

Buddhism and Shintō

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In Japan as in most societies, religion has been a powerful force in motivating people for collective action and in bringing families and communities together. The remarkable thing about religion in Japan, however, is that multiple traditions, e.g., Buddhism and Shintō not only exist side by side in the society as a whole but in the minds and lives of individuals as part of their total religious life. Rather than being forced to choose between one religion or another, most Japanese practice several religious traditions, each in its own context. The total religious person in Japan includes a Buddhist component, a Shintō component, and other components. Many Japanese would feel incomplete without the opportunity to participate in both Buddhist and Shintō rituals.

One result of the complementary coexistence of these major religious traditions is a tolerance for religious differences. However, this has not always been the case in Japan. In the buildup towards the Pacific War, Shinto and Emperor Hirohito were made supreme by the political and military authorities, and Buddhism was relegated to a secondary position. Christianity for the past 400 years has claimed among its adherents about one-half to one percent of the entire population of Japan, and has made significant intellectual, ethical and philosophical contributions to Japanese culture. However, there have been periods in Japanese history, as in the seventeenth century, when Christians were persecuted, sometimes cruelly, because of a feared association with those foreign countries that posed a threat to Japanese sovereignty.

Today, however, the Constitution protects religious freedom and mandates a separation of church and state. Shintō and Buddhist rituals are both practiced by most Japanese families, and it is difficult to say which is the more important. To a great extent each has its own domain in their lives. Buddhist rituals are the most common in funerary and ancestor memorial activities. Shintō rituals predominate in prayers to the deities for success in relationships, business, exams, good health, fertility, safe childbirth, and protection from accidents, fires, and other misfortunes.

However, many times Buddhist and Shinto aspects are combined in the same ritual, and Buddhist and Shintō components frequently are interchangeable in a single ritual, e.g., in a local festival asking for the continued protection of the deities over the community and its members. Many Buddhist temples have Shintō shrines in their compounds so that the Shintō deities will provide protection against fires and other potential problems

for the temple. The ritual of offerings and prayers to the Shintō deity in those cases typically is conducted by the Buddhist temple priest, in Buddhist style.

The Meiji Constitution, promulgated on February 11, 1889, confers sovereignty to the Emperor, but at the same time limits his power by granting the Diet and the Cabinet the ability to pass laws which the Emperor cannot abrogate. The Diet also had the constitutional power to revoke any ordinances that the Emperor issued in times of emergency. This ultimate conflict between imperial sovereignty and constitutional government was not resolved in the Meiji Constitution and was left to the Diet and the Emperor to negotiate over the years.

The ambiguity inherent in the constitutional monarchy outlined in the Meiji Constitution made it unclear to what extent Emperor Hirohito (1901-1989, r. 1926-1989) was responsible for the Japanese invasion of China and Southeast Asia, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and other military actions during World War II. General MacArthur (1880-1964) and the Allied Forces that occupied Japan after its surrender in 1945 ultimately ruled that the Emperor was free of those responsibilities and he was allowed to remain on the throne. Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki (1884-1948), on the other hand, was put on trial for war crimes of aggression and was hanged for his leadership in the war. Before his execution Tōjō did everything possible to absolve the Emperor of any blame for the war, and the Emperor was spared from standing trial. Emperor Hirohito, who had become Emperor in 1926, remained on the throne until his death in 1989 and was succeeded as emperor by his son Emperor Akihito, who reigns today.

The Meiji Constitution is unequivocal in holding the emperor as sacred and inviolable and in asserting the connection between the emperor and the origin of Japan and its people. Article 1 of the Meiji Constitution states that the Empire of Japan shall be governed by a line of emperors unbroken for ages eternal.

Thus from the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 until the surrender of Japan to the Allied Forces in 1945, religion and the state were one, tightly bound together in the form of the sacred and divine emperor, direct descendant of the Sun Goddess with a supernatural ancestry documented in the sacred text of Kojiki. General MacArthur and the Occupation Forces broke the religion and state connection in the immediate postwar period. In his famous "New Year's Radio Address" of 1946, Emperor Hirohito declared that he was not divine and that he was merely a "human emperor." In keeping with this renunciation of divinity, the post-war constitution stated that "the emperor shall be a symbol of the state and the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power."

Today, the emperor performs a large number of rituals for the continued well-being of the country and its people. These include rites of renewal and thanksgiving to the Sun Goddess and the myriad other deities in Shintō, and a number of secret rituals that only the emperor and a select group of priests know. How to conduct these rituals is passed down during the extensive training given to him as Crown Prince by his father and priests in the Imperial Household Agency and the National Association of Shintō Shrines.

The paucity of males born into the Imperial Family has stimulated debate about whether a female can ascend to the throne and whether her offspring can likewise succeed to the position of emperor. On a few occasions in the past, women have served as emperor, but none of them was succeeded by one of their own children. In every case, in the next generation the position reverted back to a male from somewhere in the male line.

To a Westerner, accustomed to seeing religions being mutually exclusive, separate and competitive if not explicitly hostile, this may be comparable to a Catholic priest conducting the ritual for a Jewish bar mitzvah. However, to many Japanese the intermixture and interchangeability of Buddhist and Shintō aspects in their rituals and lives is normal, and they do not care whether a ritual to a Shintō deity is done in Buddhist or Shintō style. Moreover, they may not know, and certainly do not care, whether the patron deity of their community or the many other deities of relevance in their lives are Buddhist or Shinto. What does matter is that some ritual is performed for the deities and the ancestors. Ancestors and the various deities must receive their ritual attention, of one kind or the other. Without ritual attention the ancestors and deities may withhold protection or even punish the community and its people.

In spite of the interchangeability and intermixture of Buddhist and Shintō components in religious rituals, the Japanese do recognize the differences in the two traditions. Buddhism and Shintō have not become unified into a syncretic whole, but remain distinct. Children are still taught that in a Shintō ritual they should clap twice before bringing their hands together and bow when they address the deity and offer a prayer. In addressing their ancestors or Buddhist deities they do not clap but rather bring their hands together quietly and bow. The adults also know, and can recognize, the differences in Shintō prayers, norito, and Buddhist prayers or sutras, okyō, and the offerings that are provided at the altar. While both Shintō and Buddhist offerings include vegetables and fruits, the Shintō offerings typically add flesh food such as the colorful sea bream or red snapper. Flesh foods are not permitted in Buddhist offerings because of Buddhism's traditional prohibition against taking the life of any animal—a belief associated with reincarnation. With reincarnation, for example, it is possible that an

animal that is sacrificed for an offering may in a previous life have been the ancestor of a neighbor or even one's own ancestor.

It should be noted, however, that the Hindu derived notion of reincarnation is not prominent in the version of Buddhism practiced by most Japanese today. In the past several decades the prohibition against eating flesh foods during mourning periods, particularly the first seven days after a death, or at periodic memorial services, has been greatly relaxed. It is not uncommon for family, relatives, and close neighbors and friends to leave the temple and cemetery after a funeral or memorial service and assemble at a hotel for a scrumptious banquet complete with all kinds of fish, both raw and cooked.

Shintō, "the way of the gods," is not a word heard very often in Japanese conversation. Rather, people talk about the deities or supernatural powers, *kamisama*, and the shrines, where such deities are worshiped. This reflects the fact that Shintō is not a unified, institutionalized religion with a central dogma. Rather, it is a collection of animistic beliefs and practices related to the world of the supernatural, both personified supernaturals (the deities, *kami*) and non-personified supernatural powers inherent in things and relationships. The term Shinto itself has a relatively recent history (i.e., relative to Japan's very ancient origins) and may go back only to the thirteenth century. It is a convenient term for scholars and intellectuals when discussing non-Buddhist religious things. However, most Japanese people in common discourse talk about the *kamisama* in general, or a particular deity, i.e., a specific *kamisama*, of relevance at that particular moment.

There is an infinite number of *kamisama* having purview over all domains of human existence. Some *kamisama* are relevant to specific concerns, such as *Yama no kami*, the mountain god that is called on for assistance in matters of fertility of humans, the livestock, and the farm crops, especially rice. The *Yama no kami* is also prayed to for safe and successful childbirth. However, these deities of concern in particular situations also have broad and general functions and may serve as the patron deities for local communities in all matters of importance for the people. Shrines where people go to worship the deities may have several deities, and include both Shintō *kamisama* and *bodhisattvas* from Buddhism. Many worshipers at shrines do not know the deities they are addressing, and rarely if ever see the icons or statues inside that represent the deities and provide a physical form to the spiritual being or power. There also may be confusion about whether a deity is Shintō or Buddhist. However, there is no confusion in the need to give ritual attention to the deities in the shrines, whatever the traditions those deities may stem from.

State Shintō and the Emperor

Sometimes scholars distinguish State Shintō from Folk Shintō. State Shintō relates to the origin myth, the Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters) of A.D. 712, and the emperor, who is assumed to be the direct descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami, the Sun Goddess, supreme among the many deities described in the Kojiki. It is the Kojiki that gives justification to the high position of emperor as head of the Japanese state. It is possible that in the five hundred years before the Kojiki was written a number of tribes were competing for political and military supremacy of the Japanese archipelago, and that ultimately the Yamato clan, ancestral to the mainstream Japanese population, emerged victorious. Kojiki gives textual validation to the political supremacy of the Yamato over its competitors and provides sacred support for the emperor as the spiritual and political leader.

The position of the emperor has varied over the past 1500 years. At times both military and political power were held by the emperor, and at other times military power was held by the warrior class, e.g., the Shogun. However, even when a particular domain lord achieved control over most of Japan through military conquest, such as Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), who defeated his competitors in the sixteenth century to unify the country, a pilgrimage to the emperor to receive the affirmation as Shogun, military ruler of all of Japan, was necessary.

In 1868 the Tokugawa family was removed from political power, and the emperor again became the sovereign of Japan. The Meiji Restoration of 1868, a nearly bloodless revolution, was brought about because of widespread dissatisfaction with the Tokugawa regime's impotence in the face of foreign threats. The young samurai participating in the Restoration were prime movers in the formation of a new government in 1868. These young samurai had valuable experiences in the governance of their own feudal domains and constituted a highly competent and experienced bureaucratic class that, with Emperor Meiji at the helm, formed a new constitutional government that accelerated the move of Japan toward greater modernization.

The current constitution says nothing about gender, stating only that "The Imperial Throne shall be dynastic and succeeded to in accordance with the Imperial House Law passed by the Diet." The Diet, however, has passed a law restricting the Chrysanthemum Throne to males. At the point of this writing, there are no males eligible for succession following the Crown Prince and his younger brother Prince Akishino given that the wives of both have given birth only to daughters.

General MacArthur moved to reduce the size of the Imperial Family. All daughters when they married had to leave the Imperial Family and become commoners. Distant cousins also lost their imperial family status. As a result, there is controversy today as to how to handle the succession issue. One option is to reinstate those distant cousins so that any

males born of them could be eligible to become emperor. Another option is to reinstate the official concubine system that, in previous eras, resulted in a number of emperors. Yet another other option is to pass a law allowing females to ascend to the throne.

Given that there are only girls in the families of the Crown Prince and his brother, the succession problem will continue to demand a solution. Thus, if there is no son born, we can expect in the coming years that the Diet will consider laws to accommodate this new situation. We also can expect that those laws may take into account changing values in Japan with respect to gender and power.

The image of the Emperor and the Imperial Family presented to us by the Imperial Household Agency and promoted by the popular media is one of "ideal Japaneseness." The Imperial Family is shown as a loving, caring family, concerned about one another through illness and health. Much was made of the Empress Michiko massaging the legs of her ailing and bed-ridden mother-in-law not long before the dowager's death.

The Imperial Family members are often photographed visiting hospitals, senior citizen's homes, schools, facilities for the handicapped, and areas affected by natural disasters. Traditionally a member of the Imperial Family has been the honorary head of the Red Cross of Japan. The image is that the Emperor cares deeply about the well-being of his subjects, and we have no reason to think that this is not true.

The Imperial Family is also portrayed as caring about the environment and being concerned with nature. The Emperor and other family members are scientists. The Emperor himself is an accomplished marine biologist; his second son, Prince Fumihito, earned a Ph.D. in ornithology. They also are photographed climbing mountains and in other ways enjoying nature.

The Imperial Family also supports the arts, having a chamber ensemble made up of Imperial Family members. They sponsor poetry contests and submit their own entries in an annual waka event at New Year. The thirty-one syllable waka (a.k.a. tanka) is quintessentially a Japanese form of poetry, making it an appropriate venue for celebrating the richness and historical depth of Japanese culture. By participating in these uniquely Japanese activities the Emperor and the Imperial Family provide a strong symbol of Japanese ethnic, cultural and national identity.

These images of the Emperor and the Imperial Family have changed over the years as Japanese culture has changed. The stoicism and self-sacrificing of past generations has been replaced by an ethic of love between husband and wife and within the family more generally. Much was made of the assumption that it was a love marriage between the Crown Prince and Crown Princess, whether in fact it was a love marriage or not. A popular weekly magazine ran a cover story presenting their marriage as the culmination

of a six-year love affair. This of course reflects a growing concern in Japan that marriages should be characterized by love, that a woman should make the decision on her own about whom to marry, and that the choice should be based at least in part on love. One issue of the magazine had a feature article on how the various couples in the Imperial Family hold hands. Such intimacies would never have been made public a generation ago, either for the Imperial Family or the population more generally. Similarly, the issue of succession to the throne by a woman, and being able to have her own child succeed her as Emperor, resonates with many people in Japan today as the society works towards gender equality and gender neutrality.

To many Japanese, the emperor symbolizes Japanese society, ethnicity, and nation, and as such, provides a model of ideal Japanese culture and behavior. This role as symbol enhances the sacredness of the emperor, as the most eminent of the Japanese. For many Japanese, criticizing the emperor is tantamount to criticizing oneself, as a member of that ethnic group and as a participant in that culture.

Though devoid of political power today, the Emperor remains a powerful and sacred ethnic symbol. Shrines throughout the country continue to celebrate various imperial occasions. The birthday of the Emperor, December 23, is a national holiday. Popular magazines, such as the best selling women's weekly *Josei Jishin*, have photos and an article or two on the Imperial Family in every issue. Surveys reveal that approximately 80 percent of the Japanese have a favorable impression of the imperial family and support its continuation. The imperial system as it is seen today, divorced from the compromises and maneuvering that would otherwise be necessary if the Emperor were involved in politics, provides a clean and untarnished symbol that enables people to feel proud of their ethnicity and cultural heritage.

Folk Shintō

Shrines, large and small, are scattered in neighborhoods and communities throughout Japan, as places to worship the deities and request their protection and support. Though some shrines are linked to others through common origins, most are independently supported by their local community. Sects with differences in dogma are not a factor in Folk Shintō. In any year most people will visit a number of different shrines, searching for support and protection in the multiple aspects of their lives.

When they buy a new car, for example, they will go to a shrine to have the new car blessed to avoid accidents, a rite that is likely to cost \$50 or more in a donation to the priest of the shrine. Other shrines have deities that can assist one in business, e.g., *Oinari-san*, or in college entrance exams and in other matters of education and scholarship, e.g., *Tenjin*.

Fitting with the animistic nature of Shintō, i.e., a wide pantheon of deities each having some specialization but most also having very general functions over worldly matters, the deities have diverse origins. Some are thought to be indigenous to Japan, and Shintō is considered to be the native religion of Japan. However, a number of the popular deities in Japan have Hindu and Buddhist origins. Their alien origins are of little matter to most Japanese.

Many of the shrines have annual festivals that provide an opportunity for local citizens to party together, to give thanks to the deities for their protection over the past year, and to ask for continuing assistance in the coming year. Offerings made to the deities of the community shrine on festival day provide income for its maintenance and for the sake party of the workers after the cleanup following the festival. Some festivals with competitions of sports or displays between different segments of the community offer an occasion where various internal hostilities and conflicts are expressed overtly or covertly. The so-called "fighting festivals," where each ward of a community parades its large float through the streets, crashing into the floats of other wards or even threatening to crash into the shops or houses of particularly troublesome people of the community, are examples of the kinds of activities that make festival day a popular occasion in Japan.

January 1, New Year, together with the first few days following it, is one of the two major holidays in Japan, the other being Obon in mid-summer. New Year is a holiday for families to reunite and go to the shrine to pray to the kami. Typically people go to more than one shrine during the first five days of the New Year, and it is the time when shrines make money for their annual operations, since the offerings people take to shrines now is money, rather than rice or other goods that farmers and others took in the past. Some of the popular shrines in the Tokyo area, such as Meiji jingū, attract more than three million people in the New Year's season.

Other than the annual festival day and New Year, most shrines do not have a regular cycle of weekly or monthly services. Rather, people visit the shrine when it is convenient and at times of special concern such as illness, exams, childbirth, drought, business or work worries, and major life transitions. Girls of three and seven, and boys of five, dressed up in colorful and expensive traditional garb, are seen going to shrines to be blessed by the shrine priest in the 7-5-3 (shichigosan) festival. Ideally they go on November 15, but typically they go on any weekend in November that is convenient. It is a photo-op occasion for the family, grandparents, tourists and the visiting anthropologist.

Another photo-op occasion are weddings performed in Shintō chapels, with the bride dressed in an elaborate and colorful kimono, which evokes the image of a long-standing

tradition. In recent years, however, many weddings are performed in Christian chapels at hotels and wedding halls, giving the bride the opportunity to dress in the Western white wedding gown and projecting an image of modernity, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. The religious meanings of these Christian chapel weddings are minimal. Frequently the person who officiates in the place of the priest or minister is nothing more than a visiting anthropologist or some other foreigner in the area. Having a foreigner conduct this pseudo-Christian ritual adds to the internationalism and cosmopolitanism of the wedding.

Weddings conducted in a Shintō shrine are much more religious in appearance and substance. The Shintō priest asks everyone to bow their heads while he addresses the kami, does a purification rite, and offers a Shintō prayer in ritual language. The heart of the Shintō wedding ceremony is the ritual sipping of sake, *san-san-kudo*, three times each from three separate cups, by the bride and groom. The bride and groom then offer the boughs of the sacred camellia or cypress tree at the altar to the kami. Throughout the wedding ritual the kami are asked to bless and protect the newly married couple and to make them fertile with healthy babies.

Shintō kami can be either malevolent or benevolent, depending on the attention they receive from human beings. As with humans, they require food and drink, which they receive in the form of offerings, and human attention which they receive in rituals. Left alone they can become angry.

Consequently, Japanese religion is based more on action-doing the rituals-rather than commitments of faith. The responses of many surveys asking the Japanese whether they believe in the deities show that the level of belief is not high. Nevertheless, the Japanese invest great amounts of time and money in performing religious rituals.

The explanation for this apparent discrepancy between belief and action is that even if one does not believe in the existence of the deities, one cannot be sure. It is better to do the rituals than suffer the consequences of the possible existence of angry deities. Moreover, the entire social fabric of Japan is tightly related to religion, at the most intimate level in terms of the family and the ancestors, at the neighborhood and community level in terms of the local shrines and their festivals, and at the national and Japanese ethnic level in terms of the Emperor. To not participate in the appropriate level of rituals is to reject one's incorporation in those important social units. One's own social identity is expressed in the various rituals.

Supernatural powers in Japan are not all personified in the form of deities. Kami, the supernatural power, can be resident in the deities, as in *kami-sama*. Kami is the word for supernatural power, and *-sama* is the honorific suffix attached to the name or title of someone of high status. However, kami, the supernatural power, can also be resident in

other things, as in kamikaze "divine wind," the term used to refer to the suicide pilots flying into American ships near the end of the Pacific War. People of unusual skills are said to be in possession of kami. Surely Michael Jordan had more kami resident in him than other normal human beings. In this sense kami is more like mana, a supernatural power, than a supernatural being.

There are other powers of significance in human lives that do not neatly fit into the category of Shintō or other religions in Japan. For example, there is power inherent in the relationship of things, e.g., geomancy, and in directions. A farm family I know that had a series of misfortunes, starting with a fatal illness of the young wife and culminating in a fire that destroyed the house, moved the house site across the road thinking that perhaps the location of the original house site was the cause of the problems. The northwest is considered to be a direction from which evil spirits and bad things come. Consequently, various measures are taken to protect oneself from those dangerous things. In many rural areas a small concrete or stone shrine a foot or so high is placed at the northwest corner of the house lot to protect the house and its family members from those powers.

Numbers also have power. The number four is unlucky, and some buildings do not have a fourth floor, just as some American buildings do not have a thirteenth floor. The explanation given for why four is unlucky is that one pronunciation of "four" is shi, which is the exact same pronunciation as the word for "death" (though each word is written with a different kanji). Four courses in a meal are to be avoided, and four items of the same kind are rarely seen on a plate. The numbers three, five, and seven, on the other hand, are good numbers, and these numbers will be expressed in the preparation of meals and in many other activities.

An association with blood is considered to be polluting. This is the explanation for the existence of the burakumin, an outcast segment of society that traditionally was engaged in important but polluting activities such as leather working, butchering, and mortuary practices. In olden times some rural hamlets had birthing huts outside the residential area of the community so that the blood that accompanies childbirth would not pollute the village. Even today women are prohibited, or strongly discouraged, from climbing certain sacred pilgrimage mountains or participating in some rituals because of the blood of menstruation, though these discriminatory and power-laden prohibitions are diminishing.

Another source of pollution is death. A major function of funerary rituals is to rid the family and other associates of the deceased of their pollution, and to aid the deceased in the transition from the state of a highly polluted being to that of a clean and purified god.

Pollution is not sin. People become polluted through otherwise noble acts, such as a midwife, surgeon, or mortician helping family members through their time of grief. The family members themselves, living in close association with the deceased, also become polluted.

However, pollution is not a desired condition. It is unclean. Defilement comes from a variety of activities and associations, to be avoided when possible. When avoidance is not possible, steps must be taken to eliminate the pollution and return to a purified state. For example, because immoral acts may be considered polluting, people will throw salt to purify an area where an evil person has stood. Similarly, people returning from a funeral will throw salt over their left shoulder to purify themselves before entering their house. A small packet of salt for this purpose is frequently included in the gift packet given by a bereaving family to guests who attend the funeral.

The concept of pollution has roots both in Shintō and Buddhism, and therefore it is not possible to say to which religious tradition it belongs. Like much in Japanese religious life, it belongs to both.

Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced into Japan from Korea in A.D. 538, though some sources list the official date as 552 when a mission from the Kingdom of Paekche brought various Buddhist images and sutras to Japan. Contact between Japan, China and Korea has been extensive since that time, with each affecting the nature of Buddhist thought and ritual in the others. Today Buddhism in Japan has its own distinctive characteristics, and at the popular level has little to do with monastic teachings in other parts of the world. Throughout its history in Japan, Buddhism has risen and fallen in the favor of the central powers. Some factions, e.g., the Mononobe and the Nakatomi, powerful families of the imperial court in the 6th century, fought vigorously against the spread of the alien Buddhism, fearing that it would anger the native Shintō gods. Others, such as the Soga family, found Buddhism to be spiritually and politically useful.

When the Soga defeated the Mononobe in the 7th century, Buddhism became a virtual state religion. Prince Shōtoku (574-622), regent of Emperor Suiko (554-628, r. 592-628), became the first great patron of Buddhism in Japan. In the ensuing centuries Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines took advantage of the imperial court's policy of giving tenure in perpetuity to anyone who developed or reclaimed unused public lands for rice paddies. By expanding their landed estates, shōen, and using whatever tax exemptions that were available to religious institutions, some of the temples became very rich and powerful, occasionally competing with the imperial court and the military governments for control over the local areas and their tax revenues. Tōdaiji, the temple with the

largest wooden building in the world housing the large bronze Buddhist statue, the Daibutsu (Great Buddha, consecrated in 752) of Nara, at one time controlled shōen in twenty-three provinces and 14,000 acres of rice land. The shōen system of management and government died out in the 16th century as feudal domains and the central government became more powerful.

Nevertheless, in the Tokugawa Period, 1600-1868, the central government continued to use Buddhist temples for control over the population, though the relationship of the government to Buddhism remained tenuous. In its efforts to eliminate any Christians remaining after the inquisition type efforts to eradicate Christianity in the 17th century, the government required selected Buddhist temples throughout Japan to do an annual census of the families in their areas, investigating whether any of those families had Christian ties.

This made the temples responsible for assuring that no Christians lived in their area. The fear of Christianity was based on the concern that Christianity was tied to those Western political powers that were interested in colonizing Japan and other Asian nations. The suppression of Christianity was therefore more of a political expediency than a theologically driven conflict. The Japanese throughout their history have been quite tolerant of theological differences.

Towards the end of the Tokugawa period, the threat of foreign invasion and the impotency of the shogun to stop it contributed to a rise in nationalism and the need for a revolution. The emperor became the symbol of the movement, and Shinto emerged as a state religion. In 1868 the emperor was returned to sovereignty in the new Meiji constitutional monarchy. Buddhism was relegated to a secondary position, and many Buddhist temples found it necessary to erect Shinto shrines in their compounds, both to secure the protection of the Shinto deities and to keep the government authorities from harassing them for their political and religious incorrectness.

Shintō remained the state religion until Japan's surrender to the Allied Forces in 1945. It is significant that in this period of a state religion and relative religious intolerance, that Japan engaged in a war of aggression and towards the end of the period a loss of civil liberties for its citizens. Today there is no state religion, there is substantial religious tolerance, and the citizens enjoy civil liberties. However, among the radical right there are calls to restore the emperor to a position of sovereignty, and the nationalistic symbols of the past are still displayed in some political circles. Buddhism is practiced by most Japanese, especially in funerary, memorial and other rituals directed to the ancestors. A few Japanese, for example, the Emperor and other members of the Imperial Family and also Shintō shrine priest families, will do most of their rituals in the Shintō tradition. This is to be expected with the Imperial Family because the Emperor is,

in essence, Shintō's main figurehead. However, even Imperial Family members participate in Buddhist rituals on occasion, such as an in-marriage member of the imperial family who joins in the Buddhist funerary and memorial services when someone in their natal family dies. The two traditions are more complementary than competitive.

Both Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) and Hinayana (Smaller Vehicle) schools of Buddhism are found in Japan, though Mahayana is the more prevalent. Mahayana Buddhism has as a primary premise the idea that various Buddhas or bodhisattvas from the distant past are there to assist the rest of us in our quest for enlightenment or salvation. These saintly bodhisattvas out of their compassion for the rest of us stopped just short of their own enlightenment so that they can teach and help us. Once a Buddha has gone all the way to complete enlightenment, he is at one with the universe and no longer able to be involved in earthly, humanly affairs. Japanese Buddhism teaches us that suffering comes from human desire. Wanting things only brings frustration, disappointment, and suffering.

The conundrum lies in how to avoid wanting things, i.e., how to overcome desire, because if we desire not to desire we still desire; and this results in frustration, disappointment and suffering. Buddhism in Japan has a cultural legacy that the way to purge desire is through meditation and a total concentration on the task at hand, without concern for pain, difficulty or self. This cultural approach to life has brought about a disciplined, hardworking population with remarkable accomplishments. The danger is that in its extreme it can also lead to fanaticism.

Mahayana Buddhism has taught the Japanese that salvation and enlightenment is possible for the laity as well as the priests and monks. This high religious state is possible even for the factory worker on an automobile assembly line if focus, concentration, and discipline are practiced. It is not something that can be achieved through an occasional mountain retreat. It requires constant effort in one's daily activities as well as in the temple.

It is differences in the definitions of salvation, enlightenment, buddhahood, and how to achieve these desired religious and spiritual conditions that distinguish the many Buddhist sects that have developed over the centuries in Japan and elsewhere. These differences are of little importance to most Japanese, however. When a young woman marries into a family as a bride, or a young man marries into a family as an adopted husband, they quickly take up the rituals and practices of the Buddhist sect of their new family. The caution about marrying someone of a different Buddhist sect is not the issue that it is in America, where young people frequently are cautioned not to marry someone of a different religion. A different "religion" in Japan means a non-Buddhist

and non-Shintō person, i.e., a foreigner, and that is another matter. But a person of a different Buddhist sect is of little concern. Since there are no sects in Shintō, marrying into another family and another community means little in terms of Shintō affiliations.

The aspect of Buddhism that is most prominent in Japan is not a concern about enlightenment in this life but rather well-being for the ancestors and oneself after death. More than leading an exemplary life before death, though that is not irrelevant, the progression from being a highly polluted person at death to deification, either as a kami for some or as a buddha, hotoke, for others, is made possible through ritual. It is not a quick journey, and the rituals are many, especially in the first week after death but continuing for as long as 33 years, or increasingly for 50 years, when the final memorial service for an individual is conducted. After that the deceased becomes one of the collective of ancestors and no longer receives individual ritual attention, having already achieved kami or buddha status.

The rituals include a wake at the home, a funeral at the temple, a service at the grave site for family and close relatives, and a memorial service and a large banquet at a hotel or other banquet facility to be repeated at certain yearly intervals until the 33rd or 50th year memorial service. In less affluent days, the 33rd year memorial service was thought to be enough, enabling the deceased to achieve a fully deified and purified state. In recent years, however, temple priests have been encouraging parishioners to extend the cycle to 50 years.

The cynics will point out that memorial services are a big source of revenue for temple priests, but many people are indeed holding these services for family members for up to 50 years after their death. Greater longevity in Japan also means that some family members will have a personal memory of someone who died 50 years ago.

Other occasions to perform rituals for the ancestors include the spring and fall equinox when people go to the family tomb and give offerings and pray before the ancestors. Masses of people return to their natal homes on Obon, the mid-summer All Souls Day, to pray to their ancestors and reunite with their family and friends. As many as three million people leave Tokyo for the provinces to celebrate Obon on this holiday. Cemeteries are frequently packed on August 13, or July 13 in some parts of Japan, as worshipers go with flowers, cookies, water and incense to pray before their ancestors.

The family altar, butsudān, in the house is decorated for this festival where the returning family members can present their offerings to the ancestors and pray. Ideally someone in the household lights incense and presents tea and rice or some other offering at the family altar every day. Not infrequently the person who does this daily activity is the wife, or grandmother, who has married into the family and is not related by blood to the husband's ancestors to whom the ritual is directed. The in-marrying people pray to their

own ancestors when they return to their natal home for Obon or on other occasions. If the young bride is employed at a job outside the home and thus very busy, and if there are no grandparents in the house, this morning ritual for the ancestors may occur less frequently.

Buddhism and Shintō are in a functionally complementary relationship for many Japanese, though the lines between them are not firm or strong. Shintō provides the ritual opportunities to maximize this worldly concern through ritual such as in business, school, entrance exams, relationships, health, protection from accidents, and a smooth passage through the various life stages, e.g., conception, childbirth, marriage, and the critical ages when a person is particularly vulnerable for misfortune. The most dangerous ages are 19, 33, and 37 for a woman and 25, 42 and 61 for a man. Buddhism focuses on the otherworldly things and the afterlife, and therefore involves funerary and memorial rituals, and a belief system for achieving salvation and enlightenment in this life and after.

In neither Buddhism or Shintō is a commitment of faith as important as doing the rituals. Religion in Japan focuses on the doing, the practice, of religion rather than making commitments of faith that bind the person to one tradition or another. Thus people can pray to the ancestors for help on an entrance exam, for example, when most commonly such prayers will be directed to the kami at a Shintō shrine or in some other kind of Shintō ritual. Religion covers all human concerns in Japan, with frequent overlap.

New Religions

New religions have appeared throughout human history and continue to appear periodically today. Typically someone claims to have had a revelation through a vision or some other contact with the supernatural, providing a new understanding of the true nature of the universe and the supernatural world. All religions at one time were "new" religions.

In Japan the term *shinkō shūkyō* (new religions) has come to mean those that have developed in the past 150 years, particularly those that have developed in the 20th century. Frequently these religions are syncretic, incorporating features from other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Shintō, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. In contrast to the animistic pantheon of Shintō, some of the new religions postulate a single all-powerful god. An example in this regard is Tenrikyō, one of the largest of the new religions, which claims that an origin god, Tenri ō no mikoto, is the creator of the world and serves as the caring parent of all mankind.

The prophets of these new religions frequently have their revelations at a time of personal crisis, such as a severe illness of themselves or one close to them. Faith

healing is a major component, with positive results in overcoming personal problems being reported in the testimonials of the sect members.

Most of the new religions are optimistic in their teachings, but not all. The prophet of Aum Shinrikyō, Asahara Shōkō, preached that the apocalypse is near. To be prepared he set his group on a course of destruction, culminating in a nerve gas attack in a central subway station of Tokyo and four other stations, killing twelve people and injuring close to 4,000, some permanently. The philosophy of Aum Shinrikyō derives heavily from Hindu texts, but it also includes ideas from Buddhism and Shintō. Asahara Shōkō and some of his followers have been tried for their terroristic crimes, with Asahara and a few others being found guilty and sentenced to death.

At its peak Aum Shinrikyō had about 10,000 members, with chapters in Russia and New York City. This is small compared to some of the other New Religions. Sōka Gakkai, for example, the Nichiren Buddhism lay organization formed in 1930, has chapters in 190 countries with twelve million members. The appeal of Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai is the belief that the Buddha nature is inherent in each of us, the common people, priests, monks and the social elites alike. The Buddha nature, latent in everyone regardless of social class, can be realized through religious practices, primarily the chanting of the "Nanmyō hō rengekyō," (Devotion to the Lotus Sutra). One does not need to enter into a mystic state to achieve the peace and harmony of the highest life condition, or Buddha nature, but rather through continuous effort in daily life, individual peace and oneness with the environment can ultimately be attained.

Cults or new religions everywhere inevitably run into conflict with the established religions and the state. The threat that the new religions pose to the establishment, whether real or imagined, often elicits oppressive measures. Makiguchi Tsunesaburō, the founder of Sōka Gakkai, was imprisoned in 1943 for refusing to place Shinto talismans in his home. Japan was at war at the time, and Shinto was the state religion. Makiguchi died in prison. After the war the charismatic leader of Sōka Gakkai, Ikeda Daisaku, challenged the priesthood of Nichiren Shōshū, the long established Buddhist sect and the parent organization of Sōka Gakkai, on doctrine. Ikeda was censured and forced to resign from his position as president of Sōka Gakkai, though he remains as honorary chairman.

Sōka Gakkai also experiences hostility at the local level. Ancestral tablets, *ihai*, that are central in the Buddhist altars of most Japanese families, become unnecessary in a cult in which the Buddha nature is latent in everyone. Therefore, the instructions from the leadership to destroy the tablets runs counter to the strong symbolism that the tablets have of a continuing family line from generation to generation. Filial piety and intergenerational ties are less important in the more individualistic oriented doctrine of

Sōka Gakkai. Furthermore, the fact that the local temple priest, and his temple, no longer are necessary for the religious condition of the Sōka Gakkai members, who are unwilling to pay the temple priest to maintain their family tombstones, creates ill-will between Sōka Gakkai and the rest of the community. Therefore, Sōka Gakkai is more successful in the larger cities of Japan where the solidarity of the local community is weak. One of the more successful proselytizing methods in the large cities, where loneliness and anonymity are prevalent, is to hold discussion and testimonial type meetings in members' homes on a regular basis, giving members the opportunity for intense and intimate human interaction, which otherwise may be difficult to come by in the city.

Thus, Buddhism in Japan, with a history of nearly 1500 years, must adjust to changing times, as religions everywhere must do if they are to survive. We can expect new religions to emerge again and again as the processes of globalization and change continue.

Christianity and Other Religions

Francisco de Xavier, a Basque Jesuit missionary, arrived in Japan in 1549 as part of the religious component of the Portuguese colonialist and imperialist effort. This date is seen as the beginning of Christianity in Japan. The association with the Western world had both advantages for the missionaries, and disadvantages. Western learning and technology were of great interest to the Japanese, and therefore early mission activities met with some success. However, the association of the missionaries with the foreign powers was also seen as a threat by Japanese authorities, who feared that Japan's sovereignty might be lost as the colonization of other parts of Asia occurred. Beginning in 1600 with the Tokugawa shogunate, an escalating oppression of Christianity and Christians therefore took place. Japan was entering into a period of national isolation, sakoku, and Christianity was seen as a foreign threat. Japanese Christians either went underground with their new religion or were persecuted, sometimes with brutal torture and painful execution, as on the cross. At the start of the oppression perhaps one-half of one percent of the Japanese population was Christian.

With the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 and the ending of national isolation, Christianity again became a religion of considerable interest to the Japanese. Foreign missionaries returned to Japan, surprised to find that the underground Christian community had survived 250 years of oppression and secrecy. The association of Christianity with Western philosophy and learning gave it special appeal among those who were working to modernize feudal Japan.

As Japan moved into its own period of imperialist expansion in the first half of the twentieth century, Christianity again was oppressed by the central government. Shintō and the emperor were the state religion to which all Japanese should adhere. Christianity was a foreign religion. Therefore, the loyalty of Christians to the Japanese nation was called into question, and people either gave up their faith or again went underground with it.

The humiliating defeat of Japan to the United States and the Allied Forces in 1945 left a religious vacuum in Japan. In this environment, Christian values of social responsibility and moral compassion for others became increasingly attractive. An active mission effort by representatives of many Christian churches, Protestants and Catholics alike, took place in the early decades following the war. People in positions of leadership, including a prime minister, unabashedly proclaimed their Christian commitments. In just a few years, the percentage of practicing Christians rose again to about one percent of the total population.

Christianity has matured in Japan and is no longer dependent on a foreign missionary effort, with native Japanese taking most of the leadership positions in a wide variety of denominations. With the success of Japan's postwar economic growth and rise in international stature, along with an increasing self-confidence in Japan and things Japanese, the quest for foreign, primarily Western, philosophies and ideologies is no longer as compelling as it once was. In keeping with this, the growth of the Christian community in Japan seems to have stabilized at around that one percent level.

Judaism has active communities of both Japanese and foreigners in some of the largest metropolitan areas of Japan, especially Tokyo and Kobe, but it is almost non-existent in the provinces. Perhaps the most notable thing about Judaism in Japan is a series of anti-Semitic bestsellers that have been published in the past twenty years. Since most Japanese have had no contact with any Jews, scholars have had a difficult time in explaining this fad. Japan's dependence on Arab oil, and its former alliance with Germany and the Axis powers in World War II, have been unsuccessfully suggested as possible reasons for the large sales, up to half a million copies, for some of these books. Perhaps the search for an "Other," any other, to maximize the pride one feels in one's own culture and ethnic heritage is at the heart of this genre.

Conclusion

Japan is a global, international society. Foreigners come to Japan in large numbers to study, travel, and conduct business; and many Japanese go overseas for the same reasons. Thus all of the world's great religions are well represented in Japan. Religion in Japan is diverse, with multiple origins and expressions. The interrelationship of the

major traditions such as Shintō and Buddhism make it difficult to talk about Japanese religions as discrete institutions or bodies of thought. Rather, we should begin to think about the "total religious person" to understand how all these various parts come together in an integrated system in the individual. At that level many Japanese express a strong religiosity, if we take that term to mean the practice of things the Japanese consider to be religious and sacred.

At this moment in Japanese history, the Japanese are very eclectic and accommodating in combining religious ideas and practices from different sources. The Constitution insists on religious freedom and a separation of religion and the state, and the values expressed in the Constitution regarding religious freedom are pervasive throughout society. There is no state religion, though the far right in the political arena continues to push for the restoration of Shintō as a state religion and the sovereignty of the emperor. However, the prevailing approach today in Japan is to cultivate a tolerance for religious difference. This tolerance results in a minimum of religious conflict. This is a situation the rest of the world should study carefully.

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