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AWAKENING BETWEEN SCIENCE, ART AND ETHICS:
VARIATIONS OF JAPANESE BUDDHIST
MODERNISM, 1890–1945

James Mark Shields

Modern Buddhism seeks to distance itself from those forms of Buddhism that immediately precede it and even those that are contemporary with it. Its proponents viewed ancient Buddhism, especially the enlightenment of the Buddha 2,500 years ago, as the most authentic moment in the long history of Buddhism. It is also the form of Buddhism, they would argue, that is most compatible with the ideals of the European Enlightenment, ideals such as reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom, and the rejection of religious orthodoxy. It stresses equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local, and often exalts the individual over the community.

– Donald S. Lopez, 'Foreword' to Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha: According to Old Records* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publications, 2004), p. viii

Overcoming the tradition, 'going beyond' it, differing from it—these are the [Buddhist] tradition's own demands, not something counter to it or outside its parameters. Simply to agree with the tradition, to obey its current form, is to fail to receive the 'transmission'. It is to be 'ungrateful' as the Transmission of the Lamp put it. This form of reflection can only derive from a deep sense of historicity; it implies the radically temporal thesis that who we are as human beings is historical through and through. History is conceived here not so much as a force that acts upon our human existence but rather as something closer at hand, something beyond which we will not go. It is true that only a few exceptional Buddhists were ever willing to face

this realization in a thorough-going way. Most preferred to apply it to things of 'this world' but not of the transcendent realm of Buddhas, nirvanas, and mind-to-mind transmission.

– Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 155–156

The term *modernism* is notoriously difficult to pin down. In trying to do so one often gets caught in a frustrating tautology: *anything relating to modern thought, culture or practice*. More specifically, modernism (sometimes Modernism) refers to a range of cultural and artistic transformations that resulted from the changes taking place in Western society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of these were large-scale tendencies brought about by scientific and technological changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while others were self-conscious attempts to create new techniques, associations and ideas that would better reflect or deal with these changes. While the links between self-conscious modernist movements and previous streams of Western culture—such as the Enlightenment and Romanticism—are clear, modernists tended to see themselves and their work as part of a break with past traditions, whether aesthetic, literary, architectural, political, or spiritual. Ezra Pound's motto: 'Make it new!' could apply to modernism as a generalized movement.

In the realm of thought, it can be said that modernists questioned many if not all of the traditional assumptions of European cultural heritage, including those of the mainstream religious traditions and the Enlightenment, seen as extending from Descartes through Kant and ending in the writings of Hegel.¹⁵² This is not to say, however, that modernism can be easily characterized as reformist or socially progressive—the desire to break with the immediate past, especially the Enlightenment, sometimes resulted in a reactionary politics, as can be seen in writings of Italian futurists such as Marinetti and in the person of Pound.¹⁵³ Moreover, the modernist reaction to science and technology was complex: for some, machines were to be embraced as the future of humanity, while for others—especially those more closely

¹⁵² See Pericles Lewis, *Modernism, Nationalism, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 38–39; also Peter Faulkner, *Modernism* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1990), p. 60.

¹⁵³ See Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 17.

linked to earlier Romantic streams—modern technology must be limited or rejected outright in favour of a more ‘aesthetic’ or introspective approach to life’s problems.

Turning to the case of Japan, definitions of modernism are further complicated by the simple fact that the ‘modern’ was itself a foreign import. Thus, while one sees the same tensions as within Western modernism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these tensions take unique and often extreme forms. Among other things, what emerges from a close examination of Buddhist thought in Japan during the five decades between 1890 and 1945 is a debate between competing visions of ‘new Buddhism’—some based on an understanding of ‘modernity’ as a historical locus with specific political and ethical implications, and others based on a ‘modernist’ understanding of religion as a form of ‘aesthetics’ largely abstracted from historical circumstances. This chapter examines the various permutations of ‘Buddhist modernism’ during the period leading up to the Second World War, as well as the implications for postwar and contemporary Japanese Buddhism.

Meiji Restoration and Aftermath

Virtually all aspects of modern Japan were born out of the Meiji Restoration of 1868—properly not a *restoration* so much as ‘a complete revolution, which affected all levels of society’.¹⁵⁴ In what surely remains a unique historical event, a self-appointed new government in that year effectively invented a modern nation out of what was largely a feudal assemblage of warring states. This invention involved not only the centralization of authority, both literally and symbolically, in the Emperor, but also the drive to *modernize* Japan—to create an industrial and military power to rival those of the West. Among other scholars,

¹⁵⁴ Nishijima Gudō (Wafu) 西嶋愚道 (和夫), ‘Japanese Buddhism and the Meiji Restoration—With an Introduction to Master Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*’. The American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 1997. Web version: <http://www.dogensangha.org/downloads/Pdf/AAR.pdf>. The Japanese term *ishin* 維新 (lit., ‘new ties’) implies something more radical and transformative than the English ‘Restoration’. Also see Robert Sharf, ‘Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited’, in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, edited by James Heisig and John Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1994), p. 47, for more on the paradox of modern nationalism: ‘As nationalist representations of self are inevitably constructed in dialectical tension with the foreign ‘other’, the nationalist promise to restore cultural ‘purity’ is always necessarily empty.’

Najita and Harootunian note the deep and abiding ambiguity at the heart of the Restoration, 'between the capacity of an indigenous culture to withstand change and the claims of new knowledge demanding transformation.'¹⁵⁵

In the preceding Edo period, despite their sympathies with neo-Confucianism, the ruling shoguns had largely adopted Buddhism as the *de facto* state religion.¹⁵⁶ Thus, some of the Meiji restorationists felt compelled to launch a sustained critique of Buddhism as non-Japanese, under the slogan '*Haibutsu kishaku!*' (廃仏毀釈; lit. 'Throw away Buddha and abolish Śākyamuni!')¹⁵⁷ After a short wave of severe persecution (1868-1873), during which the number of temples was reduced from over 450,000 to approximately 70,000 and the number of Buddhist priests from 75,000 to under 20,000,¹⁵⁸ the government generally

¹⁵⁵ Najita Tetsuo and H. D. Harootunian, 'Japan's Revolt Against the West', in *Modern Japanese Thought*, edited by Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 208. 'On the one hand, the Meiji restorers announced, in the opening decree proclaiming the Restoration, that the aim of the new policy was to return to the 'events of antiquity and the Jimmu emperor's state foundation.' This meant returning to origins, a mythical time before Japan had been corrupted by Buddhism and Chinese civilization, and to the unalloyed practices of native experience. Yet at the same time, the new government declared in the Charter Oath its determination to 'search for new knowledge throughout the world' and to 'eliminate old customs' 'based on the universal way.' Some *bakumatsu* 幕末 (i.e. late-Edo period) intellectuals such as Sakuma Shōzan 佐久間象山 (1811-64) had already preached the social doctrine of *tōyō dōtoku sei'yō gaku'gei* (or *geijutsu*) 東洋道德西洋学芸(芸術)—'Eastern ethos and Western technologies. In the period leading up to the Restoration, this idea was developed further by political activists such as Hashimoto Sanai 橋本左内 (1831-59) and Yokoi Shōnan 横井小楠 (1809-69), both of whom eventually fell victim to assassination. See also Bob T. Wakabayashi, 'Introduction' to *Modern Japanese Thought*, p. 3; Hirakawa Sukehiro 平川祐弘, 'Japan's Turn to the West', in *Modern Japanese Thought*, p. 42; and Kenneth Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 106.

¹⁵⁶ In Edo Japan, 'religion supplied a context of ultimate meaning to the central value system through the fact that the primary collectivities in the society—the nation and the family—were conceived as religious as well as secular bodies. ... Acting in closest accord with the political values of the society, that is, giving one's full devotion to one's particularistic superiors, and expressing this devotion in vigorous and continuous performance with respect to the collective goal, was seen as the best means to acquire the approval and protection of divine beings or to attain some form of harmony with ultimate reality. It was precisely the attainment of such approval and protection of divinities or of a state of enlightenment which was the best way to handle the basic frustrations and anxieties of existence' (Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion: The Values of Pre-Industrial Japan* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1957), pp. 39-40).

¹⁵⁷ See Nishijima 'Japanese Buddhism and the Meiji Restoration', pp. 15-16; also James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

¹⁵⁸ These numbers come from Winston Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society: Paradigms of Structure and Change* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 161.

abandoned its zero tolerance towards Buddhism. Though outright persecution came to an end, the growing nationalism of the period placed increasing pressure on Buddhism to prove itself as a truly *national* religion.¹⁵⁹ Thus began a move towards what Winston Davis calls Buddhist strategies of ‘passive enablement’,¹⁶⁰ exemplified by the so-called *kairitsu* 戒律 or ‘praxis’ movement led by Buddhist priests Fukuda Gyōkai 福田行誠 (1806–88), and Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909).¹⁶¹ While it may be tempting to write off the *kairitsu* movement as a cynical Buddhist accommodation to political winds, it was inspired by the recognition that one reason behind the persecution of Buddhism was its poor public image, and that this poor public image was not wholly undeserved.¹⁶² As such the *kairitsu* leaders sought to reinvigorate Buddhist values among monks and laypeople, by calling for a ‘return’ to the ancient Buddhist precepts and monastic rules (*vinaya*).¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Buddhist leaders actively participated in whipping up nationalist sentiment through the Great Teaching (*Daikyō* 大教) campaign of 1871, in which 80 percent of doctrinal instructors were Buddhist priests, and in 1889, Buddhist leaders from all of Japan’s major sects joined to create the United Movement for Revering the Emperor and Worshipping the Buddha (Sonnō Hōbutsu Daidōdan 尊王奉仏大同断), whose intent was ‘to preserve the prosperity of the Imperial Household and increase the power of Buddhism. The result will be the perfection of the well-being of the Great Empire of Japan ... The time-honoured spiritual foundation of our empire is the Imperial Household and Buddhism’ (quoted in Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhill 1997), p. 18). Also see Brian Victoria, ‘Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet?’ (draft manuscript received from the author, 2001), p. 19; Brian Victoria, ‘When God(s) and Buddhas Go to War’ (draft manuscript received from the author, 2002), p. 8.

¹⁶⁰ See Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 160 (also ch. 4, *passim*.)

¹⁶¹ Who were inspired in turn by the earlier bakumatsu figure Jiun Sonja Onkō 慈雲尊者 欽光 (1718–1804). ‘To protect the Dharma, these priests elaborated a conservative strategy based on a reaffirmation of the religion’s loyalty to the throne.’ Various slogans proclaimed that the Dharma was virtually coextensive with the law of the land. Buddhist leaders argued that Buddhism was ‘useful’ (*buppō kokueki* [仏法利益]) because it could magically and morally ‘protect’ the nation (*gohō gokoku* [御法護国]). From this they reasoned that the state, in turn, should protect Buddhism by reestablishing it as an official religion (*goyō shūkyō* [御用宗教])’ (Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 162).

¹⁶² Though, as Orion Klautau points out in a recent article, the Meiji ‘discourse on Edo-period Buddhist decadence’ was infested with ideological aspects. See Orion Klautau, ‘Against the Ghosts of Recent Past: Meiji Scholarship and the Discourse of Edo Period Buddhist Decadence’, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 35, 2 (2008), pp. 263–303.

¹⁶³ Certainly, there is a reactionary—even fundamentalist—aspect to this moral reformation; e.g. in Sōen’s insistence that the sacred esoteric Mount Kōya remain off limits to women. At the same time, unlike most fundamentalists, they also evoked the long-standing Japanese ideal of sectarian and inter-religious harmony, ‘calling for a restoration of the syncretistic ties they traditionally had enjoyed with Shinto and Confucianism’ (Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 162). While Davis’s argument, that this ‘return’ to basic Buddhist values also provided a ‘plausibility structure’ by which the persecution of Buddhism could be rationalized and understood, has merit, it need not be taken as the primary motivation behind the desire for Buddhist reform among the *kairitsu* masters.

The Buddhist Enlightenment: Visions of Buddhist 'Modernity'

While the impact of these Buddhist 'restorationists' cannot be denied, theirs were the voices of a passing generation, which would soon be drowned out by those of a 'new generation'¹⁶⁴ of Buddhist scholars who would actively seek to remake Buddhism for the modern age. These thinkers modelled themselves less on their *kairitsu* co-religionists than on the secular 'Civilization and Enlightenment Movement' (*bunmei kaika* 文明開化). Taking its name from a term coined by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901), the Civilization and Enlightenment Movement promoted the benefits of Western learning for Japanese civilization.¹⁶⁵ Some members of this group—and within early Meiji intellectual circles more broadly—were convinced that the West's technological and economic strength was based on its moral and spiritual traditions, and that Japan required Christianity if it hoped to advance.¹⁶⁶ Others like Fukuzawa took a view on religion that can be considered 'rationalist', 'Frazerian' or even 'neo-Confucian': all religions, including Christianity and Buddhism, were mere stepping-stones towards the higher wisdom found in science and philosophy.

Faced with this challenge, thinkers of the so-called Buddhist Enlightenment—including Hara Tanzan 原坦山 (1819–1892), Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911), Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929), Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919), Shaku Sōen 釋宗演 (1859–1919), and Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903)—attempted in various ways to 'modernize' (as well as spread) the Dharma.¹⁶⁷ Though the

¹⁶⁴ The phrase comes from Kenneth Pyle, *New Generation*, and is also employed by Katheen Staggs in "Defend the Nation and Love the Truth: Inoue Enryō and the Revival of Meiji Buddhism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 38, 3 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 251–281.

¹⁶⁵ The ideas of the *bunmei kaika* found expression in the Meiji Six magazine (*Mei roku zasshi* 明六雜誌) published by a group that called itself the Meiji Six Society (*Mei roku kusha* 明六社)—many of whom were members of the new Meiji government. This group held regular meetings, at which they would discuss all manner of issues related to modern life: human rights, the role of women, the role of scholars in society, economic and political issues, as well as matters of ethics and religion. Though the Press Ordinance and Libel Laws passed in 1875 silenced the group's organ, they continued to meet until the 1890s.

¹⁶⁶ This faction was represented by Nakamura Masano 中村正直 (1834–1891). Best known for his 1871 translation of Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*, Nakamura became an influential member of the Meiji Six Society and converted to Christianity in 1874.

¹⁶⁷ Others included Katō Kurō 加藤九郎 (1830–90), Ōsu Tetsunen 大洲鉄然 (1834–1902), Akamatsu Renjo 赤松連城 (1841–1919), and Ishikawa Shuntai 石川舜台 (1842–1931). With the exception of Hara Tanzan, the Sōtō Zen priest and scholar who was the first to establish the academic study of Buddhism at Tokyo Imperial

social and political conclusions of these figures ranged from mildly liberal to solidly conservative and even, in some cases, quasi-imperialist, they present an important bridge to the more progressive New Buddhists as well as the Kyoto School thinkers of succeeding generations. In short, while these Buddhist Enlightenment thinkers may have found inspiration for 'reform' in the *kairitsu* movement of the previous generation, they also attempted to 'modernize' the Dharma in line with many of the principles espoused by the *bunmei kaika*—without, however, going so far as to renounce Buddhism in favour of Christianity or secular philosophy.¹⁶⁸ While they were certainly 'modernizers', they were not necessarily 'modernists' in the sense outlined above.

As Western culture and values, including models and methods of Western scholarship on religion, began to make themselves felt in the mid- to late-Meiji period, it was inevitable that such would lead some Buddhist scholars towards a demythologized,¹⁶⁹ rational, ethical and historicist understanding of Buddhism.¹⁷⁰ Though it can hardly be considered a school or movement in its own right, theories of scholars who

University and Shaku Sōen, a Rinzai Zen priest and Buddhist 'missionary' to the West, the entirety of these names are connected in some fashion to the Meiji Shin Buddhist Ōtani-ha 'reform' movement. For more on Hara, see Sueki Fumihiko 末本文美士, 'Building a Platform for Academic Buddhist Studies: Murakami Senshō', translated by James Mark Shields, *Eastern Buddhist*, New Series 36, 1, 2005. Davis presents a mixed review of the Buddhist Enlightenment, suggesting that, while 'they deserve respect for their attempts, however feeble, to make sense of their own religious tradition in light of the western scientific and philosophical thought inundating Japan at the time ... they tended to be critical of society itself but not of political absolutism', and thus cannot be called truly progressive (Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 164).

¹⁶⁸ Though, as Snodgrass notes, in 1881 Fukuzawa would soften his stance, calling on all Buddhist priests 'amenable to reason' to defend their faith from attacks. Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 139.

¹⁶⁹ This drive towards demythologization of a religious tradition finds a parallel in Western scholarship on religion of the same period, particularly the drive towards uncovering the 'historical Jesus', as well as the slightly later work of German theologian Rudolf Bülmann. As with such Western Christian scholars, the scholars of Daijō hibussetsuron were generally working to preserve some pure essence of their tradition by opening the gates to historical critical method, in the sincere belief that science could provide religious answers that mythology and even centuries of doctrinal development could not. It is important to note the fact that, in both cases, there was a distinctly 'theological' undercurrent at work.

¹⁷⁰ Parts of the following section on Murakami Senshō have been taken from my article 'Parameters of Reform and Unification in Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought: Murakami Senshō and Critical Buddhism', *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series 37: 1–2 (2005), pp. 106–134. Thanks to the *The Eastern Buddhist* for permission to reprint this material. See this essay for more on Murakami and his anticipation of some features of the contemporary Critical Buddhist (hihan bukkyō) movement.

adopted such tendencies came to be known, often derisively, as *Daijō hibussetsuron* 大乘非仏説論, which may be literally translated as the ‘theory that the Mahāyāna teachings are not true Buddhism.’ The term was applied to the writings of several Buddhist scholars beginning in the 1890s such as Murakami Senshō and Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), the latter of whom would eventually, and perhaps not incidentally, be appointed as first professor of Religious Studies at Tokyo Imperial University in 1905. Inspired by Western scholarly notions of empiricism and scientific method, *Daijō hibussetsuron* sought to clarify and demarcate the limits of what should be included under the rubric ‘Buddhism.’ In short, they combined a scholarly methodology with an unmistakably normative—and even ‘sectarian,’ though in a very broad sense—agenda. The conclusion of *Daijō hibussetsuron* was that that the so-called Great Vehicle was a repository for supernaturalism, mysticism, deformities or corruptions of the original, pure teachings, better preserved in the early ‘Hinayana’ and latter-day Theravāda streams of south-east Asia. Controversy of course ensued, most of the criticism coming, unsurprisingly, from the Buddhist establishment, those still-powerful institutions understandably reluctant to serve up their longstanding beliefs on the altar of modern (and Western inspired) sensibilities.¹⁷¹

Though often associated with *Daijō hibussetsuron*, the work of Murakami Senshō provides a good example of some of the ambiguities and complexities of Buddhist Enlightenment modernism. In his magnum opus, *Bukkyō tōitsuron* 仏教統一論 (On the Unification of Buddhism), Murakami attempted to employ the tools of modern critical

¹⁷¹ It is also important to note that the most important precedent for *Daijō hibussetsuron* within Japan are the controversial writings of Edo period scholar Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基 (1715–1746). Tominaga may well have been the first writer ‘systematically to question the assumption that the Mahāyāna sūtras, or indeed others, were transmitted directly from the [historical] Buddha.’ Moreover, without, once again, the benefit of Western learning, Tominaga came to this conclusion by ‘the critical, historical method of juxtaposing innumerable variations in the various texts and illustrating how these arose in order for some point to be made over against another school.’ Tominaga’s work raised a strong challenge to the authority claims of the various Mahāyāna sects, a challenge hardly mitigated by the aggressive and sometimes derisive tone he took towards those who ‘vainly say that all the teachings came directly from the golden mouth of the Buddha’ (Tominaga Nakamoto, *Emerging from Meditation*, translated by Micahel Pye (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), pp. 4-5. Perhaps not incidentally, Tominaga may have also been the first scholar in Japan to employ the term *shūkyō* 宗教 in a sense that approximates its modern usage (Tominaga, *Emerging from Meditation*, p. 122). As Ian Reader has pointed out, this flies in the face of the assumptions of scholars such as Tim Fitzgerald, who insist that the concept of religion is simply a cultural borrowing (or imposition) from the West (see Reader 2004: 9).

scholarship to discern a clear historical and doctrinal foundation for Buddhism. The result is at once an original, impressive, and yet deeply flawed piece of Buddhist scholarship—a ‘gorgeous failure’¹⁷² whose grand aspiration to bring about a ‘scheme for the amalgamation of all Buddhist sects’ was bound to end in disappointment.¹⁷³ Written in fits and starts over a period of more than twenty years,¹⁷⁴ its argument is, on the face of it, quite simple: Buddhism can and should be unified, because, whether Buddhists themselves recognize it or not, underlying all the manifold teachings (*kyōsō* 教相) is a common, fundamental essence of doctrine (*kyōri* 教理), which provides not only the historical trunk but also the life-giving sap of the great Buddhist tree.¹⁷⁵

In reading *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, however, it becomes clear that while Murakami was a self-consciously modern scholar dedicated to rigorous historical scholarship, he was not so quick to follow the *Daijō hibussetsuron* path of complete demythologization—he clearly states his commitment to uncovering not only the bare facts of Buddhist history, but also to the more elusive religious or doctrinal dimensions

¹⁷² Sueki Fumihiko clearly outlines the main failings of Murakami’s scholarship, not least of which are his complete lack of Sanskrit and dismissal of Western scholarly conclusions on Buddhism. See Sueki, ‘Building a Platform’.

¹⁷³ As Murakami himself, by the time of writing the final chapter on ‘Practice’ (1927), came to acknowledge: ‘At the time of its first publication, theoretically and also practically, there was a possibility of Buddhist unity, as well as the thought that such was necessary.’ However, after this time, he could not help but acknowledge that while, ‘the theoretical possibility remained, the practical possibility did not’. This seems to contradict or at least problematize his earlier admission that the unification he sought was not to be taken at the ‘formal’ level. In any case, Sueki argues, correctly, I think, that the failure of Unification has as much if not more to do with inherent problems in Murakami’s approach as it does with changing social and religious circumstances. (See Sueki, ‘Building a Platform’.) There was a possibility of Buddhist unity, as well as the thought that such was necessary.’ However, after this time, he could not help but acknowledge that while, ‘the theoretical possibility remained, the practical possibility did not’. This seems to contradict or at least problematize his earlier admission that the unification he sought was not to be taken at the ‘formal’ level. In any case, Sueki argues, correctly, I think, that the failure of Unification has as much if not more to do with inherent problems in Murakami’s approach as it does with changing social and religious circumstances. (See Sueki, ‘Building a Platform’.)

¹⁷⁴ Successive volumes were published in 1901, 1903, 1905 and 1927.

¹⁷⁵ Murakami Senshō, *Bukkyō tōitsuron* 仏教統一論 (On the Unification of Buddhism), edited by Ōta Yoshimaru (Tokyo: Gunsho, 1997 [1922]), p. 10. Murakami’s use of *kyōsō*, is of course related to the traditional, particularly Mahāyāna Buddhist teaching of *upāya kauśalya* (Jp. *hōben* 方便)—expedient means or ‘beneficent deception’—used especially by Chinese Buddhists ‘to help deal with the hermeneutical problem of reconciling the disparities among the different teachings attributed to the Buddha—to explain that the differences in the teachings of the Buddha delivered in his forty-nine year ministry were the result of the different audiences he addressed’ (Charles Muller, *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, ‘*upāya kauśalya*’).

that bind Buddhists of all stripes together. In other words, Murakami employs what he refers to elsewhere as a ‘Buddhistic’ (*Bukkyō shugi* 仏教主義) approach to history. He concludes that while faith should not be completely irrational, it does and must come into play.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, although Murakami’s commitment to historical studies appears to weaken over the decades, it never entirely disappears, and serves to keep him apart from the growing trend towards the ahistorical, existential brand of modernist Buddhism developed in the early and mid-twentieth century by D. T. Suzuki, the Kyoto School, and continued by many postwar Western Buddhist popularizers. Before turning to this alternative form of modernism, however, let us examine several movements dedicated to reforming Buddhism along lines of humanism and social reform.

Warp and Woof: The Birth of New Buddhism

In 1894, twenty-three year old Furukawa Isamu (Rōsen) 古河勇(老川) (1871–1899) founded the Warp and Woof Society (*Keikai* 経緯会), dedicated to Buddhist reform. The members of Warp and Woof were harshly critical of the existing Buddhist establishment, and made it their mission to show that, contra neo-Confucian claims, Buddhism was not—or did not have to be—a superstitious and otherworldly religion. In particular, they followed the lead of Buddhist Enlightenment figure Inoue Enryō in rejecting so-called ‘magical Buddhism’ (*kitō bukyō* 祈祷仏教) in favour of a Buddhism that was humanistic, progressive, and this-worldly in focus. Warp and Woof was based on two central principles: ‘free investigation’ (*jiyū tōkyū* 自由討究) and ‘progressive reform’ (*shinshū* 新修). At the same time, the society also had a messianic aspect. According to their manifesto: ‘This Association is a union of those who believe in Buddhism as the highest and greatest religion and who want to propagate Buddhism and universally spread

¹⁷⁶ ‘As a rule, are there not two main forms to what is referred to as religious faith? One, which does not require an appeal to common sense, is belief beyond or outside anything rational, while the other is faith obtained through approval of an appeal to reason or common sense. In these two types of faith, the first cannot help but block the advance of society and progress, while the second cannot help but accompany social progress. In our humble opinion, the function of training based on a rejection of the irrational, and adjudication in terms of common sense, is all the more important among the present generation of thinkers’ (Murakami, *Bukkyō tōitsuron*, p. 464, my translation; also see Sueki Fumihiko, *Meiji shisō-ka ron—Kindai Nihon no shisō: Saikō I 明治思想家論—近代日本の思想・再考I* (Tokyo: Transview Press), p. 21).

its blessings to all humanity?

Furukawa was the leading light in Warp and Woof. During a decade characterized by a series of incidents related to the so-called Conflict between Religion and Education (*kyōiku to shūkyō no shōtotsu* 教育と宗教の衝突) the majority of Buddhist leaders and scholars—including some associated with the ‘Buddhist Enlightenment’—had joined their voices to the chorus of anti-Christian and anti-foreign rhetoric. In contrast, Furukawa’s writings present a decidedly impartial appraisal of the current problems and crises facing modern Japan and Buddhism. In 1894, on the eve of the Sino-Japanese War, Furukawa published an article entitled ‘Entering an Age of Doubt’ (*Kaigi no jidai ni haireri* 懷疑の時代に入れり) in which he proclaimed the birth of a ‘new Buddhism’ (*shin bukkyō* 新仏教),¹⁷⁷ though the seeds of his ideas can be found in a 1892 essay simply entitled ‘On Buddhism’ (*Bukkyō-ron* 仏教論).¹⁷⁸ All philosophies and religions, according to Furukawa, go through three stages: dogmatism (*dokudan* 独断), doubt or scepticism (*kaigi* 懷疑), and criticism (*hihyō* 批評). While Christianity has passed through its age of doubt and entered an age of criticism, Buddhism was only just emerging from dogmatism and entering into a period of doubt and scepticism. Unless Buddhism passes through what might be called this

¹⁷⁷ Three years earlier, in a piece entitled ‘Nijūyon-nen igo no nidai kyōto 二十四年以後の二大教徒’ [Adherents of Two Faiths: 1891 and Beyond], published in the journal *Hansei zasshi* 反省雑誌, Furukawa noted that, although Buddhism was superior to Christianity in terms of its ‘truths’, it lagged behind its Western rival when it came to social concerns, having over its long history become enmeshed in rituals, superstitions, regulations and fallen prey to general irrationality. For these reasons, reform—directed in particular towards social engagement—had become necessary. At this point, Furukawa’s ideas were still largely derivative of Enlightenment figures such as Nakanishi Ushio 中西牛郎 (1859–1930). See Yoshinaga Shin’ichi 吉永進一, ‘Furukawa Rosen no bukkyōron’, Panel on The Discursive Space of ‘New Buddhism’ and its Meaning in the History of Religion and Culture, Proceedings of the 67th Annual Convention of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies, *Shūkyō kenkyū* 82, 4, 2009, p. 1041.

¹⁷⁸ Published in the journal *Bukkyō* 佛教. Here Furukawa also expresses his conviction that scholarship must persist, even if such leads to a crisis of personal faith—a belief shared by the DJHB scholars as well as their contemporary Western counterparts in the so-called Religionswissenschaft movement. See Yoshinaga ‘Furukawa Rosen’, p. 1041; also see Max Müller’s remarks about the ‘scientific’ study of religion, which inevitably ‘entails losses, and losses of many things which we hold dear. But this I will say, that, as far as my humble judgement goes, it does not entail the loss of anything that is essential to true religion, and that if we strike the balance honestly, the gain is immeasurably greater than the loss’ (F. Max Müller Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution with Two Essays of False Analogies, and the Philosophy of Mythology (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1873), pp. 9–10).

cleansing period, it will not be able to enter into its perfected, critical stage.¹⁷⁹

At the same time, this emphasis on a ‘scientific’ approach to the study of religion held a concomitant danger of losing sight of the practical and this-worldly aspects of Buddhism that Furukawa and other ‘new Buddhists’ wished to promote. In an article entitled ‘The Practical Direction of New Buddhists’ (Shin Bukkyō-to no jissaiteki hōmen 新仏教徒の實際的方面) published in the journal *Bukkyō* in 1893, Sugimura Jūō argued that an emphasis on ‘scientific Buddhism’ (*gakuri jūshi no bukkyō-ron* 学理重視の仏教論) should not take precedence over a Buddhism committed to ‘social activism’ (*shakai-teki katsudō* 社会的活動). In similar fashion, Furukawa, while mindful of the importance of a ‘scientific’ approach to Buddhism, emphasized the priority of lived experience (*keiken* 経験) to theory (*riron* 理論).¹⁸⁰

Although Warp and Woof disbanded in 1899 upon the untimely death of Furukawa, their torch was soon passed to a new group calling themselves the New Buddhist Fellowship.¹⁸¹ This group consisted of a dozen or so young scholars and activists including Sakaino Satoru (Kōyō) 境野哲 (黄洋) (1871–1933), Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭

¹⁷⁹ Here we might note the similarities between Furukawa’s stance and that of Paul Carus (1852–1919), the German-American writer who was simultaneously formulating a ‘modernist’ interpretation of Buddhism that would be enormously influential in both Asia and the West. Though best known for his *Gospel of Buddha* (1894), Carus published a work entitled *Science: A Religious Revelation in 1893*—the year of the Columbian Exposition—in which he expressed his conviction that ‘science’ was a necessary scourge of orthodox religious belief, and yet the final result would be not irreligious materialism but rather a higher ‘religion of science’ (see Martin Verhoeven, ‘From Crisis to Conversion: The Religion of Science’, in Paul Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha: According to Old Records* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publications), p. 8). In 1899, the year of Furukawa’s death, Carus wrote the following paean to science as harbinger of true religion: ‘There is no peace of soul for him whose religion has not passed through the furnace of scientific criticism, where it is cleansed of all the slag and dross of paganism. If God ever spoke to man, science is the burning bush; and if there is any light by which man can hope to illuminate his path so as to make firm steps, it is the light of science . . . for science is holy, and the light of science is the dwelling place of God’ (quoted in Richard Hughes Seager, ed., *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World’s Parliament of Religions, 1893* [LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publications, 1993], p. 72).

¹⁸⁰ See Yoshinaga, ‘Furukawa Rosen’, p. 1041.

¹⁸¹ Although New Buddhism is a term that is sometimes applied to the broad sweep of reform movements in Buddhist thought and practice from the 1870s, the term *shin bukkyō* refers more specifically to a short-lived movement of the late 1890s and early 1900s. Founded in 1899 as *Bukkyō Seito Dōshikai* 佛教清徒同志會 (Buddhist Youth Fellowship), the group changed its name to *Shin Bukkyō Dōshikai* 新佛教同志會 (New Buddhist Fellowship) in 1903. The New Buddhists were all in their mid- to late twenties, from similar middle-class backgrounds, and were largely unaffiliated with a particular sect. Their youth gave a spirit of freshness—as well as cheekiness—to their writings.

(1872–1933), Sugimura Kōtarō (Jūō; Sojinkan) 杉村広太郎 (縦横; 楚人冠) (1872–1945), Katō Kumatarō (Totsudō; Genchi) 加藤熊太郎 (咄堂; 玄智) (1873–1965), and Takashima En (Beihō) 高嶋円 (米峰) (1875–1949).¹⁸² Like the Warp and Woof Society, the New Buddhists were critical of the ‘old Buddhism’, which they believed had been complicit in the conservative forces that had thus far inhibited ‘progress’ in Japan—particularly in the areas of education and ethics.¹⁸³ In July 1900, a magazine entitled ‘New Buddhism’ was launched as the movement’s mouthpiece. Here could be found their Statement of General Principles (*kōryō* 綱領), summarized in the following six points:

1. In our view, Buddhism is fundamentally a faith based in morality.
2. We will work hard to foster sound religious beliefs, knowledge, and moral principles in order to bring about fundamental improvements to society.
3. We advocate the free investigation of Buddhism in addition to other religions.
4. We resolve to destroy superstition.
5. We do not accept the necessity of preserving traditional religious institutions and rituals.
6. We believe the government should refrain from favouring religious groups or interfering in religious matters.¹⁸⁴

Despite the increasing dangers, New Buddhists engaged in mild forms of social activism, by protesting, for example, the government’s actions during the Tetsugakkan Affair (*Tetsugakkan jiken* 哲学館事件) of 1902 and the publication of the Ministry of Education’s Order Number One (Kunrei Ichigo 訓令一号) in 1906. They also expressed criticism of neo-Confucianism, *bushidō*, the Boshin Imperial Rescript (Boshin Shōsho 戊辰詔書) of 1908, as well as the state-sponsored Hōtoku 報德 and the National Morality (*kokumin dōtoku* 国民道德) movements.

¹⁸² Other members were: Hayashi Takejirō (Kokei; Bakuan) 林竹治郎 (古溪; 猿庵) (1871–1941), Tanaka Jiroku (Gakan) 田中治六 (我観), Andō Hiroshi 安藤弘, Kawamura Jūnirō (Gohō) 川村十二郎 (五峰), Ito Sachio 伊藤左千夫, Kimura Teitarō (Daisetsu) 木村貞太郎 (大拙) and Dōyū Gen 道融玄.

¹⁸³ Like many of their conservative peers, they also promoted abstinence, non-smoking, and an end to prostitution.

¹⁸⁴ See Shin Bukkyō 新佛教 1, 1, 1900, my translation. As the final point above shows, unlike some ‘reformers’ of the day, they were not looking for government support of Buddhism—in fact, they were highly critical of any government involvement in religious matters. This was based on their analysis of Buddhism during the late Edo and early Meiji periods, which, in their estimation, had become corrupted by state support—and compliance with the ‘Tennō system’ (tennōsei 天皇制) in particular.

Some members openly expressed ‘war weariness’ at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, though only one—Takashima Beihō—went so far as to publicly oppose the war.¹⁸⁵ As a result, their magazine was forcibly shut down several times during its brief existence.

In making the case that Buddhists—and Japanese more generally—owed a debt of gratitude to ‘all sentient beings’ (*shuyō-on* 種々恩), interpreted here to mean ‘society’, the New Buddhists attempted to combine traditional Buddhist teachings and Confucian concepts of debt (*on*) and gratitude with the emerging constitutional language of the day. In turn, it was the role of the sovereign or state to preserve the political order (*kengi* 憲義). As such, they distinguished themselves from conservative factions, both religious and political, that emphasized the necessity of returning gratitude via complete submission to the Emperor, state or ‘national body’ (*kokutai* 国体). In fact, following Winston Davis, the New Buddhists were at the forefront of what can be called ‘the Buddhist discovery of society’.¹⁸⁶

In a piece entitled ‘Reply to Dr Kato’, Sakaino embraces the ‘new’ aspect of New Buddhism, while rejecting the notion that the movement is simply a form of Buddhist ‘liberalism’.¹⁸⁷ New Buddhism is based on a return to foundational Buddhist principles, but is also that such a return will involve a certain measure of ‘reform’ (*kairyō* 改良) and ‘making new’ (*arata ni suru* 新にする). As such, New Buddhists see no problem in calling their movement ‘new’.¹⁸⁸ But what, Sakaino goes on to ask, is it that lies at the foundation of Buddhism? His answer, rather surprisingly, is a ‘pantheistic worldview’ (*hanshinron-teki sekai-kan* 凡神論的世界観)—by which he means something like a (Shinto?) recognition of the ‘sacred’ quality in all things.¹⁸⁹

With regard to the question of how Buddhism relates to other forms of religion and scholarship, New Buddhists contend that Buddhism must invariably support a broad-minded and tolerant perspective. Indeed, Sakaino suggests that it is ‘a matter of course’ that Buddhism should engage and even adopt principles from other religions and

¹⁸⁵ See Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁶ Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 179.

¹⁸⁷ *Shin Bukkyō* 2, 9, p. 383.

¹⁸⁸ *Shin Bukkyō* 2, 9, p. 383.

¹⁸⁹ ‘We New Buddhists wish to establish Buddhism on the basis of a pantheistic worldview. A pantheistic perspective shall be the foundation of Buddhism. Upon this foundation, the Buddhism of the future can be continuously improved and purified. This is what we are calling New Buddhism’ (*Shin Bukkyō* 2, 9, p. 384, my translation).

scholarship, if these can provide surer support to Buddhism.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, ‘just as historical Buddhism was transformed by the thought of various periods, so too must the many sects and schools in existence today be transformed by contemporary thought.’¹⁹¹ Thus, while it is true that New Buddhists look towards the ‘original’ foundations of Buddhism as a source—in the assurance that Buddhism holds the most profound ‘truth’—they also recognize that a number of ‘evil practices’ have arisen throughout Buddhist history, leading to a condition in which contemporary Buddhism has become ‘unsatisfactory.’¹⁹²

A major criticism faced by the New Buddhists—and one raised by several members themselves in the pages of *The New Buddhist*—was that they had let social and political concerns overtake ‘spiritual’ ones, and thus had effectively removed themselves from mainstream Buddhist tradition. Indeed, some critics such as Buddhist scholar Ōuchi Seiran 大内青巒 (1845–1918) questioned whether they could even call themselves ‘Buddhist’ at all, given that they had failed to produce a ‘new faith’? Of course, such criticisms raise numerous complex questions about the definition of ‘religion’ versus ‘politics’ or ‘ethics.’¹⁹³ It is fair to say that the New Buddhists, along with their Warp and Woof predecessors, shared the conviction that their ‘new faith’ was intrinsically connected with social concerns.¹⁹⁴

Nishida's Pure Experience and the Origins of Zen Modernism

This final section will focus on several key themes in the writings of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), founder of the Kyoto School (*Kyōto gakuha* 京都学派), the most prominent philosophical school of twentieth-century Japan. Though not affiliated or grounded in religion per

¹⁹⁰ Shin Bukkyō 2, 9, p. 384

¹⁹¹ Shin Bukkyō 2, 9, p. 384

¹⁹² Shin Bukkyō 2, 9, p. 384

¹⁹³ These questions remain as complex today as a century ago, as we can see in the following remark by Winston Davis: ‘Nevertheless, the New Buddhists would not have recognized a purely secular salvation as enlightenment, or an enlightenment without the spirit of emptiness, self-control and non-ego as salvation’ (Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 170). What, we are compelled to ask, does Davis mean by ‘purely secular salvation’ or ‘the spirit of emptiness’?

¹⁹⁴ Though, as Davis notes, while some New Buddhists ‘tried to move towards the workers, like other ‘bourgeois intellectuals’, their sympathies usually stopped short of direct political action (Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society*, p. 170). This turn was left to more radical movements such as the ‘Youth League for Revitalizing Buddhism’ (Shinkō Bukkyō Seinen Dōmei 新興仏教青年同盟), led by Nichiren Buddhist layman Senō Girō (1889–1961).

se, the philosophy developed by Nishida and his main successors, including Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962) and Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), was deeply indebted to Buddhist and Zen thought in particular. Moreover, their work reflects a different flavour of modernism—one distinguished by a turn away from the lure of science and historical scholarship and towards an *existential* and *aesthetic* interpretation of religion.

In Nishida's earliest work, the groundbreaking *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (An Inquiry into the Good, 1911), he introduces his fundamental concept of 'pure experience' (*junsui keiken* 純粹經驗).¹⁹⁵ For Nishida:

To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by *pure* I am referring to experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. ... In this regard, pure experience is identical with direct experience. When one experiences one's own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ As many scholars have noted, contemporary Western thinkers such as William James and Josiah Royce (1855–1916) deeply influenced Nishida's Inquiry into the Good. James had discussed the root of all experience in terms of an 'instantaneous field of present' in which all experience is 'pure,' and noted that: 'It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there," more deep and more general than any of the particular "senses" by which current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.' See William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (New York and Boston: Longmans and Green, 1912), pp. 23–24; and *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 55. And yet, despite the reliance on James, in some respects Nishida's Inquiry into the Good brought an end to the direct and often uncritical import of Western philosophy characteristic of the Meiji period and prompted the beginnings of a genuine Japanese philosophy. During the later period of his life, Nishida openly acknowledged that his Inquiry into the Good was too psychological and mystical: 'As I look at it now, the standpoint of this book is that of consciousness, and it might be thought of as a kind of psychologism.' These remarks can be found in a preface to the 1936 edition entitled 'Upon Resetting the Type'. See Abe Masao 阿部正雄, 'Introduction' to Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, translated by Abe Masao and Christopher A. Ives (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. vii–xxviii. Also see David A. Dilworth, 'Introduction' to Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, Nishida Kitarō. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), p. 18; and Jacynthe Tremblay, *Nishida Kitarō: Le Jeu De L'individuel Et De L'universel* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000), pp. 14–15, for a discussion of the various periods of Nishida's life and thought.

¹⁹⁶ Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, translated by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 3–4. One might, again, refer here to an aesthetic way. 'Artistic experiences are often 'pre-conceptual' in the sense that they are not mastered by a conceptualizing intellect. In a way, these experiences give the impression of unfolding themselves 'all alone', that is of taking place without any conscious effort from the part of the subject.' See Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Place and Dream: Japan and the Virtual* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2004), p. 11.

Moreover, against Immanuel Kant as well as the New Buddhists, Nishida contends that 'religion does not gain adequate definition from the moral standpoint. The religious form of life does not even arise from that standpoint. Even if such a thing were to be imagined, it would not be true religion.'¹⁹⁷ Religious experience, says Nishida, is not about 'ethical progression' of any sort, but it is grounded in the realization of the problematic nature of one's very existence. In short, Nishida conceives of religion as the ultimate 'transvaluation' of morality. 'To speak of religion in moral terms,' he concludes, 'is to set up social existence as the basis of the self's own existential condition.'¹⁹⁸

Although he never abandoned the idea, in his later writings Nishida turned away from speaking of pure experience, replacing such with a more nuanced and, in his understanding, more clearly Buddhist concept of *basho* 場所—usually translated as *topos*, locus or 'place'.¹⁹⁹ Yet, extending through all works is the conviction that 'the religious horizon of concrete immediacy is the deepest *a priori* of the self, underlying the *a priori* of cognitive intellect, moral will, and aesthetic feeling.'²⁰⁰ In Nishida's final writings, the 'logic of place,' along with the philosophy of 'active intuition,' come to be more closely related to ethics and political behaviour.²⁰¹ 'Religiously

¹⁹⁷ Nishida Kitarō, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, translated by David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), p. 82. In these words one hears echoes of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), particularly his three 'stages on life's way': aesthetic, ethical, religious—except that in Nishida's conception, the aesthetic realm is indistinguishable from the religious.

¹⁹⁸ Robert Carter, summing up Nishida's critique of Kant, says 'Clearly, the ultimate goal of Buddhism, and of Zen, is not morality, but spirituality' (Robert E. Carter, *The Nothingness Beyond God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nishida Kitarō*, 2nd edition (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1997), p. 129.

¹⁹⁹ In the 1920s Nishida developed his ideas of *basho* along lines borrowed from Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the neo-Kantians and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), and placed emphasis in particular on pure feeling as the basic condition or ground for 'true subjectivity' and as 'a more profound level of consciousness than intellectual cognition.' His final works written in the period leading up to and through the Pacific War (1930–45), deal more extensively with *basho vis-à-vis* 'the world of action' and historical reality. See Tremblay, *Nishida Kitaro*, p. 16, n. 5. As Dilworth notes, Nishida's 'nine successive volumes of purely philosophical writing during 1911 and his death in 1945 were a continuous process of articulation of a central insight concerning 'the immediacy of experience' in Buddhistic terms'. See David A. Dilworth, 'Nishida Kitarō: Nothingness as the Negative Space of Experiential Immediacy', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 13, 4, 1973, p. 463. Here, Dilworth refers to the series of volumes, eleven in total, published between 1911 and 1945. Nishida's complete works in nineteen volumes were published by Iwanami Shoten in 1965.

²⁰⁰ Dilworth, 'Nishida Kitarō', pp. 469–471.

²⁰¹ This late turn has been called Nishida's *Kehre* from a philosophy of self-consciousness to one of history-politics, possibly as a response to the writings of his erstwhile disciple Tanabe Hajime. See Huh Woo-Sung, 'The Philosophy of History in the 'Later' Nishida: A Philosophic Turn', *Philosophy East and West* 40, 3, 1990, pp. 343–374.

awakened people,' writes Nishida, 'become "master of every situation" as the self-determination of the absolute present. In all respects these people are active. For each, "the place in which one stands is truth" ... From a true religious awakening one can submit to the state.'²⁰²

Ironically, in his attempt to give a more concrete and socio-historical understanding of *basho*, Nishida ends up creating a highly abstract and de-historicized ideological basis for the imperialist vision of the day. As Christopher Ives puts it, 'Nishida helped provide a philosophical foundation for the 'holy war' being waged in the name of the emperor.'²⁰³ Indeed, a major critique of Kyoto School philosophy—and Nishida's *pure experience* and *logic of place* in particular—is the tendency towards a dehistoricized noetic ground for awareness and subjectivity which 'makes it impossible in the end to consider the "contradictions" of this world as tragic contradictions; it slants one in the direction of esthetic contemplation.'²⁰⁴ In speaking of Nishida's later move towards understanding *basho* in light of absolute nothingness, Jan van Bragt argues that it 'seems to wipe away every imperfection of actual human life by proclaiming a higher standard from which all such things are seen to be non-existent or illusory.'²⁰⁵

²⁰² Quoted in Christopher Ives, 'Ethical Pitfalls in Imperial Zen and Nishida Philosophy: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique,' in *Rude Awakenings*, p. 23. This idea is repeated in an essay written in 1944: 'True obedience to the nation should be derived from the standpoint of true religious self-awareness. Mere seeking one's own peace of mind is selfish' (Nishida Kitarō, 'Towards a Philosophy of Religion with the Concept of Pre-Established Harmony as Guide,' translated by David A. Dilworth, *Eastern Buddhist*, New Series 2, 1, 1970, p. 45). Even more significant, Nishida—borrowing a line from Kegon Buddhism—emphasized the importance of 'See[ing] the universal in the particular thing.' This notion may be fairly innocuous in itself, but Nishida situated it in concrete terms by locating the universal principle in the particular locus called the Tennō 天皇—the Japanese emperor.

²⁰³ Ives, 'Ethical Pitfalls,' p. 25. It should be noted that, particularly in his personal letters, Nishida feels some obvious discomfort as to the way ultranationalism was sweeping the country in the 1930s and 1940s. Some commentators have suggested that, in fact, Nishida was mimicking the language of the militarists in order to bring it up from the concrete reality of war and into some higher philosophico-religious sphere. This is not a very strong claim, even when coupled with the fact that Nishida did come under suspicion by some rightists for some of his moderate writings.

²⁰⁴ Kitamori Kazuo 北森嘉蔵, quoted in Jan Van Bragt, 'Kyoto Philosophy—Intrinsically Nationalistic?' in *Rude Awakenings*, p. 252.

²⁰⁵ Van Bragt, 'Kyoto Philosophy,' p. 253. Van Bragt adds: 'I do not wish to challenge the value, the incalculable value, of such a standpoint for religion—provided that it opens a path back to a heightened awareness of the actual contradictions, beautiful or tragic as they may be, provided that it elaborates this path in sufficient detail to constitute a norm for our imperfect attempts at being fully human.' For Heisig, 'the consequences of [Nishida's] position come to this: the non-I that emerges from the self-awareness of absolute nothingness looks for all the world to be a highly cultivated form of ataraxia, a self-transcendence of which the highest good consists of its inability to be moved by either good or evil.' See James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 86.

Conclusion: Legacy of Aesthetic Modernism

Despite the relatively liberal cultural and intellectual climate of the period which later came to be known (rather wistfully) as ‘Taishō democracy’, the first decades of the twentieth century saw increased resistance on the part of nationalistic groups to the incursion of foreign ideas and values. Though there remained a stalwart few who attempted to construct a more moderate and even progressive model for modern Japan, by the late 1930s even these moderate voices were lost amid the rising tide of nationalism.²⁰⁶ Far from being a fringe movement, this intellectual turn between early Taishō and early Shōwa—from cosmopolitanism to what has been called ‘culturalism’ (*bunkashugi* 文化主義)—is reflected in the writings of mainstream intellectuals, writers, political and religious leaders.²⁰⁷ Among other things, within this intellectual trend we see a highly Romantic spirit; not least in the contrast between *culture* (meaning creative self-realization, depth of spirit, and aesthetic value) vs. *civilization* (meaning the rational, material, pragmatic, but ultimately spiritually vacuous wisdom of the modern industrial West). In addition to the obvious echoes of Ferdinand Tönnies’s classic distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, this turn away from civilization, ethics and politics towards culture and aesthetics reflects what Marxist critic Tōsaka Jun 戸坂潤 (1900–1945) referred to as a widespread move among Taishō and early Shōwa intellectuals from ‘political’ to ‘cultural liberalism.’ According to Tōsaka:

[As t]he very meaning of such liberalism is literary, it must be a liberalism that is decisively cut off from liberalism in the sense of political actions (which would necessarily lead to the pursuit of democracy). Even in its political aspect, it is here nothing more than liberalism as a literary concept, one that utterly transcends politics. ... Now surprisingly enough, such literary liberalism contains a path that runs through fascism.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Many believed that by realizing the best of East and West, Japan had achieved a new cosmopolitan culture. The recognition of having achieved this unprecedented synthesis validated the subsequent belief that Japan was uniquely qualified to assume leadership in Asia, although much of the rhetoric that writers used referred to the world at large’ (Najita and Harootunian, ‘Japan’s Revolt’, p. 208).

²⁰⁷ ‘Whereas an earlier cosmopolitanism promoted the ideal of cultural diversity and equivalence based on the principle of a common humanity, which served also to restrain excessive claims to exceptionalism, the new culturalism of the 1930s proposed that Japan was appointed to lead the world to a higher level of cultural synthesis that surpassed Western modernism itself’ (Najita and Harootunian, ‘Japan’s Revolt’, p. 208).

²⁰⁸ Tōsaka Jun, quoted in Karatani Kōjin, ‘Overcoming Modernity’, in *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, edited by Richard F. Calichman, pp. 101–118 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

Modern interpretations of Buddhism—and Zen in particular—continue to reflect this mindset, developed in large part by thinkers such as Nishida and D. T. Suzuki.²⁰⁹ Although we cannot simply dismiss this interpretation of Buddhism as false, it is imperative to recognize its manifest *hybridity*, with sources that lie as deep within modernist conceptions as within traditional Buddhist teachings.²¹⁰ Moreover, it is also important to recognize the variations in modernist interpretations of Japanese Buddhism. While the aesthetic or existentialist interpretation of Buddhism has come to dominate postwar understandings of Japanese Buddhist thought, it is in fact only one of the various forms of Japanese Buddhist modernism to flourish in the late Meiji through early Shōwa periods. Others, such as the New Buddhist movements discussed above, show a quite distinctive but equally fertile combination of modernist currents with Buddhist thought and practice.

²⁰⁹ Robert Sharf, one of the more astute and critical contemporary scholars of Asian Buddhism, argues that modern Zen as developed in the various writings of Zen-influenced philosophers like Nishida and Suzuki came to be conceived as a ‘mystical or spiritual gnosis that transcends sectarian boundaries’ (Sharf, ‘Whose Zen?’, p. 43). Such an understanding of Zen, Sharf argues, is quite distinct from anything preceding the Meiji period, and vastly different from what goes on in the regular Zen monastery to this day. Stuart Lachs makes the same point, suggesting that Suzuki in particular ‘promoted a non-traditional, modernist interpretation of Zen’ by emphasizing a Zen ‘freed from its Mahayana Buddhist context, centred on a special kind of ‘pure’ experience and without the traditional Buddhist concern for morality’. This view, according to Lachs, was taken up by the Kyoto School in an attempt to accentuate the aspects of Buddhism ‘that are both most different from Western traditions and most distinctively Japanese’—an ironic twist, given that it is largely the modernist element of such an interpretation of Zen that has attracted so many Western Buddhists of the past several generations. ‘This view has fostered in the West a widespread conception of Zen Buddhism as a tradition of exclusively cognitive import, inordinately preoccupied with the ideas of Sunyata, non-duality, and absolute nothingness but with little talk of karma, Marga (the path), compassion, or even the ‘marvelous qualities’ of Buddhahood. Such a view fails to give adequate attention to the positive disciplines, including morality, that comprised the lives of Buddhists, and easily leads one to think that Buddhists are unable to treat the ordinary world of human activity seriously.’ See Stuart Lachs, ‘Coming Down from the Zen Clouds: A Critique of the Current State of American Zen’, web article: <http://www.geocities.com/jiji_muge/uszen3.html>, p. 1.

²¹⁰ In a recent book entitled *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), David McMahan has traced many of these sources. While *Buddhist Modernism* is invaluable in presenting a nuanced overview of the construction of Buddhist modernism in the West, as the author himself notes, there is much more work to be done in terms of uncovering the specifics, as well as the variations, of Buddhist modernism as it developed in Asian contexts.