

# Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Regained

## Groping for the Mind of Medieval Japan

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OVER THE YEARS since its initial publication in 1962, Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*<sup>1</sup> has had a ripple effect far beyond the study of the physical and biological sciences. One cannot be certain that Kuhn intended or even welcomed such an extension of his work into the so-called "softer" disciplines; nevertheless, it exists and has already had, in contemporary philosophy for instance, a profound effect. In their introduction to the initial volume in a new series on "Ideas in Context," its editors reflect on the Kuhnian impact. They contrast it with the "pre-Kuhnian" way of doing things that had until recently been typical in Anglo-American analytical philosophy; they note that the analytical philosophers had disdained history, usually holding that until themselves there had been "nothing which could be called 'the history of philosophy', but only a history of almost-philosophy, only a pre-history of philosophy."<sup>2</sup> They go on to epitomize the difference as follows:

On that [analytical] sort of view, questions do not change but answers do. On a Kuhnian view, by contrast, the major task of the historian of a scientific discipline is to understand when and why the questions changed.<sup>3</sup>

This new interest in "the rise and fall of questions" is hard to overlook in contemporary philosophy; it informs, for instance, Richard Rorty's

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<sup>1</sup> University of Chicago Press, 1962.

<sup>2</sup> "Introduction," in Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

widely-discussed *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.<sup>4</sup> It has also begun to show up in the work of some historians of Western religions but, at least to my knowledge, has had little or no impact on our ways of dealing with religions and philosophies that had their origin outside the ambit of the West—even though the word “paradigm” has sometimes been used in a somewhat loose sense.

Although not the main focus of the book, my *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan*<sup>5</sup> attempted an exploration of what a Kuhnian approach to medieval Japan might yield. I had long been convinced that, in spite of the fascinating materials offered by the study of medieval Japan, such study in our academy is divided into a number of disparate and unconnected disciplines. Not only is the domain divided between institutional and intellectual historians but the latter is further parceled out to the very different methodologies of the Buddhologist, the comparative philosopher, and the historian of religion. My hope was that, at the very least, the introduction of a Kuhnian approach to the topic might stimulate interest in looking more carefully how these different methodologies intersect and how they might more profitably interact as well.

My book has now been tested by a number of reviewers, many of whom focused on the literary issues.<sup>6</sup> Martin Collcutt and James H. Sanford, however, in quite separate ways,<sup>7</sup> raised questions about my approach to Buddhism in Japanese history and the editors of this journal subsequently offered me these pages for response. Both Sanford and Collcutt paid my book a number of compliments and I hope that they will not read what follows as suggesting that I am an ingrate. But since it would be neither seemly nor interesting to dwell on those compliments, I will here merely express my thanks for them and go on to discuss the points where I detect misunderstandings or genuine

<sup>4</sup> Princeton University Press, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Especially Susan Matisoff in *Monumenta Nipponica* 39:2 (Summer 1984), pp. 191-195.

<sup>7</sup> James H. Sanford, “Paradigms and Poems: A Review of LaFleur’s *The Karma of Words*,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 17:2 (Autumn 1984), pp. 124-133, and Martin Collcutt, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 11:1 (Winter 1985), pp. 146-152. Since Collcutt and Sanford do not take issue with my unorthodox use of “medieval”—as not equal to the Japanese *chūsei*—I do not discuss it here but refer interested readers to my book’s discussion of the matter.

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differences of approach. In order that this may have value even for persons unfamiliar with my book or the Collcutt and Sanford reviews, I will try here to focus on the broader issues of methodological import. The bulk of the documentation cannot be reintroduced here and for that I will refer the curious reader back to the book itself.

### *Cartwheels or Trapeze Acts?*

Anyone who today uses the word "paradigm" or the phrase "paradigm shift" in a book or article is likely to invite the suspicion that he or she is trying to be modish rather than intelligible. Often the terms are used without great precision. I decided that, in spite of such dangers, the term "paradigm" was important enough for my purposes and I hoped that my usage would be justified by whatever new light it might throw on the materials and epoch under consideration. My hypothesis was that many Buddhologists' and intellectual historians' tendency to channel our understanding of Japanese Buddhism through the writings and personalities of the "great" Buddhist thinkers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—figures such as Hōnen, Shinran, Eisai, Dōgen, and Nichiren—sometimes leads to a certain historical distortion. That is, if medieval Japan can be looked at in terms of "the rise and fall of questions," then it seems clear that the *making* of that epoch took place some centuries earlier. Perhaps to some extent Kuhn forces us to restore some of its original meaning to the term "epoch-making" when we use it to describe the work of a thinker or, more collectively, a group of thinkers who shape a given era's major intellectual concerns and concepts. Thus it seems to me that the great figures associated with the Kamakura period, in spite of their obvious brilliance, religious profundity, and powerful impact on developing—and continuing—institutions, were not quite "epoch-making" in the same way as those Buddhists who, a few centuries earlier, laid down the foundation for a completely new way of thinking in Japan.

The fact that Kūkai (774-835) and Saichō (766-822) were such "epoch-makers" would seem unobjectionable. Less clearly so deserving of attention is the work of Kyōkai, a monk of negligible status who wrote the *Nihon ryōiki* at the end of the eighth century. My argument in *The Karma of Words* was that his work was much more than a rustic's loose weaving together of miracle-stories and legends and is, in

fact, an intelligent and intelligible work with an underlying argument in spite of its bizarre episodes.<sup>8</sup> My point was that it is an unusually good aperture for us at our distance to observe how the mental shape of medieval Japan was formed—especially since it vividly presents ways in which ordinary people in their everyday contexts could understand their lives in terms of karma and the concept of transmigration through the six realms of existence (*rokudō* 六道). In the context of that discussion I claimed that it might be best to think of Kyōkai as offering in his work an entire new “paradigm”—that of karma and the *rokudō* taxonomy—whereby his contemporaries would understand themselves and their world. That this book—along with roughly contemporaneous other works—had a lasting impact is evidenced by the fact that soon afterwards the notion of karma had become a virtually unquestioned concept, taken to be immediately intelligible and beyond need of proof by Heian and Kamakura period writers and poets. The evidence for this is, I think, exceedingly strong.

That to which James Sanford took special exception, however, was my additional contention that the category of “religion” is not quite adequate to encompass all the things karma was assumed by Kyōkai and his contemporaries to explain. Sanford is a defender of the customary perspective taken by most professional students of religion; he insists that the intention of the tales of the *Nihon ryōiki* is primarily “salvational and religious.”<sup>9</sup> He objects to my reading as follows:

A confusion between Kyōkai's alleged attempt to give a rational explanation to reality and the objective basis of modern, Western scientific views of the external world, leads LaFleur into cartwheels and backflips of interpretation when he tries to reconstruct the objective medical anomalies that he supposes underlay Kyōkai's stories.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> There is some movement also within Japanese scholarship to see the connections between “legendary literature” and the history of ideas; see, for instance, Ōsumi Kazuo, “Setsuwa to rekishi: Chūsei kizoku no ishiki,” *Shisō* no. 732 (June 1985), pp. 24-35. Richard Rorty notes that in any adequate intellectual history we must also include “all those enormously influential people who did not get into the canon of the great dead philosophers”; see “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,” in Rorty et al., eds., *Philosophy in History*, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> Sanford, p. 127.

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In response I think that Sanford has misunderstood my argument to some extent but there is also here a significantly different way of looking at a medieval text. In order to clarify this I will here try to move the discussion through two steps: how a medieval text differs from a modern one, and how a medieval Buddhist text differs from one, for instance, from medieval Christian Europe.

For some time before writing *The Karma of Words* I had gained the impression that there are things going on in medieval Japanese Buddhism which lay outside the role and province of most of our modern understandings of "religion." I found both validity and utility in Alasdair MacIntyre's trenchant observation that the move from medieval to modern in the West was one in which "the specific character of religion becomes clearer at the cost of diminishing its content."<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre means that both modernity and the growth of the explanatory power of the various exact sciences have engendered—as a kind of by-product—a certain precision about the exact domain of religion. It was, after all, within the modern period that words for "religion" appeared in many languages, including Japanese.<sup>12</sup> One aspect of this attempt to define and delimit exactly what is meant by "religion," however, has been the implicit assumption that whole domains of experience and explanation now lie outside that which Christianity or Buddhism once claimed to explain. That is to say, in modern contexts the center or essence of religion has emerged as "the sacred" or "faith" or the "experience of the numinous" or whatever—but the common feature of these various definitions is that each of them is at the same time a delimitation. Paul Tillich's well-known depiction of religion as that which deals with man's "ultimate concern" is a case in point; a distinctive characteristic of the ultimate is that it is not only high but *also narrow*. Such a definition is, I think, distinctly modern and arrived at after a whole array of less-than-ultimate concerns have been willy-nilly removed from the authority and explanatory domain of the traditional ecclesiastical institution.

<sup>10</sup> Sanford, pp. 126-127.

<sup>11</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?" in Brian R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp. 62-77, and LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, pp. 27, 167.

<sup>12</sup> An interesting and important discussion of this is Ōsumi Kazuo, *Chūsei shisō-shi e no kōsō: Rekishi, bungaku, shūkyō* (Tokyo: Meicho Kankōkai, 1984), p. 91 ff.

This was most likely an inescapable development. My concern, however, was less with the modernization process than with an application of MacIntyre's formulation in order to grasp its implications for medievalists. That is, it makes sense to uncover the logical corollary of MacIntyre's observation that in the modern world "the specific character of religion has become clearer at the cost of diminishing its content" and take note of the fact that in medieval contexts the specific character of religion remained vague but to the advantage of contents whose scope was commensurably large. Practically this means that Christianity in medieval Europe and Buddhism in medieval Japan were *mutatis mutandis* each much more culturally agglutinative and attitudinally triumphalist than either of their counterparts in modern contexts—contexts, that is, in which science has taken over vast portions of what requires explanation and manipulation in culture. Therefore, what the modern theologian, philosopher of religion, or historian of religion defines as "religion" may often be far too constricted a rubric to account for what Christianity or Buddhism were in their respective medieval contexts.

It takes, therefore, an act of historical imagination to reach back in time to what lies on the far side of Descartes, Kant, and especially Schleiermacher—that is, to a medieval epoch in which frameworks such as Christianity or Buddhism claimed for themselves the right and capacity to deal not only in "salvation" or the "holy" narrowly defined but also the whole domain of things about which human beings are naturally curious enough to seek an explanation. This, I would contend, is the value of going after the meaning of medievality through the insights of Kuhn and MacIntyre rather than the definitions of religion formulated in modern contexts, especially since the latter tend to stress subjective and "inner" experiences as the center of religion.

If this is so for all medieval contexts it is, I would hold, *a fortiori* the case for ones informed by Buddhism. This is why it is hazardous to interpret the title and contents of a work such as the *Nihon ryōiki* through the rubric of "miracle"—as if such had a univocal meaning. It is easy to assume that, since the monk Kyōkai's tales deal with paranormal events and came from a time when a "religious" institution was growing in social power, they have a role and intentionality similar to the fantastic tales and miracle plays, for instance, of medieval Europe; in such an interpretation they become another case of what is assumed

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to be a universalizable penchant for piety and faith—especially among the less educated portion of society.<sup>13</sup> It is to assume that the finer nuances of difference between religious philosophies can be found at higher levels of doctrinal discussion but that the religion of the common people is, after all, the same thing the world over—that is, a simple “faith” and piety that is often not very different from gullibility *vis-à-vis* stories or demonstrations issuing from charismatic persons or authoritative institutions.

I think this view, even though widely held in the academy, may very well be wrong. What makes the interpretation of the *Nihon ryōiki* such a good place to examine the matter is the fact that it was clearly intended to be understood by unsophisticated, common people—especially after being incorporated into the sermons of Buddhist preachers. What deserves attention, I think, is not just the fact that the eighth-century Japanese work includes accounts of bizarre and highly-unlikely events but the frame of interpretation given these works as a whole. And that interpretation is strikingly different from the interpretations of “miracles” that were from its earliest days such an important part of Christianity. The central point of all this is that in the *Nihon ryōiki* the events which are presented as divergent from things we ordinarily experience in life are said to be merely accelerated cases of karma and transmigration—that is, only *relatively* different from the basic framework of law that operates in and through all things in the universe. That is, anomalies are only apparently so; they exhibit rather than break the ordinary laws according to which all things operate. In Christianity, by contrast, miracles from the beginning were interruptions in the laws of the cosmos and come into being because a personified divine intelligence outside the universe and its laws has the right and power to violate its laws at will. This understanding of things, traditionally understood to be basic to Christianity’s view of God and the world, is different from that of traditional Bud-

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<sup>13</sup> This approach to the *Nihon ryōiki* was adopted by Kyōko Motomochi Nakamura in her introduction and translation; see her *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon Ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973) and my review in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43:2 (June 1975), pp. 266-274. Martin Collcutt may be tilting in the same direction when he writes that in his own reading of that work its author, Kyōkai, is dealing with “the same old human nature” (Collcutt, p. 149).

dhism. And this is a difference which, I would maintain, informs not only the discussions of the philosophers of each system but also enters into the way tales get told and interpreted to the common people. The difference goes all the way down.

This is not to deny that in the history of Buddhism there were persons who, in order to enhance their own status or that of the institution they represented, happily soaked up the charisma that accrues often to a display of "sacred" power or what, in Eliade's felicitous phrase, is a kratophany. There were those who knew that a kratophany that dumbfounds the people often encourages them to trust the institution they themselves represent. Such persons, moreover, were often more interested in gaining credence through stunning performances than through careful explanations of karma and the like. Nevertheless, the real weight of the Buddhist tradition, beginning already with the stories of Śākyamuni's refusal to perform miracles, was on the side of those who insisted that orthopraxis consists of the explanation of the universe's fundamental laws, not in performances which purport to show the abrogation of those laws.<sup>14</sup> From this point of view the real kratophany in Buddhism was held to lie in the *power to explain*.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that this does not imply that from within Buddhism there arose what we know as modern man's ability and right to explore the workings of natural law through controlled scientific experiments. Sanford's misunderstanding of this point to the contrary, I have not claimed in *The Karma of Words* that a medieval Buddhist such as the monk Kyōkai had an equivalent of a "modern, Western scientific view of the external world." What I do take to be derivable from Kuhn's notion of "normal science," however, is a view of history which is not sharply divided into pre-scientific and scientific man; Kuhn moves quite far in the direction of seeing this development on a continuum, thus challenging positivism's usual *account of history* even while fully recognizing that controlled experimentation has come to be the primary modality of modern explanation.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Although Tertullian's *credo quia absurdum est* formulation was not typical of Christianity, its very existence suggests one extreme point in Christianity's ongoing tension with philosophers and skeptics who denied its basic claims about miracles. Such did not occur within Buddhism.

<sup>15</sup> This, as I take it, is also part of Richard Rorty's objection to a special something called "the scientific method" in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. 191-210.



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It is not science's method of discovery which is at question but the untested and unverifiable view of history that seems to have accompanied positivism for so long. This view of history was accepted by most professional students of religion and even by many theologians, who then went on to rescue some elements of value in "pre-scientific" world views by acts of *Entmythologisierung*, by claims that the real import of religion lies in salvation rather than explanation or, alternatively, in the internal and subjective rather than external and objective. They also—unwisely, I think—tend to pour medieval worlds through its sieve to retain the residue of a specifically "religious" intentionality there. What falls away in this process is medieval man's interest in explaining his world—and in connecting ultimate things with his curiosity about a vast array of less-than-ultimate matters.

Therefore, in contrast to this, I maintain that the author of the *Nihon ryōiki* was not merely interested in "faith" and "salvation" but also in karma's capacity to explain the taxonomy of all beings in the world (the *rokudō*), strange events in the skies, the four different ways in which the tradition said beings get born into this world (*shishō* 四生), the etiology of specific illnesses, and the like. He was, in short, interested in exploring and explaining the inner rationale—or what he took to be such—of an entire episteme, not in the much more narrow domain of faith and salvation. He used his eyes, ears, and especially his rhetorical skills to write a book which tried to shore up public confidence in the Buddhist institution by providing what might be called the "kratophany of explanation."

James Sanford does not accept that. He views my explanations of the *Nihon ryōiki* as "cartwheels and backflips of interpretation," preferring instead to see that text's import as "salvational and religious." Since by "religious" he seems to mean what I have here characterized as a distinctly modern view, it drives him, in my opinion, into his own mode of hermeneutical acrobatics. We can observe him on his trapeze in the following, his own version of what is going on in Kyōkai's text:

A simpler understanding of the "anomalous stories" of the *Nihon ryōiki* would seem to be that they were moral tales whose less than credible details constituted not the scientific placement of anomalies within a lawfully ordered (by karma)

universe, but only the obvious rhetoric or moral hyperbole, something to be “believed in” not as a matter of fact but at the levels of metaphor and allegory.<sup>16</sup>

This is a very skillful act at the top of the tent but, at least for now, I think I will stick with my more ground-level exercises—what Sanford has called my “cartwheels and backflips.” I prefer not to have to try to keep my balance up on some high notion that Kyōkai meant his tales to be taken by his reader-listeners as merely “metaphor and allegory.” It is not that allegory was a literary technique unavailable to the medieval Japanese; it is merely that there is not the slightest hint anywhere in the *Nihon ryōiki* that its author wanted his readers to take his stories and the karma they purportedly demonstrate as anything other than *literal facts*. Kyōkai’s rhetoric and hyperbole may be perfectly patent to Sanford and me—especially because we can see these within a wide range of documents from diverse traditions. But if Kyōkai had hinted as much to his contemporaneous readers, they would likely have concluded that his whole enterprise was a house of cards; he would have jeopardized his whole project if he had suggested that the things he described and the principle of karma they exemplify are only things to be “believed in not as matters of fact but at the levels of metaphor and allegory.”

The trouble with Sanford’s Kyōkai is that he has been transformed into an eighth-century equivalent of the twentieth-century Christian parson who tells his congregation that the resurrection, while not to be taken literally any longer, is still true as a poem! Kyōkai, who in Nara lived at the intellectually robust beginning of a new episteme, is made equivalent to the infamous de-mythologizing Bishop Robinson, who more than likely was trying to salvage bits and pieces of traditional Christianity—through the rubric of poetry—in an era when both its miracles and its general paradigm had encountered rough-sledding. To try to pull off such a stunt of interpretation involves, I would suggest, not only a modern distortion of a medieval text’s intentionality but also a transposition of problems occasioned by Christianity’s miracle-based paradigm on to a Buddhist text which rests on a very different basis.

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<sup>16</sup> Sanford, p. 127.

*Caskets, Keys, and Paradigms*

As a historian of medieval Japan, Martin Collcutt provides a discussion of *The Karma of Words* that understandably raises different questions than those that come out of the academic study of religion. He condones the overall aim of the book (to grasp “movements, texts or ideas within Buddhism . . . as part of the whole fabric of a culture”) and goes along with my discussion of karma and the *rokudō*—at least for a good portion of the distance. Where he seems to wish to take leave and go in a different direction, however, happens to be at the crucial point, a place where I am most eager to have him reconsider going the full distance. Thus in what follows I will hope to show what is at stake in a parting of paths where Collcutt seems to want to do so. I find him—although through the ventriloquism of hypothetical “others”—beginning to articulate his own worries in the following passage:

Some readers will question the pervasiveness and durability of *rokudō* ideas, or perhaps suggest that alternative notions—*mujō* or *hongaku*, for instance—were more influential. LaFleur may not convince everybody that he has found the golden key to unlock the intricate casket of medieval thought. He does show, however, just how pervasive and fertile the symbology of the six realms could be in the works he chooses for discussion in this volume.<sup>17</sup>

These are legitimate worries and I already know from various other conversations that Collcutt articulates the concerns not of hypothetical phantoms but of real people. I would like to untangle what I think are two separate questions here: first, whether any single concept or idea in Buddhism deserves recognition as that which shaped the era in intellectual terms and, second, whether the concept of karma/*rokudō* is the right candidate for such status. Since I would answer both questions in the affirmative, some discussion of the alternatives is in order here.

The first question is really the question whether it makes any sense at all for the intellectual historian to think in terms of paradigms. This is because the notion of an epoch living its intellectual life in terms of a regnant paradigm is really to hold that thought in that era had some

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<sup>17</sup> Collcutt, p. 149.

shape or structure and was not just an inchoate mixture of free-floating ideas and symbols. It certainly also involves the connection between such ideas and the available technology—of whatever level—of that era. Thus, for instance, it would be foolish to think that Buddhism gained hegemony over the mind of the medieval Japanese as disembodied ideas or without the ability to appeal to the impressive technology of temple architecture, sutra collection and production, and art that were part and parcel of its derivation from China and Korea in the days when Buddhism made its impact. All these undoubtedly dazzled the Japanese of the time under consideration; but Buddhism also attempted to make “sense” and in order to do so it had to be not just new knowledge but *a new organization* of knowledge. I do not wish to gainsay the point that Buddhist ideas other than karma were important and, in fact, my book deals at considerable length both with the notion of pervasive impermanence (*mujo*) and the doctrine of fundamental enlightenment (*hongaku*).

I would wish to hold out, however, for the idea that the era's knowledge and questions were organized, not just a soup of freely-floating ideas and symbols. This is why I would like to convince Collcutt to go farther with me and not take the side-path that would reduce karma and the *rokudō* taxonomy to merely one important “symbolology” among others. When symbols and symbolologies all get treated as equals the possibility of seeing an era's intellectual shape, its paradigm, is immediately lost. I wish to ask Collcutt and others not to become too egalitarian too quickly; I would like them to test farther and deeper my hypothesis that karma and the *rokudō* taxonomy quite suddenly and quickly came to *dominate* intellectual life in Japan.<sup>18</sup> I hold that, because it made “sense” on many levels as an explanatory system, karma literally made the mind of medieval Japan. Moreover, it was an idea intelligible to commoners and the elite alike. Karma made its bite into the collective mind by maintaining that it was in full operation in every place and every time—for better or for worse. A person did not have to go to some place special, holy, or sacrosanct to get in

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<sup>18</sup> This question is and must remain separable, I think, from questions as to what constituted the principal teachings of earliest Buddhism in India or what Buddhists in contemporary contexts have come to define as the central message or philosophical thrust of their tradition today. In neither of these is karma likely to emerge as a principal candidate for centrality.

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touch with karma; sacred mountains and temples but also ordinary rice-fields and marketplaces—all were the “field” of its operation. Likewise its practical articulation along the six paths of species-transmigration was explained as the reason why certain beings were born as emperors in palaces or as *kami* in sacred shrines. That same working, differently directed, brought other beings into new life-forms in the barnyard or into destitute families within the human species.<sup>19</sup> The notion of karma dissolved—at least potentially—any division between the holy and profane and moved the effective reach of Buddhist teaching into every niche of existence. To that degree it was not only a comprehensive new idea but also a fairly revolutionary one. That is why I maintain we not only need a paradigm to grasp the shape of medieval Japan but also that karma is the most apt candidate for that position.

Any such candidate, however, must show not only universality but also a certain flexibility in the era which it serves. This point can, perhaps, be best illustrated by teasing out some of the implications of a vivid metaphor employed by Collcutt who, as noted above, wrote that in *The Karma of Words* I may not have convinced everyone that I had found “the golden key to unlock the intricate casket of medieval thought.” I do not wish to play a mere game with words but, inasmuch as this does touch on the historical functions of something offered as an era’s paradigm, the point deserves exploration. I think there is a fallacy in Collcutt’s analogy; that is, the relationship between a paradigm and the epoch of history within which it does its work is *not* the same as that between a key and the casket or a box it was fashioned to open. In our ordinary experience the relationship between keys and locks must remain a fixed one through time. To alter the shape of the key or allow rust to form on the tines of a lock is to render their mutual relationship literally un-workable. When such happens it becomes necessary—either by lubrication or scraping—to return the two back to their “original” condition so that they might function together once again.

By contrast, an effective paradigm, as Kuhn and others have shown,

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<sup>19</sup> The *rokudō*, even though a taxonomy, was not static; stress was always on the movement through its various rubrics. Perhaps, as Terada Tōru suggests, there is even linkage between this and the notion of the various arts as “ways” that developed and had such importance in medieval life. See Terada Tōru, *Michi no Shisō* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1978), especially pp. 6-7.

usually begins to undergo some adjustment and change as soon as it is introduced as the new model for comprehensive explanation of things. Since it seems clear that, to date, humanity has not yet found a single paradigm that will remain everlastingly valid, a “good” paradigm is one that will retain a high degree of workability even while undergoing modification due to the need to incorporate new data or old data otherwise neglected. There always seems to come a point, however, when the elasticity of even the best of paradigms has been stretched too far—that is, when the quantity and/or importance of unassimilable and anomalous data has brought the existing paradigm to a breaking point. Then it will be replaced by something else that literally “works” better—at least for a time—and this change is what is referred to as a “paradigm-shift.” Up to that point of shift, however, one index to a regnant paradigm’s view will be its flexibility under stress; it will not only incorporate new data but, as Alasdair MacIntyre shows, also give an account of why older paradigms seemed to work so well for so long.<sup>20</sup>

This was a point which, I had hoped, was clear in *The Karma of Words*. It is the reason why there I went into considerable detail to show that the karma/*rokudō* explanation raised new problems and difficulties even as it was proposed to solve others. The story of Buddhism throughout the medieval epoch of Japan’s history is one of continuing adjustments and changes in that paradigm. I repeatedly referred to the “tensions” that attended the concept of karma and suggested, in addition, at least four basic modalities according to which the *rokudō* taxonomy was stretched and qualified in attempts to make it “work” better—not only to the intellectual but also the emotional satisfaction of persons alive then. The great thinkers identified with the Kamakura period were, I think, the high point in the ongoing effort to adjust, qualify, and—if at all possible—bring the paradigm into a form of final perfection. The fact that this effort and activity continued on after them suggests that such perfection in the paradigm’s formulation remained forever elusive.

I mention this because I am somewhat at a loss to understand how Martin Collcutt could have read my book and come away with the im-

<sup>20</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” *The Monist* 60:4, p. 467, and LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, p. 46.

pression that what was offered there was, in his words, presented as “a monolithic Buddhist episteme erected by Kyōkai and disposed of by Motoori Norinaga” and in need of greater “flexibility.”<sup>21</sup> My guess is that this arose from a misunderstanding of the specific role of something claimed to be an era's paradigm—that is, sufficiently structured and comprehensive to organize the questions and knowledge of a given era but at the same time flexible enough to accommodate change during that same period of time. I agree that something “monolithic” will not qualify but I also would suggest that my offering of karma/*rokudō* was far from monolithic. On the other hand I do worry about the alternative Collcutt seems willing to adopt. It threatens, I think, to become quite readily a disorganized mixture of free-floating concepts and symbols, none of which had the power to become the organizing principle for an epoch's grasp on reality. This is to say that a touch of *mujō*, a pinch of *mappō-shisō*, an element of *honji-suijaku* and even a very generous helping of *hongaku* may comprise a mixture of things but will not, I think, in the aggregate add up to an epoch with a discernible *shape*. Therefore, while perfectly ready to consider other viable candidates, I will for now hang on to the things offered in *The Karma of Words* as the best I can suggest for making sense of medieval Japan in intellectual terms.

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<sup>21</sup> Collcutt, p. 151.