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Émile Guimet, the History of Religions, and Japanese Buddhism

FRÉDÉRIC GIRARD

I. GUIMET THE MAN

Guimet's Intellectual Scene

THE EXPERIENCE of Émile Guimet (1836–1918) in Japan was decisive for the way in which he envisioned the history of religions, a discipline taking shape in France in his day, one or two decades after it had been conceived in Germany. He became a significant actor in this process after the Musée Guimet began publication of a new journal entitled *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* in 1880. This was just a few years after Guimet himself, a most judicious collector and connoisseur, had visited China, Japan, and India. I seek to set out here the various elements which played a part in the development of this new discipline, paying special attention to Guimet's role in it. In particular, I seek to reconstruct his understanding of Japanese religions, especially Buddhism, by drawing upon documents which have in part remained unpublished to this day, and upon the testimony of close collaborators such as Félix Régamey (1844–1907) and Léon de Milloué (1842–n.d.).

Émile Guimet was a prominent figure in the history of Oriental art and museology in France, and it is well known that he founded a museum bearing his family name, the Musée Guimet, in a quarter of Paris which was both elegant and popular. Being close to the Trocadéro, the Eiffel Tower, and the Champs-Élysées, it has been integrated into one of the most

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The Eastern Buddhist 48/1: 49–109

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important tourist centers in France. The conception of this museum may be said to have influenced the sensibilities of its visitors in relation to Oriental religions and thought for almost a century and a half. The importance of this museum among Western people for their perception of the Oriental world cannot be underestimated, whether one thinks of the cultivated public in general or of academic personalities.¹

What is less well known is that Guimet was himself most ambitious in the academic fields of the humanities, fine arts, and the history of religions. His image has rather been that of a businessman established in the upper bourgeoisie of Lyon. He was the son of the president of a society known as “Bleu Guimet,” and this association stayed with him through his life. He was therefore regarded as a person interested in Egyptian and Oriental religions, and in archaeology, but as some have unkindly said, as an amateur motivated by curiosity and without professional expertise. Accordingly, he has not been taken seriously enough by Western scholars in the various academic fields which interested him. An exception to this was Bernard Frank (1927–1996), my deeply missed teacher in Japanese studies, who maintained a different image of Guimet as an initiator of serious studies in the field of Oriental, and specifically Japanese, religions through his presentation and analysis of the pantheon of Buddhism and Shinto.² One of Frank’s own great achievements is his major work on the Japanese Buddhist pantheon, which he developed while organizing the items of Japanese religious art in the Guimet Museum.³ This he did in parallel with a study of his own collection of Japanese *ofuda* お札 (religious amulets) as a reflection of Japanese religiosity.⁴

In continuity with Frank’s work, alas left prematurely unfinished, I seek to examine the work of Guimet in a new light.⁵ I pay special attention to the dialogues that Guimet had with representatives of Japanese Buddhist sects and with Shinto priests during his travels in the Far East. These travels took place from summer to winter in 1876, the ninth year of the Meiji era, under the auspices, though without the financial support, of the French Ministry of Public Education. Guimet was a cultivated man who had been interested in Egyptian archaeology since his youth. His interest in the cults of Isis, made

¹ See Omoto and Macouin (1990) 2001; Omoto and Makuwan 1996; Jarrige 2000; Sueki 1999.

² Frank 1986, 1989, 1991, 1992.

³ Frank 1991.

⁴ Frank 2006.

⁵ See Girard 2010.

up of elements from Egyptian, Greco-Roman, Celtic, and Gaelic cults, stayed with him until his death. He was well informed about the analysis of Isis cults from the work of another specialist, Georges Lafaye (1854–1927),⁶ and authored two works of his own on these topics: “L’Isis Romaine”⁷ and “Les Isiaques de la Gaule.”⁸ He also knew very well the philosophical studies of Athanasius Kircher (1601–1680) which centered on a syncretic, Neoplatonic pantheon as presented in *La Chine Illustrée* (China Illustrated; 1670),⁹ a work which Guimet owned. While Kircher can be regarded as a forerunner of comparative religion, Guimet himself was hoping that his studies of religion would sow some happiness in society.

When he started out to the Far East, Guimet shared the common ideals of French intellectuals of his day, being not attached, or only weakly attached, to the Catholic faith, holding republican views similar to the socialism of Charles Fourier (1772–1837), in which society was to be made up of “phalansteries,” that is, communities based on an ideal of justice and on their own internal rules. This was not dissimilar to the Shirakaba 白樺 Association led by Arishima Takeo 有島武郎 (1878–1923) in Japan under the influence of Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). But like some of his acquaintances, such as the politicians Jean Jaurès (1859–1914) and Georges Clémenceau (1841–1929), he was in search of a philosophical and moral system which grounded its metaphysics and ethical norms without reference to a supreme being or God such as is found in Christianity, seeking an equivalent for this supreme being in a religion with no supreme deity, as Buddhism was regarded in European countries at that time. In an increasingly sceptical, agnostic, and atheistic country like France, which had developed the concept of laicity and the concomitant notions of the separation of the church and state, and freedom of faith, Buddhism came across as an interesting atheistic philosophical system, which, though unknown in Europe, had succeeded in producing harmonious and developed societies in the Far East. It may be noted, incidentally, that Régamey was involved with the insurrectional Commune movement in 1871 and was obliged to flee to England where he met the poets Rimbaud and Verlaine whom he sketched in unforgettable drawings.¹⁰ When Guimet himself went to Japan, he was registered on official documents as a “scholar” (*kyōshi* 教師), and perhaps because of

⁶ Lafaye 1884.

⁷ Guimet 1896.

⁸ Guimet 1900–1916.

⁹ We use this abbreviated form of the title in this essay. For the full title see Kircher 1670.

¹⁰ See Girard 2012, p. 9, n. 1.

this, a Shinto priest named Nishikawa Yoshisuke 西川吉輔 (1816–1880) of Hiyoshi Jinja 日吉神社 at Sakamoto 阪本, himself a scholar in Nativist studies in the tradition of Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843), quarrelled with him on the assumption that he was a Christian missionary.¹¹ Guimet naturally denied this, declaring that he was only a scholar in the field of religions. The word *kyōshi* was evidently ambiguous for Japanese people and might have carried the implication of being a missionary, but in fact Guimet was not closely allied to Catholicism.

Biographical Elements

Émile Guimet was a man of the nineteenth century who in many ways fitted perfectly into his time. A businessman against his will, he was above all a humanist who made use of his resources in the service of research. This was reflected first in his prodigious grasp of culture, nourished by the classics, and second in his humane and social attitude. Having inherited the family business, he found himself at the head of a company which he sought to direct on the basis of humanely conceived justice for all his staff. In this perspective he was apparently very close to the Fourierist ideals of the businessman and political theorist Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) that were current in the fertile French intellectual context of the time, even though no specific affiliation to this trend can be documented. I outline here just a few features of this complex personality that may help to explain his interest in the Far East, and to view his investigations into religion from angles that seem to be appropriate, given my own onsite investigations and examinations of relevant texts. There remain many grey areas which, it may be hoped, will one day be illuminated by the discovery of relevant historical documents.

Guimet was born in Lyon in 1836 and died at Fleurieu-sur-Saône, near Lyon, in 1918. He was the son of a chemist and polytechnic industrialist who invented the artificial ultramarine color famously known as “Artificial Outremer.” His mother was a painter. The young Guimet focused early on the arts (ceramics, painting, and music), and on science and literature. He was particularly interested in philosophical and religious questions, which he perceived as being at the heart of human development and society. In 1860 he succeeded his father in the flourishing development of “ultramarine blue,” perhaps with little initial vocation but with tenacity and professionalism.

¹¹ See letter no. 9 in Yamamoto 2002, pp. 31–32, and Breen and Teeuwen 2010, pp. 117, and 234, n. 42.

Guimet's love for Egypt was long standing, and he maintained it throughout his life. From November 9, 1865, to January 16, 1866, he went on a journey there, the chosen land of religions and the cradle of all else, as was for a long time believed in Europe. This love of Egypt opened him up to the ancient religions, to philosophy and archaeology, and to a confident search for pure morality, grandiose philosophy, and intense religion. It also led him to acquire whatever interested him in respect to books, objects, or mummies, all collectable materials which reveal in their own way "the good, the true and the beautiful" as expressed in Plato's famous definition. He chronicled his journeys.¹² Did he conceive of them as "a journey to the East," such as those undertaken by nineteenth-century men of letters, carrying with them the works of Gustave Flaubert or of Arthur Rimbaud, as did Gérard de Nerval? To be sure, in 1868 he visited Greece, Turkey, Romania, and published his *L'Orient d'Europe au fusain: Notes de voyage* (Europe's Orient in Charcoal Sketches: Notes from a Journey) in the same year.¹³ The following year he traveled in two other countries that were then considered to be part of the East: Algeria and Tunisia. Following this, his thirst for study knew no end, and he devoted most of the rest of his life to scientific investigations punctuated by numerous lectures and publications. He participated in the First International Congress of Orientalists in 1873, organized by the Japanologist Léon de Rosny (1837–1914), attending in particular the Far Eastern section (China, Japan, India, and Tartary). This congress was attended by personalities such as Johann Joseph Hoffmann (1805–1878) of Leiden, Philippe Édouard Foucaux (1811–1894), Joseph Halévy (1827–1917), Gaston Maspéro (1846–1916), James Legge (1818–1897), Charles Elliot (1801–1875), Ernest Satow (1843–1929), the Shinshū monk Shimaji Mokurai 嶋地黙雷 (1838–1911), President of the State Council in Edo, Gotō Shōjirō 後藤象二郎 (1838–1897), Governor of Kanagawa, Mutsu Yōnosuke 陸奥陽之助 (1844–1897), former Extraordinary Ambassador and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Swiss Confederation in Japan, Aimé Humbert (1818–1900), the sinologist and Japanologist François Turretini (1845–1908), Chairman of the Swiss Committee and Director of the Atsumé-gusa and the Banzai-sau in Geneva—important collections which included the work of sinologists such as Stanislas Julien (1797–1873) and Hervey de Saint-Denis (1822–1892)—and Henry Freudenreich (1825–1909), a traveler in Japan.¹⁴

¹² Guimet 1867.

¹³ Guimet 1868.

¹⁴ *Congrès International des Orientalistes* 1873, n.p.

This list of scholars and other leading figures gives an idea of the academic and social environment in which Guimet moved before he took off to the Far East three years later, in 1876. In the same year, he attended the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia where he met Félix Régamey, a writer and painter of great talent who became very attached to Japan. He also became friends with the woodblock artist Kawanabe Gyōsai 河鍋曉齋 (1831–1889), a disciple of the famously innovative painter Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北齋 (1760–1849). Guimet then went to Japan with some Japanese companions and stayed there from August 28 to November 3, 1876, before returning to France in March 1877 after an additional tour in China, India, and Ceylon. His journey was recorded in a newspaper, of which he was the co-founder, entitled *L'Exploration: Journal des Conquêtes de la Civilisation sur tous les Points du Globe* (Exploration: Journal of the Victories of Civilization throughout the World) as follows:

Our colleague in the Geographical Society and one of the founders of *L'Exploration*, Mr. Émile Guimet, undertook a trip around the world supported by the Minister of Education, during which he stopped in Japan to study the different religions there. After visiting temples at Shiba in Tokyo, Nikkō, and Ise, Mr. Guimet traveled overland to Kyoto, accompanied throughout by Mr. Régamey, a skilled graphic artist, many of whose very popular sketches of Japan have been published in illustrated magazines in Europe and America. The two travelers were received in the holy city with the same enthusiasm which had met them everywhere since they set foot on Japanese soil. The governor of Kyoto provided several officials to arrange their visits to the main temples, where unusual receptions awaited them. During their stay seven large consultations were held in Kyoto with the high priests of all the temples, including one of the Shinto religion and others for the various Buddhist sects. The last one was arranged for the Sinsiou [Shinshū] sect, the most important of all, and this was convened in the famous pavilion known as Taiko-sama. The others were held in the temples themselves, usually in front of their main halls. Mr. Guimet could not be more pleased with the outcome of his trip. The ceremonies he attended, he said, had been of the most imposing character, and he would leave Japan with very complete and accurate documentation as well as some very important materials. As we have already reported, our young and

learned compatriot has proposed to establish a Japanese school at his own expense in his hometown in France. Many students were promised to him for this purpose in Kyoto, and he hopes that several more will be sent from Tokyo, where the Minister of Education is evidently firmly interested to welcome this new foundation.¹⁵

At the provincial Congress of Orientalists, held in Lyon after his return from Japan in 1878, Guimet displayed his collections and played a central role in the proceedings. As the president declared:

For the facilitation of Oriental studies, Mr. Émile Guimet does not simply convene a group of Oriental scholars, but also wishes that the monuments of the East can be studied easily in our city. Visitors to the Trocadéro Palace can admire treasures brought by our zealous president from his trip to the Orient, which are as yet but a small part of the wonders which will be housed in the museum to be inaugurated.¹⁶

Once again a host of renowned scholars were in attendance: the Sanskritist Émile Burnouf (1821–1907), the Tibetologist Philippe-Edouard Foucaux, the Egyptologist Gaston Maspéro, the historian Ernest Renan (1823–1892), Léon de Rosny, the sinologist and book collector Henri Cordier (1856–1923), and Kuki Ryūichi 九鬼隆一 (1850–1931), Councillor of State and Secretary General of the Ministry of Education in Japan, who had helped Guimet during his travels in the archipelago. Kuki also happened to be the father of the philosopher Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造 (1888–1941). Cross-cultural themes were discussed, such as, “What species of lotus were considered sacred by the Egyptians, the Indians, Chinese, and the Japanese?” or “What are the relations between Japanese Shinto and Chinese Sen-Tao [Shendao]?” Other questions touch on universal problems in religions such as: “What exactly, according to Buddhist ideas, is the state of the soul of Buddha in paradise (nirvana)?” Guimet’s interests are characterized by a continuity running from before and after his trip to the Far East. In 1878 and 1880, he published reports on his tours in Japan in literary form under the title *Promenades Japonaises* (Japanese Walks), and created the Museum of Religions at Lyon in 1879. He continued to lecture and publish books and articles such as those mentioned below, and in 1880 he founded the *Revue*

¹⁵ Hertz 1877.

¹⁶ *Congrès Provincial Orientaliste* 1880, n.p.

de l'Histoire des Religions under the auspices of his museum. In 1900, after the world exhibition in Paris, as a sign of the successful and persistent continuity of his work since his visit to Japan, he co-created the Société Franco-Japonaise together with Japanologists, Japanophiles, and Japanese personalities, with himself as vice president and Régamey as general secretary.

Throughout his life, Guimet's curiosity regarding Egypt was to remain steady, as shown by his publications: "Le Dieu d'Apulée" (The God of Apuleius, 1895), "L'Isis romaine" (The Roman Isis, 1896), "Plutarque et l'Égypte" (Plutarch and Egypt, 1898), and "Isiaques de la Gaule" (Followers of Isis in Gaul; 1900, 1912, 1916). At the same time, his range continued to expand into other Eastern areas, marked as he was by his experience in Japan and the Far East, and this also served to enrich the methods of anthropology, ethnology, the history of religion, and the history of art. It was Edward Said who denoted three main families of Orientalists in the nineteenth century: academics and scholars, poets and philosophers, and politicians and men of action.¹⁷ If we follow this classification, Guimet belongs to all three: he is a researcher and a writer, a philosopher, and a businessman. He suggests translating the Buddhist concept of causality, in business terms, as "capital, intelligence, and labor."¹⁸ Might his love of Egypt and his quest for the original Mother indicate an affinity with the Saint-Simonian movement?¹⁹ Guimet's Orient is however that of Asia and not of North Africa, and the element of colonialism is lacking. We must therefore ask: Where did this universal intellectual curiosity come from?

In Search of Guimet's Religious Conceptions

Guimet seems to have been imbued with the idea that the success of the great world religions arises from the fact that their founders were able to solve the major social problems of their time. He himself was at the head of a company employing personnel whose best welfare he wished to ensure, and he therefore understood himself to be concerned about the same issues. He lived in "the hope that these [scientific] works might sow some happiness."²⁰

¹⁷ Said 1979, p. 15.

¹⁸ *Annales du Musée Guimet* 1880, p. 341; see too Girard 2012, p. 68.

¹⁹ Guimet (1886) provides an account of himself speaking to a circle of Saint-Simonians. Concerning this possible connection with Saint-Simonians, a brief allusion is made in Omoto and Macouin (1990) 2001, pp. 162–63.

²⁰ Frank 1991, p. 24.

In religious matters he inevitably shared the conceptions typical of his time, on the one hand drawing on Greek, Roman, and Egyptian features, and on the other hand on Judaeo-Christian monotheism. He does not seem to have been a convinced Catholic, but he would have inherited certain cultural values, and we may therefore ask how he conceived of the existence and the status of other religions, which, according to common assumptions, came into conflict with a Christianity that was exclusive in matters of faith. In his academic work we find negative terminology such as “fetishism,” “idolatry,” or “paganism” applied to non-Christian religions. Such language is inherited from that used by missionaries since the sixteenth century when referring to religions regarded as “polytheistic,” a term itself now regarded as quite out-dated. At the same time, he was extremely respectful toward those religions which, according to him, deserved greater attention on the part of scholars.

II. ISIS WORSHIP AND NEOPLATONISM

Guimet’s academic contributions deserve more than the epithet “sometimes disorderly curiosities”²¹ that was applied to his essays on the religion of Isis. He was in fact the author of books on such famous Greco-Roman and Egyptian figures as the god of Apuleius, Plutarch in Egypt, and the Roman Isis, in which he demonstrated his commitment to scientific methods. His collections are characterized by a systematic concern. He founded the museum in Lyon that bears his name in 1879 and donated his collection to the French state in 1884. It was then transferred to the current premises in Paris. From 1928 to 1929 the museum was attached to the system of national museums and was established as a “major department” in 1945. Although some of his Egyptological work might be considered invalid, his perseverance and his intuition concerning his vision, together with a consistent and logical approach, was a significant influence on Europeans reacting to the East. It will therefore be important to identify and highlight the main elements of the “science of religions” (*science des religions*) which were important for Guimet. His conceptual outline seems to come, at a greater or less distance, from Platonism or Neoplatonism. Is it not the case that these, as seen in the Greek and Latin authors, or in the Renaissance, though not having direct influence on him—for he is much too scientific for that—nevertheless presented a backdrop for his research?

Plutarch and Apuleius are the two great ancient sources for descriptions of the worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis that were developed in

²¹ Bonnefoy 1999, p. 587.

various forms in Europe: first the syncretic Greco-Roman form, then those of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In these Guimet found a model of a pantheon that was structured, hierarchical, and driven by soteriological dynamism, leading to the salvation of the soul through union with the supreme God, with deities, demigods, and kings seeking universal validity. Here, the divinities of Egypt, the oldest in the world and yet of a local nature, whether pertaining to a cult of sacred animals or deified humans, appear as a rational way of embodying the principles and functions at work in the world (heaven, earth, water, fertility, and so on). That is, they appear ultimately as philosophical and religious concepts such as those developed especially by Pythagoras, Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, the latter having conceived the idea of an undefinable supreme God above all others, which foreshadowed the Christian God.

An *interpretatio graeca* had come to equate the gods of the Egyptian pantheon with those of the Greek pantheon. Furthermore, the idea emerged that religion is a universal phenomenon with a birthplace in Egypt, located at the crossroads of the two continents of Europe and Asia. Guimet was familiar with that tradition. He said for example that the myth of Osiris as a beneficent god killed by treachery and enthroned as king-savior and judge of the dead, anticipates the passion of Christ. According to a well-established system of correspondences, an Egyptian deity can be seen as a Greek god, a Roman god, or a divinity in a particular aboriginal tradition. These conceptions, following the superimposition of the metaphysical structure of Neoplatonism, divide the deities into horizontal and vertical groupings. The latter form a hierarchy above which is an absolute that unifies all being in its purity, while in the world below there is a plurality of phenomena that is dominated by passions and dark forces. The soul, which exists in the world, serves to connect these two groupings.

Together with Georges Lafaye, Guimet was a pioneer in the rediscovery of the cult of Isis in the late nineteenth century.²² Their work was made known by Franz Cumont (1868–1947) who highly praised their scholarly essays. This Neoplatonist-inspired system of thought took concrete form in the “Table of Isis” attributed to Plato, discovered in 1525 (see fig. 1). Here the pantheon of Isis is organized into a coherent whole involving iconic attributes of the deities as well as hieroglyphic letters that define their function. With Isis at the center they comprise thirty-five divinities such as the ibis-headed Thoth, Ptah of Memphis, the falcon-headed Horus, Anubis the psychopomp, the lion-headed Sekhmet, the Apis bull and Nevis; then crocodiles, sphinxes, baboons, canopic

²² Lafaye 1884.

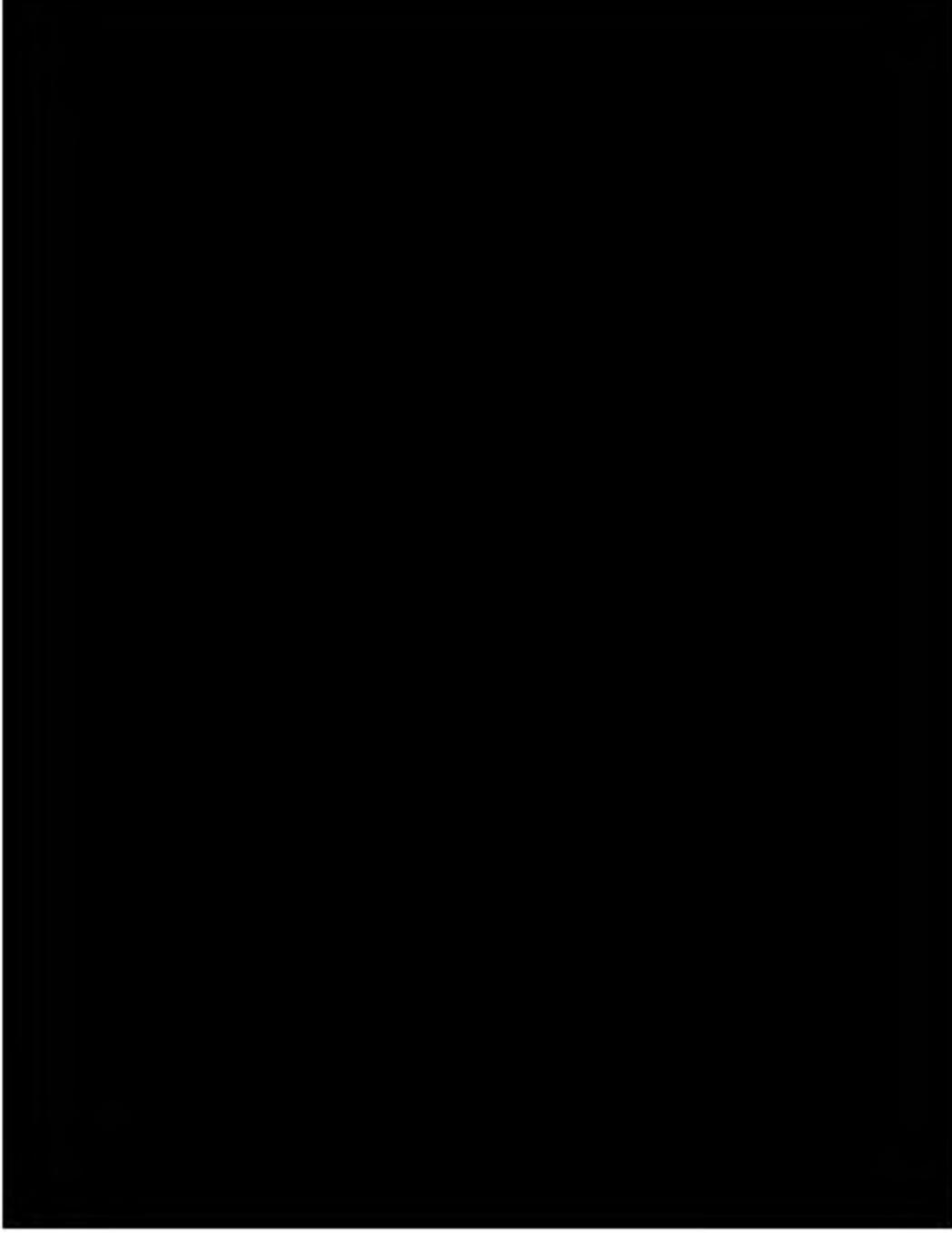


Figure 1. The Table of Isis as reproduced in Kircher's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1655).

jars, beetles, scorpions, and mummies; then come other objects of worship with divine attributes, crowns, special hairstyles, tiaras, sticks, sceptres, and vases with intertwined emblems and indecipherable pseudo-hieroglyphics. All this was suggestive of a comprehensive directory of these deities, their symbols, and their respective functions, first in the Egyptian world and then by implication in all the world's religions. In this way the foundations of a scientific comparative study of religions were laid, at least potentially, during the Renaissance, as in the writings of Lorentius Pignorius (1571–1631), who attempted to trace Indian divinities to Egyptian origins.²³

The German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher extended the theory of Pignorius on Egyptian gods to India, China, Japan, and the two Americas, in a corpus of Egyptological knowledge compiled in a Neoplatonic perspective, where the religion, philosophy, and theosophy of Egypt were brought into symbiosis. This was set down in his *Oedipus aegyptiacus* (1655), of which a summarized version appeared in his *La Chine Illustrée*, a work that Guimet possessed in his library. According to Kircher, the world is inhabited by cosmological ideas, initial concepts corresponding to figures (gods or symbols) with religious attributes, represented by the hieroglyphs. The cosmos is composed of elementary forces represented in the guise of gods that rise or fall through four levels of being, namely the spheres or regions of the ideal, the intellectual, the sidereal, and the elemental. These spiritual levels are all presumed to communicate with each other through dynamic powers such as deities which emanate from an unseen divine center.

Kircher explains the hidden meaning of the Table of Isis as follows:

The Egyptians . . . saw divinity in two ways: either as an eternal understanding in contemplation of itself and separated from all commerce with material things, enjoying ineffable happiness in its state of divinity; or as standing in relation to the created things which it governs, established in its center, from which geniuses and fruitful substances emerge, animating and giving fertility to the things of this world and supporting them with its power. They conceived of God as having a triple power, a God which forms the substance on which all things depend, as they had learned from Mercury Trismegistus. This God was like a seal imprinted on the various classes of things in the world, sentient or insentient. This is how the Table of Isis was conceived.²⁴

²³ Pignorius 1669.

²⁴ Kircher 1655, pp. 89ff.

Kircher interpreted this analysis in terms of a threefold metaphysical terracing. At the highest level, a numinous principle expresses the divine will and brings to light the hidden workings of secret forces. Further down there is a humid heat which ensures the persistence of the cosmos by increasing and decreasing the perpetual generation of matter. At the most elementary level are found the negative, mixed forces of the darkened mind, with defects such as hatred, envy, or hypocrisy. He believed that the three hypostases of Neoplatonism could be recognized in this structure.

The Table of Isis as explained by Kircher received many comments. Éliphas Lévi (1810–1870) in his *Histoire de la magie* (1860) reported Kircher's description along the following lines:

The learned Jesuit divined that it [the Table] contained the hieroglyphic key of sacred alphabets, though he was unable to develop the explanation. It is divided into three equal compartments; above are the twelve houses of heaven and below are the corresponding distributions of labor throughout the year, while in the middle place are twenty-one sacred signs answering to the letters of the alphabet.²⁵

Kircher describes the central span as being divided into seven areas, the lower bay having an entrance at each end, the whole set being considered to correspond to a partition of sacred spaces used in rituals. In all, forty-five enumerate leading figures and a number of smaller symbols. The forty-five figures are further grouped into fifteen triads, four in the upper bay, seven in the central span, and four in the lower bay. Kircher analyzes both this table and the principles of Neoplatonic metaphysics in three strata, from the center to the periphery, in much the same way as in a mandala, posing a dynamic of the mutual inclusion of the One and the All:

The Table of Isis shows that everything is in God and God is everything, that everything is in everything, and that everyone is in everyone. Emanating from a supreme deity, the Creator Spirit, the intellectual and invisible world is manifested in the sensible and visible world, which has its model in the former.²⁶

²⁵ Lévi 2006, pp. 81–82.

²⁶ Kircher 1655, pp. 89ff. It is worth noting that it is the penetration of the One and the All which, according to Guimet, characterizes the teaching of Buddhism.

Rather like the periodic table of elements devised by Dmitri Mendeleev (1834–1907), leaving gaps to be filled as research progresses, the Table of Isis seemed to provide a directory for the deities and their functions in all parts of the world. It was thought that by taking it as a model and a starting point, the Egyptian pantheon rebuilt in the Renaissance would lead to the working out of a comprehensive picture of the religions of the world, showing them to be so many derivatives of a family tree that would sooner or later be reconstructed in its entirety. Was this not the ambition of Guimet, as a founding figure of the history of religions? Maurice Vernes (1845–1923), in his introduction to the first volume of the then new journal *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, expressed the need for scholars to focus their research in a single journal, basing their work on methodological unity and a division of areas along philological lines.²⁷

III. BUDDHISM AND THE JAPANESE CONNECTION

Kircher moved imperceptibly to a consideration of Buddhism, offering in his tables parallels with the symbolism of numbers in this religion.

The figures vary in eight different ways, depending on shape, position, gesture, act, and so on. These eight symbolic methods for drawing out the secret powers of the figures are subtle reminiscences of the eight kinds of spiritual knowledge with which the Real Self in man can be apprehended. In order to express spiritual truth, Buddhists refer to the spokes of a wheel, of which eight emerge into consciousness through the Noble Eightfold Path.²⁸

Isis is fertile nature in all its forms, the universal Mother Nature, and the moon which manages land, sea, and stars. She is the complementary passive principle of the active principle, her brother Osiris. Their son Horus represents the combination of these two forces, the three making up the supreme triad. Kircher's ideational reading (*lectio idealis*) gives meaning to any element of reality, divine figures, hieroglyphics—of which the Chinese pictographs are presumed to be derivatives—sculptures, and bas-reliefs, all in a lively, developing, dynamic, and reabsorbing world.

Kircher's fondness for comparisons was characterized by embarrassingly little scruple. While identifying the Japanese sects he reduced them to two main ones: those who deny the immortality of the soul and those who argue

²⁷ Vernes 1880a.

²⁸ Kircher 1655, pp. 89ff.

in tune with the currents of Greek philosophy. “The first deny the existence of another life and do not believe in rewards and punishments for good and bad works in this life; they relish life in the manner of Epicurus. These are the followers of Zen.”²⁹ And: “The Amidists are like Pythagoreans. These are the ones who believe in the immortality of the soul in another life, and in the magic of rites and ceremonies. They worship their idol by the name of Amida.”³⁰

Kircher does not hesitate to identify Amida with the Egyptian god Horus. He goes on to identify the *yamabushi* 山伏, practitioners of mountain asceticism, with the “witches” who were initiated in the mountains by the Egyptians.

This cult is followed by another, the so-called Jamabuges [*yamabushi*], that is to say, the mountain soldiers. In brief, their activities were closer to the rites of the Egyptians as regards the conjuration of spirits and the creation of statues of spirits. Dedicated to all kinds of divination, they love the solitude and the steep mountains, for there is little inspiration for it in cultivated and inhabited places.³¹

In this way Japan renders back to Egypt and Greece, to which it can therefore be reduced. Guimet, too, engages in a similar reduction. In his “Plutarque et l’Égypte” (1898), Guimet highlights the role of Isis as bright supreme deity, embodying Nature and Thought, including within itself all the virtues and positive functions of all deities. As it is itself in love with the beauty with which it is united, it is able to share it with human beings who are loving worshippers of Being, that is, of the supreme being who lives in pure intelligence with the goddess. It therefore acts as an intermediary between God and Nature, and God and human beings, by allowing them to glimpse the truth through the visions of philosophy and dreams. Isis thus becomes the feminine sovereign of the universe, the sovereign of souls, and almost the Christian Lord. Is that not the Isis that Gérard de Nerval described in the features of his various heroines, an author whom Guimet had read in his youth?

IV. WESTERN RELIGIOUS ORIENTATIONS IN GUIMET’S TIME

It is not easy to identify Guimet’s personal views on religious matters. Was he himself a believer or a nonbeliever, a sceptic, an agnostic, an atheist, or

²⁹ Kircher 1670, p. 187.

³⁰ Kircher 1670, p. 187.

³¹ Kircher 1670, p. 189.

a scientist? It is difficult to get any precise idea of his own convictions or personal faith. His scholarly productions however suggest that he had some sort of strong faith in the works of Platonism as giving a firm foundation in philosophy. This idea was current in his time and seems to have inspired Saint-Simonism, the positivism of Auguste Comte (1808–1859), and the spiritualist positivism of Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900), reinterpreted by de Rosny with the idea of a “method of consciousness” (*méthode conscientielle*) and an “exactivist philosophy.”³² Among the books in his library may be found *Le Cogitantisme ou la Religion Scientifique basée sur le Positivisme Spirituel* (Cogitantism, or Scientific Religion, based on Spiritual Positivism; 1886) by Édouard Loewenthal (1836–1917), which attacks hidden forms of materialism going by the names of positivism or evolutionism (*Entwicklungstheorie*). By contrast, this work stresses the value of metaphysics as a synthesis seeking to explore the unknown to the extent that it is possible to do so. But does this mean that Guimet subscribed to the theses of the World Alliance of Cogitants? We dare not affirm this. Rather, he seemed less interested in the intellectual debates of his time. Loewenthal noted a contrast between optimistic evolutionists in favor of giving “the stronger” an exclusive right to the bliss of privilege, and pessimistic evolutionists who “find their supreme fortune, with Buddhists and Schopenhauer, in the negation of the will to live,” thus finding “the ideal of deliverance from the misery and wretchedness of human existence.”³³

This philosophy of pessimism also includes the writings of Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), in whose work philosophy itself is defined as the true quest of the unconscious. Once known, the unconscious then passes beyond philosophy to become cosmology, theology, logic, or psychology. Hartmann built up a philosophy of religion, “a religion of the future,” which mixed together the pessimistic and optimistic ingredients of Buddhism and Christianity. To this end he recommended that Buddhism should renounce its claim of reducing everything on earth to deceptive appearances; and on the other hand, that Christianity should resign its hope of eternal life in exchange for the concept of nirvana, that is to say, the end-state or complete annihilation of existence.³⁴ Von Hartmann sought a religion for the future, a scientific religion based on positivism or inductive-spiritualist spiritualism, in other words, the cogitantism which as a religion of science and progres-

³² De Rosny 1879, 1887.

³³ Loewenthal 1886, p. 7.

³⁴ Loewenthal 1886, p. 8.

sive conscience had been in vogue since 1865.³⁵ He regarded development as being the effect of a supreme being involved in a permanent renewal of the spirit and of universal consciousness. In this process, religion and philosophy coalesce, and founders of religions such as Buddha, Mohammed, Moses, and Jesus Christ each find their place and are revered. The development of the human mind, based on the heart, is a continuous process of consciousness into individual consciousness, and of mind into universal mind, from Plato and Aristotle to Hegel.³⁶

The context of this current of thought was the more general one of the separation of church and state. In this perspective, free thinking was advocated but, far from leading to the hypothesis of atheism, it led its proponents to recognize and affirm the existence of a higher being. As Loewenthal stated, “The complete absorption of churches and different denominations by the universal religion of cogitantism or progressive science and true humanity: that is the supreme goal of democracy, and of the free thinkers of the intellectual aristocracy in general.”³⁷ It was assumed that a certain social justice giving a balance between rich and poor, and a rationalization of production that did not favor machines over human beings, would introduce a form of true socialism. The Cogitantist movement, providing asylum to Buddhism, transferred its headquarters to Paris in September 1889.³⁸ How much had Guimet learned of these doctrines? May we assume that even if he did not adhere to their form of enlightenment at an early stage, they nevertheless formed a backdrop to his own scientific and intellectual enterprises, giving pride of place to Buddhism and to his thirst for justice?

Among books that Guimet may have read, we may include by contrast a work that nowadays raises little more than a smile but seems to have had a certain vogue in those days, namely *La Religion Fusionnelle, ou, Doctrine de l’Universalisation réalisant le vrai Catholicisme* (1864) by Louis-Jean-Baptiste de Turreil (1799–1863). It does, though, reflect the collective concerns with which Guimet might have identified to some extent given that it was in his library. It sets out the teaching of a current of Illuminist revelation advocating reforms in contemporary society to benefit its members now, and even more so for the deceased who will come to live permanently

³⁵ The religio-philosophic Company of Cogitants was founded in 1865 by Loewenthal in Germany where he obtained citizenship. He also founded the Deutscher Verein für internationale Friedenspropaganda in 1874.

³⁶ Loewenthal 1886, pp. 9–11.

³⁷ Loewenthal 1886, p. 15.

³⁸ Loewenthal 1886, p. 20.

in the fullness of a perfect existence. In a world ruled by God who is both Being and Truth in their eternity and immutability, this teaching ensures the conformity of individual beings with nature. Emphasizing the Good and the Just, a harmony of Being is established which ensures the perfect order and agreement of all parts in unity and simplicity, even among diversity.³⁹ As a spatio-temporal infinite Being is realized in all its fullness, thanks to the divine action fertilizing both attraction and assimilation, every being finds fulfillment in a trinity consisting of the Mother, the Father, and the Androgyny of daughter and son. Each person realizes universal being which is pure light, the beginning and end of everything. “Each individuality is a colorful, infinite radius of clean shading intended to realize infinite light by merging all the individual rays with infinite shades.”⁴⁰ Spheres with bright suns in successive stages (Lactean, Ethereal, Super-Ethereal, Empyrean, and Universal) achieve universal light in the infinite, culminating in the “company of the gods” in boundless radiation. In doctrines of this type Guimet may have found resonances of Platonic and Manichean elements that led him to find echoes of them in Buddhism as well. For him, Buddhism was to be interpreted as a philosophy of the interpenetration of the One and the All. Such are the conjectures that one can indulge in when noting certain works in his fabulous library, although they inevitably remain as questions without satisfactory answers. We remain sceptical of course about any direct influence of such doctrines, but the mere existence of the thought patterns they reveal gives us ideas about the kind of collector he was and the kind of classification of deities that he sought to elaborate.

In the Guimet-funded museum at Lyon there is a work by James Darmesteter (1849–1894) entitled *Essais orientaux*, dating from 1883. This work highlights the role that France should be playing in the development of science, particularly with respect to the recognition of Oriental studies as a scientific field, notably vis-à-vis Germany which was the great pioneer in this domain. He recalled that in the eighteenth century, the “Oriental languages” were Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, and sometimes also Chinese. The Orientalist now embraced them all, but with extensions to Persia, Egypt, Assyria, and Cambodia. The path was widened with the discovery of the *Zendavesta* by Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) in 1758,⁴¹ while Darmesteter also emphasizes the role of the famous Sanskritist and Indianist

³⁹ De Tourreil 1864, especially pp. 305–6.

⁴⁰ De Tourreil 1864, diagram in the appendix; n.p.

⁴¹ Anquetil-Duperron 1997, pp. 15–32.

Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852).⁴² Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832), inspired by Plutarch's *Lives of Illustrious Men*, as later was Guimet, deciphered hieroglyphics by establishing continuity with papyrus hieroglyphics in cursive form.⁴³ Similarly, Guimet sought to decipher the signs used on ritual objects with figurative representations of deities by recourse to iconological explanations or rituals that he observed firsthand. He believed in a structured semantic face, such that all that remains to be done is to decipher, not by multiplying ethnological investigations—a task he left for others to undertake—but by collecting objects and inviting the appropriate scholars in France to study them. With these ideas in mind, he first of all invited priests to the museum which he conceived as a laboratory for scientific analysis.

V. TOWARD A HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

The *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses* (1880) edited by Frédéric Lichtenberger (1832–1899), included an article entitled “Religions (Classement et filiation des)” (“Religions: Classification and Affiliation”), written by the same Maurice Vernes who had founded the *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*.⁴⁴ This work, held in the library of the Guimet Museum, presents the scheme current in religious sciences at the time of Guimet’s return from the East. It refers in particular to the classification of religions established by Albert Réville (1826–1906), cofounder of the journal, first holder of the chair of History of Religions at the Collège de France (from 1880), and first President of the Section of Religious Science at the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes (1886). These “religious sciences” were born from a combination of history, which gathers materials, and philosophy, which orders and makes use of them. They therefore go beyond the previously prevailing view of an opposition between Jewish and Christian religions and paganism, and beyond the general conviction in the eighteenth century that a thing so frivolous and ignorant as religion was nothing but a means to abuse and exploit the population. According to the French dictionary *Litttré*, a rehabilitation of religion was brought about with the philosophy of Auguste Comte and by the Protestant criticism that, by removing the supernatural, it could return as an influential factor in the evolution of societies. A classification of world religions, initially established by the Dutchman Cornelis Petrus Tiele

⁴² Darmesteter 1883, pp. 2–5.

⁴³ Darmesteter 1883, pp. 45–51.

⁴⁴ Vernes 1880b.

(1830–1902) in his *Manuel d'Histoire des Religions* (1876), as translated into French in 1880 by Maurice Vernes, was endorsed by Réville, though with quite significant amendments in the distribution of its constituents.

This fashionable classification outlined an evolutionary and progressive development as follows: (1) the ancient religion of primitive man based on a naive worship of nature mediated by the animated objects through which it represents itself, and conceived as being conscious and actively influencing human destiny; (2) a so-called animism of native peoples—African, Eskimo, Finnish, Tartar, American Indians, and Polynesians—based on animistic and fetishist intuitions, personifying natural features, distinguishing the body and the soul, acquiring autonomy for regaining a world populated by spirits, and articulated in a sketched mythology; (3) national polytheistic religions that have developed mythologies dramatizing nature on the model of human life—China, Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Germania, Gaul, Italy, Greece, New World Mexico, and Peru, with Vedic mythology representing the most complete form, and in all likelihood including Japanese mythology (still barely known) and Indo-European and Semitic religions; (4) nomistic religions founded on holy law or scripture, tending to pantheism or monotheism—Daoism, Confucianism, Mosaic religion, Judaism, Brahmanism, Zoroastrianism; and (5) universalist human religions based on principles and maxims: Buddhism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. The main original thesis of Réville was to establish a distinction between “polytheistic religions,” which include numbers one through four above as well as Buddhism, and “monotheistic religions,” namely Judaism, in its Mosaic, legalistic, and national forms, Islamism, both legalistic and international, and Christianity, an international religion with characteristics of redemption. Buddhism, according to Réville, is at the juncture of two groups: it is a universal religion of redemption, opposed to polytheism, but one which actually integrates local polytheisms.

Vernes was critical of this classification as being based on artificial philosophical distinctions unrelated to the environments and the natural surroundings in which the religions were born. The main drawback lay in ignoring an effective historical evolution of religions and doctrines as related to social transformations. Even in religions of universal monotheism, national traits never disappear but evolve into polytheism again by adapting to local cults or through the emergence of saints, so that the history of religions, like literature, is just another chapter in world history.

In this perspective, the idea of an initial origin, or an original state of religions, disappears in favor of a comparative approach that seeks ethnological,

textual, historical, archaeological, and philological data of the period concerned. This is the spirit which informs the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* published under the auspices of the Guimet Museum. Maurice Vernes defined its principles in the introduction to the first volume, and this helps us to better understand the ideas of Guimet himself. Vernes said that this science draws primarily on the historical sciences, of which it could be just one branch. It is therefore based on the rules of historical criticism to develop reconstructed models of the past, inspired by the *Revue Historique* founded four years earlier, that lead to general rules. Rather than being the expression of any philosophy or religion, it takes philology as its scientific model, almost as an absolute, and this is extended in a broad vision to cover the whole story. Special effort is required for researchers to distance themselves from those religions that still inhabit the minds of Europeans, namely Christianity and Judaism, whose sacred narratives seem threatened with profanity by the comparison with other data. The large amount of materials recently uncovered and the definition of working methods in areas such as philology, comparative mythology, and textual and historical criticism justify the creation of this specialized journal that would avoid the regrettable disintegration typical of other journals such as *Journal Asiatique* or *Revue Critique*. The application of human perceptions and historical explanation are to be the new watchwords of the philologist who plows the newly emerging, almost infinite research fields. The primary enemy of "historical criticism" is, according to Vernes, a fanaticism that channels abusive beliefs: proper criticism should avoid taking an easy path of simplistic, blind refutation that would, for example, make Jesus an impostor. The researcher's primary task is positive and not negative. A respectful sympathy with the past and the people of ancient times is accompanied by a spirit of independence and critical judgment that sees the emergence and development of religious phenomena in their historical context. Vernes attacks sectarian points of view, including that of a biased Protestantism that projects its own views onto the past. Such a rationalist critique, instead of making a sincere effort to restore the cultural richness of the past, flatly reduces the mythical sequences or legendary stories into the framework of its own viewpoints and intellectual opinions. Vernes for his part recognizes the different stages of progress according to geographical area: very thoroughly for Egypt, Assyria, India, and Persia; less so for Judaism and original Christianity; and with a promising horizon for Greek and Roman antiquities where philology and epigraphy come to the aid of comparative mythology.

The purpose of the new journal and thus of the new science, though not called "*science* of religions" but "*history* of religions," was to be the study

of Eastern religions ancient and modern, and ancient Western religions, steering clear of contemporary controversies. Vernes wanted to avoid the term “science” as it had become too much like the sole key to the controversies of the day, and he preferred the term “history” as the key most appropriate to open the door to the study of humanity’s most fruitful productions.⁴⁵ Interest was focused in Europe on the formation of large organizations, such as the church up to the fourth century, but not on subsequent church history, or on how religious crises gave birth to new forms like the Reformation—which would explain the patterns of current beliefs—or on popular mythology. The Indo-European and Egyptian-Semitic religious complexes have a history running from ancient times until today and are thus of exceptional interest. If Christianity is deeply Semitic (Arab-Syrian, for lack of a better phrase), it displays the peculiarity of having become intertwined with that other big Indo-European group, namely the Greek and Roman branch. Vernes sought rigor in carving out areas of investigation based on geography, but he was also very sensitive to changes in these historical frames in cases where symbioses occurred, giving rise to new frames. While the journal could boast of being surrounded by specialists in these fields, it was recognized that the East still occupied an important place, and that as well as Egypt and India, work on America, China, the Far East, Finland, and Turan (Central Asia), and on wild and primitive peoples would be the subject of future publications. The journal sought to open up a general history of religions and to address a wide audience by providing an organ where different skills, working to rigorous scientific methods, would find a shared medium of expression. It excluded biased positions that would make it a battlefield for religious or political ideas: “The *Revue* is purely *historical* and excludes any work with a *polemical* or *dogmatic* character.”⁴⁶ Homage is payed to Émile Guimet for his initiatives and the activities to which the journal is attached. An undeniable intellectual kinship is emphasized in his praise of Guimet as someone who has never been a follower of a specific philosophy or of a sectarian religion, even if Vernes also declares the journal’s independence from the founder of the museum. Rather, it is the dynamics of a collective enterprise, carried out in a spirit which is both scientific and intellectually autonomous, which is highlighted in his remarks. This initiative took place at a time when the same discipline was being set

⁴⁵ He proposed the term *hiérogaphie* for this discipline, which was however not subsequently retained. See Vernes 1880a, pp. 2, 16.

⁴⁶ Vernes 1880a, p. 17; emphasis in original.

up elsewhere. In 1877, the Dutch encyclopedist and theologian Cornelis Petrus Tiele became the first titular professor of the history of religions in Leiden in the Netherlands. Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) initiated the same discipline with lectures on the history of religion at Oxford University in 1878, supported by the Hibbert Fund, and through the publication of the huge collection of Sacred Books of the East (Oxford, 1878–1905), while other public chairs of the history of religions were opened in England through the Gifford Foundation. In spite of the work of the talented Eugène Burnouf, of whom Max Müller had been a disciple, France was somehow late in getting into this field of research.

The situation of the history of religions at the time when Guimet went to Japan and was building up his museum in France suggests that, in the context of the general scepticism that reigned with regard to religion, and to Catholicism in particular, it was important to raise awareness about an area that had been left in the dark, namely the civilizations of the Far East which remained the poor relation of this new discipline. In terms of ideas, this new science was also struggling to become an independent, free-thinking discipline amid currents that denied any value at all to religion. Presumably, if Guimet had considered Buddhism to be a godless philosophy and a new model, or secular moral philosophy, suitable for France at the time, he would have imagined it unlikely to attract zealous followers. He realized the tremendous extent to which this religion had enjoyed growth and developed complex religious forms of expression in Japan. It is inconceivable that he shared the views of Enlightenment currents that incorporated Buddhism into their system or built sects with dubious dogmas. He was largely aware of such ideas that, with others, formed the intellectual backdrop of the France of his time. The patterns of evolutionary explanation characteristic of Kircher, posing an absolute origin were, in our view, still alive among a certain intelligentsia, but as an epistemological framework rather than as a scientific system to be taken literally. This framework was aging and crumbling. It could be refurbished, as it had not been replaced, but was in need of another reference system that was not easy to find. Guimet was a specialist in cults which were both “universal” and “syncretic”; to use the categories of Vernes: he was at the forefront of research in this field, and his scientific ambition was obviously great. He could only try to avoid the pitfalls which we have seen. Following his travels, during which Japan was at a turning point, there was no doubt in his mind that he had a vision which outlined the prospects of this new science.

VI. AN ISIS-INSPIRED QUEST FOR THE BUDDHIST PANTHEON

Émile Guimet's precise scientific intentions, like those of everyone who has a rich and complex personality, are not easy to identify or to define in a few words. Nevertheless, if we take account of various indications that he left, some outlines emerge which are of utmost relevance for our investigation. His Japanese tours were immortalized in his *Promenades Japonaises*, relating his first impressions of Japan, and Guimet was convinced that this type of record has a value of its own as being immediate and sincere. Here are his first remarks on landing in the country when he felt that he had arrived in a place rather like Rome:

But what is this classical vision that appears on the deck of the boat? A group of young Romans is advancing with dignity; they are dressed in the long Roman robe and their hair is styled after Titus; their features are fine, delicate, and pure, and there is nothing Asiatic about their facial appearance; these must be the sons of Brutus that we see coming toward us. As if making their escape from the works of Cicero, the group heads straight for our Japanese traveling companions, and the young Romans bow down before the Mongolian engineers until their hands touch their bare feet.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, when Guimet came to Japan, he did not hide the fact that he was motivated by the scientific ambition of studying religions.

At the hotel we enter into conversation and I am of course subjected to the usual interrogation:

—Have you come to Japan for trade, sir?

—No sir.

—So are you here on banking business?

—No, not that either.

—Then you must have been invited in the employ of the Japanese government?

—Still less.

—Then you are probably in the diplomatic service, sir?

—No, not in the least.

—Maybe in journalism then?

⁴⁷ Guimet 1878b, p. 12.

—Not at all.

—So you are just traveling for pleasure?

—Not exactly. I do not travel for my pleasure, nor for that of others. I have come to study the religions of the Far East.⁴⁸

When he explained that the purpose of his trip was to collect Eastern religious objects, representations of the divine, utensils used in worship, and sacred manuscripts, he would confide that on his return to France he intended to found in Lyon a virtually universal museum of religions: “A religious museum containing all the gods of India, China, Japan, Egypt, Greece, and the Roman Empire.”⁴⁹ As stated in an explanatory note: “His [Guimet’s] scientific ambitions cover a wider geographical terrain than the country he comes to visit, since he revealed that the ideal scope of its investigations included not only Greece and Rome, but also Egypt, which he had long known so well.”⁵⁰

VII. GUIMET’S ORGANIZATION OF THE BUDDHIST PANTHEON

When Guimet took part in the World Exhibition at the Trocadéro in Paris he contributed to the Japan Pavilion on the Champ de Mars by exhibiting a number of documents and material objects which he had just bought in Japan, including a Tōji-style mandala (Tōji Mandara 東寺曼荼羅; see fig. 2, below), half the size of the original, which he had commissioned in Kyoto.

If we follow the guiding ideas of Johann Joseph Hoffmann and of the *Butsuzō zui* 仏像圖彙 (Catalogue of Buddhist Images, 1690),⁵¹ we arrive at a kind of pantheon which is organized into six categories of iconic figures known as the “Venerated Ones” (*shoson* 諸尊)—which is the scheme pursued by Bernard Frank in his presentation of the Émile Guimet collections. The six categories are:

1. Tathāgata or Buddha (*nyoraibu* 如來部, *butsubu* 佛部)
2. Bodhisattva (*bosatsubu* 菩薩部)
3. Kings of Science (*myōōbu* 明王部)⁵²

⁴⁸ Guimet 1878b, p. 31.

⁴⁹ Guimet 1878a, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Guimet 1878a, p. 5.

⁵¹ Hoffmann (1852) 1975. *Zōho shoshū butsuzō zui* 1796.

⁵² Guimet equates these with the next category, *tenbu*, probably following the explanations of a Japanese informant while not understanding them precisely.

4. Celestial divinities (Skt. *deva*; Jp. *tenbu* 天部, sometimes *tenjin* 天神)
5. “Circumstantial appearances” or divinities (*gongenbu* 權現部; *kami* 神, that is, as manifestations of a buddha or a bodhisattva)
6. Eminent monks and patriarchs (*kōsōsoshibu* 高僧祖師部)

These six classes may be summarized and explained as follows:

1. This explanatory structure of the Buddhist pantheon is of fundamentally Buddhist inspiration. Its salient purpose is to order all the beings who represent the forms or manifestations of possible realities in the context of one single, solar, bright Buddha, namely Dainichi 大日 (Skt. Vairocana), the sun that illuminates all things, great in wisdom and compassion. Immediately visible are four further buddhas who operate in the four directions, representing four sides of the knowledge and compassionate action of the primordial Buddha. Accordingly, the five buddhas are as follows: Dainichi Nyorai 大日如來 (Skt. Mahāvairocana Tathāgata), Ashuku 阿閼 Buddha (Skt. Akṣobhya), Hōshō 寶生 Buddha (Skt. Ratnasambhava), Amida 阿彌陀 Buddha (Skt. Amitābha), and Fuku Jōju 不空成就 Buddha (Skt. Amoghasiddhi).

2. On the second level, the functions of the buddhas are represented as bodhisattvas who are both emanations and ideal and practical achievements, appearing at the level of human beings at the same time as embodying a less abstract sphere of buddhahood. The content of the enlightenment of the Buddha consists in an intelligence that discerns things both theoretically and practically, that is, the supreme wisdom, which is at the same time compassionate action based on the idea that all beings are equal. The latter implies that the discovery of enlightenment by the Buddha can and should benefit sentient beings by distributing his teachings in a manner which is adequately proportional to their faculties. The two main functions embodied in the bodhisattva thus correspond to intelligence, or wisdom, and compassion. These two are represented by the bodhisattva Monju 文殊 (Skt. Mañjuśrī; Guimet has “Mongu”) and the bodhisattva Fugen 普賢 (Skt. Samantabhadra) in triads in which Dainichi Buddha or Śākyamuni Buddha stands at the center; and by the bodhisattva Seishi or Daiseishi 大勢至 (Skt. Mahāsthāmaprapta) and Kannon 觀音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara) in triads in which Amida Buddha stands at the center. In this way a central buddha delegates its two main functions to two bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva Jizō 地藏 (Skt. Kṣtigarbha), meanwhile, with his sistrum which chases away evil spirits and obstacles in his path, is a guide to souls through the six kinds

of rebirth. That is the reason why he may be represented in six forms. He ensures that souls are led safely in posthumous life. This includes those of prematurely dead infants, and that is why this bodhisattva is represented with a sort of fabric cap on his head and an apron on the chest, just like children and infants. The five bodhisattvas are: Vajra, Vajrasattva, Vajrakarma, Vajraratna, and Vajradharma. The last four are identified as the bodhisattvas Miroku 彌勒 (read and interpreted by Guimet as “Maria”), Kannon, Monju, and Fugen.

3. At the lower levels, there are various types of gods. First, at the third level, those gods appear that represent human passions to a heightened degree: love, hatred, wrath, and the fury of a warrior. But these deities have overcome their various passions through the converting action of the Buddha. Converted themselves, they can convert other beings who are afflicted by them. It is for this reason that they are known as Kings of Science (Skt. *Vidyārāja*); they know the springs of the human heart and how to act on them in order to appease them. Kujaku Myōō 孔雀明王 (Skt. *Mahāmayūrī*) is the great peacock destructive of passions. Fudō Myōō 不動明王 (Skt. *Acala*; Guimet has “Ocala”) represents immutability and impassivity in the face of passion. An intelligence that cuts through doubts with his sword, Aizen Myōō 愛染明王 (Skt. *Rāgarāja*) represents love, which when brought to its acme, is sublime enlightenment. The five Kings of Science are: Fudō-sama; Kongō Yasha 金剛夜叉 (Skt. *Vajrayakṣa*); Gosanze 降三世 (Skt. *Trailokyavijaya*) and Daijizaiten 大自在天, or Śiva and his wife Umā (Jp. Uma 烏摩); Daitoku 大威德 (Skt. *Yamāntaka*); and Gundari 軍荼利 (Skt. *Amṛtakundalī*).

4. At the fourth level appear the beneficent deities of the Indian world who, hearing the preaching of the Buddha, spontaneously volunteered to protect him. Among them are the Nāga dragons (the deified cobra), the deified bird Garuda, the divinity of eloquence and the arts, Benzaiten 辯才天 (Skt. *Sarasvatī*; Guimet has “Benzoate”), the god of fortune, Daikokuten 大黒天 (Skt. *Mahākāla*),⁵³ Kishimojin 鬼子母神 (Skt. *Hārītī*), the ones who both protect and devour children, Śiva, Bonten 梵天 (Skt. *Brahmā*), and Taishakuten 帝釋天 (Skt. *Indra*), the founding supreme deities or guarantors of the world order. It also includes half-man, half-god deities such as Sugawara no

⁵³ On Daikokuten, see Iyanaga 1994, 2012.

Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903) as the god of intelligence and knowledge who is invoked in particular for success in university examinations. Guimet mistakenly refers to him as Tenmangū 天滿宮, which is in fact the name of the shrine.

5. At a fifth level are to be found all the deities responsible for local or functional guardianship, those protective of a city or a clan, Sino-Indian gods of the wind and rain, and the master of the underworld, Enma-ō 閻魔王 (Skt. Yama-rāja), as a Chinese official. Here is the proper place and rank of Japanese gods, *kami* such as Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神, the Great Divinity Illuminating Heaven, which is both a symbol of the sun—and so the source of all life—and the ancestor of the imperial family that ensures order and prosperity. This *kami* is both functional and ancestral. Here too are: Inari 稻荷, the fox messenger of the deity of the mountain (*yama no kami* 山の神), who, together with the snake, represents the spirit of grains and provides assurance of good harvests; all kinds of gods of fertility who bring fortune, money, and family happiness to merchants, artisans, peasants, and other liberal professions such as the seven gods of happiness, the Shichifukujin 七福神, which include Ebisu 惠比須, Daikoku, Bishamonten 毘沙門天 (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa), and so on. Note also the divinity Sanbō Kōjin 三寶荒神, the “Rude Divinity,” a violent being converted by the Three Treasures and so by Buddhism, who then ensures peace and domestic prosperity, and finally Fudō 不動 as a patron deity of running water.

6. At a sixth level appear the patriarchs and eminent monks: those of Indian tradition, the holy disciples of the Buddha reaching nirvana, the *rakan* 羅漢 (arhat), those of China, such as Bodhidharma, who came from India to China to spread the teachings of *dhyāna* (Chan, Zen), Fudaishi 傅大士, the inventor of writing, Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師 (Kūkai 空海, 774–835) the patriarch founder of Shingon 真言宗, Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574–622), the civilizing hero at the dawn of historic times, and the semi-legendary Chūjō Hime 中將姫, the wise and pious young woman of antiquity who vowed to be born in the Pure Land of Amida by weaving a mandala of his Paradise (Taima mandara 當麻曼荼羅).

If we consider these six categories from the lowest upwards, we can progress in reverse order. Every being, however demonic, is potentially a buddha, as well as being potentially divine. Its current position is only “temporary,” and it is called to unite ultimately with the primordial Buddha,

or buddha-nature itself. The loop is closed in the monistic thought pattern to which Guimet was accustomed in the mythological and religious figures he had previously studied. No doubt he felt there was some analogy here, and this explanatory diagram seduced him more than any other. We see that its main defect is to devalue the deities in two respects: Indian deities are protective deities converted to Buddhism, and Japanese deities are sometimes included as the *tenjin* (heavenly gods), but they are mostly catalogued among the ones that only appear circumstantially as manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. They are therefore lower than the Indian deities, in a sense, and of course always subject to the buddhas and bodhisattvas situated above them as ideals to achieve.

The description by Hoffmann is more scrupulous than Guimet's Japanese model and provided a better fate for the Japanese *kami*.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, these remain part of a rather ill-defined cohort of divine entities who in any case seem to be of a lesser order than the great buddhas and bodhisattvas. In a sense, the Meiji Restoration, the effects of which Guimet saw with his own eyes, was perhaps in some ways a healthy reaction to outdated, artificial mental structures concerning the unduly junior place given to the *kami* as compared with the buddhas. It seems that Guimet brought the two classes of beings on to exactly the same religious level. A reading of his *Promenades japonaises* suggests that Japanese people first simply believe in a given religious entity before considering whether to identify it as belonging to Buddhism or Shinto.

VIII. GUIMET'S VIEW OF THE TŌJI MANDALA

Against this background it is appropriate to consider Guimet's analysis of the Tōji Mandala, as originally explained in the booklet for the Trocadéro exhibition. He presents the structure of the mandala, with its twenty-three figures, by distributing the nineteen most important ones in such a way that the lowest categories are assigned to the third level (see fig. 2). He wrote:

To understand the meaning of the *maṇḍala*, one must know that buddhas have three modes of being:

1. The power still to improve, although already being a Buddha.
2. The power to descend to the state of bousât [*bosatsu*], incarnating in particular beings in order to save souls through gentleness and persuasion.

⁵⁴ Hoffmann (1852) 1975.

3. The power to turn into Miō-ō [Myōō] or Tembou [Tenbu] and to act against the passions by force and fear.⁵⁵

On this basis, he sets out what is in effect a series of emanations reminiscent of Neoplatonism. The presentation is admittedly somewhat inconsistent in that, after naming the hierarchy of three groups of beings, only the first and third are taken into account as emanations while the bodhisattvas do not figure. In the buddha group, the central figure Dainichi is perfection incarnate, around whom are distributed the four further buddhas. Then come the Kings of Science or divinities (*ten* 天), which are regarded as the main secondary forms of the buddhas. He wrote:

The group at the center shows Daīniti Niourai [Dainichi Nyorai], the great Niti [nichi 日] meaning Light, and the great Niou [如 of *nyorai*]: Perfection *par excellence*. The index finger of the right hand represents the intelligence that pervades and controls the five elements represented by the five fingers of the left hand.

There follow four primary and four secondary emanations. The four primary ones are the virtues (powers of Daīniti), personified by beings who have become Buddhas. These are:

1. Ashikou [Ashuku] (shown to the fore) represents nascent faith: the first and most important step in belief. It is one of the four great virtues. The left hand is a closed fist squeezing the tip of the garment: this is a sign of willpower. The right hand is open and tilted toward the earth to attract beings: this is a gesture of charity.
2. Ho-shio [Jp. Hashi; Skt. Ratnasambhava] (to the left) had regulated his conduct admirably throughout his lifetime. He is personified in the second level under Daīniti, who represents perfect living. He also holds his left fist closed, and his right hand has three fingers raised (in the manner of Christian bishops), which represents the three modes of being of Buddhas. Sometimes all five fingers are raised, representing Daīniti and the four virtues.⁵⁶

Note next the virtual identification of Amida with the soul of the world:

3. Amida (to the rear) preaches and directs. He represents the power to explain the divine laws through eloquence based on reasoning.

⁵⁵ Guimet 1878a, pp. 7–8.

⁵⁶ Guimet 1878a, pp. 8–9.

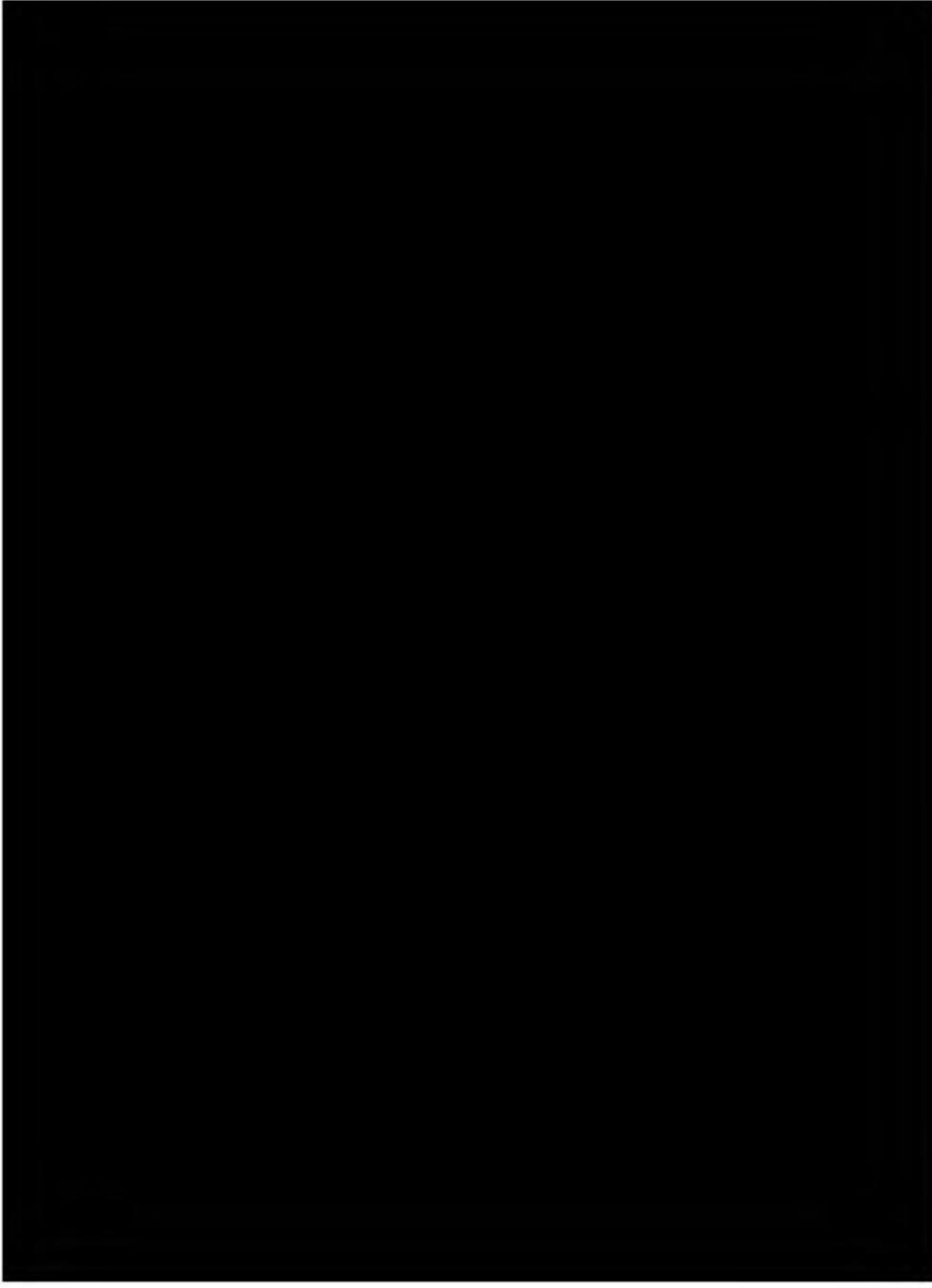


Figure 2. Tōji Mandala. Reproduced from *Exposition Universelle, Galeries historiques—Trocadéro: Religions de l'Extrême-Orient; Notice Explicative sur les objets exposés par M. Émile Guimet et sur les peintures et dessins faits par M. Félix Régamey*. Guimet 1878a.

Amida (*a*, without, *mindā*, life eternal; cf. Aminta/Amenti) presiding in the funereal region of the West, plays a large role in [the destiny of] souls in some sects. The swastika, the striking cross which Buddhas wear on their chest, is dedicated to him. His left hand (the elements, the universe) is held by its fingertips to those of his right hand (his own nature, his soul), and this symbolizes the identification of beings with Amida: it is almost the universal soul.⁵⁷

We recall that for Kircher, in both his *Oedipus aegyptiacus* and his *La Chine Illustrée*, the Japanese Amida is equivalent to the Egyptian god Horus, which precisely implies a kind of cosmic soul in the Isis system of thought. Guimet continues:

4. Fekou-ou-joo-djou [Jp. Fukū Jōju; Skt. Amoghasiddhi] (to the right) saves human beings by every possible means. His left fist is closed. Its right hand is horizontal, palm upwards and placed on his chest, indicating the strong desire of his heart to save the universe just as he saved himself. In some sects Sakia-Muni [Śākyamuni] is likened to Fekou-ou-joo-djou.

The four secondary emanations, placed between the previous four, derive from them and help them to attend on Daīniti in all parts of the Hokkai [*hokkai* 法界] (the Buddhist heaven).⁵⁸

Next, he does not hesitate to identify the Kings of Science with the celestial deities:

Foudo-sama [Jp. Fudō sama; Skt. Acala] (*fou*, without; *do*, motion: unshakeable, stable). A transformation of Daīniti—in this form he leads men by terror and by torments as necessary. The rock indicates stability and the fire indicates passions. He knows how to remain calm and inflexible amid the violent feelings of humanity. There is sometimes a waterfall under his feet because his followers follow the custom of self-mortification by cold showers. He holds the sword to destroy the passions. The three-pointed handle recalls the sacred implement that represents the three modes of being of the Buddhas. The rope catches evil spirits. The hairstyle braided in eight strands at the side (for four Buddhas and four Bousats) is like the hairstyle of Horus. The four

⁵⁷ Guimet 1878a, p. 9.

⁵⁸ Guimet 1878a, p. 9.

emanations of Foudo-Sama are transformations into Mio-ô [*myōō*, Kings of Science] of the four virtues of Dañiti.

Fokou-ou-joo-djou niourai [Jp. Fukū Jōju Nyorai; Skt. Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata] becomes Gosanzé [Gōsanze] (the one to the fore). He takes on eight arms, seizes terrible weapons, and to make an example of them, strikes down an unhappy couple with a heartbreaking story. The husband, Dai-Dizaïten [Dai-jizaiten], had all the passions, while his wife Oumako [Uma-kō] was full of curiosity, especially about the sciences and about religious knowledge other than Buddhism. For this reason, Gosanzé punished her without mercy. Amita is transformed into Dai-itokou [Jp. Daiitoku 大威徳, Yamāntaka] (seen to the rear), saddles a green bull symbolizing a being that has lost the right track, and soars away fully armed in pursuit of the wicked. Ashikou [Ashuku] becomes Kon-go-ia-sha [Kongō Yasha] and multiplies his arms, in particular those which hold religious objects. He makes leaps and bounds to crush lotuses, emblems of the human heart, forcing them into vigorous bloom.⁵⁹

Guimet then identifies the group of the *prajñā* bodhisattvas in Kūkai's mandala with the literary genre of Wisdom (Prajñā), not without incidentally identifying the bodhisattva of that name with the god Agni and his Latin hieroglyph Agnus, and the staff of Mañjuśrī with a shepherd's crook:

The right-hand group is Han-gnia [Jp. Hannya 般若; Skt. Prajñā] [also the name of the] third division of Buddhist books. It is a book, and at the same time it is a divinity, a god of light and intelligence, a god of demonstration and persuasion. In this myth it is easy to find traces of the luminous Agni (*ignis*) and relationships with the Latin hieroglyph Agnus, which represents the resplendent lamb lying on the sacred book.

Around this god stand: (to the front) Mirokou [Jp. Miroku; Skt. Maitreya], (to the rear) Quanon [Jp. Kannon; Skt. Avalokitêśvara], (to the left) Mondjou [Monju], (to the right) Fouguen [Fugen]. The last two are disciples of Sakia-Mouni and are usually shown in attendance on him: Fouguen on an elephant, and Mondjou on a lion.

Mirokou holds a pagoda with five shapes representing the five elements: space, air, fire, water and earth.

⁵⁹ Guimet 1878a, pp. 10–11.

Quanon holds in the left hand a half-opened flower of the water lily (the heart of a human ready to blossom into perfection), and the index finger and thumb of the open right hand are touching together in a sign of compassion [*charité*].

Mondjou holds in his left hand a *pedum* (a crosier or pastoral staff), and his open right hand resting on the right leg signifies that he will meet the aspirations of beings for their salvation.

Fouguen holds in his left hand an open lotus on which is resting the book *Dai-Han-gnia* [*Daihannya*], indicating that this book will open the human heart; and his right hand is open, as that of Quanon, to attract beings through compassion [*charité*].⁶⁰

The directions are guarded by four kings:

At the corners of the four cardinal points, subduing demonic enemies of the Buddhist religion are:

Bishamon (East), a blue figure; Koomokou [Jp. *Kōmoku* 廣目; Skt. *Virūpākṣa*] (South), a red figure; Djikokou [Jp. *Jikoku* 持國; Skt. *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*] (West), a green figure; and Sootsho [Jp. *Zōjō* 增長; Skt. *Virūdhaka*] (North), a flesh-colored figure.⁶¹

IX. JAPANESE RELIGIONS AMONG THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

In his encounter with Japanese religions, Guimet makes various associations between the sites, objects, symbolism, and sacred attributes of divinities found in a significant number of European and Egyptian contexts. In describing Japanese sacred places, he seems to make no great distinction between Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. It is noteworthy that during his sojourn in Japan he describes how worshippers go to the shrines, while at the same time noting that such worshippers are “rare today.”⁶² He concludes that the nature of official Shinto does not seem to find any echo in the religious consciousness of the people, or toward the worship of *kami*. Rather, these are religious sites of antiquity that are indicative of a “primitive purity” far more than are the modern churches of Christianity. His curiosity seems to be fuelled by the impact of a religiosity indicative of the purest and most ancient

⁶⁰ Guimet 1878a, pp. 11–12.

⁶¹ Guimet 1878a, p. 12.

⁶² Guimet 1878b, p. 44.

human beliefs: that is where he sees the interest of his research coming to fruition more successfully than in other parts of the world that have become polluted by later civilizations. The analogy with Egypt is again a priority for him here: the sacred groves and towering trees by their very height and age are the determining elements of the religious site, even when many interiors are as rough as could be, or even uninhabited and without cultic objects. This very fact indicates that there is a great variety of objects of belief and worship. The religious space is marked out by a “triumphal arch,” the *torii* 鳥居, like a Jacob’s ladder around a mono-spatial building where the divine lies perched in the middle of a wooded mound, just as in the central hall of rectangular Egyptian temples there sits a divinity inaccessible to ordinary mortals. “The temples we are confronted with are not the vast ecclesiae of Christianity, built to receive the faithful; they are usually small empty shrines which, like Egyptian temples, are always surrounded by a grove, like the ancient [Roman] *lucus*.”⁶³ He gives the example of the shrine dedicated to the volcanic Mount Asama 浅間, home to a deity who is a partition of the spirit of Mount Fuji:

The most important of these sacred groves is devoted to Sen-guen [Sengen 浅間], the spirit of Fouzy [Fuji]-Yama. A stone arch of triumph (*torii*), a unique form imitating primitive, raw wooden doors, having a twisted trunk, turned up at the ends, formed the top, being the entrance above a wide staircase, steep like Jacob’s ladder and, like that, leaving only an open view up into the sky.⁶⁴

His remarks on the Japanese sense of innocence go beyond mere folk investigation into the field of comparative religion. He repeats again and again that the nudity exhibited by the Japanese is a mark of their innocence, as that of Eve before original sin.

Moreover, the custom is to take at least one bath a day, and the presence of travelers does not bother men or women in any way in the exercise of this duty of cleanliness. “It’s depravity!” Will you cry? I answer, “No, it’s innocence.” And the proof is that no one here understands the new police regulations prohibiting such exhibition *coram populo*. We are dealing here with Eve before sin, unaware of impropriety, ignorant of being shocking; and now, there come the curious glances of gentlemen, and the cries

⁶³ Guimet 1878b, p. 43.

⁶⁴ Guimet 1878b, p. 43.

of frightened ladies, which reveal an unknown sin. I declare that modesty is a vice. The Japanese did not have it; we are giving it to them.⁶⁵

Three days after his arrival in Japan, Guimet was eager to begin his investigative work. He went to Kamakura 鎌倉, and from there his expedition to Enoshima 江の島 was planned for scientific investigations into Japanese religions. It was the first step, as if he had it in mind to solve the riddle of the being who is worshipped there, Benzaiten. “But I was told that on the way to visit the sacred island of Enoshima, we would see the temples of Kamakura, of Katassé [Katase 片瀬] and Fouzysawa [Fujisawa 藤沢], and so I hope already to start my scientific investigation on Japanese beliefs.”⁶⁶ Was this divinity for him an avatar of the Egyptian Isis? He does not say so, but surely his scientific caution would not put an end to a legitimate curiosity in this regard.

Some representations of children on gravestones of a Buddhist character that he saw shortly after leaving Kamakura reminded Guimet of the Ptah embryo of the Egyptians:

Here and there we meet with Buddhist tombstones hidden in the undergrowth. Above there is a crouching figure who seems to sleep with his head on his right hand. Below there are three small grimacing beings seen from the front, perhaps children, or the damned, or else the Phtah [Ptah] embryo of the Egyptians.⁶⁷

Coming across theatrical scenes (*kagura* 神樂) revealed to Guimet a form of religion in which theater was one of the expressions of the sacred, and theatrical staging a cult accessory, as in Greece and India:

Buildings on the right and left of the largest constructions are used as tea houses or conference rooms. Moreover, the theater was a cult accessory in Japan, as in India and in Greece; and when there is no company of actors, a sole storyteller plays scenes that are apparently very funny.⁶⁸

He notes the role of the fan considered as a divine body, a *shintai* 神體—a receptacle for the divinities that come to be manifested there.

⁶⁵ Guimet 1878b, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Guimet 1878b, p. 58.

⁶⁷ Guimet 1878b, p. 63.

⁶⁸ Guimet 1878b, pp. 43–44.

Even his fan will play an important role in his discourse: smart taps on the table will structure the diction, underlining some of the words and punctuating phrases; and then, fully opened and gracefully waved, it will indicate to the public *that they may have the honor of thanking him*.⁶⁹

He describes the small shrines to Inari along the same lines:

Other chapels hide in the trees, and small niches painted red and preceded by small toris [*torii*] also in red wood; the whole is dedicated to Inari, the popular god who presides over the rice crops and to his well-known servants Kitsné [*kitsune* 狐], the fox, and Ranouki [*tanuki* 狸], the badger.⁷⁰

Guimet examines in detail the symbolism of the sistrum as a cult object, which is observed around the world:

The sistrum shows that all beings should be shaken and nothing done to stop their movement, and that it is necessary to somehow stir them and rouse them from their state of stagnation and stupor. It is claimed that with the sound of sistra typhoons are diverted and put to flight. The top of the sistrum has a convex shape, and fixed to the top are the four things that shake. The portion of the world that is created and which must die is contained within the sphere of the moon; and in this part all the movements, all the experienced variations, are the result of the combination of the four elements, fire, earth, air, and water. At the top of the convex area, the sistrum is carved with a cat with a human face; and at bottom of the instrument, below the things that are shaken, is on one side the face of Isis, and on the other that of Nephtis. These two emblems refer to birth and death as the various mutations and movements suffered by the four elements. The cat represents the moon because of its variety of colors, its nighttime activity, and its fertility. [A cat can bear up to twenty-eight kittens, which corresponds to the twenty-eight days of the lunar month.] Note that Buddhist sistra also have the role of driving away evil spirits.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Guimet 1878b, p. 44; emphasis in the original.

⁷⁰ Guimet 1878b, p. 44.

⁷¹ Guimet 1898, pp. 28–29.

Similarly, Guimet mentions in connection with the mandala of Kūkai “two statues of Jiso [Jizō] holding the gemstone ball and ringing a sistrum (*caduceus*) used to lead souls.”⁷²

On the garments of the priests of Isis and of Buddhist monks he writes as follows:

Over the shaven heads and linen robes of the priests of Isis, some of the sacred costumes are in dark colors accented with shining ornaments, the priests themselves being bearded and with long hair. The priests do not wear woollen clothes that have belonged to living beings. The flax flower [of their linen] is blue like the sky and above all is a sign of mourning. This last point should be remembered because the Buddhists of India ascribe the same meaning to the costume they wear even today; so too do they shave their heads in penance, and indeed Śākyamuni himself took as clothing the shroud of a deceased person.⁷³

Plutarch, whom he follows here, is steeped in philosophy in his description of the cult of Isis:

The linen dress is not the priest, nor is the mantle itself the philosopher. The real Isis is the one who is being instructed in teachings and practices relating to deities, holy doctrines submitted to the examination of reason and studied in depth, in the truth. Imitation is not enough. We still need meditation and free inquiry.⁷⁴

Such comments could almost apply equally well to Guimet’s observations of Buddhist monks.

Similarly, commenting on a sacred vessel representing the mother of Śākyamuni, he notes that it is none other than the mother of Mercury and of Jesus: “We see Maya advancing in the sky, Buddha’s mother (Maya, the mother of Mercury, Maria, the mother of Jesus).”⁷⁵ As for Chinese, it is none other than Egyptian: manuscripts of the Buddhist sect “Zen-Shiou [Zenshū 禪宗]” are said to be written in “old Chinese hieroglyphics.”⁷⁶ As in the explanations already given earlier,

⁷² Guimet 1878a, p. 13.

⁷³ Guimet 1898, p. 30.

⁷⁴ Guimet 1898, p. 30.

⁷⁵ Guimet 1878a, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Guimet 1878a, pp. 24–25.

[The Buddha] Ho-shio [Jp. Hōshō; Skt. Ratnasambhava]... is personified in the second level under Dañiti. . . . He . . . holds his left fist closed, and his right hand has three fingers raised (in the manner of Christian bishops), which represents the three modes of being of Buddhas. Sometimes all five fingers are raised, representing Dañiti and the four virtues.⁷⁷

Allusions to Plato run throughout Guimet's writings. Some relate to his fleeting impressions of the Japanese: "Antiquity lives still! Young people emerging from school, their clothes draped, their feet bare, their sleeves rolled up, their hair cut in a Greek style, remind me of the young Athenians of the time of Plato. They are like a graceful group of Socrates' companions assembling under the plane trees on the banks of the Ilissus."⁷⁸ He noted from Plutarch that at the large temple for the priests of Isis at Delphi there is a "Platonic aspiration to monotheism" and "an inability to free oneself from the designs of the pagan deities."⁷⁹ Plutarch takes to Egypt what Pythagoras reported from India, and Plato carried it forward to the banks of the Nile. Plutarch wants to fight fetishism, superstition, coarse elements, and local cults to make these gods ideal entities, principles of explanation of the world by which they can join up with philosophical principles. It is a view of providence that directs everything with the help of secondary forces. Elsewhere Guimet compares this providence, superior to the gods themselves, to the Buddhist idea of causality (*innen* 因縁), understood as destiny. Thus unburdened and relieved of local superstitions, the Egyptian Olympus can be accepted and venerated by the philosophers of Europe. But they have undergone transformations, and their Egyptian character tends to disappear, as follows: Serapis becomes Pluto; Ptah becomes Hephaistos and Vulcan; Anubis with the jackal's head becomes Mercury; and Amon becomes Jupiter.

Osiris and Isis are sublimated: "They are the measure and regularity. . . . All that in nature is beautiful and perfect exists through them. Osiris gives the regenerative principles, and Isis receives them and distributes them."⁸⁰ The aim of her worshipers is knowledge of the first Being, the sovereign, pure Being which lives with and in the goddess. Isis became the supreme deity. Horus is the world born of good principle and matter; he is neither

⁷⁷ Guimet 1878a, pp. 8–9.

⁷⁸ Guimet 1878b, p. 29.

⁷⁹ Guimet 1898, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Guimet 1898, p. 34.

eternal, nor affectionate, nor incorruptible. But he is always reborn; and thanks to these changes of state, to the revolutions through which he passes, he is constantly young and never runs the risk of being annihilated. According to Guimet, “Europeans have indeed adopted Horus in the form of a child. The Egyptians called him Hor-pe-Koti (*Horus enfant*) from which the Greeks took the word of Harpocrates, and by changing country, the young god was the victim of a singular confusion.”⁸¹ The Greeks also transformed Horus by moving his braid to his left arm where it becomes a cornucopia. Guimet draws a connection in this regard to the braids found on the sides of Japanese deities of happiness.

X. GUIMET’S BUDDHIST SYNTHESIS BEFORE GOING TO JAPAN: BUDDHISM AS AN AVATAR OF THE CULT OF ISIS

Guimet attached a primary importance to Buddhism. It seemed to him to be almost a summary of all the Eastern religions. He likened Brahmanism to Buddhism and Jainism and, by implication, he also likened Daoism to the latter. According to a legend related as historical fact, Laozi was introduced to Indian books of Brahmanism at an early stage in his intellectual journey.

He [Laozi] was a librarian under the Prince of Chou. He had read a great deal and evidently with great attention. He will have found translations of Brahmanical and Jainist books, whose ideas, germs of Buddhism, had entered his thought to be added to native beliefs; hence the preoccupation with metaphysical ideas hitherto unknown to Chinese philosophers.⁸²

Guimet said that Daoism recognized a universal soul, metempsychosis, and a purely karmic retribution for acts committed:

In short, his system was simple; he admitted the Brahmanical idea of the universal soul from which flow all souls for their births, and where all souls return after death. He even admitted the Buddhist idea of retribution in this world, with rewards and punishments, without any divine intervention but through the power of cause and effect with the certainty of a mathematical, physical, or chemical law, with right acts producing the good, and bad acts producing evil. But our sage thought that his contemporaries would

⁸¹ Guimet 1898, p. 34.

⁸² Guimet 1905, p. 168.

have difficulty in following these philosophical theses and hence explained them in steps, making them mysterious to seem more important, so that the book that resulted is difficult to read.⁸³

In sum, for Guimet, Buddhism appears to embrace the whole range of Eastern religions, starting from their Egyptian origin. He did not, however, take this literally in respect to all its detailed ideas which he later became aware of. Guimet ultimately interpreted the religions of the East presented to him in his travels as compound sets by correlating them based on patterns of thought or ideas appearing commonly among them. The designs he had forged during his earlier studies of religions predisposed him, in our view, to adopt from among the different religious representational schemes that exist in Japan the strong classic position that is favored in some Buddhist circles, particularly in the schools characterized as esoteric or secret.

We know that Guimet adopted as a general principle of classification that of the iconographic *Butsuzō zui*, the most comprehensive title of which, as given in the preface, is “Catalogue of Representations of Deities, Buddhas, and Spirits” (*Jinbutsu reizō zui* 神佛靈像圖彙). The latter title covers a wide semantic field but remains unsatisfactory and rather disappointing as regards the position of the Japanese deities themselves in the classificatory plan. The universe described here is nevertheless sufficiently diverse and comprehensive from a quantitative point of view that almost all the characters in the Japanese pantheon can find a place in it. The book is also complemented by a repertoire of symbolic objects whose meaning is given briefly, but in Guimet’s view, consistently. Later editions (1783, 1796, 1832, 1886) complement the original with representations of Buddhist figures of the various sects.⁸⁴ Guimet found this work through a presentation that was made by Hoffmann, entitled “Pantheon von Nippon,” as an appendix to the encyclopedia on Japan by von Siebold (1852).⁸⁵

It is the apparent rationality of this directory which in all likelihood seduced our collector. It provides a mapping that is not dissimilar to the Neoplatonic reinterpretations of Isis cults that succeeded in the feat of bringing together Greek and Egyptian mythology, reinterpreted in a religious and philosophical way by means of Platonic idealism, while also integrating the doctrinal iconological elements of Judeo-Christianity. Guimet’s pantheon is based on a unifying principle according to which all religious entities organized in one set are resolved into a coherent whole. He was,

⁸³ Guimet 1905, p. 169.

⁸⁴ Hoffmann and Guimet used the 1796 version.

⁸⁵ Hoffmann (1852) 1975. See too Frank 1991 and Sueki 1999.

however, quick to understand phenomena, even while relating them to his Platonic inclination. Moreover, he noted some affinity between the religious phenomena of the European cult of Isis and Japanese religious concepts of the divine that incorporate several functional elements in a single figure. This principle of organization responded well to Guimet's scientific requirement of rationality. It certainly suffers from some defects, though: since he made but a brief three-month stay in Japan, and spent very little time in India and China, he was hardly able to make very many observations with his own eyes, or at least he was scarcely able to go beyond the observation of the facts as far as an analysis of the elements of Japanese religion. In his own pantheon, the Japanese gods are virtually nonexistent, and since they are considered as satellites of the Buddha, he had to consider them on the same level as Buddhist figures, and to treat them on an equal footing.

For Guimet, the equivalent of Christianity in the East seemed to be Buddhism. This is what still remained for him to study in Japan, since it was virtually absent in India or even China, and it is from Japan that he wished to bring representatives of the Buddhist clergy for the Eastern school that he had the ambition to found in France. No doubt he thought he was bringing in an explanatory and unifying principle to explain, report, and locate the position which other divine entities occupy at all levels of being. In doing so, rather than working from the actual beliefs of the Japanese, Guimet superimposed a religious universe of entities, most of which remain quite abstract or even nonexistent for the population in general.

If, as we have noted, Guimet sharply disagreed with the negative attitude toward Buddhism of some of his scholarly contemporaries, he might be thought of as having had sympathy and empathy with, and perhaps received some influence from, the religions he studies. In any case, it is clear that Guimet considers the Japanese population as particularly refined and intellectually informed, possessing a very high elevation of the mind and an enviable cultural level. He praised them in a manner that is neither feigned nor rhetorical. He wrote very little, though, about Japanese religions. Was this relative silence due to a fear of saying or writing something academically unfounded on a topic of which he had come to realize entails many complexities and difficulties? Is this the mark of a laudable scientific caution? It is tempting to think so. Or is it simply a sign of indifference to the topic? It would be hard to believe the latter considering his constant interest in the matter and the energy that he invested in pedagogical and political organization to raise awareness of the religions of the East.

XI. EVIDENCE FROM RÉGAMEY

There is a further resource, admittedly indirect but rather consistent, which sheds light on Guimet's position. It is possible to see what persons associated with him such as Régamey, de Milloué, or Alfred Millioud (1864–1929) have said about Japan and its religions.⁸⁶ We would expect that the opinions of Guimet and Régamey in particular were closely related, since the two men traveled together in Japan. Even more important, it is difficult to imagine that their views differ greatly on important points as they communicated throughout their lives and because, in all probability, Régamey drew his information and opinions from Guimet to begin with. The same can be said even more of de Milloué, since he worked directly under Guimet's guidelines.

A number of quotations from Régamey are of unique value in informing us about the orientation and conceptions of Guimet's thought. Régamey's high esteem for the Japanese is obvious. If they are religious, as stated everywhere, they "are not at all superstitious," which is consistent with their civic sense and their knowledge of the rules of life in Japanese society. Japan is a model of civilization, a term considered incompatible with technical and industrial production, both of which were unknown in the country when Guimet went there. This was not only because of the civility and morality of its inhabitants, but also and especially because of their respect for the nature of others:

If by civilization we mean an honest and moral people, cultivating the arts and sciences, leading a happy and quiet life in pursuit of business and agriculture, enjoying equitable laws, protecting the weak against the strong, and treating women and children with affection and kindness—then it must be recognized that Japan is all the more civilized, because it has all that and much more.⁸⁷

The two travelers, who seem to have had a euhemerist conception of religion, considered Shinto as the most ancient religion of the archipelago and describe it as the antithesis of idolatry. This cult is organized around: (1) the veneration of the *kami*, who are heroes or deified ancestors; (2) emblems kept in sacralized, closed sites, namely, the three imperial regalia—the sword the crystal ball (the curved gem, *magatama* 勾玉), and a *gohei* 御幣 (in place of the mirror)—which contain, respectively, glory, purity, and

⁸⁶ De Milloué's *Le Bouddhisme dans le Monde* (1893) was reedited with additions and corrections under the title *Bouddhisme* in 1907 in order to "give a precise and clear idea of this great religion, which merits our attention and admiration" (p. ii). See too Millioud 1892.

⁸⁷ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 169.

joy; and (3) the forces of nature represented by benevolent or evil spirits. The supreme deity is a “pure immaterial spirit, unique, uncreated, eternal, invisible, creator,” Ame no Minakanushi no Kami 天御中主神.⁸⁸ Régamey gives here a hint concerning his understanding of Japanese religions that Guimet never stated explicitly. With this remark, Régamey indicates that he had reached the conclusion that Japanese religions admitted a single creator, enriched with laudatory epithets, in the guise of the Shinto god Ame no Minakanushi. Régamey adduces a practical image he experienced during their visit to see the Ise *kagura*, a sacred dance that invites the gods to a sacred entertainment. But for Régamey, even though in Japan *kagura* gives an image that associates it with Confucian morality, “in practice, it sticks to the principles of the morality of Confucius, and so results in sermons accompanied by offerings of songs and dances, to the sound of instruments played by the priests and by girls in long red and white dresses topped by a gilded copper helmet loaded with flowers.”⁸⁹ This cult of the *kami* is augmented by that of the ancestors deified within the walls of family dwellings.

The Buddhism described by Régamey is the religion of the majority of the population. From the dialogues that Guimet had with Japanese monks and priests, Régamey recalled that the world is viewed as creative; by this he means that it is self-sufficient, since it forms a perpetual cycle of development and returns to chaos during immense periods of time without beginning or end. The temporal power of Buddhism is marked by the militarization of some of its members who went so far as to endanger the government, even more so than did the Guise family in France. It was this power in a religion that explains the fear felt by Jesuit missionaries and the repression they suffered. Régamey notes the trend toward combining Buddhism and Shinto which came about by voluntary choice and an inherent Japanese preference for tolerance: “After a power struggle that lasted for centuries between Shinto and Buddhism, appeasement was encouraged; one may even say that a kind of fusion was established between the two religions.”⁹⁰ He gives the following example of this acclimatization:

Their spirit of tolerance . . . could not be characterized better than by the following example: a fine English lady who approached the priests of one of the great temples in Tokyo for permission to

⁸⁸ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 169.

⁸⁹ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 169.

⁹⁰ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 169.

celebrate an Anglican service, saw her request warmly welcomed, since when Christian prayers are said there every Saturday.⁹¹

This explains why the Japanese are reluctant to be converted to any exclusivist religion, which is what Christianity was perceived to be. Gentleness, politeness, friendliness in human relations based on the values of life in its variety, the cohabitation of families holding different opinions, flexibility of mind, and renunciation of entrenched positions are what denote a spirit full of politeness which refuses to accept abstract considerations or principles without considering the circumstances and specific factual situations. They are therefore indifferent to the scarecrow messages of Christianity, discredited as they are by their abstract nature.

Free from fanaticism, the Japanese, whose art and philosophy feed from the pure sources of life itself, practice a smiling tolerance and a tireless politeness. Refraining from religious speculations that derive their authority from the fear of death and eternal punishment, they offer no opening to the demands of those who would convert them. “These are bad pagans,” say our missionaries.⁹²

The syncretism of ideas is a constant feature of Japanese thought that reaches right up to their constitution and parliamentary system and is summarized in the formula: “We will draw on the quintessence of ideas from around the world to increase the prosperity of the Empire.”⁹³ The Japanese government is concerned about more efficiency in the religious system that it wants to build on its territory, and while leaving a spirit of tolerance always in place to enable foreign educational institutions of all faiths, it is indifferent to religious allegiance:

Besides, the state has completely lost interest in religious matters; it professes a morality that is no more inspired by the doctrine of Confucius than by Buddhist precepts; the only sacred book of Japan is its national history, and lessons drawn from it are subject to strict control.⁹⁴

Régamey defines some of the cultic figures in the Buddhist pantheon in terms that recall those of Guimet, referring for example to “Kwanon, Goddess

⁹¹ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 169.

⁹² Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 169.

⁹³ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 176.

⁹⁴ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 176.

of Mercy (from a Japanese print),” or, “the six representations of the god Jizō with various attributes, protector of children, patron of travelers.”⁹⁵ In *Japon*, he completes the picture with the great primordial buddhas. He situates the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, as the central figure of veneration, and gives other buddhas such as Amida and Dainichi sublime expressions of divinity; then come other figures organized around these in a hierarchical manner:

Çakya-mouni [Śākyamuni] is revered. Amida and Dai-Nitchi-Mourai [Dainichi Nyorai] are represented as the highest expression of divinity with a procession of buddhas, bodhisattvas, *rakans* and *djins*, “spirits,” *tenidevas* [Jp. *ten*; Skt. *deva*] or heavenly gods, *tengous* [*tengu* 天狗], gods of the mountains and woods with heads of birds or oversized noses, a very large number of demons, and also *kami* borrowed from Shinto.⁹⁶

The above descriptions of the religions of Japan give as a constant a set of three Buddhist sects: Zen, Jōdo Shinshū, and Lotus or Nichiren. Added to these are some others: Jōdo, Tendai, and Shingon with its affiliated sect of Shugendō, which has practitioners called *yamabushi*, and worships the gods of heaven and earth, and the sun and moon. This classification dates back to the Yamaguchi controversy as well as to the letters of Francis Xavier (1506–1552). It is referred to again by Kircher, Jean Crasset (1618–1692), and Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix (1682–1761). In modern times, the French missionary Louis Furet (1816–1900) reproduces it almost unchanged: Zenshū, Jōdoshū, Hokkeshū, and Ikkōshū.⁹⁷ The Jesuit Luis Frois (1532–1597) considered that “the Japanese are requiring from *Camis* [*kami*] temporal goods and from *Fotoques* [*hotoke* 仏, that is, buddhas] the salvation of their souls.”⁹⁸ It could be that a majority of writers on Japan reproduce this pattern and that Guimet was only a link in the same chain. However, his account introduces variations that deserve to be noted, and he evidently made up his mind to give a complete description of the Japanese Buddhist sects, considering them separately from Shinto.

It appears that Régamey listed Buddhist sects or schools, up to as many as fifteen, in accordance with the ideas and classification of Guimet,

⁹⁵ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 176.

⁹⁶ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 176.

⁹⁷ See Beillevaire 1999, p. 198.

⁹⁸ Frois (1585) 1993, p. 27.

writing: “[Buddhism] is divided into several sects; Singon [Shingon] and Sinsiou [Shinshū] are the most successful. Then come Tendai, Hokke-hsiu [Hokkeshū], Djo-do [Jōdo] Nitchi-ren [Nichiren], Hosso [Hossō], and so on.”⁹⁹ These are almost exactly the same sects from which Guimet interviewed representatives during his stay, except for the Hossō. The headquarters of this latter sect is in Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nara which he had not yet visited. It also has a presence in Kyoto at Kiyomizudera 清水寺, a popular temple with no doctrinal claims. This was visited by Guimet and is represented in a painting by Régamey. Zen is curiously absent from the list. Guimet also met only one representative of the Rinzai school, and did not go to see Sōtō Zen monks. Does this indicate a certain disaffection concerning Zen? The Hokkeshū, which covers both Tendai and Nichiren, also appears here as an entity. It is true that, as Régamey assures us, one can hardly count these sects in Japan or distinguish them from one another.

There are many sects; it is difficult to distinguish the features that differentiate them and even to determine the number. There are some which are fused with each other or linked to other sects, including Shougen [Shugendō], Kegon [Kegon], and Ritsou [Ritsu]. Others have had only a fleeting existence.¹⁰⁰

In this description, it is the major sects which are listed, while others are secondary or fused with them. This is acknowledged in the *Hasshū kōyō* 八宗綱要 (Summary of the Eight Sects) of Gyōnen 凝然 (1240–1321) which Régamey and Guimet consulted.

It is rather strange that first place is given to the Shingon school because this does not match the reality of the figures. But Régamey ascribes authoritative knowledge to representatives of this sect.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless he described it in unflattering terms as a kind of school of witchcraft. This is reminiscent of the old descriptions of Kircher, who identified the Kōbō Daishi sect with Shugendō, and Egyptian mysteries:

Singon [Shingon] (meaning “true word”), imbued with mysticism, uses cabalistic signs made with the fingers that combine magic formulas and silent prayer. It was founded in the ninth century by Koo-boo-Daïssi [Kōbō Daishi] who worked great miracles

⁹⁹ Régamey (1903) 1907, pp. 177–78.

¹⁰⁰ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 177.

¹⁰¹ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 177.

by uttering or by mimicking with the fingers certain magic Sanskrit words, following the practices of Buddhist sorcery.¹⁰²

In order of importance, we should expect: Jōdo Shinshū coupled with Jōdoshū, Zen, and Nichiren, with the other sects being only relatively poorly represented. Régamey clearly follows Guimet. For him, Shingon is of the first importance among the schools for reasons that we can hypothesize about below. Its almost complete inclusion of the figures in the pantheon found in the other schools was enough for him to emphasize its prevalent role.

Régamey's most thorough account of the Buddhist sects is found in his work *Japon*. Here, the Jōdo Shinshū comes second in importance, and Régamey declares that it is the only sect that allows marriage and the consumption of meat. "After Singon, Sinsiou [Shinshū] is the most flourishing sect today. It advocates the incessant invocation of the sacred name of Amida and is the only one that allows the marriage of its priests and the use of animals as food."¹⁰³ Then come two Nara sects which are described in the *Hasshū kōyō*, one of which, the Sanron (Three Treatise School), as being "the earliest to admit a middle term which is neither being nor nothingness."¹⁰⁴ We note this opposition between being and nothingness, which was included in the presentations of Buddhism at the time. The Hossō down to this day "asserts that nothing is real but the mind, everything else is illusion."¹⁰⁵ As for Tendai, it is "like a form of Amidism in which the name of Amida Buddha is recited orally, as in the sect which advocates commemoration of the Buddha Amida in a kind of fusion—Youzou Nenbutsu [融通念仏]."¹⁰⁶ He also states that "Tendai and Youzou [Yūzū] recommend the incessant invocation and recitation of the holy name of Amida."¹⁰⁷ Then, while the Jōdo Shinshū schools, Tendai, and Yūzū Nenbutsu advocate forms of the oral invocation of Amida, the sect of the Pure Land (Jōdo) advocates a "buddha contemplation," that is, an internalized and non-vocal invocation of Amida. The definition of Zen requires only two words: "abstract meditation." By contrast to the contemplation of a specific object such as a buddha (Amida in the case of the Jōdo sect), it is charac-

¹⁰² Régamey (1903) 1907, pp. 177–78.

¹⁰³ Régamey (1903) 1907, pp. 177–78.

¹⁰⁴ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 178.

¹⁰⁵ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 178.

¹⁰⁶ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 178.

¹⁰⁷ Régamey (1903) 1907, p. 178.

terized by a radical mental evacuation, and this inspired Régamey to use the term “abstract.” Had he in mind the temple gardens of Kyoto such as Ryōanji 龍安寺? He recognizes, surprisingly, that the Nichiren sect also has this same character of “abstract meditation,” and sees it again in the name Hokkeshū, the Lotus Sutra sect.¹⁰⁸ Régamey’s description adds some sects of minor importance such as Sanron and Hossō, but it ignores Jōjitsu and Kusha, which were integrated into the latter. It considers that the Kegon, or Floral Ornamentation, sect and Ritsu, the school of discipline, both of Nara, are fused with others, especially Shingon, both at Tōdaiji 東大寺 and at Saidaiji 西大寺. Possibly he considered that Kegon was similar to Shingon. The Ritsu “school” never had any independent existence so we cannot refer to its “fusion” with anything. Shugendō, meanwhile, has been described since the days of the Jesuits as following Shingon, though as one of its least worthy epigones, and Régamey seems to endorse this view. Shingon was apparently seen as swollen by the addition of Nara schools and the practices of mountain hermits, worthy or not, and the latter cannot compete with Shingon over the whole set of gods it has brought into the Buddhist pantheon. Insofar as having almost exactly the same vision as that of Guimet, as we see through the details given a posteriori by Régamey concerning Japanese religions, it is understandable that he focused on Shingon as the sect that included all of the other sects.

XII. EVIDENCE FROM MILLOUÉ

Another person close to Guimet was Léon de Milloué, who wrote *Le Bouddhisme dans le monde: Origine, dogmes, histoire* (1893). In the preface, the Indianist Paul Régnaud (1838–1910), preaching an evolutionist theory of comparative linguistics, notes the importance of a knowledge of religions, as these comprise one of the main factors in the development of world civilizations. He argues that the new discipline of “science of religions,” recognized in France since the 1880s, was therefore a necessity. Analogies with Christianity that Buddhism has in terms of morality and discipline, as well as in other matters, suggest a sufficient similarity in their soteriological message to support the hope of finding common ground in these two largest of world religions. He also notes the impact exerted by religion on the idle minds of Parisian dilettantes—he himself worked in Lyon—notably by the mystical and pessimistic aspects of Buddhism, advocating inaction and

¹⁰⁸ Régamey’s description is more accurate in his *Japon* than in his *Japon en images*, where Hokkeshū is epiphenomenal.

nothingness. This, Régnaud suggested, is contrary to the scientific spirit, which itself struggles against evil, and against the philosophical and positive spirit that seeks to penetrate the secret of the universe. He places high value on “reason relying on science,” and from this point of view praises the work of de Milloué and, indirectly, of Guimet.¹⁰⁹ Presumably, even if Guimet did not share the nihilistic views of Régnaud on Buddhism, at least he was rather sceptical and reserved in respect of any religious system established hastily as a sectarian current, and agreed on the whole with Régnaud’s rational and scientific point of view. He probably adopted the views of de Milloué, who saw before his very eyes both “the creation of the science of comparative religion”¹¹⁰ and the importance of Buddhism. Of the latter de Milloué wrote:

Now among all past and actual religions, the one that has the most affinity with our own feelings and at the same time the purest and highest moral ideas is undoubtedly Buddhism. If we add to this its eclectic character of tolerance and universalism, which is quite remarkable for the time in which it was founded, it naturally excites sympathetic interest, at least academically and philosophically.¹¹¹

The interest in comparing the two religions, Buddhism and Christianity, while avoiding premature reconciliations, was a major reason for the development of the scientific study of religions.¹¹² For de Milloué, Buddhism—which does not seek social or political reforms and preaches equality, brotherhood, love of one’s neighbor, and universal charity—has none of the characteristics of revelation or of a deification process, but rather encourages individuals to engage in study, meditation, reflection, and the pursuit of intelligence, thus making it a purely philosophical doctrine of salvation. Its goal, like that of all philosophies,

is to explain, in the most satisfactory way possible, the origins of the world and of man, and the troubling problems of the infinite, and to lead its followers toward the good and to happiness, whether absolute or relative, teaching them not to rely on the

¹⁰⁹ See Régnaud in de Milloué 1893, pp. vii–viii. He refers to Aristotle, Stoicism, Cabanis, Voltaire, and *Littré*.

¹¹⁰ De Milloué 1893, p. 2.

¹¹¹ De Milloué 1893, p. 4.

¹¹² De Milloué 1893, pp. 5–8.

assistance of a god, but to purify their hearts, to subdue their passions, and to be delivered from the most frequent causes of misfortune, namely, the concerns and seductions of the world.¹¹³

The views of de Milloué on Japanese Buddhism and, we may assume, for the most part of Guimet as well, are couched in a rationalist understanding, or at least in opposition to the practice of magic and irrational superstition that they saw as dominating in China. This was certainly the opinion which Guimet expressed in his report to the French Ministry. In de Milloué's view, it was only when priority came to be given to Amida Buddha that worship became limited to that of a meditative buddha (Dhyani Buddha), far from the level of popular cults. The superstitious practices of witchcraft and magic "that disgrace Chinese Buddhism are very rare in Japan,"¹¹⁴ he wrote without hesitation. Lending weight to his argument, he adds, is the fact that Japanese clergy have a marked tendency to study their texts deeply, commenting and debating on them. The "tendency to controversy and metaphysical speculation in the Japanese mind" is the cause of the multiplication of the sects from China, with the exception of one, namely the Ryōbu [兩部].¹¹⁵ This, he explains, is a combination of Japanese Buddhist gods with persons who have become the objects of cults, thus making buddha and bodhisattva avatars into deities in "a kind of mixed religion of Buddhism and Shinto."¹¹⁶ Awareness of this singular, Japanese Ryōbu cult certainly explains why Guimet wanted to conclude his dialogues with Japanese religious leaders with a question about the links between gods and Buddhist figures.

De Milloué establishes a list of "sects" that he considers the most important: Zen, associated with Śākyamuni Buddha and the bodhisattva Kannon; the mystical Shingon of Kūkai, in which individuals should reach the status of a buddha in this life via the practice of incantations (*mantra*), *mudra*, "cabalistic signs made with the fingers," and the adoration of the one-thousand-sixty-one buddhas of the three worlds; Tendai, which reveres the thirty-three salvific forms of Kannon, as well as Benten, the "feminine deity of the sea, science, and speech—the Brāmanic Saraswati"; the Hokkeshū, which reveres Nichiren's Buddhist trinity of the "Three Treasures" of buddha, dharma, and sangha; the Jōdo, which adores Amida in his paradise and

¹¹³ De Milloué 1893, pp. 17–18.

¹¹⁴ De Milloué 1893, pp. 246–47.

¹¹⁵ De Milloué 1893, pp. 246–47.

¹¹⁶ De Milloué 1893, pp. 246–47.

invokes his name to attain salvation, while also revering Kannon, Seishi, and Jizō; the Shinshū of Shinran, which worships Amida Buddha as “eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and of whom Kannon and Śākyamuni are emanations,” and, in distinction to the other schools, advocates the doing of good without imposing the requirement of celibacy and the abstinence of meat eating.¹¹⁷

The praise made in this book by de Milloué of the Buddhist clergy, temples, organization, ceremonies, and art (where “everything seems calculated to make the religion kind and to seduce the soul with pleasure!”¹¹⁸) reflects clearly the experience of Guimet. While the peculiarities he attributes to the “sects” are too restrictive—the deities Kannon, Jizō, Benten, or Fudō are not the prerogative of any one sect—the sectarian divisions that de Milloué describes reflect in all likelihood the same conceptions that Guimet held during his dialogues with religious figures in Japan. Guimet inquired in detail about Benten, mainly in Tendai temples, whether at Nikkō, Tokyo, Kamakura, Nagoya, or Kyoto. His statistics highlight the importance of Buddhism for a population of thirty-three or thirty-four million, where twenty million people were Buddhist followers, as opposed to thirteen million Shinto adepts. De Milloué concluded his presentation by noting the defects and positive qualities of Buddhism after it had migrated across the Far East. Its defects include a lowering of its intellectual level to align more closely with that of its faithful masses; a love of acquisition, power, and glory, as seen in every religion; a lack of clarity in its explanations of “nirvana,” the nature of the soul, and its doctrines of “the void” and “no-ego”; and, a pessimistic, antisocial character that expresses disinterest in this world in favor of the one beyond, thus making it guilty of the crime of *lèse humanité*.¹¹⁹ As for positive qualities, Buddhism develops human virtues, such as the love of one’s neighbour, brotherhood, and tolerance; it emphasizes equality and charity, as compared to the Brāhmanism from which it came; and it defines sin as the carrying out of bad actions and not as the injunctions of a god, thus teaching the principles of full responsibility, free will, and freedom of consciousness.¹²⁰ Do we not see here de Mil-

¹¹⁷ De Milloué 1893, p. 249.

¹¹⁸ De Milloué 1893, pp. 249–50.

¹¹⁹ De Milloué 1893, pp. 252–53.

¹²⁰ De Milloué 1893, pp. 251–52. A presentation of Buddhist doctrines that is very similar to that of de Milloué can be found in Guimet 1880, pp. 396–99, 400–401. To Guimet’s presentation, de Milloué adds the Risshū (Vinaya) sect, which teaches principles common to all sects without being a particular school itself.

loué defining Buddhism from the perspective of the question and answer sessions held between Guimet and the Japanese priests? Can we not draw conclusions about the advantages that de Milloué, and therefore Guimet, saw in Buddhism, once we abstract from its doctrines those elements that seemed “irrational” or “unclear” to their rationalist point of view as Western and European intellectuals? Guimet distances himself both from those who condemned Buddhism in the name of Western philosophy, in one or other of its forms, as did the philosopher and statesman Jules Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire (1805–1895), and also from those who sought to integrate Buddhism with other religious currents in a composite eclecticism, as did the Theosophical Society. He seems simply to have sought out the elements of a purely rationalist-inspired philosophy.

XIII. GUIMET’S CONCLUDING ASSESSMENT OF BUDDHISM AS A RATIONAL SYSTEM

The preface by Guimet to the French version of a romantic novel entitled *Okoma* お駒 (1814) by the Japanese writer Takizawa Bakin 瀧澤馬琴 (1767–1848) and illustrated by Régamey can contribute to a fairly accurate idea of his views on Buddhism in 1882, shortly after his trip to the Far East and his dialogues with religious persons in Japan. Guimet considers this novel to contain supernatural elements and to be in some manner Buddhist.¹²¹ Though his preface is short and intended to present a literary work, it is eloquent and revealing of his own conceptions. He notes first that the Japanese have surpassed China in their art, mastering and highlighting simplicity, clarity, harmony, spirit, and emotion, in contrast with the abuse of details and the search for complications typical of the Chinese, who had originally been their masters. He then notes that if Bakin had continued to focus on the natural sciences, he would have written “chemical novels” and would have paid attention to the “real transmigration of matter governed by an immutable force” represented by combinations of atoms, like so many dramatic situations recognized in literature.¹²² The novel contains Buddhist elements in that it explains the present situation of its characters according to past karma. Guimet made no mistake here, even if it was at his time hardly possible to make a clear distinction between Buddhist literature and the cultural influence of Buddhism on literature. For him, Bakin is a philosopher, a free thinker who wrote a philosophical novel

¹²¹ Guimet 1883, p. 7.

¹²² Guimet 1883, pp. 5–6.

and, to that end, calls upon philosophical doctrines of universal value. The Buddhist principles he explains in this way are therefore general philosophical principles rather than religious doctrines based on a specific credo as such.

Guimet describes religious people of the Far East as spiritualists because they believe in spirits, souls, and the immortality of the soul. But, as a man of his time, he also sees atheism there, as they ignore a “creator God” or a “director God.”¹²³ The world of nature is subject to laws “full of foresight and justice”¹²⁴ which, despite an apparent unfairness, never fail to embody and realize a balanced and equitable distribution of justice: “Everything is good, since everything follows the forcible impulse given by *inga* [因果], so every mistake is punished, and every virtue rewarded; what appears to be an injustice is only the effect of a relentless fairness.”¹²⁵ Although there is no personal rector in this universe, these laws are nevertheless governed by a principle of causality (*inga, innen*) so that every element is the product of a cause, which itself is also the result of a cause. The world of nature permits of a principle of explanation, immanent at least in appearance, that is based on causal cycles (*rinne no hō* 輪廻の法). Each point can become in turn the center of a circumference that defines a causal cycle, and each cycle is regulated by a strict determinism. In each cycle, the center is considered a cause (*in* 因) and the girth as the effect (*en* 縁). If we disregard a certain inconsistency in the terminology used by Guimet—he also properly translated *en* as conditions, rather than as effect—and also in his interpretations, we may consider his vision of the Buddhist universe, which he seems to identify in practice with the “basic ideas of the religions of the Far East,” as entirely appropriate, consistent, and rigorous. Where any ruling principle of the universe such as God is absent, it is the laws of nature in their strict determinism which sit regally in the void left by his vacant throne. Like his contemporaries, Guimet was in search of values in a world where scepticism ruled, hoping to see in this doctrine a radical rationalism which could avoid the danger that atheism, left to itself, would end in dark pessimism or nihilism. Fair compensation for acts guaranteed by a purely natural order and based on responsibility in human action¹²⁶ defined a rationalism

¹²³ Guimet 1883, p. 7.

¹²⁴ Guimet 1883, p. 7.

¹²⁵ Guimet 1883, p. 8.

¹²⁶ On this point, Guimet considered that the *Yijing* 易經 (The Book of Changes), the Daoism of Laozi, the teachings of Confucius, and Buddhism all shared the same atheistic but moral principles. See Guimet 1905.

without any superstitious mythology. Could this give hope to the idea of building a better world on such a basis and not by any arbitrary principle? It seems that Guimet not only perceived in Buddhism a doctrine with a rationalist character that could meet the expectations of his time, particularly in France, but he claimed to analyze this on a strictly scientific basis, with an objectivity that stood out against clearly biased judgments by his contemporaries. Some of these other ideas were either inspired by Catholicism or some form of it, or by philosophical Platonism (as with Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire), or by neo-spiritualist attitudes such as fusionism or cogitantism, all broadly speaking sectarian in character.

It seems that Guimet's approach, which claimed to be scientific, dispensed with all the positions noted above. He himself was seeking to elaborate a new type of scientific perspective by making use of the latest findings that were available to his insatiable curiosity. In fact, if Guimet remained discreet about the religious denomination he would embrace, is it not because his intellectual concerns displayed a virtual indifference toward religious positions that had left Europe with memories of bloody battlefields, prompting great spirits such as Montaigne, Descartes, or Voltaire to keep their distance from any unconditional credo? In his approach, developed with prudence and rigor, he could deploy his ideas all the more freely in that he had no religious attachment or sectarian dependence. His dialogues with Japan's religious leaders no longer display the controversial character of those between Christians and Buddhists or Confucians that developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Japan. Rather, they reflect not only intellectual curiosity with a thirst for avoiding the risk of the mental emptiness of Europe, and of France in particular, but were also led by a general scepticism about religious matters, models of society, and human values. In the search for a morality in the context of a secular religion without God, was Buddhism not offering a fine living example?

Dialogues with Japanese Monks and Priests

We conclude with a few notes on the dialogues which Guimet held with Buddhist monks and Shinto priests. These included Buddhist clergy of the Zen, Jōdo, Jōdoshin, Nichiren, Tendai, and Shingon denominations, and priests of the Shinto shrine Kitano Tenmangū in Kyoto. First let us see what questions were posed by the French scholar. They can be listed as follows: (1) Is there a creator or a creation? (2) What is the power and virtue of a *hotoke* as judge and executor of retribution for acts committed (*karman*); in

other words, if there is no creator, what or who is the supreme authority, or who decides what is good and bad? (3) Are there miracles? (4) Is there a life after death? (5) What are the principles of morality? (6) What is the history, and what are the doctrines, of your sect? (7) What are the relations between Buddha and deities? (8) Which are the sacred texts of your sect? and (9) Can you please explain the *mudrā* of the Shingon sect?

What is the significance of these questions, which (except for number 9) were the same for whichever sect was concerned? It might seem at first that these exchanges turn into a dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, as in the so-called “Christian century” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But as Guimet was not a convinced Catholic, this hypothesis is weak and unreliable. In his report to the French Ministry, Guimet asserted that translating the answers he received in the shape of letters from the religious leaders was a work of priority for him: in other words, for him it was the work of presenting Japanese ideas on religion and Buddhism that was important.

Since Guimet did not really carry out colloquial dialogues, the records in general lack spontaneity and accuracy. The only one published when he was alive was that carried out with representatives of Jōdo Shinshū at Nishi Honganji, namely with Shimaji Mokurai, Akamatsu Renjō 赤松蓮城 (1841–1919), and Atsumi Kaien 渥美契縁 (1840–1906).¹²⁷ We may well inquire what the reason was for limiting publication to this one exchange. It is well known that Mokurai visited Europe and introduced to Japan the decisive concepts of the separation of religion and state and of freedom of faith which had a determining influence at the time. However, such matters are not really discussed in these dialogues. Considering the irreconcilable variety of answers from the Japanese clergy, the best hypothesis could be that he gave up the project as planned because he did not receive singular answers to the questions he posed to his interlocutors.

For instance, the Shinto representatives had Ame no Minakanushi no Kami as a creator, but the Buddhists spoke mostly of causality (*innen*, *inga*, *engi* 縁起), or of the manifestation of things by mind-only (*yuishin* 唯心), or the principle of things (*shinnyo* 真如), as well as of the Indian demiurges such as Brahmā. Guimet’s conclusion, insofar as there could be one, was that while the Shinto spokesmen had an answer, the Buddhists did not, or

¹²⁷ For the Japanese version, see *Montai ryakki* (1877) 1976; for the French version, see *Annales du Musée Guimet* 1880, pp. 335–73. An English translation of the record of this encounter may be found in this volume, pp. 111–35.

at least not a clear one. Nevertheless, the Buddhists maintained in their understanding of causality a kind of *fatum*, or destiny, as an overwhelming principle of the universe, a non-personal causative principle identified with the innermost part of the human mind (*yuishin*, *shinnyo*, *isshin* 一心) and karma. Accordingly, the Buddhists had a kind of causal law as a principle of the universe, like the occidental notion of cosmic law, without the embarrassing hypothesis of a personal God. From this point of view, the norms of good and bad must be sought in something other than in the mind of man himself. And if, as Buddhists state, there are no exceptions to this law (for example, miracles), the law is purely natural and universal. From this point of view, it can be asserted that moral and ethical principles are in the human mind only and not in an extrinsic authority such as a personal deity. Regarding the question about the relationship between buddhas and deities, there was no allusion to the actual situation of the recent persecution of Buddhism in Japan. The answers were very reserved, simply stressing the superiority of buddhas and bodhisattvas and the accessory role of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese deities, despite the fact that Guimet may have hoped to see some treatment of the relationship of Ame no Minakanushi no Kami with the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The frequently confused and muddled answers to his questions were, it may be supposed, the motivation for the non-publication of those dialogues from which he could not extract any consistent conclusion on the matter he mainly had in mind, namely, instead of the Christian God, what principle have you Buddhists to suggest to us? As he obtained no clear conclusion, he could only make suppositions, and these we can find in the publications of his collaborators, Félix Régamey¹²⁸ and Léon de Milloué,¹²⁹ but scarcely in the works of Guimet himself. That is also the reason why he promoted the publication of the *Jūnishū kōyō* 十二宗綱要 (Summary of the Twelve Sects) by Fujishima Ryōon (1852–1918) and the *Hasshū kōyō* of Gyōnen in French translation.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Régamey 1891, (1903) 1907, 1904.

¹²⁹ De Milloué 1880, 1890, 1893 (1907).

¹³⁰ Fujishima (1889) 1982.

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