

## After Olcott Left: Theosophy and “New Buddhists” at the Turn of the Century

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THE OPENING ARTICLE of the *Hansei zasshi* 反省雑誌 (The Temperance)<sup>1</sup> dated 2 August 1896 was titled “Shinkyō bokkō no ki” 新教勃興の機 (The Time for the Rising of a New Doctrine).<sup>2</sup> While as an unsigned editorial its authorship is unclear, its content was rather passionate. It first states that Buddhism is corrupt and unable to obtain popular belief. Furthermore, it continues, there are those among the youth who advocate free inquiry and scientific research, however these individuals have not attained faith, and are thus cannot satisfy the needs of Japanese people. The article notes that, nonetheless, people have not abandoned religion and continue to pursue faith. It calls for individuals with passionate belief to rise up and develop a new religion.

Such spiritual problems were deeply felt by young Buddhists of the Meiji 20s (the decade from 1888 to 1898). For instance in *Shin shūkyōron* 新宗教論 (A New Theory of Religion), a work published by Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) before visiting North America, he states that if there is no religion worth relying on, then we ourselves need to find a place in the universe for spiritual peace and realization. However, the “universe” he refers to is not theistic, but pantheistic:

We are atheists and not theists as in Christianity. However, mere atheism knows but passivity, and the active aspect [of religion] is never clarified. That is why we, hereafter, advocate pantheism. For

<sup>1</sup> The title literally translates to “The Journal of Self-Reflection,” yet the English title provided on the journal itself is “The Temperance.”

<sup>2</sup> “Shinkyō bokkō no ki” 1896.

the latter, the universe itself is God, and there is no God beyond the universe, and there is no universe outside of God.<sup>3</sup>

People were in a spiritual crisis and religion was deemed necessary. Yet, how might one foster faith without belief in a transcendent Creator? This problem, which seemed paradoxical from a Christian viewpoint, was one that never ceased to haunt Japanese Buddhist intellectuals. Especially under the system of religious freedom established with the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, several sets of values came into conflict with each other. How might one satisfy the present spiritual hunger and conceive of a harmonized citizenry and a universal, ideal religion?

During the second and third decades of the Meiji period (1868–1912), intellectuals provided several answers to the above-mentioned questions. Radical stances—such as that of Kimura Takatarō 木村鷹太郎 (1870–1931)—called for the elimination of religion and metaphysics. On the other hand, there were those such as Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1856–1944), who emphasized the development of an ideal religion through the combination of the favorable characteristics of existing religions. There were also propositions that, recognizing the impossibility of newly creating a religion, called for the construction of a standpoint that made possible the comparison of several religions. For instance Hirai Kinza 平井金三 (1859–1916), who was influenced by both Shingaku 心学, an ethical religious system started in the Tokugawa era, and Spencerian philosophy, developed a theory of synthetic religion. There were also ethical groups such as the Teiyū Konwakai 丁酉懇話会 created by Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949) and organizations such as Unitarianism that upheld religion while essentially promoting inter-religious dialogue.

It is interesting that during the same period in the United States people also went through a spiritual crisis, and there were proposals for a civil religion. In issue 17 of the *Hansei zasshi*, we find a translation of an article by the then American consul to the Philippines, Alexander Russell Webb (1846–1916),<sup>4</sup> titled “Ittō shūkyō o ronzu” 一統宗教を論ず (On a Unified Religion). In this piece, the author suggests that Americans abandon sectarian Christianity and adopt Buddhism, a doctrine more sophisticated, scientific, and grounded in truth.

<sup>3</sup> Suzuki 1969, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Webb later converted to Islam, taking “Mohammed” as his first name, and dedicated himself to Islamic missionary activities in the United States. There is evidence that Webb joined the St. Louis Theosophical Society in 1881, and remained a member at least until 1893. See Abd-Allah 2006, p. 59.

Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Buddhism's popularity grew in America, and Webb's article is a vivid illustration of the contemporary expectations focusing on Buddhism. However, the Buddhism he speaks of is not the same Buddhism that contemporary Asians unthinkingly accepted, but the "pure" Buddhism preached by Śākyamuni, whose truth had also been expounded, in part, by the likes of Jesus and Confucius. Interestingly, the translator of this American liberal theory on religious reformation was Nakanishi Ushirō 中西牛郎 (1859–1930), himself a Japanese Buddhist reformist.

Tweed divides Americans who took an interest in Buddhism by the end of the nineteenth century in three types: esoterics, rationalists, and romantics.<sup>5</sup> Among these, the esoterics (whose interest was in the occult) and the rationalists (who praised Buddhism as a moral and scientific system) are especially important in relation to Japanese religion. During the Meiji 20s, non-Japanese with close ties to Japanese Buddhism were the Theosophist Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), the Swedenborgian Philangi Dasa (1849–1931), and the philosopher Paul Carus (1852–1919)—the first two esoterics, and the latter a rationalist. However, this classification is but an ideal type, and in reality there are several characteristics shared by both esoterics and rationalists. In both camps we find progressive individuals who, unsatisfied with a Christianity that no longer responded to the contradictions of capitalist society and the advance of science, praised Buddhism as a moral, scientific, and rational alternative. In addition to Buddhism, those progressive thinkers who criticized the American Christian male-dominated society of the time were often connected to spiritualist ideas. For example, there were "-isms" based on compassion for living beings such as pacifism, animal protectionism, and vegetarianism, as well as socialism and the women's right movement. In the middle-class reform movement of the 1890s, psychic phenomena and New Thought also gathered many supporters.<sup>6</sup>

In both Japan and the United States, progressive and reformist individuals disgruntled with religion attempted, while following their own strategies, to understand one another. Among them, there were cases where people just used one another's thought, where the relationship was clear (i.e., Suzuki Daisetsu and Paul Carus), and where the association happened indirectly on a level of intellectual influences.

In this paper, through a discussion of how Japanese Buddhists understood Theosophy during the Meiji 20s, I intend to depict one aspect of Japanese

<sup>5</sup> Tweed 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Satter 1999, p. 182.

Buddhism's internationalization and modernization. After a discussion concerning the image Theosophists held of Buddhism in the first part of the Meiji 20s, I will consider the historical position of the Shinbukkyō 新仏教 (New Buddhism) movement during the second half of the same decade, and trace the changes in the discourse of that time relating to Theosophy within the process of Buddhist modernization.

## BUDDHISM AND ESOTERICISM

### *Esoterics*

Founded in New York in 1875, the Theosophical Society was at first a small group for the study of occultism. However, after the transference of its headquarters to India in 1879 the number of members grew rapidly, and it developed into an international organization. One of the reasons for this is that the Theosophical doctrine was not based on the individual authority of H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), but on the mythical world she had created. Upon moving to India, she claimed to be in communication with and protected by the supernatural power of superhuman beings known as the Tibetan Mahatmas, Masters, and Arhats. Furthermore, their messages emerged through physical evidence such as letters and telegrams. The Theosophist A. P. Sinnett (1840–1921), a Blavatsky supporter who worked as a journalist in India, authored a book titled *The Occult World*, focusing on the supernatural phenomena that took place around Blavatsky. The book was published in 1881, and became a best seller in both Great Britain and the United States. Two years after that, based on Blavatsky's correspondence with the Mahatmas, Sinnett published *Esoteric Buddhism*, a work in which he summarized the “secret doctrine from which all religions and philosophies have derived whatever they possess of truth.”<sup>7</sup> Blavatsky rendered an image in which Theosophy was equal to Tibetan esotericism. Furthermore, as if to emphasize the historical legitimacy of her primeval truth, she claimed to have used the extremely ancient “Stanzas of Dzyan” as a source in her 1888 work *The Secret Doctrine*.

However, there were two criticisms of this idea. The first concerns psychic phenomena: in 1884, the British Society for Psychical Research thoroughly inspected the Theosophical Society headquarters, and concluded that the periodical appearances of the Mahatmas' messages there were tricks.

<sup>7</sup> Sinnett 1883, p. vi.

Additionally, Oxford University's Max Müller (1823–1900) made scathing criticism of the idea of hidden Tibetan Mahatmas and of an esoteric doctrine.

Frédéric Lenoir asserts that people's fascination with Theosophy was, among other factors, due to its "practical use of fashion and exoticism," its being "a religion of tolerance and with no dogmas," and to images it evoked of "Tibet and the power of occultism." Furthermore, Lenoir argues that the theory of reincarnation was not originally Buddhist, but a projection of Western ideas: it was, in fact, a bricolage.<sup>8</sup> The assertion that Theosophy was, in essence, an aggregation of Western Occultism and Eastern religion is correct. The Theosophical doctrine was, of course, not put forward by Tibetan Mahatmas, but by Blavatsky herself. Moreover, it is understandable that she was—and to this day, still is—criticized for using psychic phenomena and pseudo-ancient works as sources of authority. However, it is also true that she added Eastern ideas to Western esoteric thought, and served as a gateway for Americans and Europeans into Eastern religion. Blavatsky's doctrine was not simply limited to occult phenomena.

In order to better comprehend the premises of Theosophy and esoteric thought in general, it might be useful to refer to the revised version of the Theosophical Society's three objectives,<sup>9</sup> published in 1887:

- (1) To form the nucleus of a Universal brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, or color.
- (2) To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literatures, religions and sciences.
- (3) A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the society, is to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers of man.

I would like to approach these three features in terms of the way in which they were reflected in texts written by Japanese Buddhists who were in contact with esoterics.

For instance, regarding the first topic of humanitarian ethics, in issue 20 of the *Hanseikai zasshi* 反省会雑誌, G. Edward Wolleb (n.d.), then president of the Golden Gate Lodge of the Theosophical Society in San Francisco, published an article entitled "Kirisuto kyōto wa hatashite Nihon teikoku o jūrin suru no kachi aru ka" 基督教徒は果して日本帝国を蹂躪するの価値あるか (Are Christians Worth the Japanese Empire Being Trampled Underfoot?).

<sup>8</sup> Lenoir 1999.

<sup>9</sup> "Supplement to *The Theosophist* Jan. 1887" 1887, p. lvii.

There, he praised Buddhism for “crossing a thousand years with the same [level of] benevolence and peace,”<sup>10</sup> asserting that “the spirit of the Great Dharma consists of pure love, and its final realization is nothing but the attainment of peace.”<sup>11</sup> In numerous articles published in Japanese Buddhist periodicals, Philangi Dasa also emphasized Buddhism’s humanitarian and social nature. In a piece entitled “Naze ni bukkyō naruya” なぜに仏教なるや (Why Buddhism?), the author cites, along with the upholding of equality and the absence of a Creator, respect for life as a superior aspect of Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in “Bukkyō no tokushitsu wa jissai no jikei naru koto o ronzu” 仏教の特質は実際の慈恵なることを論ず (Real Compassion is Buddhism’s Distinctive Feature),<sup>13</sup> Dasa responds to criticisms of Buddhism as being nihilistic and other-worldly by pointing to the religion’s construction of hospitals in ancient India, emphasizing that its essence was in contributing to the secular world.

The second objective (the study of philosophy and thought of both East and West) is related to the idea of ancient wisdom. The truth, which was known in ancient times, only remains in fragments scattered in religious thought across the world. The Theosophists believed that, by making comparisons between world religions (especially mysticism) or Eastern religions, one was able to get closer to this ancient wisdom. We find the exact same motif in Swedenborgian thought, which Dasa is responsible for connecting to Buddhism.

Viewed optimistically, this idea leads to the universalistic idea of harmonization between the various religions. However, it also leads to the pessimistic perception that, since they are preoccupied with dogmas, contemporary denominations are decadent. For instance, Olcott made the following remarks on becoming a Buddhist.

To be a regular Buddhist is one thing, and to be a debased modern Buddhist sectarian quite another. Speaking for her [H. P. Blavatsky] as well as myself, I can say that if Buddhism contained a single dogma that we were compelled to accept, we would not have taken the *pāṅsil* nor remained Buddhists ten minutes. Our Buddhism was that of the Master-Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom Religion of the Aryan Upanishads,

<sup>10</sup> Wolleb 1889, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Wolleb 1889, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Dasa 1888, p. 7; Dasa 1889b, pp. 27–29.

<sup>13</sup> Dasa 1889a, p. 5.

and the soul of all the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed.<sup>14</sup>

From such a viewpoint, Japanese Buddhism's sectarianism deserved criticism. In fact, during his second visit to Japan, Olcott earned the displeasure of both Higashi 東 and Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 for preaching solidarity between Southern and Northern Buddhism. In this regard, what lies behind this position of comparison of religions is the superiority of the comparativist. For Olcott, ultimate truth was in Theosophy, while for Dasa, it was in Swedenborgianism, but for both these men Buddhism occupied the second best position. In this context, however, Japanese Buddhism (and Mahayana Buddhism in general) was attributed a low status: Theravada Buddhism was regarded as closer to primitive Buddhism and, therefore, a purer and superior form thereof. In any case, the eclecticism of Theosophy both bewildered and stimulated Japanese Buddhists. I will discuss this subject more below.

Regarding the third objective of the scientific clarification of psychic phenomena, this can be regarded as that which distinguishes between rationalists (such as Paul Carus) and esoterics. However, this is, at the same time, linked to a scientific orientation. Psychic phenomena lay not in the dimension of faith, but were considered to follow strict laws. To begin with, Theosophy had received influence from the French occultist Eliphas Lévi (1810–1875), for whom occult phenomena were generated by the focusing of one's will. There was a trend toward projecting this image of magic as a technique of psychological manipulation onto the idealist aspect of Buddhism.

For example, William S. Bigelow (1850–1926) said to Japanese Buddhists that Buddhism is superior to Christianity in four ways. Along with being superior in its philosophical, scientific, and progressive aspects, he also asserted that Buddhism has Theosophical elements such as thought reading and techniques of animal magnetism (hypnosis), which transcend the boundaries of normal science.<sup>15</sup> Bigelow believed that Buddhism had the power to provoke parapsychological phenomena. That is to say, he thought it capable of further advancing techniques of hypnosis. The pre-conception of Buddhism as having the force to strengthen spiritual power is also clear in articles by the above-mentioned Alexander Russell Webb.

<sup>14</sup> Olcott 1954, pp. 168–69.

<sup>15</sup> “Bigerō shi” ビゲロー氏 1886, pp. 56–57.



However, there were times when this developed into criticism of Japanese Buddhism. In 1900, the Theosophist Edward Stephenson (1871–1926), who had recently arrived in Japan, stated the following about Asian Buddhism in a dialogue with Sugimura Jūō 杉村縦横 (1872–1945):

Buddhism has died in India and Korea, and is about to do so in Japan as well. The only place in the whole earth where an actual living Buddhism exists is the United States in North America. American Buddhism is in the lineage of Olcott and Blavatsky's Theosophical school. They believe that by concentrating one's will, it is easy to achieve things laypeople would consider fantastic. If one's force of will is intense enough, one can even hang in the air with no stairs. One can walk into water or fire and suffer no harm. One can speak to deceased people exactly as if they were alive. If Japanese Buddhists do not engage in such activities, then it is proof that theirs is not a living Buddhism. In Japan these things are demeaned as witchcraft and vituperated as occultism, and intellectuals go past them as if they were not worthy of any attention. It seems that Japanese Buddhists, not engaging in these kinds of practices themselves, seek to find in [their] revilement the little consolation they can.<sup>16</sup>

Although a radical opinion, Stephenson's words express very well the expectations and frustrations of Theosophists. In the end, during the Meiji 20s Theosophists believed that the truth was already on their side. They did not support Japanese Buddhism out of admiration for its doctrines. Rather, due to its "fragile" character, they sought to protect it from Christianity's worldwide net. However, Japanese Buddhists misread this as signifying their doctrinal superiority.

### *The Perspective of Japanese Buddhists*

Meanwhile, what was the Japanese perspective on Theosophy in the Meiji 20s? From the viewpoint of Japanese sects, foreign Buddhists were a means for Buddhist revival or for overseas propagation, there being very little interest, on the Japanese side, in the contents of their ideas.

The contact between Japan and Theosophy happened mainly during the first part of the Meiji 20s, beginning some time prior to Olcott's visit, and continuing for a while after. There were two groups responsible for this encoun-

<sup>16</sup> Sugimura 1900, p. 33.



ter, each with different strategies. One of these groups was comprised of lay Buddhists (*koji* 居士) based in Kyoto, and was centered around Hirai Kinza of the “Oriental Hall” English school and the cleric Sano Seidō 佐野正道 (n.d.) of the Ōtani 大谷 branch of the Shin school (Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗). Envisaging the revival of Buddhism in Japan, this group was responsible for inviting Olcott to the Japanese archipelago, a visit that was finally realized in 1889.

The other group was centered on Matsuyama Shōtarō 松山松太郎 (n.d.), English language instructor at Nishi Honganji’s Futsū Kyōkō 普通教校 (General School), members of the Hanseikai 反省会 (The Temperance Association),<sup>17</sup> and employees of the Futsū Kyōkō. This group was in contact with William Q. Judge (1851–1896) of the Theosophical Society of America, and besides communicating with Theosophists from all over the United States, also began exchanging letters with Philangi Dasa.<sup>18</sup> Matsuyama’s group serialized such overseas correspondence, along with a number of articles, in the pages of the *Hanseikai zasshi* in 1887. In 1888 they launched the English-language magazine *Bijou of Asia*, after which they established the Kaigai Senkyōkai 海外宣教会 (Buddhist Propagation Society). The latter group was responsible for the periodical *Kaigai bukkyō jijō* 海外仏教事情 (Overseas Buddhist Affairs), where articles by Dasa and Theosophists were published. To this extent, the response from Theosophists overseas was influential on the Buddhist media.

During his first visit to Japan, even though Olcott delivered a great number of lectures all over the country, he hardly spoke about Theosophy, according to his diaries. Japanese Buddhism, its sectarian institutions in particular, only needed him as a “Western authority,” a role that Olcott played faithfully. There is no sign that he exchanged opinions about Theosophy. On the other hand, many articles on the subject were published in the above-mentioned *Kaigai bukkyō jijō*. A translation of Blavatsky’s “A

<sup>17</sup> The Temperance Society is the English name used by the group itself.

<sup>18</sup> Philangi Dasa is also known as Herman Carl Vetterling (1849–1931). According to Andrei Vashestov, Dasa was an American of Swedish origins. Having crossed to the United States in 1872, he started his studies of Swedenborg in 1874. In 1877 he graduated from Urbana University, a Swedenborgian theological institution in Ohio, upon which he became a minister of the same denomination. Dasa (then Vetterling) left this post due to a scandal in 1881, and after learning homeopathy at the Hahnemann Medical School in Philadelphia, relocated to California. Between 1884 and 1885 he published a series of articles titled “Studies in Swedenborg” in *The Theosophist*. In 1887 he published *Swedenborg the Buddhist; or The Higher Swedenborgianism: Its Secrets and Thibetan Origin*. In 1888 he moved to Santa Cruz and published what became the first Buddhist magazine in the United States, *Buddhist Ray* (1888–1894). See the introduction in Dasa 2003 (1887).

Dialogue on Buddhism and Theosophy” appeared in October 1890 as “Bukkyō to shinchigaku ni tsuite no mondō” 仏教と神智学に就ての問答, where she speaks of Theosophy as “Buddhism” (*bodaikyō* 菩提教).<sup>19</sup> The article’s translator, Matsuyama Shōtarō, provides further explanation regarding the Tibetan Mahatmas and on Theosophy, describing it as an eclectic form of Buddhism.

However, there were few who rigorously examined Olcott’s view of Buddhism. During his first visit to Japan, Olcott was praised in the pages of the *Hanseikai zasshi* neither as a Theosophist nor as a Theravadin, but as a supporter of Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> In 1893, when he had lost his popularity, the Dendōkai 伝道会, a Nishi Honganji related group, denounced Olcott for firmly believing in Southern Buddhism and for questioning its Northern counterpart.<sup>21</sup> Just as Snodgrass has said, the white Buddhist “was used, deployed to the advantage of Buddhist revival in the Meiji discourse on religion.”<sup>22</sup>

As for criticism directed toward Theosophy, by the time of Olcott’s first visit, the Christian Kozaki Hiromichi 小崎弘道 (1856–1938) introduced gossip about Blavatsky to the public. However, the most severe of such criticisms came perhaps in the form of the translation of Max Müller’s article on Theosophy. “Bukkyō no shinpi” 仏教の神秘 (Esoteric Buddhism) was published as a supplement for the 4 September 1893 issue of *Meikyō shinshi* 明教新誌. It was soon refuted by Toki Hōryū 土宜法竜 (1854–1923)<sup>23</sup> of the Shingon 真言 sect. For instance, in “Ōbei bukkyō no taisei” 欧米仏教之大勢 (General Trends in European and American Buddhism), published in *Jōdo kyōhō* 浄土教報 in 1894,<sup>24</sup> Toki asserted that, while the practice of European Theravadins is academic and intellectual, those who seek Buddhism out of the need for faith join the Theosophical Society. If Japanese scholars

<sup>19</sup> Blavatsky 1890.

<sup>20</sup> “Kāneru, Orukotto shi” カーネル、オルコット氏 1889. For Olcott, however, this was perhaps not considered as a compliment.

<sup>21</sup> Yuminami 1893, pp. 6–8. The reason for the sudden change in the opinion toward Olcott is due to the coming to Japan of C. Pfoundes (n.d.), the only British member of the Kaigai Senkyōkai, who left Buddhist circles after creating a variety of problems. According to the *Meikyō shinshi*, the Japanese were enthusiastic toward Olcott and Mahayana clerics even bowed before him, forgetting he was a Hinayana monk. The newspaper criticized Pfoundes harshly, saying that he must have come to Japan expecting to achieve the same success as Olcott, but that the time to praise white Buddhists had passed. See the editorial (*shasetsu* 社説) for issue 3232 (4 May 1893).

<sup>22</sup> Snodgrass 2003, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> His family name can also be pronounced Dogi.

<sup>24</sup> Toki 1894.

agree with Müller and criticize Sinnett, it was because, he added, they do not know the true details of the situation. Toki fully accepted the ideas of Dasa and the Theosophical Society, and understood both Swedenborgianism and Theosophy as branches of Mahayana Buddhism. Nevertheless, in light of the difference in commitment between academic and esoteric practitioners, both Toki's denial of Müller's understanding of Theosophy and other Buddhist-inspired esotericism as "incorrect academics" as well as his attempt to view them within the framework of religion were ahead of their time.

Based on endorsements and criticisms in the Buddhist media in the Meiji 20s, the intellectual contents of Theosophy seem in the final analysis not to have been a major issue for most readers. Furthermore, at least until the Meiji 40s there was almost no effort made to disseminate Theosophy institutionally.<sup>25</sup>

The cooperation between Olcott and Japanese Buddhism was, therefore, unbalanced: while the former's initiative was to revive Buddhism worldwide, the latter intended to utilize Western prestige for a revival which was already essentially underway. Meanwhile, there were many Buddhist sympathizers in Europe and America, a fact that the Kaigai Senkyōkai realized from the many letters it received from those places. There was even the optimistic belief that, even though Theravada Buddhism was fashionable in Europe and the United States, Mahayana Buddhism could, due to its superiority in terms of philosophical profundity, be propagandized in an unaltered form throughout those regions.<sup>26</sup> However, those points which interested European and American Buddhists the most—i.e., precepts as espoused in the Theravada tradition and the occult phenomena of "esoteric" Buddhism—were probably

<sup>25</sup> Stephenson was a teacher at the Yokosuka Naval School (Yokosuka Kaigun Kikan Gakkō 横須賀海軍機関学校). He founded a lodge in Zushi 逗子, Kanagawa Prefecture, and remained active in his Theosophical activities. In 1910 he published *Reichigaku kaisetsu* 靈智学解説, a Japanese translation of Blavatsky's *The Key to Theosophy*, together with Udaka Hyōsaku 宇高兵作 (1875–1923). He also published several other pamphlets on the subject.

<sup>26</sup> Shimaji Mokurai 島地黙雷 (1838–1911), the second president of the Kaigai Senkyōkai, mentions the following in an article titled "Kaigai Senkyōkai shokun ni tsugu" 海外宣教会諸君に告ぐ (To the Gentlemen of the Kaigai Senkyōkai): "There are those who cannot help but feel that an opportune tendency toward our Buddhism in Europe and the United States has truly arrived. . . . The Hinayana is yet a superficial doctrine. Our perfect and sudden, profound and wondrous doctrine of the Mahayana is coherent and concurrent with and does not go against the various philosophical sciences Europeans and Americans routinely investigate. Why would they not be suddenly impressed by and then turn to the deep, broad, and subtle mind which rises outside the mysterious godly principle?" He understood that, "as if lighting the fuse of a gun," due missionary work would spread Mahayana Buddhism in Europe and the United States (Shimaji 1892).

beyond the scope of the understanding of the Nishi Honganji branch of the Shin school, the Kaigai Senkyōkai's parent organization.

During the first part of the Meiji 20s, for Japanese Buddhist sects Theosophy was something to be used, not understood. However, it is also a fact that the eclectic religiosity embodied in Theosophy inspired several new Buddhists. Moreover, during the late Meiji 20s, the concept of mystical experience as presented by Theosophists gained importance.

## THE MEIJI 20S AND "NEW BUDDHISM"

### *The Meiji 20s*

Let us once again summarize the situation of Japanese Buddhism in the Meiji 20s. In the first part of this decade, we observe the formation of many Buddhist lay associations, the launching of several Buddhist periodicals, and the development of institutions for general education by Buddhist sects. It is thus a period marked by Buddhism's vigor. Anti-Christian trends were also strong, and they continued until the 1893 "clash between religion and education" affair. Furthermore, due to contact with Theosophy, this decade also saw for a brief period of time a growing interest in missionary work directed toward Europe and the United States, as can be seen in the creation of the Kaigai Senkyōkai and Buddhist participation in the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions. This decade also marks the beginning of a Buddhist movement led by a young generation versed in Western scholarship, as can be seen in the founding at Nishi Honganji's Futsū Kyōkō of the Hanseikai, a group that advocated complete abstinence from alcohol and overall strengthening of self-discipline.

In the second half of the Meiji 20s, Buddhism and Christianity began to head toward reconciliation.<sup>27</sup> Between 1896 and 1897 representatives from the various denominations of Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity gathered for discussions, which led to the formation of the Teiyū Konwakai, an ethical movement. There were those who dreamed of the amalgamation of Buddhist sects, the merging of Christian denominations, and the union of Buddhism and Christianity.<sup>28</sup> The activities of Unitarians also contributed to inter-religious dialogue and reconciliation.

<sup>27</sup> In an article published in *Taiyō* 太陽 in 1896, Nakanishi Ushirō pointed out that because Christianity continued to criticize Buddhism as pessimistic and Buddhism to criticize Christianity as anti-national and unscientific, the two have started to increasingly resemble each other. Nakanishi lambasted both Buddhism and Christianity as decadent for bringing such non-religious elements into inter-religious criticism (Nakanishi 1896).

<sup>28</sup> "Butsu-ya ryōkyō no sekkin to shinshūkyō" 仏耶両教の接近と新宗教 1896.

Unitarians initiated full-fledged missionary activity in Japan in 1889 with the arrival of their first missionaries. Thanks, in part, to support from Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉 (1835–1901), they were very active. With no dogmas and a low sectarian awareness, Unitarianism's character as a movement of universal ethics made it popular among Japanese intellectuals and bureaucrats: Yano Fumio 矢野文雄 (1851–1931), one of Fukuzawa's disciples, even proposed that Unitarianism be adopted as the state religion. When Saji Jitsunen 佐治実然 (1856–1920) from the Ōtani branch of Shin Buddhism started participating in Unitarian meetings in 1892, he was followed by several other Buddhist polemicists. Behind this was the missionary Clay McCauley (1843–1925), who envisaged a Christianity that was inclusive of Buddhism and promoted a radical de-Christianization on several fronts.<sup>29</sup> This was specific to Japanese Unitarianism. However, despite their different religious backgrounds, Nakanishi Ushirō and Hirai Kinza (whom I will consider below in more detail) shared a common interest in pluralistic understandings of religion as well as in the creation of a new eclectic religion. Furthermore, the participation in Buddhist circles of many young Buddhists with an advanced education led to the creation of an atmosphere of free investigation in the religious world, which sparked new debates regarding religion.

In Buddhist circles, youth organizations became very active, and after the Sino-Japanese War, Zen came into vogue.<sup>30</sup> Also at this time, the Shirakawa Party (Shirakawatō 白川党) was pushing for reform in the Ōtani branch. Due to the momentum generated by free investigation, the later part of the Meiji 20s also became an age of discussion and dispute. In the January 1897 issue of *Hansei zasshi*, an article entitled “Meiji nijūku nen no bukkyōkai” 明治二十九年の仏教界 (Buddhism in 1896) reminisced on the events of the past half decade: free investigation began to flourish in 1894; 1895 saw the publication of articles on the proposition that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana,<sup>31</sup> the issue of cause and effect,<sup>32</sup> the Shingon sect, and the popularity of Zen studies; and in 1896 several arguments about the nature of

<sup>29</sup> Regarding this issue, see Tsuchiya 2001.

<sup>30</sup> “Zen no ryūkō ni tsuite” 禪の流行に就て 1895.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, see articles such as Nishiyori 1895.

<sup>32</sup> “Bukkyō inga ronsō” 仏教因果論争 1895. Starting with Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之 (1836–1916) and his “Bukkyō ni iwayuru zen'aku no inga ōhō wa shinri ni arazu” 仏教に所謂善悪の因果応報は真理にあらず (The Buddhist Law of the Cause and Effect of Good and Evil Is Not Truth), many writers joined the debate, including Tokunaga (Kiyozawa) Manshi 徳永 (清沢) 満之 (1863–1903), Sakaino Tekkai (Kōyō) 境野哲海 (黄洋) (1871–1933), Ōkubo Shōnan (Itaru) 大久保湘南 (格) (1865–1908), Samura Norisuke 佐村徳介 (n.d.), Mokubo San'nin 木母山人 (n.d.).

religion were published.<sup>33</sup> Regarding the issue of cause and effect, the materialist Katō Hiroyuki 加藤弘之 (1836–1916), a former president of Tokyo Imperial University, questioned whether the Buddhist idea of recompense through cause and effect was a natural law. The age in which one could defend Buddhism through science and philosophy was over. Moreover, as can be ascertained through the debate on the authenticity of the Mahayana as the words of Śākyamuni, it became clear that the study of Buddhism could undermine faith, which called attention, once again, to the relationship between scholarship and belief. An article by Furukawa Rōsen 古河老川 (1871–1899) entitled “Kaigi jidai ni ireri” 懷疑時代に入れり (Entering an Age of Skepticism),<sup>34</sup> published in the January 1894 issue of *Bukkyō* 仏教 (Buddhism), can perhaps be regarded as a symbol of this age. Furukawa put forward the notion that religion progresses through the repetition of three stages: dogmatism, skepticism, and criticism. According to him, Buddhism was about to enter the second stage. In this context, securing faith became a subjective problem for young Buddhists.

Meanwhile, during this period, romantic literature became popular, and authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) and Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) came to be widely read. In 1893 Kitamura Tōkoku 北村透谷 (1868–1894) published his “Naibu seimei ron” 内部生命論 (Essay on the Inner Life), where he asserted that the “true rewarding of good and punishing of evil should take place based on one’s inner experiences” (*shinsei no kanchō wa kokoro no keiken no ue ni tatazaru bekarazu* 真正の勸懲は心の経験の上に立たざるべからず).<sup>35</sup> Kitamura thus located the basis for good and evil in the depths of the self—that is, in the internal divine nature spoken about by Emerson. This independence of the self also signified a withdrawal from institutions and customs that provided one protection. The crisis of faith can also be regarded as a kind of uneasiness that accompanied the formation of this modern self.

This echoes the sentiments of the Buddhist youth, which criticized clericalism and emphasized individual faith. One such expression is an article by Suzuki Daisetsu entitled “Emāson no zengaku ron” エマーソンの禅学

<sup>33</sup> “I realized that, no matter how, Buddhists and Christians should not, hereafter, continue upholding the same faith they have in earlier years, in which the most importance is attached to the founder and scriptures. Attaining spiritual truth cannot be done through theory, but at the same time, cannot be done without it” (“Meiji nijūku nen no bukkyōkai” 明治二十九年の仏教界 1897, p. 81).

<sup>34</sup> Furukawa 1901b, pp. 106–11.

<sup>35</sup> Kitamura 1967, p. 471.



論 (Emerson's Theories on Zen)<sup>36</sup> that was published in 1896. In this short piece, Suzuki speaks of Emerson's idea of internal divine nature, which was one possible answer to this question of individual faith. However, unlike Christian believers, for Buddhists there was no possibility of a personal and transcendent being such as the Creator. Therefore, the problem of how one secures faith and salvation became related not to God or the soul, but to the world and the self.

### *New Buddhism*

Between the Meiji 20s and 30s, young Buddhists made wide use of the phrase "new Buddhism." Here it might be useful to emphasize that, in Meiji Buddhist history, the designation "new Buddhism" is used with at least three different meanings. The first of these, which we will not deal with further here, is that which we see in the book *Meiji no shinbukyō undō* 明治の新仏教運動 (New Buddhist Movements of the Meiji Period) by Ikeda Eishun. Here this term works as an all-encompassing historical term describing Meiji's "new Buddhism," including enterprises based on the thought of Edo-period scholar monk Jiun 慈雲 (1718–1805), the activities of the likes of Hara Tanzan 原坦山 (1819–1892) and Shimaji Mokurai, and movements such as the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai 新仏教徒同志会 (Association of New Buddhists) and Seishinshugi 精神主義 (Cultivating Spirituality).<sup>37</sup>

The second meaning of this term was first seen and spread through the works of Buddhist polemicists such as Mizutani Ninkai 水谷仁海 (1836–1896) and Nakanishi Ushirō, from roughly around 1887. Ikeda Eishun calls this trend the development of "theories on Buddhist reform" (*bukyō kakushin ron* 仏教革新論). Nakanishi is a particularly important character in this second sort of new Buddhism. Born in Kumamoto, by the first half of the Meiji 20s he was a well-known writer of the same stature as fellow countryman Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰 (1863–1957), and in terms of Buddhist reformation, comparable to Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919). Nakanishi's *Bukyō kakumei ron* 仏教革命論 (On Buddhist Reform), published in 1889, was very well received and earned him an invitation to work as principal at Nishi Honganji's Futsū Kyōkō, as well as assistance from the same sect to travel to the

<sup>36</sup> Suzuki 1896.

<sup>37</sup> Ikeda's definition is as follows: "The New Buddhist movements of the Meiji period developed through the reconsideration, from a modern perspective, of the historical and intellectual issues which had appeared in early-modern Buddhism, as matters of secular ethics and civilizational thought" (Ikeda 1976, p. 1).



United States. In 1892, perhaps due to the fact that at the time Nakanishi was the principal of this school, his work *Shūkyō taisei ron* 宗教大勢論 (General Trends in Religion)<sup>38</sup> was widely read by young Buddhists associated with the Hanseikai. His activities as a critic were not connected to organizations or movements, but were nevertheless responsible for the development of the group of young Buddhists that called themselves “New Buddhism.”<sup>39</sup> After resigning from Nishi Honganji’s Futsū Kyōkō (which at the time had been reorganized as the Bungakuryō 文学寮), Nakanishi participated in Unitarian meetings, but withdrew from these as well. In 1897 he published *Gongo hōjō* 嚴護法城 (A Solemn Defense of the Dharma Castle), in which he declared that he had parted ways with New Buddhism.

The third meaning of “new Buddhism” is used with regard to the Bukkyō Seito Dōshikai 仏教清徒同志会 (Buddhist Puritan Association), founded by Sakaino Kōyō, Sugimura Sojinkan 杉村楚人冠 (1872–1945), and Takashima Beihō 高島米峰 (1875–1949), among others. In 1900 they launched the journal *Shinbukkyō* 新仏教 (New Buddhism), and later changed the group’s name to Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai. Although many of its members had connections with Nishi Honganji, it was an independent association organizationally and doctrinally. Journalists and teachers were particularly numerous among the group’s affiliates, and its activities were promoted mainly through media such as regular lecture meetings, the journal *Shinbukkyō*, and books by individual members. With a mission statement that upheld sound faith, social improvement, free investigation, the eradication of superstitions, the uselessness of ritual, and the denial of government interference in religious affairs, the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai emphasized Buddhists’ social activities. This was certainly a response to the new Buddhism called for in the *Hansei zasshi* article “Shinkyō bokkō no ki” that was introduced at the start of this piece, as well as the emergence of a modern Buddhism. In his theories on the history of modern Buddhism, Yoshida Kyūichi describes public space activities and the internalization of doctrine as characteristics of modernization, and regards the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai, along with the Seishinshugi movement, as signs of modern Buddhism.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Nakanishi 1892b.

<sup>39</sup> In a congratulatory message during the celebration of Shinran’s birth (Shinran Kōtan’e 親鸞降誕会) held at the Honganji’s Bungakuryō, Nakai Gendō 中井玄道 (1878–1945), later a professor of Ryukoku University, declared, “The little life that is left in old Buddhism lies in hollow rites and ceremonies. The pent-up energy of new Buddhism is truly about to burst forth in irresistible force” (“Naigai ihō” 内外集報 1897, p. 85).

<sup>40</sup> Yoshida 1959.

According to Ōtani Eiichi's research,<sup>41</sup> the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai created in the Meiji 30s is not unrelated to the new Buddhism of the Meiji 20s: the latter, supported by the Buddhist youth, led to the former. At first, Hanseikai members (consisting mostly of Nishi Honganji's Futsū Kyōkō students) were the ones to support Nakanishi's Buddhist reform theories. However, in the second half of the Meiji 20s, its leading members moved to Tokyo,<sup>42</sup> and their activities became centered on the Bukkyō Seinenkai 仏教青年会 (Buddhist Youth Association) movement. These young Buddhists were students of institutions of advanced learning such as universities and technical colleges, and gave rise to youth associations all over the country. In 1894 Furukawa Rōsen gathered young Buddhist reformists and founded the Keikai 経緯会 (The Warp and Woof Association), and became the editor-in-chief for the supra-sectarian journal *Bukkyō* in the following year. However, he died before the publication of the inaugural issue of *Shinbukkyō*, though his literary activities laid the groundwork for the Shinbukkyō movement in terms of both personal connections and ideology.

The self-styled "new Buddhists" of the Meiji 20s were Buddhist intellectuals who, critical toward traditional sects and basing themselves on broad perspectives that allowed them to relativize Buddhism, attached a great deal of importance to free investigation. In addition to emphasizing social morals and activities, they applied scholarly results from academic fields such as Buddhist studies and Western philosophy, favoring personal religiosity over institutional norms and customs. Such Buddhist reformists were not formed within a single generation, but over at least two. The first is the generation of Inoue Enryō, Nakanishi Ushirō, and Hirai Kinza, who in the Meiji 20s already held teaching positions. The second is composed of a generation of students represented by the likes of Furukawa Rōsen, who was roughly ten years younger than these scholars.

Both the new Buddhists of the Meiji 20s and the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai in the 30s understood Buddhism as an essentially scientific and rational construct. The source of this perspective is Inoue Enryō,<sup>43</sup> who asserted the

<sup>41</sup> Ōtani 2009.

<sup>42</sup> "As the headquarters of old Buddhism, the western capital [i.e., Kyoto] moves closer toward waning everyday. In inverse proportion, as the center for the new Buddhism the eastern capital [Tokyo], increasingly casts forth dazzling splendor" (Kai 1894, p. 83).

<sup>43</sup> Around the year Meiji 20, Inoue Enryō did not intend to revive traditional Buddhism, but to develop a new Buddhism for intellectuals. At the beginning of his 1887 *Bukkyō katsuron joron* 仏教活論序論 (Revitalizing Buddhism: An Introduction), while speaking of his intellectual journey so far, Inoue admits that his "discovery of pure truth in Buddhism is quite

union between Buddhism, philosophy, and science. His influence was great, especially in that he denied the existence of a divine Creator. The question of how to persuasively show the existence of a non-materialist universe in spite of the absence of a personal God became a key item on the agenda of Buddhist intellectuals after Inoue. In this context the word “pantheism,” considered capable of enduring philosophical scrutiny, was used.

Nakanishi referred to Buddhism as “pantheism.” For him, there were three stages in the evolution of religion: polytheism, monotheism, and pantheism. Therefore Buddhism, as an instantiation of the third, was regarded as the religion of the future. While Nakanishi argued that it was Japan’s mission for the twentieth century to elevate civilization from material to spiritual, he also held that the East was at that point still inferior to Europe and the United States in terms of religion, and this perception led to his theories of Buddhist reformation. In his aforementioned *Bukkyō kakumei ron*, he enumerates seven types of reforms: (1) progressive (*shinpoteki* 進歩的), (2) popular (*heiminteki* 平民的), (3) spiritual (*seishinteki* 精神的), (4) faithful (*shinkōteki* 信仰的), (5) social (*shakaiteki* 社会的), (6) historical (*rekishiteki* 歴史的), and (7) rational (*dōriteki* 道理的). As in Inoue’s civilizing Buddhism, Nakanishi’s proposal is also about the creation of a progressive and scientific Buddhism. His suggestions that one ought to be socially conscious, avoid being bogged down in scriptures, and find a way to connect Buddhist knowledge to faith, were also inherited by the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai. Compared to Inoue Enryō, Nakanishi’s originality is in his emphasis on

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recent” (Inoue 1967a, p. 383). In this work, Inoue declares that he was born into a Buddhist household and educated in Shin Buddhism, but realizing that truth was not there, began learning Confucianism after the Meiji Restoration. Feeling this was also insufficient, he expected truth to be in Christianity but, upon reading the Bible, Inoue again met with unsatisfactory results. In order to promote a new religion, he then attempted to achieve truth through Western scholarship, and as he continued his studies at university, discovered it within philosophy. However, in 1885, he realized that Buddhism had much in common with philosophy, and “having given up the ambition of creating a new religion,” he “decided to reform Buddhism, and make it the religion of the civilized world” (Inoue 1967a, p. 384). Inoue saw the actual clergy as terminally corrupt. For him, Buddhism was both “a religion within the world of reason and a doctrine for scholarly society” (Inoue 1967b, p. 367), and therefore he declares that “we need to acknowledge the fact that this is not the Buddhism of monks, but the Buddhism of the Japanese nation, of the Japanese people. The reformation of this Buddhism is not the responsibility of the clergy alone, but something we have to strive for as an educational issue. We need to make known the reason why one should devote undistracted attention to this reform” (Inoue 1967b, p. 372). In this way, he advocated a Buddhist reform within the framework of school education and dissociated from clerics and temples.

faith and recognition of the importance of religious experience. In his words, “true religion lies not in knowledge but rather in experience” (*shin-sei no shūkyō naru mono wa chishiki yorimo mushiro keiken ni sonshi* 真正の宗教なるものは智識よりも寧ろ経験に存し).<sup>44</sup> The fact that he emphasized faith and experience while attaching such importance to science may appear contradictory. Hoshino Seiji argues that this is actually a compartmentalization of these two domains.<sup>45</sup> However, since for Nakanishi Buddhism was a pantheistic religion that did not recognize any entity transcendent of the universe, the issue of the extent to which such a compartmentalization was actually possible appears open to question.

It is hard to assess the degree to which Nakanishi was influenced by Theosophical thought separately from Western philosophy and Christianity. Nevertheless, in *Gongo hōjō*, he mentions that he wrote his *Bukkyō kakumei ron* after reading Olcott’s works, and it is also clear that Nakanishi was stimulated by Theosophy from the fact that his use of the term “new Buddhism” was based on the Theosophist Sinnet’s terminology.<sup>46</sup> However, Nakanishi’s reformist program was more Protestant than Theosophical, and its religious eclecticism and tendency toward science made it closer to Unitarianism. For instance, in *Shūkyō taisei ron*, he praises Unitarianism as a pioneer of religious reformation, arguing that if Christians were to add pantheism and Buddhist doctrines to their teachings, then they would become Buddhists, and pointing out that Unitarianism in particular was already moving in that direction. In fact, by 1892, Nakanishi was taking part in Unitarian activities.

Hirai Kinza did not have as much influence in Japan as Nakanishi, but he too put forward his ingenious idea of a new religion, which he called “synthetic religion” (*sōgō shūkyō* 総合宗教).<sup>47</sup> According to this theory, religions do not actually worship idols or personalities, but truth, and all religions have this point in common. In order to attain to this truth, one needs to cultivate one’s heart and brighten one’s Buddha-nature, which is present in every being, including inorganic entities. However, since no religion actually possesses ultimate truth, it is necessary to combine several religions in

<sup>44</sup> Nakanishi 1889b, p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> Hoshino 2010.

<sup>46</sup> Nakanishi 1892a.

<sup>47</sup> Since Hirai left no comprehensive work on the subject, I have relied on Hirai 1892a (translation of Hirai 1892b), Hirai 1893a (translation of Hirai 1893b), and Hirai 1899. The last is the transcript of a lecture by Hirai.

order to draw closer to its ideal form. Furthermore, according to Hirai, this supra-religious perspective is already present in Japanese Shingaku. Besides the latter, Hirai's rhetoric also mixes Spencerian philosophy and ideas from the *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 (The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana). However, in light of the fact that he emphasized truth and regarded the Japanese people as seekers thereof, it is possible that he was influenced by Theosophy. Hirai also showed great interest in social issues, as can be seen in his *Shūkyō to seiji* 宗教と政治 (Religion and Politics), published in 1898. There, he advocated religious people's social activities and educational improvement, among other things. Considering his liberal and progressive perspective on both religious and social issues it was, arguably, only natural that Hirai too joined Unitarianism in 1899.

The Buddhist theories of both Nakanishi and Hirai were based on pantheistic worldviews. They aspired to harmonize Buddhism with science and other religions, while maintaining, at the same time, a high level of social awareness. Their Theosophical and Unitarian tendencies can be seen in their advocacy of an eclectic and ideal religion. However, according to their theories, if Buddhism and the various other historical religions were relativized, the very need for such appellations would, in the end, disappear. This is why both of these men distanced themselves from the word "Buddhism" and joined Unitarianism. The eclectic tendencies in Unitarianism at the time corresponded to their religious views. Due to its intellectual character, however, it was not to become the final destination of their religious odyssey. Nakanishi and Hirai both eventually left Unitarianism.

Compared to these radical new Buddhists, the younger generation can perhaps be regarded as conservative. They did not distance themselves from the term "Buddhism." As I have described above, theirs was an age when the relationship between scholarship and faith was again called into question. These young Buddhists, thinking as independent modern individuals, needed to walk unguided along the narrow path of free investigation and faith. Furthermore, although they continued to utilize the word "Buddhism," its essential meaning had changed greatly—or at least there had been many attempts to change it. I will discuss this point below.

#### NEW BUDDHISM: FROM SKEPTICISM TO FAITH

Among young Buddhists, there were two influential polemicists who valued Theosophy highly. One of them was Ōkubo Itaru 大久保格 (1865–1908, also known as Shōnan 昌南, and later as Yoshimura Kakudō 芳村格道). In an 1894

article entitled “Yunitariankyō to shinchigaku” ユニテリアン教と神智学 (Unitarianism and Theosophy),<sup>48</sup> he states that both groups are supra-sectarian, liberal, promoters of free investigation, and bearers of sophisticated moral sensibilities. After this he points out that Unitarianism contains a contradiction in claiming to be rationalist while maintaining theism, and that Theosophy is not just limited to common science but “transcends academia to include spiritual experiments and studies.” That is to say, he compares the strengths and weaknesses of both groups, arguing that Unitarianism is shallow and bright while Theosophy is dark and deep. Furthermore, in the article “Gakuriteki bukkyō no shōrai” 学理的仏教の将来 (The Future of Scientific Buddhism),<sup>49</sup> published in the following year, Ōkubo claims that contemporary Buddhism lacks intellectual elements and thus has no basis upon which to respond to the challenges of science and philosophy. According to him, it is necessary to establish a foundation for scientific Buddhism. Here, he praises the intellectual aspects of Theosophy, seeing it as a “bridge connecting scholarship and Buddhism.” If we refer to Ōkubo’s above-mentioned 1894 article, then perhaps we may infer that the scientific elements he speaks of here are not within the boundaries of rational, everyday science, but of a scientific worldview that included the occult and esoteric. His position, however, is somewhat difficult to understand.

Furukawa Rōsen’s appraisal of Theosophy was much clearer than that of Ōkubo. Furukawa, whose given name was Isamu 勇, was born in Wakayama Prefecture into a temple of the Nishi Honganji branch of the Shin school. A student at the denomination’s Futsū Kyōkō, he also became a member of the Hanseikai. He moved to Tokyo in 1889, and in 1892 entered Tokyo Imperial University’s special course in the area of Chinese studies (*kangaku* 漢学). He was a classmate of Suzuki Daisetsu, and junior, by one year, of Taoka Reion 田岡嶺雲 (1870–1912). From April 1893 he became responsible for a column in the journal *Bukkyō* titled “Hyōrin” 評林, where he analyzed contemporary events in Buddhist circles. He actively participated in Buddhist youth movements in Tokyo and in 1894 founded the Keiikai with a group of young progressive Buddhists. From 1895, he started participating in *zazen* 座禅 sessions at Engakuji 円覚寺 temple, but later contracted tuberculosis, which led to his passing in 1899. In histories of modern Japanese Buddhism, Furukawa is depicted as an important character who determined the direction of Shinbukkyō after 1897. He is regarded in this scholarship to have maintained

<sup>48</sup> Ōkubo 1894.

<sup>49</sup> Ōkubo 1895.

a fair perspective unbiased toward Buddhism in his essays while also to have particularly emphasized its social character. However, his claims did vary with changes in the times. In a certain sense, he can be seen as a spokesperson for the young Buddhists of the time.

There are many articles in which Furukawa refers to Unitarianism. In “Nijū yo nen igo no nidai kyōto” 二十四年以後の二大教徒 (Believers of the Two Great Religions after 1891),<sup>50</sup> published in 1891, he had already praised Unitarianism. He prophesied that Japanese Christianity, after going through the stage of Unitarianism, would develop into a new Christianity, the essence of which would consist of Buddhist doctrine. After this it would, perhaps, spread around the world. In his “Yunitariankyō o ronzu” ユニテリアン教を論ず (On Unitarianism),<sup>51</sup> Furukawa states that Unitarianism should have a powerful critical influence on religious society, playing an active role in the eradication of superstition, and, furthermore, that if Unitarianism wished to call itself a “religion,” then it should become Buddhism. That is, although he praises Unitarianism for its critical character, he also asserts that, in its current state, it lacks some of the attributes necessary to be called a “religion.” Here, we can also observe a certain pride in his understanding of Buddhism as a religion based on scientific principles.

On the other hand, while he does not refer to Theosophy very often, Furukawa does mention it in one of his significant articles, “Chibetto bukyō no tanken” 西藏仏教の探検 (Exploration of Tibetan Buddhism),<sup>52</sup> which was published in March 1895. According to this piece, Tibetan Buddhism was important for Japanese Buddhists not simply for the sake of investigating the proposition that the Buddha did not preach the Mahayana, but also for the study of mysticism. This is because mysticism was that which could save religious faith from the crisis it faced due to rational criticism. In a continuation of the arguments he made in “Kaigi jidai ni ireri,” Furukawa asserts the following:

In both the West and in Japan, the general tendency is toward skepticism, critique, disruption, and uncertainty. In this situation, even though there may be those who do not welcome the rise of mysticism, in recent years the brave Russian Madame Blavatsky has been very active in Europe, which is an indication that mysticism is rising.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Furukawa 1891.

<sup>51</sup> Furukawa 1901c, pp. 116–24.

<sup>52</sup> Furukawa 1901a, pp. 180–86.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184–85.



In this article, he points out that the popularity of Theosophy, hypnotism, and Zen was a sign of the rise of mysticism in Japan. After discussing how mysticism became fashionable in Europe due to Blavatsky who had studied Tibetan Buddhism, he argues that even though Japanese Zen and Shin-gon are valuable types of mysticism, since their contemporary forms are degenerate, it is necessary to learn Tibetan Buddhism in order to practice mysticism.

Furukawa's arguments on mysticism are actually not his own. They draw, in large part, from the mystical philosophy of Taoka Reiun, a year his senior in the Chinese studies course at Tokyo Imperial University.

Taoka Reiun is known today as a literary critic, journalist, and as an anti-establishment intellectual. However, he also devoted himself to the study of Schopenhauer, and read on Zhuangzi 莊子, Indian philosophy, psychophysics, hypnotism, and spiritualism.<sup>54</sup> In 1893 he traveled to Engakuji temple in Kamakura. Gaining nothing after a week of practice there, it was while reading Schopenhauer that he had an epiphany: that no-self was the basis of both Zen and the *nenbutsu* 念仏 alike. Afterwards, he started his studies of yoga and hypnotism at Tokyo Imperial University. For him, the state of no-self was the ultimate good, "absolute completeness, the ambit of the free illuminated spirit," it was the Buddha, it was God.<sup>55</sup> Zen meditative concentration (Sk. *dhyāna*) is none other than the state of no-self brought about by spiritual concentration.

Taoka was versed not only in the classics of mysticism (German mysticism, Indian Yogic philosophy, Neoplatonism), but was fully informed regarding the contemporary situation in Europe. In his "Jūkyū seiki seiō ni okeru tōyō shisō" 十九世紀西欧に於ける東洋思想 (Eastern Thought in Nineteenth-Century Western Europe)<sup>56</sup> published in 1894, he refers to Theosophy and Swedenborgianism, and says that following the popularity of the former, vegetarianism, cremation, and the study of hypnotism had blossomed. In part one of his "Shinpi tetsugaku" 神秘哲学 (Mystical Philosophy),<sup>57</sup> Taoka claims that it was as a reaction to a skeptical, mechanistic, and analytical atmosphere that mystical theories were born. He also predicted

<sup>54</sup> Nishida 1973. This information is based on the memoirs of Oyanagi Shigeta 小柳司氣太 (1870–1940) found in *Sōun* 叢雲 (Higuchi 1910). Furthermore, here "psychophysics" (*seishinteki butsurigaku* 精神的物理学) refers to the kind of experimental psychology practiced by Motora Yūjirō 元良勇次郎 (1858–1912), a professor at Tokyo Imperial University.

<sup>55</sup> Taoka 1973.

<sup>56</sup> Taoka 1894a.

<sup>57</sup> Taoka 1894b.

that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a new mystical philosophy would come into vogue. Furukawa's theory in which he attempts to overcome skepticism toward Theosophy and mystical experience was in fact no more than an application of Taoka's ideas to Japanese Buddhism. After reading Furukawa's article, Taoka published an essay entitled "Zenshū no ryūkō o ronjite konnichi no shisōkai no sūsei ni oyobu" 禅宗の流行を論じて今日の思想界の趨勢に及ぶ (On the [Current] Popularity of the Zen Sect, with Further Considerations of Contemporary Intellectual Trends)<sup>58</sup> in September 1895 where he states that due to the profuse atmosphere of skepticism brought about by experimental science, Japan found itself in a "faithless and irreligious" (*mushinkō mushūkyō* 無信仰無宗教) state. People, however, cannot live without faith. By realizing, through Zen, that "one should not seek Zen outside of the self (*jiko* 自己), and one should not seek the Buddha outside of one's intrinsic nature (*jishō* 自性)," a person is thus able to abandon skepticism. He regards Zen's popularity as a reaction against skeptical materialism, and predicts that it is Japan's role to thoroughly investigate the mystical thought of the East based on Western philosophy.

In "Jūkyū seiki seiō ni okeru tōyō shisō," Taoka described his great dream of unification between Eastern and Western thought:

Material civilization (*busshitsu teki no bunmei* 物質的の文明) was imported into the East due to Western [influences], but the East has not [yet] caused spiritual civilization (*reisei teki no bunmei* 靈性的の文明) to be implanted in Western Europe. Upon the harmonious and mutual assimilation of Eastern and Western civilizations, might we see in the coming twentieth century the rising of a new civilization which shall spread its light throughout the entire planet?<sup>59</sup>

He goes on to attempt such harmonization in several of his articles. Furthermore in the same period, articles discussing the concordance between Western ideas and Japanese Buddhist thought—such as Suzuki Daisetsu's "Emāson no zengaku ron" and "Suēdenbori to Kōbō daishi" 瑞典保里と弘法大師 (Swedenborg and Kōbō Daishi)<sup>60</sup> by Ishidō Emyō 石堂恵猛 (n.d.)—were published. One should note that in the background of these attempts by young Buddhists to integrate Eastern and Western thought, there was the aforementioned crisis religions encountered in the face of rationalism.

<sup>58</sup> Taoka 1895.

<sup>59</sup> Taoka 1894a.

<sup>60</sup> Published in serial form in the journal *Dentō* 伝灯 (Ishidō 1895).

Theosophy was regarded as a means to recover the experiential dimension of religion. Although having once disparaged Zen, Furukawa, perhaps due to his practice of *zazen* at Engakuji and discussions with the likes of Suzuki Daisetsu, reconsidered his position. In “Yunitarian, shinbukkyō, oyobi zen” ユニテリアン、新仏教、及び禪 (Unitarianism, New Buddhism, and Zen),<sup>61</sup> he states that Buddhism should once turn into Unitarianism, and then once again go back into being Buddhism. His idea was that after going through the skeptical and critical age of Unitarianism, Buddhism would be sublated into a new dogmatic Buddhism. Utilizing the same rhetoric as Ōkubo, Furukawa praised Zen as being deeper and broader than Unitarianism, and claimed that it was through Zen that this sublation should happen. The Zen he speaks of here is influenced by the “no-self” psychological concept put forward by Taoka. Furukawa asserts that Zen is present in every religion, there being such things as the Zen of *nenbutsu*, the Zen of *daimoku* 題目, the Zen of Yoga, and the Zen of Christianity. Thus, he expanded the meaning of the word “Zen” to include “religious experience.” In “Emāson no zengaku ron,” Suzuki puts forward a similar argument. However, the strategy of universalizing Buddhist traditional terms by using them in their original form while explaining them via psychology and philosophy was already observable in Hirai Kinza, who utilized Spencerian philosophy when presenting “Mahayana Buddhism” to the United States.

In reaction to these arguments favorable to Theosophy, Furukawa’s close friend and later renowned journalist Sugimura Jūō emphasized the relationship between scholarship and social activism in Shinbukkyō. In “Shin Bukkyōto no jissaiteki hōmen” 新仏教徒の實際的方面 (The Practical Direction of New Buddhists),<sup>62</sup> he asserts that one cannot assess through scriptures the true character and value of religion, and that the worthiness of a religion is measured through its activities in society. According to him, new Buddhists should not be bogged down in discussions on scholarship and truth. On the contrary, they should be able to present to actual society “a conclusion from the perspective of faith” (*shinkō no ue yori idetaru ketsuron* 信仰の上より出でたる結論). He suggested that new Buddhists pay less attention to matters of dogma and more to social issues. In this article Sugimura overcame, through social activism, the above-mentioned paradox between scholarship and faith seen in the new Buddhists of the second half of the Meiji 20s, and is considered to have determined the general direction of the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai in the Meiji 30s and after. Heirs to Inoue Enryō’s effort to “civilize”

<sup>61</sup> Furukawa 1901d, pp. 253–57.

<sup>62</sup> Sugimura 1895.

Buddhism and influenced by Unitarianism, young Buddhists followed the path emphasized by Sugimura, while Theosophy disappeared from their discourses.

Sugimura disliked the occultist aspect of Theosophy. His experience of studying at a Unitarian school is one of the reasons for his quest for a rational and social religion,<sup>63</sup> while through his encounter with the Theosophist Edward Stephenson, he learned of Theosophy's dogmatism and limitations as a universal religion. When Sugimura met Dharmapāla (1864–1933) during the latter's visit to Japan in 1902, he was pleased by the fact that the Sri Lankan had left Theosophy.<sup>64</sup> Sugimura conceived of a modern Buddhism different from the occultist version of "Theosophy," and he seems to have regarded Dharmapala's new Buddhism to match, in general terms, this vision.

## CONCLUSION

Compared to its contemporary, the Seishinshugi movement, the Shin Bukkyōto Dōshikai is known for having advocated rationalism, common sense, and sound faith, and for emphasizing a constructive social activism. If we take "disenchantment" as an indicator of "modernization," then the Dōshikai is its most distinctive example. Should we make use of the classification "Protestant Buddhism," then the Dōshikai shared common features with Dharmapala's Buddhism, which is taken up as a model of that classification, and of which these new Buddhists were aware. Although their new Buddhism seems very close to that of Unitarianism, they differ in that while one is theistic, the other is pantheistic. Suzuki Daisetsu's words "the Universe itself is God, and there is no God beyond the universe, and there is no Universe outside of God" established a difference with Christianity and, as an idea compatible with the natural sciences, became one of the greatest premises for intellectual Buddhists in modern Japan.

Nevertheless, in "Shin Bukkyōto no jissaiteki hōmen," Sugimura does not refer at all to the problem of how one might develop such a pantheistic faith, perhaps because Sugimura himself had practiced at Engakuji, which

<sup>63</sup> From 1893 to 1896 Sugimura studied at the Jiyū Gakuin 自由学院 (later renamed Sen-shin Gakuin 先進学院) run by the Unitarians. See Kobayashi 2005.

<sup>64</sup> According to Sugimura, the two men exchanged opinions during Dharmapala's visit to Japan. Sugimura mentions Dharmapala's leaving Theosophy, and introduced his words that "in the genuine doctrine of the Buddha, there are no superstitions or rituals, and religion is regarded as an activity devoted to humanity in this world," thus emphasizing the latter's proximity to new Buddhist ideals (Sugimura 1902).

provided him a degree of experience and understanding sufficient to its realization. From the rationalistic perspective of new Buddhism, experience was a subjective issue that was difficult to address. In any case, the problem of faith was not resolved by the Shinbukkyō movement. Mesmerism and mysticism would become popular in the mid-Meiji 30s, and Suzuki Daisetsu would begin to introduce Swedenborg in the last years of the Meiji period.

In the Meiji 30s, the first-generation new Buddhist Nakanishi Ushirō at one point returned to the old Buddhism he had criticized. However, after experiencing many religions, he ended his life as a Tenrikyō believer. Hirai Kinza changed from Unitarianism to Dōkai 道会 (“The Way” Church) and, while conducting psychic research, once again became interested in Theosophy. He eventually became involved in the individual practice of Zen, or that of a form of Japanese religious psychotherapy based on Buddhism and Shingaku.

As mentioned above, Theosophy’s influence endured even after Olcott’s departure, and continued serving as a guideline for the reformist ideas of young Buddhists. As the recurrent waves of disenchantment and re-enchantment observed in Hirai’s example show, the course of modernization is not a straightforward one-way path, and the same applies to other Asian countries, as well as in Europe and the United States.

(Translated by Orion Klautau)

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