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The Religious Identity of the Japanese

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The Religious Identity of the Japanese

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Any consideration of the issue of religion is closely related to a consideration of politics. In other words, when we think about the religious identity of the Japanese people, we must also think closely about their political identity. A unique relationship can be observed between religious enthusiasm and political fervor. Namely, religion and politics are closely analogous forms of social action, first in their adherence to a sect, second in their devotion to an ideal, and third in their commitment to a reformation of existing conditions. In that sense, religion is both a mirror which illuminates the origins of politics, and simultaneously a mechanism which reflects changes in society. As a result, a consideration of the religious identity of modern Japan becomes linked to an investigation into the various social and political conditions of Japanese society.

A variety of perspectives and methodologies can be employed to probe the religious identity of the Japanese people in the modern period. Such perspectives range from the theological to the positivistic, and their use may in some cases result in the appearance of propositions which are mutually contradictory. Here, however, I want to narrow my focus on this issue to the following three themes: (1) a pluralism based in ancestor worship; (2) a "mentalism" (*seishinshugi*) which emphasizes the value of "selflessness"; (3) the desire for a temporal utopia.

1. PLURALISM FOUNDED ON ANCESTOR WORSHIP

It goes without saying that the first point, namely pluralism founded on ancestor worship, is most essentially rooted in Japan's polytheistic religious tradition. In the Japanese myths found in the early classics *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, a variety of creator deities, nature deities, and "human deities" appear, and those were broadly classified into the two categories of heavenly deities (*amatsukami*) and chthonic deities (*kunitsukami*). Of these beings, it was the chthonic deities who were recounted on the greatest scale, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is especially

noteworthy that these chthonic deities are centered on ancestral spirits, in other words, human beings who were worshiped as gods. The reason for this importance is the fact that the process whereby a human died and was apotheosized as an ancestral spirit has been the central element of Shintō faith since ancient times. In essence, one can say that Japan's ancient Shintōistic pantheon was a polytheistic body with a core of ancestral deities.

With the coming of the sixth century, Buddhism was transmitted to Japan from China through the Korean Peninsula. As is well known, Buddhism constructed a mandala-like system centered on the activities of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but at the root of its doctrine was the concept that all human beings were endowed with the ability to become Buddhas, expressed in the formulation, "the Buddhahood of all sentient beings." In turn, that concept was shared with the Shintō belief that the fate of the dead was to become an ancestral spirit and thus achieve apotheosis. In that sense, Buddhism can also be considered a religion which included within itself polytheistic notions and a pluralistic belief system.

When the foreign religion of Buddhism entered Japan and came into contact with the native religion of Shintō, there was formed an "interpenetrating" or "overlapping" (*jūsōteki*) "faith in gods and Buddhas" (*shinbutsu shinkō*). In other words, these two religions exerted a powerful influence on each other. For example, Shintō, which to that time did not possess tangible objects of worship, was impacted by the influence of Buddhism's sculptured images and thus came to construct and enshrine its own "deity images" (*shinzō*). In the same way, the new temple architecture brought from China stimulated Shintō to construct its own permanent shrine edifices.

What kind of influence did Buddhism receive from Shintō? Originally, Buddhism had no doctrinal emphasis on ancestor veneration, but through its concurrence with Shintō, it came to possess the concept that the dead were "Buddhas" (*hotoke*) to be venerated, and it went on to develop rituals for that purpose. Under primitive Buddhism in India, the Buddha was a person who had achieved "enlightenment" *satori*, but when that idea was transplanted in Japan, the word "Buddha" (*hotoke*) came to mean "the deceased" as well.

The nobles during Japan's Nara period (710-784) sponsored the building of temples for the reading of sutras and performance of funerary rites to ancestors of seven generations. The Shintō concept that a dead individual went through a change from ancestral spirit to "deity" (*kami*) permeated Buddhism's concept of rebirth and brought about change to that concept. It might be said that under the name Buddhism, ancestor worship and the concept of becoming a Buddha (*jōbutsu*) became fused. The structure of this kind of mutual permeation of influences has in essence continued throughout the entirety of Japanese history to the present day.

At the same time, it must be noted as well that within the tradition of Buddhism, the constant subject of discussion was the central theme of the "eternal Buddha." That eternal Buddha was viewed as an abstract notion standing hidden

behind the cosmos, a transcendent symbol capable of bringing all existence to salvation. As a result, in the Buddhism which developed from its Indian period, the pluralistic Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and tutelary deities as well as Japanese deities, were all beings which flowed out from that transcendent symbol, or were developed from it (as in the theory of "original source, manifest traces" (*honji suijaku*). In short, it can be said that the mandala world of continental Buddhism, which was centered on the eternal Buddha, absorbed and subsumed the Shintō pantheon of the *Nihongi* and the *Kojiki*.

But there also developed a kind of reversal phenomenon in relation to that current of thought. That phenomenon was Shintō's insistence on a revision of the perspective involved. Namely, on the side of Shintō, there was a move to proclaim the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami as an ultimate deity, and to orient the Shintō pantheon and the Buddhist mandala beneath her, while simultaneously erecting an ideology which sacralized the emperor—the "consanguineous" descent of Amaterasu. And that ideology was ultimately successful at producing a kind of politico-religious institution of divine right. With its seeds in Japan's medieval period, this kind of move gradually grew, and flowered with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In short, the traditional religious consciousness which equated Amaterasu with emperor-worship was reinterpreted in the form of the modern "imperial institution."

When viewed in this way, it becomes apparent there is a complementary relationship between the two religions. In the Buddhist mandala, the central figure of the eternal Buddha is surrounded by strata of other Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and deities. On the other hand, Shintō placed Amaterasu (the sun goddess, identified with the emperor), at the center of its pantheon, surrounded by lesser deities, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The world of mythical tradition in the Japanese islands is replete with the countless Japanese deities, together with the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and tutelaries of the Indian tradition, but these deities and Buddhas are arranged in a pattern almost like satellites around the nucleus of "emperor" and "eternal Buddha."

At this point, let me add one comment to the earlier noted issue of the "imperial institution." Namely, what is it that guarantees the legitimacy of imperial rule in Japan? To the present, there have been generally two interpretations advanced regarding this issue. One viewpoint, perhaps represented by the historian Tsuda Sōkichi, holds that the legitimacy of the emperor's "single lineage through external generations" (*bansei ikkei*) has its origin in the exalted "status" or "position" (*chi*) of the emperor. In contrast, the other viewpoint is that of the ethnographer Orikuchi Shinobu, who stated that the divinity of the imperial prestige originates in the unchanging nature of the "imperial spirit" which is transmitted through the physical body of the historical emperors.

Even if we ignore for a moment the case of the "imperial institution as symbol" (*shōchō tennōsei*), I feel that the legitimacy of the emperor's "sovereignty" can be said to have developed historically from the exalted nature accruing to the imperial

prestige, together with an even greater charisma believed to reside in the imperial spirit. At the very least, it seems that Tsuda's historical perspective must be augmented with the religio-ethnographical interpretation of Orikuchi. And it is in this very point that the Japanese imperial institution seems to have had remarkable similarities to the divine right of the Lamas in Tibet. The Tibetan Lama held ultimate religious and secular authority; when a Lama died, it was believed that his spirit was reborn in the physical body of newly born infant, and the "holy child" was indoctrinated so as to be appointed the next Dalai Lama. In short, the spirit of the historical Dalai Lamas was considered to be unchanging, and its charisma guaranteed the legitimacy of the Lama's sovereignty. And it is precisely here that the Japanese imperial institution and the Tibetan Dalai Lamas must be discriminated from the kind of monarchies observed, for example, in Britain or Thailand.

2. A MENTALISM EMPHASIZING THE VALUE OF SELFLESSNESS

Next, the second theme I mentioned is that of a mentalism emphasizing the value of selflessness. That Buddhism expounded the doctrine of "no self" is commonly known. It denied the ontological existence of the self, and it goes without saying that this denial of the existence of self was merely the other side of the concept of "emptiness" (*kū*). But this Buddhism of no-self underwent a great modification when it was introduced to Japan.

This modification was necessary because the characteristic orientation toward the present world found in Japan would not accept the extreme metaphysical concept of "no-self." In its place, the Japanese substituted the concept of a "selflessness" ["impartiality" (*mushi*)], or "detachment" (*mushin*) which attempted to achieve a mental state of quietude. While continuing to proclaim the doctrine of no-self on the conceptual level, on the level of everyday consciousness and sensations it sought for a state of "detachment" which was characterized by a freedom from mental cares or concerns. And that detachedness came to be viewed as the basis for a pious or religious mind. Shintō had long taught the value of a "pure and bright mind," and that concept resonated with the Buddhist claim that "if the mind is pure, all things are pure," so as to construct the bedrock of Japanese religious consciousness. Rather than aiming for the independence of "self," the Japanese came to place far more emphasis on the sublimation and purification of the "mind" (*kokoro*).

For example, the medieval religious poet Saigyō (1118-1190) repeatedly spoke in poem of the mind which was ever changing, but in the last analysis, that "mind" was bright and clear like the moon, yearning after the "pure land," and he believed in the subjectivity which aspired toward that goal. For example, in one of his poems he stated,

Dispelling darkness,
the lucid dwelling moon of

mind's empty sky
 approaches the western hills

The reference here to the "moon dwelling in the mind's empty sky" uses the image of the moon hanging in the sky as a metaphor for the poet's own mind. The verb "dwell" (*sumu*) of the "dwelling moon" is both a reference to the moon in the sky, and to the moon that is entirely "clear" or "lucid" (*sumiwatatteiru*). The mind that is clear and bright like the moon proceeds to the west through a sky clear of all clouds. Saigyō is saying that just as the moon hangs over the edge of the western mountains, the mind likewise follows to the west. It goes without saying that the "western hills" spoken of here are a reference to the western Pure Land. In short, Saigyō is speaking of the yearning of the clear mind for the western paradise.

The concern for the mind as expressed here by Saigyō became even more pronounced with Japan's entry into the Kamakura period (1192–1333). That is because this kind of thoroughgoing distillation of vision onto the self made the search for the mind an even more important topic. I believe that, in terms of the intellectual history (*seishinshi*) of Japan, the chief characteristic of the Kamakura period was in its precipitous concentration on the search for the "mind."

This, of course, does not mean that a consideration and search for the "mind" was not present even before, in the Heian period (794–1191) as well. For example, Kūkai (774–835) expressed in his *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron* the concept that the human mind is gradually purified as it advances through ten stages from immaturity to enlightenment. But it must be noted that the "ten stages of mind" (*jūjūshin*) of which Kūkai spoke by and large centered on an exposition of the value or quality of the various worlds depicted in Buddhist sutras, and did not necessarily involve an attempt to reflect introspectively on the religious mind. And as noted above, it was only with the coming of the Kamakura period that such introspective reflection was engaged in a concentrated way. That introspection was the work of Hōnen, Myōe, Shinran and Dōgen.

These various figures attempted to purify and quieten the egoistic mind through techniques such as intonation of the *nenbutsu* or the practice of *zazen*, thereby achieve the mental state of a kind of "selflessness," in other words, the state of being a "Buddha." At the same time, that achievement meant as well to become mature as a human being. The mental states of the "mind of a Bodhisattava" (*bodaishin*) spoken of by Myōe and the "spontaneous accord with truth" (*jinen hōni*) spoken of by Shinran, as well as the "casting off of body and mind" emphasized by Dōgen were all alike in that respect. So it is possible to say that the Buddhist concept of "becoming a Buddha" (*jōbutsu*) was linked to the concept of the maturation of the human individual.

To take the case of Dōgen (1200–1253), who introduced the practice of *zazen* within Kamakura Buddhism, what is interesting is the fact that Dōgen expressed far more concern with the phenomenon of "mind" than with the "no-self" of Indian Buddhism. For example, in the chapter of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* entitled

"*Sokushin jōbutsu*," the functioning of the mind is explained as being, in its ultimate aspects, the same as the work of a "Buddha."

Likewise, in the chapter "*Hotsu bodaishin*" of the same work, Dōgen states that "practice of the Way through *zazen* is in itself the arousing of the mind of the Bodhisattva" (*zazen bendō kore hotsu bodaishin*). The term "arising of the Bodhisattva mind" (*hotsu bodaishin*) means to produce or stimulate the Bodhisattva mind, namely to arouse the mind which seeks for the Buddhist path. In contrast, "practice of Way through *zazen*" (*zazen bendō*) mean to follow the Buddhist path through single-minded practice of sitting meditation. In other words, Dōgen is saying that the unswerving practice of *zazen* is itself the arousing of mind.

From Dōgen's perspective, all the manifold things in this world were opportunities for the "arousal of mind." A person's mind might be aroused in a dream and thus achieve Buddhahood, or it might be aroused in a drunken stupor and likewise achieve Buddhahood. Or again, a person might have their mind aroused by seeing the swaying flowers and falling leaves, and thus achieve Buddhahood. The secret kernel to the arousal of mind is within the everyday itself, but that is merely to say that fundamentally, the truth of the Buddhist Dharma has never been to be found anywhere outside of the everyday. The maturing of the human mind within everyday life is itself in common with the experience of Buddhahood found within the Buddhist Dharma.

It is also well known that Zeami (1363–1433), who brought the art of Nō to its zenith in the fifteenth century, wrote in his *Fūshi kaden* of the concept of *shoshin* or "the beginner's mind." He stated that "one must never forget the beginner's mind." Kūkai had already spoken of the "beginner's mind" in the Heian period, and Myōe (1173–1232) likewise made it an issue in his Kamakura-period work *Saijarin*, but it goes without saying that it was Zeami who cut and fit the concept, raising it to the level of polished psychological principle. Zeami's insistence that "one must not forget the beginner's mind" means that no matter what the area of endeavor, an individual who has just set out on the path of learning must not forget his own unpolished, immature mind. In short, the "beginner's mind" means the green or immature mind, one which is yet inferior. By constantly directing the introspecting eye on that immature mind or beginner's mind, polish is added to art, maturity as a human being assured.

Zeami's theory of the "beginner's mind" appears time and again in his *Fūshi kaden*, but it was only in his *Kakyō*, written late in life, that the theory developed to its fullest. According to that work, the expression "one must never forget the beginner's mind" was early transmitted by the Kanze school, and there were three orally transmitted principles, namely.

1. Never forget the beginner's mind of discrimination of good and bad.
2. Never forget the timely beginner's mind.
3. Never forget the beginner's mind in old age.

The first injunction “never to forget the beginner’s mind of discrimination of good and bad” means that one should awaken to the unskilled immaturity of the beginner’s state (bad), and gradually proceed to the later, more skilled stages (good). The second clause “never forget the timely beginner’s mind” means that there is an artistic style appropriate for each stage from immaturity to old age, and that one should awaken to the beginner’s mind at each of these stages. The third injunction “never forget the beginner’s mind in old age” means that discipline is necessary to prevent one from becoming complacent or arrogant in old age. Zeami adds that “there is an end to life, but no end to *nō*.” In short, while the train of life inevitably reaches its final station, *nō* knows no limit as an art.

As we have seen from these three orally transmitted injunctions, Zeami taught that there must ceaseless concentrated vision directed toward the immaturity of the human mind. If that is forgotten, both the art and appearance of *nō* will disappear without trace. In that sense, the “beginner’s mind” is always within oneself, and not outside. To come into intimate contact with that beginner’s mind is to direct one’s eye within. It is necessary to constantly cultivate the immature mind which would otherwise vacillate and waver.

As is well known, the Japanese people have long loved expressions like “body and mind are indivisible” (*shinshin ichinyo*) or “mind, art, body” (*shin, gi, tai*). These expressions likewise express the strongly rooted orientation of traditional culture toward the “mind.” And this stream of thought is not unrelated to the fact that Japan’s traditional arts and martial arts often raise the issue of the purification of consciousness arising from a state of “selflessness.” And in no time, the idea arose that the “mind” changes, grows and matures. In other words, it expresses the attitude of negating the ego, and wholly accepting the object confronting oneself.

The act of “negating” (*mu*) the self is to cause the self to more closely approach the condition of “nature” or “spontaneity” (*shizen, jinen*). The “self” which has approached this spontaneity becomes a detached self which is separated from the ego. The “detached self” does not mean to be without mind, nor to empty the mind. It rather means a continual awakening to the fact that the mind is the immature beginner’s mind, a state of “selflessness” (*mushin*) which can always sympathize and resonate with nature and other individuals. While it may seem a bit abrupt to interject this comment, the expression *sokutenkyoshi* (cast off the small self and acquiesce to the will of heaven) coined by the author Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916), and the similar expression *mushi no seishin* (the attitude of selflessness) often used by the founder of modern criticism Kobayashi Hideo (1902–1983), can alike be considered pointing to a state of “selflessness” as a kind of enlightenment.

To change the subject for a moment, the British historian Arnold Toynbee once came to Japan and met with Kaizuka Shigeki. Their talk turned to the Meiji Restoration (1868) and unfolded in the following kind of debate: it is well known that the Meiji Restoration was unlike the French or Russian revolutions in that it occurred with very little bloodshed. There is of course some problem with whether the Meiji Restoration can be considered a “revolution,” but perhaps it might in that sense be

called a "bloodless revolution." But when we view the expanse of history from west to east, those events given the name revolution have been invariably associated with the tragedy of bloodshed. Only Japan's Meiji Restoration escaped that fate. What was it that allowed this to happen?

In response to this problem Toynbee wondered whether it might not have been the influence of Buddhism, but Kaizuka remained unsatisfied, and responded that he felt the influence of Confucianism was operating in one way or another.

Here, Buddhism and Confucianism were brought out as a means of explaining the "bloodless" nature of the Meiji Restoration; I would guess that the two speakers had in mind the rule against taking life (*ahimsa*) in Buddhism, and the concept of the *i-hsing* (changing of a dynasty) revolution making up the framework of Confucianism. It goes without saying that the Buddhist rule against taking life is linked to the bloodless nature of non-violence. And the concept of the *i-hsing* revolution was a political concept transmitted since ancient China which taught in effect that a virtuous and princely man (*chun tzu*) would succeed to the imperial dignity in accordance with the Mandate of Heaven. And in the background to that concept flowed a rule of abdication which aimed at avoiding strife. But is it really possible to understand the "bloodless" nature of the Meiji Restoration by means of these concepts alone?

Of course, there is no doubt that the factors of Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as of Shintō, form important topics for consideration. But together with those factors, or even prior to those factors, I feel it is necessary to consider the problem of the "sense of ego" or "sense of self" characterizing the Japanese. Namely, one might hypothesize that the relative immaturity of the Japanese people's "sense of ego" may have served to relatively reduce the amount of violent bloodshed. For example, it might be interesting in this context to compare the "ego" of Robespierre in the French Revolution and of Lenin in the Russian Revolution with the egos of the patriots who were active in the Meiji Restoration.

But the issue does not stop with a small group of revolutionaries and leaders. When considering the rebellions and insurrections of the common people as well, there was likely a considerable difference in the strength of "self-consciousness" which they bore compared to the people in France or Russia. And it is in that context that I think the spiritual or mental attitude of those Japanese who emphasize the value of "selflessness" has an important significance.

3. MODERN UTOPIAN THOUGHT

And the final theme is that of modern utopian thought. Since long ago, Japan has known the Shintōistic paradise of the "everlasting land" (*tokoyo no kuni*) far across the sea, as well as the "Pure Land" spoken of in Buddhism. I think these are two key concepts typifying the Japanese utopian vision, but in time, "*tokoyo no kuni*" and the "Pure Land" came to be viewed as worlds where only the dead went. *tokoyo no kuni* was transformed into the underworld (*yomi*) which lay in the moun-

tains, while the Pure Land was transformed into the vision of a holy mountain which was climbed by the dead. Traditional utopian thought thus coalesced on the cosmos of the sacred space of "mountains" and fused with Japanese mountain worship.

Formerly, Japanese mountains were viewed as the sacred ground where the deities descended, and the mountain itself became viewed as the deity. In the myths, the heavenly grandchild Ninigi no Mikoto descended on the peak of Takachiho in Hyūga, and in the eighth-century poetry anthology *Man'yōshū* the court poet Yamabe Akihito praised Mt. Fuji, calling it a holy mountain tinged with divinity. But at the same time, those mountains were also the places where the remains of the dead were interred. As an example from the myths, the goddess Izanami no Mikoto gave birth the god of fire and thus died, and her remains were interred in the mountains of Kumano. Thereafter, numerous sacred places to be climbed by the souls of the dead, and for the interring of their remains, were constructed in the mountains making up a large part of the Japanese archipelago.

Buddhism then came upon the scene. Among the various schools and sects of Buddhism it was the teaching of the Pure Land schools which expressed the strongest interest in the fate of the dead. The ideal world to which the dead traveled was the utopian "Pure Land" mentioned earlier. According to Indian Pure Land thought, the Pure Land was located some ten-trillion lands away in the west, in other words, on the far side of an unimaginably huge cosmos. That concept can thus likely be called a kind of metaphysical conceptual representation.

This vision of the Pure Land underwent a great change after it was transmitted to Japan. No longer was it viewed as being ten-trillion lands away, but the belief gradually and spread that the Pure Land was located in the very mountains surrounding our everyday communities. Namely, the previous metaphysical vision of the Pure Land was replaced by the establishment of a realistic view of a Pure Land located within nearby physical mountains. It can be imagined that development was motivated or influenced in one way or the other by the traditional Japanese view of deities and the dead centering on mountains, as well as by animistic mountain faith.

In this way, the utopian Pure Land was brought from its location in the unlimited beyond to the world contiguous with our everyday living space. In the medieval period, the arts of the Pure Land school gave birth to numerous "Pictures of the Amida Nyorai's Advent" (*Amida Nyorai raigōzu*), and those pictures depicted the Buddha of salvation, Amida Nyorai arriving over mountaintops on flying clouds to welcome the practitioner of the *nenbutsu* (individual at the point of death.)

As a result, the cosmos of the "mountain," to which the deities descend and the souls of the dead rise, in Buddhist art thus came to represent the Pure Land itself. The Pure Land was no longer conceived of as a utopia separated from this earth, but as a currently existing but different space, continuous with the apparent world. Those mountain holy areas were the places where the dead passed from ancestral

spirits to the status of deity (*kami*), and from there the god of the mountain (*yama no kami*) and Amida Nyorai would visit this world to bring blessings and salvation.

In this context, I would like to speak a moment here regarding the special sense given by Japanese to the "mountain." For example, when one looks at the *Fugaku sanjūrokkei* (Thirty-six views of Mt. Fuji) by the Edo-period (1615–1867) woodblock artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), or the *Tōkaidō gojū-san tsugi* (The fifty-three stages of the Tōkaidō) by Andō Hiroshige (1797–1858), one notices that while the Mt. Fuji which appears there is depicted with beauty, grandness, and magnificence, the people scattered throughout the foreground appear somehow insignificant, weak, and small. In other words, the sense of size-perspective seen in most normal perspective representations has been reversed. It might be said an opposite kind of perspective has been adopted compared to that discovered by the Renaissance painters. One gets the feeling that in contrast to the imposing grandeur of the Mt. Fuji forming the distant scene, the humans in the foreground are relegated to the backdrop, and they seem to be little more than insignificant poppy seeds. In those pictures, it is the mountain that is working with true vitality, while the humans are frail and without substantiality, like tree leaves dancing in the wind or bits of foam blown from the tops of wave. And consideration must be given to the fact that this unique Japanese sense or aesthetic consciousness toward mountains is indivisible from the view of the Pure Land of the mountains noted earlier.

The desire of the Japanese to draw utopia (the Pure Land) into the realm of the visible world is also reflected in a host of works and creations which sought other kinds of "profit" or "benefit." From the middle ages on, faith in deities grew rapidly as a means of receiving blessings in this current life, and in the Edo period it became popular in the form of the "seven gods of fortune." In this variety of folk religion, the seven gods of fortune were depicted as coming from across the sea on a ship bearing wealth and treasures to Japan's shores. Since ancient times Japan had a form of "visiting deity" belief according to which the gods would visit this world from the other world in order to bring blessings, but from the medieval through the Edo periods, this belief became linked to the concept of "present-world benefits" (*genze riyaku*) thus producing a characteristic kind of belief in gods of fortune. The Santa Claus found within countries of Christian culture is a visiting deity who comes only once a year, but the numerous deities and Buddhas which appear in Japan's shrines and temples make their appearance at any time and place, in the form of what might be called a kind of socially ubiquitous Santa Claus.

The supporters of this kind of faith in gods of fortune were the ordinary common people of the Edo period, but when their strong concern for "present-world benefits" became linked to the "world renewal" (*yonaoshi*) concept which longed for social reform, it resulted in the appearance of such new religions as Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō. These new religions came into being from the end of the Edo into the Meiji period, and were successful at gradually organizing a wide stratum of the popular citizenry, thus resulting in powerful impact on later generations. Most of the founders of those new religions entered the world of faith from within

extremities of poverty or family misfortune, and after experiencing possession by their deities, they receive divine revelations and transmitted them to other believers, thus assuring the faithful of blessings and happiness in the present world.

It should also be noted that while these new religions originated from within the womb of folk religion and traditional faith in gods and Buddhas, their basic religious consciousness also had a strong orientation toward shamanism, as can be seen from their experiences of divine possession.

The characteristics of this kind of shamanism can also be seen in the Japanese emperor, who embodies or is possessed by the divine spirit (the sun goddess *Amaterasu*). But at the same time, attention must be paid to the fact that the charisma of religious founders who transmitted the revelation of the deity in possession experiences, was successful at capturing the hearts of large numbers of the common people who suffered from poverty, unhappiness and disease. New religions like Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō adopted the vehicle of a kind of shamanism in which the religion's founder was worshiped as a kind of "living deity." In that way, they drew the attention of broad masses of the people who were "failures at life," and moreover were successful to a substantial degree at organizing those people. As can be seen in such current new religions as Sōka Gakkai and Risshō Kōseikai, large new religious organizations are playing a great social role not only within the narrow realm of religion, but within politics as well. And the principles whereby these large grasp the popular imagination can be seen already in the methods of propagation enlisted by the new religions like Tenrikyō and Ōmotokyō of the late Edo and early Meiji periods.

In sum, when one views the development of popular religion in Japan's modern period, one sees that the leading role was constantly played by a theory of salvation capable of restoring the failures and fallen in life. The message of salvation to the "failures in life" is an extremely crucial key concept for understanding the social role of popular religion in Japan's modern period. And when I take a close look at that concept, it appears to me that Max Weber's sociology of religion does not necessarily form a sufficient explanation. Because in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber develops his theory of modernization with a framework of salvation theory centered on the axis of the ethos of the "successful in life (those blessed by God)." In other words, the problem of life's dropouts hardly enters his field of vision at all. If so, then the popular religions which appeared in Japan's modern history were, contrary to Protestant movements of early modern Europe, attempting to plant a present-world utopian concept within the minds of the failures of life. And in that sense, they can, on the whole, be said to be even more closely approaching the world of the "Buddhahood of all sentient beings" taught within the Buddhist tradition.

In the foregoing, I have selected and discussed three indices to the religious identity of the Japanese people, including a pluralism based on ancestor veneration, a "mentalism" emphasizing the value of selflessness, and this-world utopian

thought. But it goes without saying that these three themes possess a structure within which they are mutually interrelated. While I cannot discuss that aspect in detail here, I feel at very least the conceptual framework formed of these three themes may form a measure useful to certain degree when considering not just the religious behavior of the Japanese people, but their political and social life as well.

Translated by Norman HAVENS