to the effect that such an obeisance was not to be considered a religious act. In the same year, the National Christian Council of the Protestant Bodies also publicly accepted the government's interpretation of State Shintō as non-religious. In the 1930's all religious bodies were asked to send their representatives to the front to pray for Japan's victory. In 1939, the Religious Bodies Law was enforced, by which the government obtained control over all aspects of religious organizations. Buddhism and Christianity were urged to unite their respective denominations and sects. Furthermore, through the initiative of the militarist government, a Religious League, composed of Christian, Buddhist, and Sect Shintō denominations, was organized in 1941 to provide a spiritual bulwark for the nation. This unhappy situation lasted until the end of World War II.

(d) *Confucianism.*—Lastly, we must not fail to mention the important role played by Confucianism in the religious development of modern Japan, in spite of the fact that it never claimed to be a religious system. It is significant to note that Confucianism served as an intellectual bridge between the feudal and modern periods. Many of the young warriors who shaped the course of modern Japan had been grounded in Confucian learning. For example, Sakuma Shōzan advocated the famous dictum: "Eastern Ethics and Western Science." He was convinced that the *li* (reason or principle) taught by Neo-Confucianism and the principle of Western science were one and the same. It was this Confucian-inspired rationale that enabled the leaders of the Meiji era to appropriate wisdom and knowledge from abroad.[26]

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[25]From time to time, when the so-called "Christian nations" in the West did something contrary to the interests of Japan, such as the passing of the Oriental Exclusion Act by the American Congress, anti-Christian sentiment flared up in Japan. By and large, however, the situation was quiet in the 1920's.

[26]It is interesting to note that some Japanese Confucianists embraced Christianity through the conviction that truth must be universal.

Meanwhile, the Meiji regime sensed the necessity of resorting to Confucian ethics as the basis of moral education, as exemplified by strong Confucian elements in the Imperial Rescript on Education. In it, the five Confucian virtues were taught as the basic moral principles of Japan, bequeathed to the people from the Imperial ancestors. Conversely, Confucian ethical principles had to be subordinated to the claims of "immanental theocracy" of the Meiji regime. Once Japanese Confucianism accepted this premise, it was easy for the Japanese Confucianists to be champions of the ethnocentric pseudo-religion based on loyalty and filial piety, justifying authoritarianism at home and expansionism abroad. Despite the lofty ethical principles of the Chinese sages, transmitted by the long tradition of Japanese Confucianism, its highest affirmation was now addressed to the throne and to the unique national polity *(kokutai)* of Japan. The historic Confucian doctrine of *wang-tao* (or *O-dō* in Japanese: "way of True Kingship") was reinterpreted in terms of *kō-dō* ("The Imperial Way"), and its ethical universalism was transformed into *Nihon-shugi* ("Japanese-ism").[27] Thus, Japanese Confucianists in the modern period were not concerned with the ethical issues that confronted modern Japan; they were preoccupied with the preservation of the *status quo* against the encroachment of Western influence, and more basically of the spirit of "modernity." The anti-Western theme of the Japanese Confucianists became more accentuated in the 1930's, especially after the formation of the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Confucianism (*Nihon Jukyo Senyo-kai*) in 1934. The Confucianists asserted that Japan was a unique nation that had preserved moral virtues, and that she had as her mission the extension of her moral influence to the rest of the world.[28]

IN RETROSPECT

In a sense, the modern development of Japanese Confucianism was closely related to the development of modern Japan with all

[27]Even the monogamy advocated by Christians was criticized by a noted Japanese Confucianist as incompatible with the preservation of the imperial line, for the practice of such a principle might cause the extinction of the Imperial House. Cf. Warren W. Smith, Jr., *Confucianism in Modern Japan: A Study of Conservatism in Japanese Intellectual History* (Tokyo, 1959), p. 95.

[28]See *ibid.*, pp. 166-84, for Japanese policy regarding Confucianism in Korea; *ibid.*, pp. 184-99, for Japanese use of Confucianism in Manchukuo; and *ibid.*, pp. 199-223, for a similar policy in China. The use of the Confucian heritage as an ideological weapon, however, failed to rally the majority of the Chinese people around the Japanese cause.

her promise and problems. The smooth transition of Japan from her feudal past to the status of a modern state would have been impossible without the guidance of the warrior intelligentsia who had learned from Confucianism that *li* (reason or principle) is universal. At the same time, it was the same Confucian-inspired rationale that gave encouragement to the strengthening of the particularity and uniqueness of the Japanese heritage. Thus modern Japan was destined to be caught in the grip of two diametrically opposed objectives envisaged by the architects of modern Japan. One of them, the re-establishment or restoration (*fukko*) of the ancient system of unity of religion and government (*saisei-itchi*) drove Japan to assert the centrality of State Shintō as the new super-religion, ironically declared to be "non-religious," over all other religious and cultural traditions. However, the second objective, namely, renovation (*ishin*), brought about the introduction, not only of technological and scientific advances, envisaged by the Meiji government, but of philosophical and religious as well as political influences of the modern West.

Caught between these two objectives, the scholars of Confucianism, as much as the leaders of Shintō and Buddhism, sided with the conservative reaction against Western influences, against novelty, and against "modernity." They provided the moral and religious fervor for the voice of the past that cried for the preservation of the particular historic experience of the Japanese without any reference to the universal historical experience of mankind. What was taken for granted by conservative Japanese leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth century was their ethnocentric belief in the sacred super-individual which was the Japanese nation itself. It was this national affirmation of the underlying religion of "immanental theocracy" that drove Japan down the dreadful and fateful path toward World War II.