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Against the Ghosts of Recent Past

Meiji Scholarship and the Discourse on Edo-Period Buddhist Decadence

This article examines the process by which the academic discourse on the decadence of early modern Buddhism was developed, especially in the context of Meiji Japan (1868–1912). The predominant framework in which much of the modern research on Edo Buddhism took place was informed, *grosso modo*, by the assumption that early modern Japanese Buddhism was very distant from what it should essentially have been. The origins of this discourse are usually traced back to Tsuji Zennosuke, but by the time he published his works on the subject, such an image of Edo Buddhism was already the norm among both scholars and clergy. Keeping these aspects in mind, after brief considerations on the role of precept restoration during the late Edo Period, this article will focus in particular on the period from the Meiji Restoration (1868) to the establishment of Japanese Buddhist history as a specific field of study during the early years of the twentieth century. It will also deal to a certain extent with Tsuji's ideas on the subject.

KEYWORDS: Edo Buddhism — Meiji Buddhism — Tsuji Zennosuke — *Kinsei bukkyō darakuron* — Buddhist decadence

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The Pathos of this work: there are no periods of decline... (N1, 6). Overcoming the concept of “progress” and overcoming the concept of “period of decline” are two sides of one and the same thing (N2, 5).

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

FOR MORE than thirty years now, studies on **early modern Japanese Buddhism** have struggled to show how lively the “religious life” of the people was during this period. Works in several languages have appeared showing the dynamics of Buddhism at the time.¹ There is no doubt that students of Japanese Buddhist History who first studied Tokugawa Buddhism through, for example, Duncan WILLIAMS’s *The Other Side of Zen* (2005), would be given a different impression than students who first studied it through Joseph KITAGAWA’s *Religion in Japanese History*, published over forty years ago (1966). While WILLIAMS intends to demonstrate that Buddhism “was as full of vitality during the Tokugawa period as in any previous era, if not more so” (2005, 6), in his seminal introduction to the history of Japanese religion KITAGAWA emphasizes “the moral and spiritual bankruptcy” of Tokugawa Buddhism (1966, 166).

Again, as any scholar of early modern Japanese religion would know, this view of Tokugawa Buddhism did not begin nor end with Kitagawa. The idea that early modern Japanese Buddhism was more decadent than that of other historical periods, which for a long time was the predominant discourse within the field, is usually traced back to Tsuji Zennosuke 辻善之助 (1877–1955).²

* This article is an expanded version of KLAUTAU 2007 (in Japanese); it also draws from conclusions presented in KLAUTAU 2008b and KLAUTAU 2008a. On developing this research and trying to understand step-by-step the way that the idea of Edo-period Buddhist decadence developed from a purely pro-Buddhist discourse to a full academic theory, the works of Robert Sharf, James E. Ketelaar, and Hayashi Makoto, and in more methodological terms those of Russell T. McCutcheon and Tomoko Masuzawa, stimulated me much more than I could show with a few footnotes mentioning their names. My deepest academic gratitude is owed to them. I also wish to thank colleagues Jon Morris, Ernani Oda, Ohmura Tetsuo, and Walt Wyman, and Tohoku University teaching staff Kimura Toshiaki, Kiriwara Kenshin, Satō Hiroo, and Suzuki Iwayumi, for their kindness and constant advice. Last, but not least, I would like to express my gratitude for the valuable comments and suggestions provided by the anonymous JIRS reviewer.

1. For useful assessments on the history of research on early modern Buddhism and its recent developments, see HÖZAWA 2000, and the more recent SONEHARA 2006 and WILLIAMS 2006.

2. One of the most important names in modern Japanese historiography, Tsuji was born in the city of Ehime, in Hyōgo Prefecture. From a family of devout Jōdo Shinshū followers,

Having developed his research in the institutional framework not of Buddhist studies (*bukkyōgaku* 仏教学) nor of religious studies (*shūkyōgaku* 宗教学), but of the field that was then called “National History” (*kokushigaku* 国史学), Tsuji left us very important works on foreign relations, as well as on Japanese political history during the Edo period.³

Still, we can say that the work for which he is most remembered is his monumental *History of Japanese Buddhism* (*Nihon bukkyō shi* 日本仏教史), in ten volumes. The first volume on Buddhism in ancient Japan was published during World War II, in 1944, and the final volume, which covered the last part of the Edo period, was published in the year of Tsuji’s death, in 1955. In the four volumes regarding the Edo period, Tsuji presents the critical image of a “decadent” Buddhist clergy, introducing documents that depicted priests leading lives more “secular” than the lay people.

Even though the *History of Japanese Buddhism* is sometimes regarded as the work that first introduced such an image of Tokugawa Buddhism, the “decadence” discourse had already been put forward by Tsuji in a systematic format by the 1930s. His articles focusing specifically on the “decadence” of early modern Buddhist priests were first published in different journals in October and November of 1930, and republished a year later in the second installment of his *Studies on the History of Japanese Buddhism* (*Nihon bukkyōshi no kenkyū zokuhen* 日本仏教史之研究 続編). In fact, in Tsuji’s earliest attempt (in 1902) at an overall history of Japanese Buddhism (TSUJI, 1984), even though he hardly addresses Tokugawa Buddhism, he describes it as follows:

Buddhism in the Tokugawa period lost outside enemies due to the prohibition of Christianity, causing Buddhism to fall into quietude, neither showing knowledge of doctrine nor striving to accumulate it. At the same time, Buddhism also adjusted itself to the great political peace, dwelling in idleness. In terms of religion, this is a period of dormancy. (TSUJI 1984, 33)

Tsuji graduated from the “National History” Department of the University of Tokyo in 1899, after which he entered graduate school with a research topic entitled “The history of Japanese Buddhism from the perspective of politics” (*Seiji no hōmen yori kansatsu shitaru Nihon bukkyō shi* 政治ノ方面ヨリ觀察シタル日本仏教史). After submitting two different theses in 1904, he was awarded the title of “Doctor of Literature” 文学博士 in 1909. From 1902, while still a graduate student, he worked at the University of Tokyo Historiographical Institute, of which he would become director in 1920. In 1911 he became an associate professor at his *alma mater*, and in 1923 he was granted full professorship, a position from which he would retire compulsorily in 1938. After that he continued to teach in a number of private universities, while still working at the Historiographical Institute. In the same year of his retirement from the University of Tokyo he was awarded the then recently created “Order of Culture” (*Bunka kunshō* 文化勲章).

3. On foreign relations, see TSUJI 1917. On Political History, see the still widely read *The Tanuma Era* (TSUJI 1915).

Although the amount of documentation utilized to describe the “decadence” of Buddhist clergy grew exponentially **over the years**, **Tsuji’s position towards Tokugawa Buddhism** remained basically the same. Note his text published in the 1930s:

When considering the decline of Buddhism in the early modern period, first of all, it is needless to say that the decadence of Buddhist priests is its prime cause. Secondly, Buddhism became formalized.... In this manner, people’s hearts eventually drifted away from Buddhism. (TSUJI 1931, 516–17)

This might be enough to suggest that Tsuji’s image of a decadent Buddhism was not a result of a thorough “empirical study,” but rather preceded it, working as the basic plot element informing his historical narrative (see, for instance, WHITE 1973; 1978; 1987). Actually, as we shall see later in this article, such an image of early modern Buddhism did not in fact begin with Tsuji. As SAWA Hirokatsu points out, by the time Tsuji published his studies “the ‘decadence’ of early modern Buddhism was already an implicit understanding among scholars” (1999, 5).

In any case, the discourse on Edo Period Buddhist decadence⁴ did not receive too much attention in the discipline of National History itself, but if we think in terms of the narrower cross-disciplinary field of **early modern Buddhist Studies**, scholars have tried for decades to overcome the image it evokes. As Ōkuwa Hitoshi points out:

In the end, a perspective that would at last overcome the “Theory of Edo Period Buddhist Decadence” could not be found. In response to such a theory [scholars] would say “it is not decadent! It is very much alive!” They would put all their efforts into emphasizing the living functions of early modern Buddhism. In the final analysis, the discussion would end

4. In Japanese, the academic discourse on the decadence of early modern Buddhist clergy is usually referred to as *Kinsei Bukkyō darakuron* 近世仏教墮落論 and variants thereof. *Ron* 論 is commonly rendered in English as “theory,” but in our context the term “discourse” (in a Foucaultian sense) may be more appropriate (see FOUCAULT 1972). As the term “discourse” is translated to Japanese with a different ideographic compound (*gensetsu* 言説 is commonly utilized), I will hereafter use the word “theory” for translating 論 from authors writing in Japanese, in order to avoid confusion. As for the naming of the discourse on Edo Buddhist decadence, TAMAMURO Fumio mentions “Doctor Tsuji’s ‘Theory of Buddhist decadence in the Edo Period’ [*Kinsei bukkyō darakuron*]” (1971, 1); ŌKUWA Hitoshi writes that in his *History of Japanese Buddhism*, Tsuji asserted the “so-called Theory of Buddhist Decadence in the Edo Period [*Kinsei bukkyō darakuron*]” (1979, 224–25). Expressions such as the “historical view of decadent Edo Buddhism” (*kinsei bukkyō daraku shikan* 近世仏教墮落史観), “the pejorative historical view of Edo Buddhism” (*kinsei bukkyō keishi no shikan* 近世仏教輕視の史観), or “historical view of Buddhist decline” (*Bukkyō suitai no shikan* 仏教衰退の史観) are also used by some authors. However, besides the above-mentioned Tamamuro and Ōkuwa, HAYASHI Makoto (1982, 60), TAKASHIMA Motohiro (1995, 151), and HIKINO Kyōsuke (2007, 3) also use *Kinsei bukkyō darakuron*, which indicates that this term has become more common than others in recent years.

up focusing on practical benefits to life in this world (*genze riyaku* 現世利益), for it was there that Buddhism [supposedly] lived. If this is so, in the end, the image of a living Buddhism [of that period] consisted, in fact, of the “Theory of Decadence” turned inside out. (ŌKUWA 2003, 7–8)

Basically, several subsequent scholars have criticized or simply denied the idea of a “decadent” **early modern Buddhism, but in the process, have reproduced** other aspects of the “Tsuji Theory.” Although they have stressed the living functions of Buddhism during the period, they have also accepted the hidden assumption that it was dead at least in some aspects: if Buddhism was to have lived, it could only be in areas other than those described by Tsuji. On the other hand, if the study of Tokugawa Buddhism has been a critical attempt to overcome the image presented by Tsuji, then we can also say this image has been a driving force, or even the basic narrative framework on which much of the later speculation took place.⁵

One way or the other, **as stated at the beginning of this article, it is now difficult** to find a scholar of early modern Japanese religion who still attempts to work within the framework of Buddhist decadence. In many articles and books on Tokugawa Buddhism we find exactly the opposite. One could say that in the last two decades there was a paradigm shift in the study of Tokugawa Buddhism, fomented in great part by new perspectives presented by scholars such as Takano Toshihiko.⁶ Indeed, anyone who takes a closer look into studies on Tokugawa religion produced in the last few years would be very unlikely to end up with the impression of a “decadent Buddhism.” However, although scholars of Tokugawa Buddhism and early modern Japanese religion in general are now mainly free of the “decadence” theory, the image of Tokugawa Buddhism presented by Tsuji is still very influential for scholars of **early modern Japan in fields other than religion**, and still much more so for scholars specializing in other historical periods. For example, studies on the intellectual history of early modern Buddhism are still very scarce compared to other historical periods: it is Confucianism and the Nativist thought of the late Tokugawa period, rather than Buddhism, that still represent early modern Japan in terms of intellectual history. On the current state of the field, Nishimura Ryō writes:

Beginning with Maruyama Masao, postwar research on Japanese Intellectual History understood early modern Buddhism in terms of the temple/

5. As for the continuities and ruptures in the image of a decadent early modern Buddhism in postwar Japan, see KLAUTAU 2008a. See also MIURA 2002, and for an analysis focused on Jōdo Shinshū, see HIKINO 2007 (especially 3–19).

6. In a thorough investigation on how practitioners of popular religions were regulated, TAKANO (1989) is able to analyze the dual structure (Court-Bakufu) of state power in early modern Japan.

lay-parishioner system [*jidān seido* 寺檀制度] and the head-temple/branch-temple system [*honmatsu seido* 本末制度], and analyzed it mainly from the viewpoint of the history of political ideas. As a result, Buddhism in early modern Japan was viewed as playing a political and socially supportive role to the *bakuhān* [幕藩] structure. The ideas it produced, marginalized as obsolete feudal scholasticism, were not regarded as worthy of attention. Historical studies, social history in particular, have clearly shown that in the early modern period Buddhism supported common people's lives; but in terms of ideas, research on early modern Buddhism still remains at the stage of the historical view of Edo-period Buddhist decadence. (NISHIMURA 2007, 87)

In regard to the idea of early modern Buddhist decadence many scholars of Tokugawa Buddhism might declare that “*that was then...*, and *we* don't do that sort of thing anymore” (MASUZAWA 1993, 31, emphasis in original), but by attempting such a hasty exit from the “old workshop” that is the discourse on decadence, we are caught red-handed. And again, as MASUZAWA reminds us, “what really disappears from our sight in this process of getting away is not the old workshop but, rather, the highly tenuous and volatile space where questions about historicity itself can arise” (1993, 32). Thus in this article I do not intend, by any means, to “overcome” the image of Buddhist decadence by presenting an alternative “historical reality” in which Buddhism was “alive.” What might be hoped for, on the other hand, is that by contextualizing the development of the discourse on decadence we might be able to “simultaneously deauthorize” it (MCCUTCHEON 1997, 29). At the same time, we try to understand the *historicity* inherent to the *modern academic discourse* that maintains that during the Edo Period, the Buddhist clergy was more decadent than in other historical periods.

So again: we will not be paying attention to the “contents” of Tokugawa Buddhism which have historically been regarded as “decadent.” While we do not intend to deny the “fact” that there might have existed “decadent” priests during the Edo period, the main problem here will be, following WHITE, not “[w]hat are the facts? but rather, How are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?” (1978, 134). **Thus, what will concern us** are the ways “historical realities” were articulated by different individuals with (sometimes) different agendas to the point that they became a self-evident discursive formation in the Foucaultian sense, regulating what came to be put forward as “knowledge.”

Pre-Meiji Discourses on “Buddhist Decadence”

Criticism of “corrupt” priests is somehow a constant in Japanese Buddhist history. While mention of such priests can be found even prior to that, a profusion of discourses on the “decadence” of the Buddhist clergy can be traced back at

least to the Kamakura period (1185–1333). In fact the rise of what twentieth century historiography entitled “Kamakura New Buddhism” (*Kamakura shinbukkyō* 鎌倉新仏教) could also be understood as a reaction to what at the time was seen as a corrupt Buddhist institution.

Although we could attempt to understand discourses on Edo-period Buddhist decadence within such a *longue durée* framework, our focus will be much narrower, for our main goal here is to understand the formation and persistence of such discourses within *modern academia*. As KETELAAR (1990, 3–42) has suggested, the development of Buddhist historical studies in the post-Meiji Restoration days is directly connected to responses to and perspectives on the *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 events,⁷ which can only be understood within the framework of both Confucianist and Nativist anti-Buddhist discourse of the late Edo period. Thus while it would indeed be possible to engage in a process of almost infinite regress, analyzing the claims of the so-called Buddhist “reformists” of the Kamakura period and the continuities of tropes concerning the age of “declining Dharma” (*mappō* 末法) throughout history, the very least we can do when focusing on post-Meiji discourses on Buddhist decadence is to understand them as part of the larger discursive matrix of the late Edo period. But to concentrate on Tokugawa anti-Buddhist critiques is no easy task either. Besides the fact that there is little consensus on what might have constituted an “anti-Buddhist” critique (modern scholarship has usually brought criticisms of very different natures together under the term *haibutsu-ron* 排仏論),⁸ in nineteenth century Japan (and even before that, we could argue) “it would be much easier to compose a list of those who were *not* ardently opposed to Buddhism” (KETELAAR 1990, 14, emphasis in original).

In any case, it might suffice to say that it was in the process of responding

7. For reference on the *Haibutsu Kishaku* see COLCUTT 1986. For a classic work in Japanese, see YASUMARU 1979.

8. Following Kashiwahara Yūsen, Kanno Kakumyō divides the term into five different categories: criticisms from the viewpoint of secular ethics, directed towards Buddhism’s *transcendental* aspirations and denial of the mundane; from an economic viewpoint, criticisms towards the ineffective character of Buddhism, its temples, and clergy; criticisms from the viewpoint of both Confucian rationalism and Western science, which exposed contradictions and criticized the nonsensical character of discourses indispensable to Buddhist indoctrination, such as the ideas of *gokuraku* 極楽, *jigoku* 地獄, and the Mt. Sumeru-centered cosmology (*shumisen-setsu* 須弥山説), and so on; criticisms based on a historical analysis of the Buddhist scriptures, which questioned whether or not the Mahayana teachings had been spoken by Shakyamuni himself (the so-called *daijō-hibussetsuron* 大乘非仏説論); and last but not least, criticisms which exposed Buddhism as incompatible with the “Japanese” nature, proffered mainly by nativist scholars (KANNO 2003, 228–29; KASHIWAHARA 1973). As one might notice in the above categorization of *haibutsu-ron*, traditional scholarship has not included under this term critiques of Buddhism by Buddhist priests themselves.

to its “outside” critics—such responses came to be regarded as *gohō-ron* 護法論 (“discourses in defense of the Dharma”)—that Buddhists started painting a sort of “self-portrait” that one could argue would be essential to the development of a “supra-sectarian” and modernist concept of Buddhism (see for example MORI 2007).⁹ Nevertheless, despite the obvious role that the construction of the *gohō-ron* played in the formation of a modern Buddhist identity, over-emphasizing the dichotomous plot “outside criticism vs. Buddhist apologetics” might be somehow misleading in understanding the genealogy of post-Meiji discourses on clerical decadence. As we will see later, one of the things that assured the persistence of the discourse on Buddhist degeneration through modernity was exactly the fact that it was a rhetoric device utilized by *Buddhist reformists themselves*. In this context, CLARKE has already suggested that the modern “rhetoric of Buddhist decline or degeneration” as put forward by members of the clergy appears for the first time “in Tokugawa-period clerical circles in the form of several monastic reform or restoration movements” (2006, 3). **Indeed, in the context of Tokugawa Japan, the number of Buddhist priests that, dissatisfied with the current situation, harshly lambasted the practices of their colleagues is not negligible. In fact the virtual heterogeneity of Edo-period Buddhism was the proper environment for the development of both inter- and intra-sectarian Buddhist criticism.** If this is so, perhaps we should emphasize less what modern scholarship has called *haibutsu-ron* and more what one could call Buddhist “self-critiques.”

Such critiques usually took place, as Clarke competently shows, in the framework of the early modern “movement for precept revival” (*kairitsu fukkō undō* 戒律復興運動). While it has become almost a constant to characterize Japanese Buddhism as having a “disregard” for precept keeping, the fact that throughout history such disregard has itself been a regular target for criticism shows that the notion that precepts must be strictly kept by the clergy never ceased to exist (SUEKI 2006a, 6–7).¹⁰ During the Edo period in particular, when sectarianism reached a new level and there seemed to be nothing but differences between some Buddhist schools, precepts came to play a very important role. Despite sectarian differences, or perhaps exactly because of them, precept-keeping was regarded throughout the Edo period by both the Bakufu and by several priests themselves to be the bare essentials of what it meant to be part of the “Buddhist clergy.”¹¹

9. As John S. LOBREGGIO reminds us (2005, 39), KASHIWAHARA Yūsen (1969, 443–45), IKEDA Eishun (1994, 32) and James KETELAAR (1990, 177–91; 227–28) all regard “attempts to transcend traditional denominational boundaries as the catalysts that enabled Japanese Buddhism to modernize and thereby engage the public in meaningful ways.”

10. For an overview on the role of precepts in Japanese Buddhist History see MATSUO 2006.

11. Following HOWELL (1995, 20), JAFFE reminds us that the formalization of a status system (*mibun seido* 身分制度) was of substantial significance in the construction of Edo society

But let us not over simplify things: while the idea of “precept” itself was indeed the focus of much attention throughout the period, disagreement on *which* set of precepts should be observed was also a constant. The “movement for precept revival” was not by any means homogeneous.

Following UEDA Reijō, we can summarize the movement roughly into two concurrent trends. One of them, understanding the precepts as based on the four-part *vinaya* (Jp. *shibunritsu* 四分律), posed severe criticism to sectarianism and to Buddhism as practiced by the established institutions at the time; the other was “conservative” and, as it was institutionally apologetic to the traditional schools, advocated a return to the precepts as professed by the respective sectarian founders (1977, 147. See also UEDA 1976). **In any case, such heterogeneities** were exactly what made these pursuits for precept revival so important, for they became a *space* where sides with contrasting views communicated. At the core of the critiques posed by each side (not necessarily towards each other) were ideals of “correct” Buddhism, and reflections on the “common base” (if there was one at all) of all the different sects, which ultimately came to serve as the ground for modern ideas on the “essence” of Buddhism. Since we do not have the space to provide a detailed account of the quest(s) for precept revival, we decided to concentrate on the relatively well-known example of Jiun Sonja Onkō 慈雲尊者欽光 (1718–1804), as a means to illustrate some of the aspects of an early modern language of self-criticism. Even then, we are aware that it would take a much more comprehensive study to exhaust the topic of Jiun’s criticism of contemporary Buddhism alone. What we intend to do is simply to assert that some of the rhetorical devices utilized by part of the clergy as a response to the religious policy of early Meiji government (especially those connected with the formation of an essentialist category which could be called “Buddhism”) did not develop merely as a reaction to the Restoration, but are part of a larger matrix of Buddhist modernist discourse of the late Edo period. In fact it is not a coincidence that Jiun was to become, in the Meiji period, somewhat regarded as a champion of supra-sectarian Buddhism.¹² He viewed the “ten good precepts” (*jūzenkai* 十善戒) as the essentials of Buddhism, as the most basic precepts among the myriad others (UEDA 1977, 171). His call for a return to practice “as it was at the time of Shakyamuni”¹³ would also have a profound influence on some

by the authorities (2001, 15–16). In the case of Buddhist clergy, the mechanism found by the Tokugawa Bakufu to make the differences between the clergy and other social groups self-evident was, in the words of Jaffe, “the distinctive aspects of Buddhist clerical life—celibacy, vegetarian diet, tonsure, clerical garb, etc., the Buddhist clergy were required to abide by the religious precepts specific to their sect and to maintain proper clerical appearance” (JAFÉ 2001, 16–17).

12. On the intellectual influence Jiun’s works had on the formation of “Meiji Buddhism” see in particular IKEDA 1990.

13. On Jiun, see WATT 1984. For a more recent assessment, see SIM 2003.

of the characters who would carry on the discourse on Buddhism in the post-Restoration days.

Heavily influenced by the methods of the “Ancient Learning” School (*Kogaku-ha* 古学派), Jiun understood the “True Dharma” (*shōbō* 正法) to have its threshold in the historically concrete figure of Shakyamuni. For him, “True Dharma is...nothing but to act as the Buddha acted, to think as the Buddha thought” (JSZ 14, 331). In turn, such a conception led Jiun to educate himself in Sanskrit, an area in which he made considerable achievements, despite the fact that in his time there was no tradition of such studies in Japan. In fact, he always spoke to an audience much wider than the Buddhist clergy. Besides the above-mentioned Ancient Learning School and other currents of Confucianism, his works were also in dialogue, for example, with those of Tominaga Nakamoto 富永仲基 (1715–1746),¹⁴ whose critique of Buddhism has been regarded by some (either rightly or wrongly) as the starting point of “modern Buddhist historiography.”¹⁵

Jiun’s notion of “True Dharma” is, as mentioned above, directly connected to his understanding of Buddhism as practiced by Shakyamuni and his direct disciples. The ideal practice having taken place in a time when there were no distinctions between different groups, Jiun regarded the sectarianism of his own time with deep contempt, even as a hindrance to the proper understanding of Buddhism. Note the following:

To be set by and fixed in one’s sect is the seed of falling into Hell. Fanaticism for the founder [of a sect] is poison which blinds the wisdom-eye. A great part of Buddhist clergy nowadays is egoistic and bigoted. They say: “Our founder is the manifestation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva! [He] grasped the variations of heaven and of earth (*tenchi no hen* 天地の変), and the changes in Yin and Yang (*in’yō no ka* 陰陽の化).” They preach: “our founder had mysterious and godlike spiritual powers!,” thus deceiving foolish men and women. And such things as this shall be many, for according to the words of the Buddha, in the age of declining Dharma evil influences will prosper. If a true follower of the path intends to seek for the true Buddhist Dharma, so should [Buddhism as it was] at the time of Shakyamuni be set as a base. In the time of the Buddha, none of the various sects we see today existed. (JSZ 14, 223)

This type of criticism towards sectarian scholarship is by no means rare in Jiun’s works.¹⁶ Also, such criticism was not by any means unrelated to what is

14. For a comparison between Tominaga and Jiun, see MIYAGAWA 2004.

15. For an overview on Tominaga’s work and a brief account of his influence on later Buddhist scholarship see KETELAAR 1990, 19–28.

16. We could call attention to at least two more of those criticisms:

Buddhists of these latter days (*kōsei bussha* 後世仏者) do nothing but compare their sect’s Buddha and that of other sects; comparing Dharma. They say: “The Buddha of

regarded as the core of Jiun's teachings, namely the above-mentioned "ten good precepts." Rather, it was not only as a hindrance to a return to Buddhism "as it was at the time of the Buddha," but as MIYAGAWA reminds us (2004, 19–20), it was as an affirmation of the ego, and thus an infringement against one of the ten basic precepts, that Jiun regarded such "dogmatism" (*fujakenkai* 不邪見戒). Furthermore, Jiun saw sectarianism as the reason for the "moral bankruptcy" of the Buddhist world of his time; it was a sort of evil that caused the clergy to lose sight of what were, as Buddhists, their true and proper concerns.

Two thousand and seven hundred years after the passing of the Tathāgata a hoard of demons infests the innumerable worlds and people experience suffering. In this era the semblance Dharma has manifested itself in the world as a congestion of divergent teachings. Boggled down in disputes over the multitude of scriptures, the actual practice of the Way is abandoned [by the Buddhist clergy]. With their shaved heads and colorful garments, clerics simply break the precepts or observe none at all, making a show of the Way and selling the Dharma. They enjoy pleasant food, drink, and clothes. They think of their many possessions as a virtue, and their ability to speak (*benkō* 弁口) [as equivalent to] having heard and understood the true teachings (*tamon* 多聞). (JSZ 16, 457)

While here we may perform no exhaustive analysis of even this aspect of Jiun's thought, it is indeed meaningful that this same "character," who was seen by many Meiji Buddhist reformists as a model, criticizes his contemporaries as "having abandoned the practice of the Way." Needless to say, Jiun did not make such criticisms intending to "destroy" Buddhism, as some Nativist scholars might have done. He did this, rather, envisaging the "reform" of an institution perceived to be set against some of the most "essential" teachings of Shakyamuni.

Jiun's example is typical of the language of inter-Buddhist accusations of impropriety that became widespread during the late Edo period. Envisaging "reform" rather than "eradication," and having at its core tropes on "ideal" or "correct" Buddhism, such language will, as we will see later on, gain new life after the Meiji Restoration.

our house being the most honored indeed, our sect is verily that which is expedient [for salvation],” and do little more than discuss the excellence of their [sectarian] texts. And discussions on textual excellence can be endless, endless indeed if one enjoys them. That is to say, they *are* endless. (JSZ 11, 422–23)

Moving into the latter world there arose the several sects, each of them learning of itself. Because of this, the original aspect [of Buddhism] was vitiated, and belief grew in the notion of an Ego (*gasō o chōzu* 我相を長ず). This led [people to start having] likes and dislikes regarding the Dharma, proud of oneself and envious of the other. Those who make the founders bigots in truth become bigots themselves. (JSZ 13, 338)

The Religious Policy of Early Meiji and “Decadent Priests”

The influence of the events following the Meiji Restoration on the Buddhist institution as a whole can hardly be emphasized enough. Although, as we have seen, a language of Buddhist “self-criticism” already existed in pre-Meiji days, the further development of an academic discourse on the decadence of early modern Buddhism needs to be understood within the framework of responses to the religious policy of the new Meiji government. Having lost the prominent and stable position they had enjoyed throughout the Tokugawa period, and faced with problems such as the rise of Shinto as state ideology and the “menace” of Christianity, Buddhists were forced to think about their future within the new *status quo*.

On the fourteenth of the third month of the first year of Meiji (1868), the *Charter Oath* (*goseimon* 御誓文), a document which presented the basic stances of the new government, was issued. Its article number four stated that “[w]e shall break through the shackles of former evil practice and base our actions on the principles of international law” (*Kyūrai no rōshū o yaburi tenchi no kōdō ni motozuku beshi* 旧来ノ陋習ヲ破リ天地ノ公道ニ基クヘシ, translated in BREEN 1996, 410). Despite the many possible interpretations, the contents of this article have to be first and foremost understood in the framework of early Meiji foreign relations. The acceptance of the new Japanese state by the international (that is, the USA and European) powers being one of the most urgent challenges facing the new government, Meiji politicians sought to show the world through the above article their compromise for stabilizing internal affairs, by creating a “modern” government system with no ties to the previous *bakuhatsu* system and the social practices it was based on. It can also be understood as a compromise with the establishment of a new national policy based not on anti-foreign ideas, but on universal foundations, thus representing a large step on the path to a decisive “re-opening” of the country (ŌZUKA 2006, 13–14). Nevertheless, as John BREEN asserts, “[t]here was intense antagonism toward the ruling elite by whom the Charter Oath was put forward” (1996, 419), and we are left with the question: “how many of the court nobility can there have been to whom the obligation of conforming to ‘the principles of international law’ was acceptable?” (1996, 426).

In fact, ŌZUKA emphasizes that all five articles in the Charter Oath were abstract in conception and were drafted envisaging the possibility of multiple interpretations (2006, 12). Indeed, both Breen and Ōzuka have pointed out how, from early Meiji to the postwar days, readers have interpreted the Charter in very different, sometimes even diametrically opposed ways (BREEN 1996, 424; ŌZUKA 2006, 37).¹⁷ As BREEN asserts, the same “degree of vagueness”

17. See also BREEN 1995 for a detailed survey of the scholarship on the Oath. BREEN 1996, on the other hand, is more focused on the importance of the Oath as a “ritual performance,” and in comparison to Ōzuka’s assessment relatively little is said about the contents of the Oath itself.

observed in the other articles is also true in relation to the “evil customs” of article four (1996, 426). Thus it is not difficult to imagine how the term must have born a different meaning in different areas of the new government: while in the context of foreign relations it might have been understood as the Tokugawa international policy, in the context of religious affairs it was understood as a still different “evil.” One of the first edicts on the issue of “distinguishing between Kami and Buddhas” *shinbutsu hanzen* 神仏判然 made by the newly (re-)created Bureau of Kami Worship (*Jingi jimukyoku* 神祇事務局) was issued only a few days after the promulgation of the Charter Oath. As pointed out by KETELAAR (1990, 9), with a language close to that of article four it might help clarify how the “past evils” were understood in a religious context:

First year of Meiji, third month, seventeenth day; with the Restoration of Imperial Rule, and the sweeping away of past evils (*kyūhei go-issen araserare sōrō* 旧弊御一洗被為在候), in the Shinto shrines of the whole country, people who adopt the appearance of Buddhist priests and call themselves *bettō* 別当 or *shasō* 社僧, are required to return to lay life (*fukushoku* 復飾). People who are hindered from doing so shall give notice. However, of course those people who decide to return to lay life shall give up the ranks and titles they enjoyed as Buddhist priests (*sōi-sōkan* 僧位僧官). As for their [new] ranks, there will be further instructions. For the time being, they shall wear white robes when performing before the Kami. Acknowledging the above, one who desires to laicize shall [also] notify this Bureau (MURAKAMI, et al, 1926, 82).

While KETELAAR suggests that, for Kamei Koremi 亀井茲監 (1825–1885) and Fukuba Bisei 福羽美静 (1831–1907), ideologues in charge of the Bureau of Kami Worship, “the ‘sweeping away’ and ‘breaking off’ of ancient evil customs was to be accomplished by the removal of all Buddhist priests, acolytes, and retainers from Shinto shrines throughout the nation” (1990, 9), BREEN argues that such men were much more tolerant towards Buddhism than modern scholarship has considered them to have been (2000). Further, for BREEN, the “first and most pressing objective” for those ideologues was not the “eradication,” but “[t]he ‘dis-establishment’ of Buddhism, that is the severance of all state ties, an end to all state privileges and the transfer of social functions to ‘Shinto’ institutions” (2000, 237).

In any case, the public policy of early Meiji was far from consistent. There was enough disagreement inside the Bureau of Kami Worship itself, let alone in the government as a whole. In addition to this, in the years immediately following the Restoration the enforcement of the new edicts was left up to each individual *han* 藩. Thus despite the fact that men like Kamei and Fukuba might have intended otherwise, cases in which separation edicts such as the above were put into effect by local administrators by the use of force were not rare, sometimes leading to the events which became regarded as *haibutsu kishaku*. Furthermore, what is

essential for us to understand is less the “real intentions” of the upper echelons responsible for religious policy, and more the way some Buddhist priests saw and understood such policy, how they received and reacted to such a “crisis.” In truth, not every section of the Buddhist clergy acted, and some parts of it stayed very indifferent indeed to the whole situation. Nevertheless, some of the priests who were directly involved in overcoming the present crisis, understanding the situation as a convenient opportunity to promote reforms, were the ones who would later become the bearers of discourses on “modern Buddhism” throughout the Meiji period.

These early Meiji Buddhist priests who felt the crisis keenly enough to take political action made, amongst others, pleas to the *de jure* central government, putting forward reformation proposals based on *their* idea of what constituted “evil customs.” Some Buddhist responses were presented via criticism of the elements priests like Jiun had been denouncing from the eighteenth century: sectarianism and precept-breaking. However, the new conjuncture of loss of institutional stability provided by the Tokugawa *bakufu* also caused Buddhists to seek, through the “sweeping away” of what they regarded to be “former evils,” the protection of the new Meiji government. Let us now take a closer look at the way some of these responses took place. Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909), who was to become one of the most active Buddhist priests of the Meiji period, wrote in the tenth month of 1868:

In my humble thoughts, the Restoration we see is the greatest of blessings for all people. And it is so by the will of Heaven. The ways of both Kami and the Buddha are with the natural order of things, they are foundational principles (*kōki* 鴻基) that remain unaltered even though things change and the stars move [in the firmament]. Now, the Council of State commands us to separate the Kami and the Buddha. My reflections [on this matter] are that Buddhist priests forgot the meaning of their beliefs, and having deranged themselves in polluted worldly affairs, brought upon themselves the disciplinary actions of the politicians. How can we bear such shame? How can we [priests] drink the water of the land of the gods, and stand on the ground of the land of the Sovereign? In walking on the royal and public Way, have not we become [like] foreigners? What I humbly expect is that [the government] will correct the wrongful deeds [of Buddhist priests], mending their Way and turning them into people who will make the ways of both Kami and Buddha illuminate, along with the sun and the moon, the ages to come, who can reform the inside heresies, taking care not to be fooled by the outside evil teachings [of Christianity] (*jakyō* 邪教). Trouble on the inside will bring misfortune from the outside: it was due to the unclear state of the Teachings of the Land of the Emperor (*kōkoku honkyō* 皇国本教) that the evil teachings of Christianity trespassed [into Japan] during the Tenmon Era (天文 1532–1555) (KUSANAGI 1913, 54–58)

There are two points worth highlighting from the above text. First, the *shin-butsu bunri* policy was implemented, to begin with, because Buddhist priests “forgot the meaning of their beliefs.” Second, these priests, through the Meiji Restoration, were now expected to “mend their Way.” Thus as a means to overcome the crisis brought about by the religious policy of the Meiji government, Unshō “admits” the past “evil customs,” and by doing so he points out the possibility for priests, through the new government, to correct their wrongful deeds. Unshō still encourages Buddhists to join forces with Shinto, to protect the “Land of the Gods” against the “evil teachings” of Christianity. In sum, in order to fight against what was perceived as a wave of anti-Buddhist criticism, Buddhism emphasizes how significant a contribution it can make to the Japanese nation, a practical example being joining sides with Shinto against the common enemy of Christianity. It was under this principle that in the twelfth month of the first year of Meiji that Shaku Unshō, among other leading figures of many Buddhist schools founded the League of United Buddhist Sects (*Shoshū dōtoku kaimei* 諸宗同徳会盟) (SAKURAI 1971, 97).

This league can be regarded as the first supra-sectarian Buddhist association of modern Japan. A list of eight “Topics for Discussion” (*Shingi daimoku* 審議題目) were drafted by the beginning of the second year of Meiji as follows:

- (1) Inseparability between secular law and Buddhist law; (2) Critique and proscription of heresies; (3) Critique of the scriptures of each sect; (4) Endeavor to unify the three ways [of the Kami, Confucius, and the Buddha]; (5) The sweeping away of the past evils of each sect; (6) The operation of new schools; (7) The recruitment of human resources; (8) Making efforts to spread [Buddhism] among all the people of the country.

(TSUJI 1931, 839)

The resemblance that the fifth topic, “the sweeping away of the past evils of each sect” (*jishū kyūhei issen no ron* 自宗旧弊一洗之論) bears to both the *Charter Oath* and the Bureau of Kami Worship edict is obviously not fortuitous. There may be several interpretations for the phrase “sweeping away of past evils,” but there is probably no mistake in saying that the League drafted this topic with the Bureau edict in mind. The Japanese sects symbolized by the League thus “take responsibility” for their mistakes, and promise to “sweep them away,” in order to guarantee a place in the new *status quo*. Further, we could perhaps read the formation of the League itself as recognition, by part of the clergy, of sectarianism as a “former” or “past evil.” While this is not a definitive assertion, we could at least say that previous sectarianism was regarded as something to be relativized so Buddhism could survive. In any case, we can definitely say that in the end, the idea that before the Restoration each and every Buddhist sect was permeated by “evil customs” that needed to be “swept away” became the order of the day.

The same discourse can be found in the individual works of other Buddhist priests of the period. For example, the same Shaku Unshō mentioned above affirms that in **ancient Japan, when Buddhism was supervised by the Imperial state**, priests kept strict observance of the precepts, and worked to protect the nation. However, with the rise of *bushi* power after the *Genpei* war, priests started to distance themselves from their ideal image.¹⁸ Now that political power was once again in the hands of the Emperor, the more “past evils” were “washed away,” the more Buddhist priests would go back to keeping the precepts, just like they used to in the days of yore. For Unshō, the decadence of Buddhist clergy is closely related to the sort of political power brought by the *bushi* government, which shows a clear association between the “sweeping away of past evils” and the Tokugawa *bakufu*. For Unshō, the religious policy of early Meiji was not evil at all; on the contrary, the “Restoration” of Imperial power gave Buddhism the chance it needed to return to its ideal form.

One more possible interpretation of the “evil customs” was presented by Fukuda Gyōkai 福田行誠 (1809–1888), who like Unshō, was a central figure in the League of United Buddhist Sects. In the chapter *Kyūhei Isshin* 旧弊一新 of his *On Virtue* (*Dōtokuron* 同徳論; KAJI 1899, 279–306), composed around the fourth

18. Note the following excerpt from Unshō’s “Petition to the Council of State on sweeping away the evils of Buddhist Clergy” (*Sōhei issen no kanpu kenpakusho* 僧弊一洗ノ官符建白書):

The Way [of Buddhism] is propagated by people, [while] it is through the Way that people can elevate [themselves morally]. While Buddhist priests keep the precepts [*kai* 戒] and their deeds are immaculate, public authorities [*ōkō daijin* 王公大臣] respect and believe in the three treasures. However, when the precepts are not kept and their deeds are wrong, they lose the sincere faith of all people [*shimin* 四民]. Thus precepts are the fundamentals of priesthood. In ancient times in the Land of the Emperor, precepts were strictly kept, and priests upon whom were not conferred the full monastic precepts [*gusoku daikai* 具足大戒] were not regarded as regular Buddhist priests... [M]y humble thoughts are that, the initiation of priests and the propagation of the Buddhist dharma were the desire of the Emperor, who would have [Buddhist priests] protect the nation. But after the *Genpei* war, because the keeping of precepts faded, people took Buddhist robes as they pleased, and the essence [*honshi* 本旨] of the Buddha was lost. Criticism from both nobles and commoners [*shishonin* 士庶人] increased day by day. [By the time] the Buddha taught the Six Principles of Reverent Harmony [*roku-wakyō* 六和敬], he kept the same precepts, ate the same food, and wore the same clothes [as his disciples]. He possessed the [same kind of] bowl and [the same] three robes. He endured famine and cold, sitting in meditation on rocks in the forest. His spiritual energy [*ki* 氣] was even higher than the galaxy, and his wisdom [*shiki* 識] transcended the three worlds [*sangai* 三界].... What I humbly expect is that by the golden opportunity of this Restoration, His Majesty will make things like they were in ancient days, re-arranging the [priestly] ranks through the criteria of who keeps the precepts and who does not, illuminating everything with the *vinaya*. Being commanded [such] reforms [*kaikaku* 改革] shall be the greatest of joys for followers of the Buddha, and in my humble opinion, also serve to protect the Throne. (KUSANAGI 1914, *Kenpakusho* 7–8)

month of the second year of Meiji, Gyōkai states that the “decadence” of the Buddhist clergy is not an obvious consequence of the age of “declining Dharma,” but was to be found in the attitude of Buddhists themselves. Gyōkai asserts that the “Dharma Gate of the original Tathāgata master” (*honshi nyorai no hōmon* 本師如来の法門) is like a “bright mirror” (*meikyō* 明鏡), and that the “evils” (*hei* 弊) are like “dust” (*jinai* 塵埃). In the same way a mirror is made dirty by accumulating dust, so is the Buddhist Dharma tainted by “evils,” and in the same way a mirror needs to be cleaned at times, so too does the Buddhist Dharma. In the age of *shōbō* 正法 (“true Dharma”), Buddhism was like a vast ocean, where filth did not accumulate. In the age of *zōhō* 像法 (“imitative Dharma”), Buddhism was like a great river, where it was very difficult for filth to accumulate, although this could happen at times. But “now,” in the age of *mappō*, Buddhism is like a small stream or a little ditch (*sairyū shōkō* 細流小溝), in which filth easily accumulates. In order to keep this ditch clean, caution that was unnecessary in previous ages is now essential.¹⁹ Urgent action was required by Meiji Buddhists in order to “clean” the Mirror of the Dharma. And this opportunity, says Gyōkai in his *On Virtue*, was provided by the Meiji Restoration:

If we do not sweep away [the evils], it will be like a bank collapsing in a river. But the evils are not only past ones, there are present evils, and in the future there will be more and more. We have to seize the opportunity given by the Restoration (*issin* 一新), and we have to strive to sweep away the evils immediately. The topics raised in this essay are the ones that need our efforts with the most urgency; we cannot leave any of them for later. If we mistake the attitudes we have to take right now for the ones we can leave until later, [the chance for] accomplishment will be affected. (KAJI 1899, 298)

The idea that the Buddhist priesthood was filled with “evil” and that the Meiji Restoration brought an opportunity to correct it was not only shared by Gyōkai and Unshō, but can also be regarded as the basic position of the League of Buddhist Sects. If we think that the construct we came to regard as “Buddhism” is based on a concept that took a clearer shape during this same period, then we can also say that this concept was already inseparable from the idea that the “current” form of Buddhism was not the ideal form, and required reformation. Inseparable from ideas of “correct Buddhism,” critiques such as the above played

19. Early Meiji Buddhists such as Gyōkai and Unshō believed that salvation was possible, even in the age of *mappō*. The specificity of Gyōkai’s *mappō* thought, according to Ikeda, is that “based on the idea that the five defilements (*gojoku* 五濁) and five aggregates (*goun* 五蘊) were the same in both ages of *shōbō*, and in the current *mappō* days of “Civilization and Enlightenment” [*bunmei kaika* 文明開化, as his present time was regarded], Gyōkai increased awareness about the end of time, while at the same time emphasizing a way to overcome it” (IKEDA 1976a, 76).

a crucial role on the development of a supra-sectarian identity, which put them in the core of “modern Buddhism” itself.

Views on Decadence: Modern Scholarship and the Quest for a New Buddhism

Although influenced in some aspects by Unshō and Gyōkai, unlike his predecessors Hara Tanzan 原坦山 (1819–1892) did not emphasize “a return to the ancient ways,” nor the strict observance of precepts as a means to reform Buddhism (and thus overcome the present crisis). Rather, he called for a restructuring of Buddhism based on the adoption of “Western” and “scientific” ideas. One of the first Japanese Buddhists to emphasize “empiricism” (*jisshō-shugi* 実証主義) and “experimentalism” (*jikken-shugi* 実験主義), in his days prior to becoming a Sōtō Zen priest Tanzan had studied Confucianism and medicine, and this basis influenced his ideas as a Buddhist to a great extent. His knowledge of human anatomy, associated with his understanding of Western philosophical and scientific thought, gave birth to a very particular interpretation of Buddhist “experience,” which can be observed in his *Records on Experiencing the Suchness of the Mind* (*Shinshō jikken roku* 心性実験録, first edition 1873; AKIYAMA 1909, 103–24).

Tanzan’s view of Buddhism reached the ears of Katō Hiroyuki (加藤弘之 1836–1916), the first superintendent of the Departments of Law, Science, and Literature of the University of Tokyo, and in 1879 Tanzan was made the first Lecturer on Buddhist Texts (*bussho kōdoku shi* 仏書講読師) (IKEDA 1976b, 92; KANAMORI 1990, 23; KIMURA 2001, 539–41). Along with Unshō and Gyōkai, Tanzan is also placed in the “Meiji New Buddhist Movement” (IKEDA 1976b, 92–111), but as mentioned above, there are obvious differences between him and the former two priests.²⁰ Differences aside, he shares the discourse that “today’s decadence” was caused by the doings of Buddhists themselves:

20. Tanzan did not seek the causes of the decadence of Buddhist priests in the transgression of precepts, as did both Unshō and Gyōkai. According to Tanzan, the problem was in “experiencing the mind” (*kokoro no jikken* 心の実験). On a lecture entitled “The Experiencing of Indian Philosophy” (*Indo tetsugaku no jikken* 印度哲学の実験) given in May of 1886, he explains that the reason why Buddhists could not answer the same questions that had been asked since Tominaga Nakamoto in the eighteenth century was because priests were “experiencing” Buddhism in the wrong way (AKIYAMA 1909, 43–48). In this manner, while criticizing the ineptitude of Buddhist priests in answering such questions, Tanzan also tried to find an answer for some of the intellectual problems Buddhism still faced at the time. While emphasizing that among the three areas of learning (*sangaku* 三学) it was the precepts (*kai* 戒) which had so far received the greatest attention, he advocated a shift towards meditation (*jō* 定). He asserted that there was no use in keeping a precept when one could not understand it, although through meditation one could repel greed (*don’yoku* 貪欲), hatred (*shin’i* 瞋恚), and delusion (*guchi* 愚痴), which would naturally lead to the keeping of precepts. By changing the focus of the discussion on Buddhist reformation from the precepts to meditation, one can say that Tanzan opened the way for the philosophical

In very ancient days (*jōko* 上古), our learning of Buddhism was practical (*jitsugaku* 実学) and verifiable (*shinshō* 真証), and there was little argument for argument's sake (*keron* 戲論). In middle ancient days (*chūko* 中古), such practical methods began decaying. [Based on] empty theories and meaningless discussions, [new] methods arose. In the course of time, it turned into the decadent [form we see] today. There is nothing incompatible between Western learning (*yōgaku* 洋学) and [the methodology of Ancient Buddhism]! Oh, those who care, why do we not regret? Why do we not lament? How can we say it is all due to the tide of the times? Whom, if not the followers of Buddhism ourselves, shall bear responsibility for such a situation? (AKIYAMA 1909, 107–10)

By this time, more and more Buddhists were trying to represent their ideas in Western philosophical terms. The idea that the present decadence is a result of the actions of the “Buddha’s disciples” themselves now becomes academic knowledge based on “Western learning,” due to Tanzan’s position as a lecturer at the first University in modern Japan.

Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919), who came into contact with Tanzan while a student at the Tokyo Imperial University, also influenced in a decisive form the debate on what role Buddhism was to play thereafter. As a philosophy major Inoue was also deeply influenced by Ernest F. Fenollosa (1858–1908), through whom he came into contact with a range of Western philosophers including Descartes and Hegel (STAGGS 1983, 257). Like Tanzan, Inoue also emphasized that it was indeed through the categories delivered by Western philosophy that Buddhism was to reassess its meaning.

In his *The Golden Needle of Truth* (*Shinri konshin* 真理金針, first edition 1886–1887) Inoue Enryō divides religion into two categories, “intellectual religions” (*chiryoku no shūkyō* 知力の宗教) and “emotive religions” (*kanjō no shūkyō* 感情の宗教). While Christianity was based solely on the latter, Buddhism was a “religion” that combined both (INOUE 1987a, 250–97). Inoue continues by emphasizing

Buddhism that would later arise with Inoue Enryō and Suzuki Daisetsu (it does not come as a surprise that Tanzan was a Sōtō Zen Buddhist). While it is true that “the terms used by the Japanese to render ‘experience’—*keiken* [経験] and *taiken* [体験]—are both modern neologisms coined in the Meiji period...[and that] [t]here simply is no premodern Japanese lexical equivalent for ‘experience’” (SHARF 1998, 102), we can think of Tanzan’s use of the term *jikken* 実験 as an early attempt to render the modern concept of an “ahistorical, transcultural experience of ‘pure subjectivity’ which utterly transcends discursive thought” (SHARF 1993, 5). Throughout the 1880’s, as Tanzan deepened his knowledge of Western philosophy and religious history, the idea of a Buddhist subjective experience became more delineated. It is interesting to notice that later on, when influenced by the works of Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), Tanzan asserts that the term “religion” (*rerijon* レリジョン; *shūkyō* 宗教) is not appropriate to describe Buddhism, the term “philosophy of mind-suchness” (*shinshō testugaku* 心性哲学) being more adequate (AKIYAMA 1909, 54–55). For more on Tanzan, see IKEDA 1976b (especially 92–102); KANAMORI 1990; KIMURA 2001 and YOSHINAGA 2006.

how significant a contribution Buddhism was able to make as a “religion” to the Japanese state. Now for the first time Buddhism became a religion not only equal to but also better than Christianity, and was said to be “beneficial for the nation” (*kokka ni hieki* 国家に裨益, INOUE 1987a, 141). As it has been put by many recent scholars, during the early Meiji days there were many alternative translations for the word “religion” (*tokkyō* 徳教, *hōkyō* 法教, *shūshi* 宗旨, *shūmon* 宗門), but it was the word *shūkyō* 宗教 that prevailed (YAMAGUCHI 1999 and 2005; ISOMAE 2003; SHIMAZONO 2004). As YAMAGUCHI points out (1999, 29–55; 2005, 30–40), the establishment of the word *shūkyō* as a translation for “religion” happened through a lively debate that took place among Japanese intellectuals during the 1880s, revolving around what should be “Japan’s Religion in the Future” (*Nihon shōrai no shūkyō ikan* 日本将来の宗教如何). This debate was centered on Buddhists and Christians, but also came to involve figures who called themselves “indifferent” to “religion.” Under the slogan “Defend the Nation and Love the Truth” (*gokoku airi* 護国愛理), and associating “unsurpassed truth” with Buddhism (STAGGS 1983, 253), Inoue Enryō was one of the characters who, from the Buddhist side, participated most actively in the debate. However, for Inoue, Buddhism in its current form was indeed far from what it should be “in essence,” and in order to be made into the official religion of Japan, Buddhism needed reformation.

Having given up the ambition of creating a new religion, I have decided to reform Buddhism, and make it the Religion of the Civilized World (*kaimei sekai* 開明世界). This is a decision of the eighteenth year of Meiji (1885), the year I began [my task of] reforming Buddhism. (INOUE 1987b, 337)

This way, Enryō emphasizes that present Buddhism is far from what it should be, but if improved it would definitely work for the good of the country. As we have seen so far, this is not a new discourse. Unshō, Gyōkai, and Tanzan all denounce the Buddhism of the present as being far from its ideal. Buddhism’s utility is emphasized first to overcome the crisis presented by the *shinbutsu bunri* policy, then in the context of the debate on which should be Japan’s future religion. In order to speak about the future of Buddhism in the Japanese nation, its “present decadence” becomes the “ground” on which many of the problems are laid out.²¹

21. This discourse would eventually surpass the borders of the Buddhist world and be reproduced by people who had close to nothing to do with priesthood for very different reasons. The discussions on the establishment of the Meiji Constitution, which took place around the same time as the reflections on what should be “Japan’s Religion in the Future,” were also held under the paradigm of a “decadent Buddhism.” In addressing the Privy Council in 1888, Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 (1841–1909) states:

At this moment, while trying to establish the Constitution, first of all we have to think of Our Country as the reference point. And it is based on this reference point that we

Further, for Enryō the undesirable state of “present Buddhism” that had been emphasized until that point had its origins “around three hundred years ago,” which clearly points to the beginning of the Edo Period. Note his following words:

During the time the Tokugawa clan was in control of political power, Buddhism seemed prosperous [from the outside], but in reality, its internal putrefaction caused rot in every part. Buddhist priests of this period, taking their privileges for granted, did not make any noteworthy contributions to society. And for around three hundred years they contented themselves with leisure, living as they would. **Not acquiring any practical knowledge, nor performing any practical activity,** they did not make any efforts for the improvement of society, thus bringing about the Buddhist decay we see today. (INOUE 1987a, 197)

Although during the Tokugawa period eminent Buddhist scholars did not do anything to improve the [lay] world, their prosperity was assured by the strong protection of the Tokugawa. Even though [Buddhism] appeared to be blooming on the outside, it was putrid on the inside. The accumulated poison of nearly three hundred years bursts out today, to the point of present decay we now see. (INOUE 1987a, 199)

The current “decadence” that reformists criticized and hoped to improve was now clearly associated with the system introduced by the Tokugawa Bakufu.²²

have to make our decisions. In Europe, there is such a thing as religion, which works as a reference point, and permeates deeply and unites the hearts of people. However, in Our Country religion is weak, and there is none which could be a reference point for the nation. Buddhism once enjoyed prosperity, and connected the hearts of all people, but in the present day it already tends towards decline. Shinto is based on the instructions of the Founders of Japan (*sosō* 祖宗), but even though it contains the words of the Forefathers [of the Emperor], it lacks strength to, as a religion, direct the hearts of the people. In Our Country, it is only the Imperial Family that can be regarded as a reference point. (SKG 1984, 156–57)

Itō's discourse in the above quotation is very similar to that of Inoue Enryō: present Buddhism is decadent, and thus cannot be turned into “the religion of Japan.” However, while Enryō emphasizes that, if “revitalized,” Buddhism can perform such a role, for Itō such a thing is out of the question. However, no matter the conclusions reached, the idea that present Buddhism was “decadent” was nonetheless a common factor.

22. More than a decade after Enryō, Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) would reproduce the same discourse in the context of Buddhist institutional reformation. In his article “Buddhists, have you no sense of circumspection?” (*Bukkyōsha nanzo Jichō sezarū ka* 仏教者盍自重乎), Kiyozawa mentions:

In their common evil, Buddhist priests passed on the idea that the Way of Buddhism was something out of reach. As a result, feeling at ease in their own vulgarity, they would **backslide and degenerate more and more. This is so regarding their own practice (*jigyō* 自行),** and it is so regarding their practices involving others (*keta* 化他), and can be seen in [both] senior and young priests. Broadly speaking, there is no Buddhist

We can say that from Enryō onward, taking action to reform “present Buddhism” and criticizing Edo Buddhism in historically concrete terms become two sides of the same issue.

In 1894, the study of Japanese Buddhist history was established in the Meiji academic world (SUEKI 2004, 93). Murakami Senshō 村上專精 (1851–1929), who by this time was a lecturer in Indian Philosophy at the then Tokyo Imperial University, published with the help of his students Washio Junkyō 鷲尾順敬 (1868–1941) and Sakaino Kōyō 境野黄洋 (1871–1933) *Bukkyō shirin* 仏教史林, the first Japanese periodical dedicated entirely to the “History of Buddhism.”²³ Some years later, between 1898 and 1899, Murakami published the two volumes of his *Outline of the History of Japanese Buddhism* (*Nihon Bukkyōshi kō* 日本仏教史綱), in which he presents the following view of Tokugawa Buddhism:

Thus, in the time of Tokugawa...the dharma eventually died. Buddhist priests indulged themselves in idleness. Around the *Genroku* 元禄 era (1688–1703), extraordinary and eminent priests appeared one after the other. However, the peak of such prosperity will have the opposite effect in the end, bringing putrefaction.
(MURAKAMI 1899, 149)

priest who has not been stained by the colors of such evil. We might conclude that the decline of Buddhism we see today is due to the actions of those who make [Buddhism] their occupation. In my opinion, Buddhism has been almost completely dead for the last three hundred years.
(KIYOZAWA 2003, 143)

23. There can be no doubt that Murakami Senshō regarded his research on Buddhism as “impartial” and “scientific.” In the second issue of *Bukkyō Shirin*, on the article “My thoughts on researching the History of Buddhism: first part” (*Gosō ga bukkyō no rekishi o kenkyū suru shisō: dai ichi* 吾曹が仏教の歴史を研究する思想 第一), Senshō asserts that “In the present day, there are basically two kinds of historian in Japan. [T]he first [kind] is academic (*gakujutsuteki* 学術的), the other one is moralistic (*dōtokuteki* 道德的). Or in other words, one is investigative (*kōshōteki* 考証的) and the other one is communicative (*dentatsuteki* 伝達の)” (MURAKAMI 1894, 1). However, his position is none of the above: “I try to research Buddhist History through the ideas of Buddhism (*bukkyōshugi* 仏教主義). In other words, I try to regard the History of Buddhism through the lens of Buddhism” (MURAKAMI 1894, 2). Sueki Fumihiko asserts that Murakami’s scholarship on the history of Buddhism differs from that of Tsuji Zennosuke in the sense that it cannot be fully regarded as “empirical history” (*jishō shigaku* 実証史学) (SUEKI 2004, 94). Indeed, Murakami did not present a historical narrative of Buddhism sustained by as many documents as Tsuji (and his pro-Buddhist motivations were a lot more clear), but he certainly thought of “impartiality” as an absolutely necessary feature for research. We can say that it was for the very sake of “impartiality” that Murakami left his position as a priest at the Ōtani branch of Jōdo Shinshū, after receiving several criticisms for having asserted the idea that the Mahayana teachings were not preached by the Buddha (*daijō-hibussetsuron*). Note the following:

The history of philosophy and doctrine cannot be studied if one is under the control of religious authorities or denominations. We have to stand aloof from sectarian influences to gain fruit from our studies. (MURAKAMI 1901, translated in OKADA 2005, 32)

The spiritual decadence of Buddhist priests was rather outrageous. Priests not only changed their masters according to the Temple [they wanted to become abbots of], but even got to the point of sending people [to learn in their places], and acted as if they themselves had learned face-to-face [from the Master]. In time, there was no person who found this suspicious, and this became a prevalent evil infecting the whole of the [Sōtō] sect. (MURAKAMI 1899, 195)

The latter quotation, although also a characteristic of the generalized “decadence” of the Buddhist clergy, is a criticism directed at the Sōtō Zen sect. This is particularly interesting if we remember that it is during this period that the idealized image of Zen as “pure experience” (SHARF 1993, 1) appears. In fact, as Wada Ukiko aptly describes, it is exactly in the works of scholars such as Murakami and Washio Junkyō that the division between *kenshū-zen* 兼修禪 (Zen practice mixed with the teachings of *kenmitsu* 顯密 Buddhism) and *junsui-zen* 純粹禪 (“Pure Zen,” introduced from China in the Sung dynasty and “unmixed” with other teachings) starts to take a clearer shape within the academic world (WADA 2006, 6–7). As Wada explains:

As [an example] of the achievements of Buddhism in the Kamakura period, Washio points out two great currents: Pure Land Buddhism and Zen. He then emphasizes that Pure Land Buddhism was responsible for the “objective development” of Japanese people’s “religious thought,” while Zen was responsible for its “subjective development.” (WADA 2006, 7)

Wada continues to show how the above idea would play a very important role in the development of Suzuki Daisetsu’s 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) reflections on Zen and the unique character of Japanese culture (WADA 2006, 11–13). The most essential point here is that Murakami’s historical narrative on Edo-period Buddhism is based on speculation about how Buddhists should act, and on what Zen ought to be (and in this case, it is not difficult to surmise that Murakami had in mind something close to what would become the “pure Zen” paradigm).

In relation to the *haibutsu kishaku*, Murakami also implies that it was caused by the “decadence of the Buddhist priests.” What was already the norm among Buddhist reformists was now reinforced by the prestige of academic discourse:

After the development of the *shūmon aratame* [宗門改め] system in the age of the Tokugawa, the Ways of Confucius and of the Kami came under [the influence of] Buddhism. Regardless of [social] class, the hearts of all people were united under Buddhism. With more than enough food and clothing, and having gained the respect of the people, Buddhist priests did nothing else than contend for titles, ranks, and the expansion and embellishment of their temples. There were none with their minds on the great teaching [of Buddhism], which was submerged in misfortune. The time came when the followers of the Ways of Confucius and of the Kami, after being long dissatisfied and power-

less regarding the position of Buddhism and the luxurious expenditures of Buddhist priests, could put their ideas into practice, which led to the great enterprise of the *ōsei fukko* [王政復古], and gave way to the *haibutsu kishaku* .
(MURAKAMI 1899, 245, emphasis in original)

Murakami's student Sakaino Kōyō also states that the position of "sole religion" and the financial stability provided by land grants by both local Daimyō and the Shōgun himself made the clergy frivolous. This frivolity, in the end, would be the cause for "the state of misery" experienced by Buddhism during the Restoration. Edo Buddhist decadence and the *haibutsu kishaku* once again appear in close association. Note the following:

[T]he prohibition of heretical teachings gave Buddhism great strength. This, added to the vermilion-seal/black-seal [land granting system] (*shuin-kokuin* 朱印黒印), meant Buddhist priests could not help indulging themselves in idleness. This is why, by occasion of the Meiji Restoration, Buddhism fell, for a period, into a state of misery.
(SAKAINO 1907, 300–301)

The same line of thought can be perceived in the writings of ANESAKI Masaharu 姉崎正治 (1873–1949), who in 1905 became the first Professor of Religious Studies (*shūkyōgaku*) at Tokyo Imperial University. Anesaki asserts that with the patronizing of "state churches" by the Tokugawa authorities, "[s]lumber began in ease" (1907, 33). In such "conditions of ease and security" Buddhist priests became "more and more corrupt" (1907, 35). Although Anesaki does not mention directly that such "slumber" was the cause leading to the *haibutsu kishaku* events, he does mention that "[t]he establishment of the Shintō faith as the state religion was fatal to Buddhism in its material aspects, but this loss was to be compensated by its spiritual reawakening" (ANESAKI 1907, 40).

The practical character of criticism towards Buddhism of the Edo Period, and the idea that historical research should be utilized as a tool for subsequent Buddhist missionary work, is even clearer in the thought of the above-mentioned Washio Junkyō. He was conscious that his writing of the past was a very political choice: from the beginning he chose to write "a" past, one that would be useful for the here and now (**perhaps in keeping with this aim his work ultimately contributed to the development of the idea of "pure Zen"**). In an April 1911 article, "Japanese Tendai from the perspective of Buddhist historical studies" (*Bukkyō shigaku yori mitaru Nihon Tendai* 仏教史学より見たる日本天台), Washio states:

Buddhism in the Tokugawa era was indeed lethargic, and in the midst of a downfall like no other in a thousand years of Buddhist history in Japan. No period in [the history of] Japanese Buddhism is as dark, or as decadent as the Tokugawa period. And it is as a continuation of such darkness, of such decadence that Meiji Buddhism exists. If Meiji Buddhism often faces restrictions, it is due to the old customs (*ishū* 遺習) of Tokugawa Buddhism. Aged priests

from this period are still alive, so [they] criticize the present Buddhism using Edo Period Buddhism as their standard.... We cannot think of Buddhism in that period as the standard. It is desirable to get back three, four, five hundred years and observe the state of Buddhism back then, and use it as a base for thinking about missionary work hereafter. Ideas brought up by Tokugawa Buddhist thought shall only inhibit future development. (WASHIO 1911, 58–59)

When thinking of what should provide a basis for Buddhism in the future, Washio criticizes Tokugawa Buddhism harshly. Speaking in concrete terms, if there is a historical period that should serve as the standard for Buddhists, it would be the era between the early fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is also emphasized that the “restrictions” Meiji Buddhism faced were a result of the “old customs” of Tokugawa Buddhism.

For Washio, the “standard” for New Buddhism should be sought within the boundaries of Medieval Buddhism. And by Medieval Buddhism he obviously did not refer to *kenmitsu* Buddhism, but to what we now call “Kamakura New Buddhism.”²⁴ We should point out that two months before the publication of the above-mentioned Washio article, the essayist KINOSHITA Naoe 木下尚江 (1869–1937) published his *Hōnen to Shinran* 法然と親鸞 (1973), and in July of 1911, Hara Katsurō 原勝郎 (1871–1924) published “Religious Reformations East and West” (*Tōzai no shūkyō kaikaku* 東西の宗教改革) (1929). The need Buddhists (and scholars of Buddhism) felt for Reformation during the early Meiji days made them seek answers in the Buddhism of Nichiren and Shinran. The idea that in Japanese Buddhism there was indeed a “standard” to be found in terms of “reformation” is further reinforced by Hara’s research in comparative history, which focuses especially on the resemblances between early Jōdo Shinshū and German Protestantism.²⁵

Thus, it is during this period that the so-called “Kamakura New Buddhism-centered-view of History” (*Kamakura shinbukkyō chūshin shikan* 鎌倉新仏教中心史観) was established.²⁶ We should note that for Tsuji Zennosuke, it was not

24. On Kamakura Buddhism as “Japanese Buddhism,” Washio comments as follows:

Representing the distinctive features of Japanese Buddhism, and with enormous strength, arose the Buddhism of the Kamakura period.... Today, the position of Shinran Shōnin, the founder of the Shin sect, is high, and so is the position of Nichiren Shōnin, the founder of the Nichiren sect. Today their position is high, but in that period their position was low. It was low, but we can say that the two of them represent the development of a practical and social character, which are the distinctive features of Japanese Buddhism. (WASHIO 1911, 56)

25. On the idea of “religious reformation” and its relation to Tsuji’s research, see MIURA 2002, especially 51–56.

26. The development of the historical view centered on the New Kamakura Buddhism is deeply related to the movement for Buddhist reformation during the Meiji era, to the development of modern Buddhist (historical) studies, and to Japanese nationalism. Although there is no

only the Edo period, but also the Heian period that was “decadent” in terms of Buddhism. Tsuji’s critical view of early modern Buddhism is largely based on the idea that Buddhism had lost the transcendental character it had gained with the “Buddhist Reformation” of Shinran, Nichiren, and Hōnen. Ultimately, it was in comparison to the “Kamakura New Buddhism” that Tokugawa Buddhism was to be considered “decadent.” Under the banner of “Religious Reformation,” Kamakura Buddhism is romanticized, and here we shall find one more cause for the establishment of the discourse on Edo period Buddhist decadence.

Tsuji Zennosuke: Empirical Historiography and Buddhist Decadence

Tsuji did not pursue his research on “sectarian Buddhist History,” nor on the “History of Buddhist teachings”; he is remembered as the first to analyze the history of Buddhism from a “scientific and impartial perspective, and in relation to the development of Japanese history” (MATSUSHIMA 1976, 187). Besides speaking from the perspective of “National History,” the fact that Tsuji was not a priest nor had, *a priori*, any responsibilities towards the Buddhist institution, surely made his position very peculiar. But even though he is regarded as having introduced a rupture in the writing of the “History of Japanese Buddhism,” the basic plot of his narrative is simply too close to his non-“scientific,” non-“impartial” Buddhist historian predecessors, no matter how massive the amount of historical documents he presents to make his point. Thus, the fact that it was neither Murakami Senshō nor Sakaino Kōyō, but Tsuji to whom the “theory” of decadence would usually be traced back, might serve to indicate how much value later scholarship placed on categories such as “empiricism” and “impartiality,” as well as the slightly different, somehow higher, authority attached to the discipline of “National History.”²⁷ But let us not

general work on the formation of such a historical view, in recent years several works have helped clarify some of its aspects. See SUEKI 1993 (especially 50–55 and 273–83); SUEKI 1995 (especially 5–15), SUEKI 1998 (5–23), and SUEKI 2006b and 2008 (especially 13–21). See also ISHIZUKA 1999 and WADA 2006, 5–27.

27. In prewar Japan, “National Historians” held a special position in legitimizing the Emperor system; let us not forget that the last years of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century are precisely the period of development (and establishment) of the “emperor-centered view of history” (*kōkoku-shikan* 皇国史観) within modern academia. As MIYACHI Masato argues, the task of delivering a Historical Education based on the principles of national polity was handed to Japanese historians (1981, 180). While it is true that researching or speaking of any historical topic related to the Imperial system was deeply restrained by the status quo, and it is also true that not all Japanese historians at the time were satisfied with such a view of history, it can also be argued that this position, as legitimizers of the historical continuity of the Chrysanthemum Throne, put them in a position in which the kind of knowledge they produced reached both academia and the populace in a peculiar way. Although Tsuji was not one of the most enthusiastic supporters of this historical view, in understanding the prewar context

over-emphasize similarities: Tsuji did reproduce the same basic plot, but did he do it for the same reasons? In which aspects did being a “National Historian” and not being part of the clergy influence his work? In order to understand his basic political stance, and as an attempt to understand the role played by the “theory of decadence” in Tsuji’s historical narrative as a whole, we will focus on his ideas and expectations of Buddhism during the Meiji period.

The fact that Tsuji was not a priest of any particular school does not mean he was emotionally indifferent to Buddhism. On several occasions, Tsuji mentions how his upbringing in a devout Buddhist family influenced his later life as a historian of Japanese Buddhism.

From the time I was a student at the Department of National History, the topics of my research papers were focused on Buddhist History, and then even moving into graduate school my research topic [continued to be] the History of Japanese Buddhism. Perhaps, without knowing it, I was influenced by my now departed father. A deeply devout follower of Jōdo-shinshū from early in his life [*shinshū no tokushinja* 真宗の篤信者], he never ceased chanting the nenbutsu [念仏]. From the time I first became aware of myself and my surroundings, my father was already steeped in the teachings of Jōdo Shinshū. [Sometimes] when he returned from his visits to the temple, he would speak about how the [contents] of the preaching in that particular day differed from the orthodox teachings of Jōdo Shinshū [*shinshū anjin* 真宗安心], and would express his criticisms [of the priest]. (TSUJI 1977a, 172–73)²⁸

As is clear from the above statement, and as HAYASHI Makoto has already pointed out (1982, 67–69), Tsuji grew up in an environment where he could develop, from an early age, a critical perspective towards the position of the clergy as the actors in the “leading-role” of Buddhism. Such a stance is not by any means unrelated to his image of a decadent Edo period Buddhist clergy. As we have seen so far, the post-Meiji discourse on the “decadence” of early modern clergy was promoted by Buddhists themselves as an antithesis of what “Modern

of his discourse (or the discourse of any Japanese historian of the time), the influence of the *kōkoku-shikan* cannot be overlooked. We are unable to perform here an exhaustive analysis of the relation between Tsuji’s scholarship as a whole and the *kōkoku-shikan*, but we do suggest that the continuation of Tsuji’s association with the image of a decadent early modern Buddhism perhaps has to do more with his prestige as a “national,” “empirical historian” than with the core of his argument *per se*. For assessments in English on the “emperor-centered view of history” see MEHL 1993 and BROWNEE 1997 (especially 81ff). For recent assessments by Japanese scholars, see KONNO 2008 and HASEGAWA 2008.

28. For other examples of Tsuji’s personal feelings in relation to Buddhism (usually towards Shinran and Jōdo Shinshū), see TSUJI 1977a, 184–85, and TSUJI 1977b, 129–30. See also HAYASHI 1982, 67–69, TSUJI Tatsuya 1991, 271–72. For an assessment on the position of Jōdo Shinshū in Tsuji’s research as whole, see FUJISHIMA 1956.

Buddhism” was to become. But in spite of promoting the same discourse, Tsuji’s concerns were still different from those of his predecessors. As we shall see below, Tsuji’s thoughts on early modern “decadent” priests are developed in a framework in which early modern (*kinsei* 近世) and modern (*kindai* 近代) periods are understood as different *in essence*. For Tsuji, ruptures between both “epochs” were not only natural, but *necessary*.

In 1900, at the age of twenty-two, Tsuji published in the prestigious *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌 a review of Okamoto Ryūnosuke’s 岡本柳之助 *Seikyō chūsei ron* 政教中正論 [On the right roles of church and state]. Having been published a year before in 1899, Okamoto’s book had as background the then vigorous “movement for public recognition of Buddhism” (*bukkyō kōnin undō* 仏教公認運動), one of the last attempts by a segment of the Japanese Buddhist world to turn Buddhism into a “state religion.”²⁹ The fact that the book begins with portraits of the founders of each of the Japanese Buddhist sects, and provides in its annex the resolutions drafted at the national Buddhist convention held at the *Chion-in* 知恩院 temple on 8 May 1899, might have led Tsuji to assert that “this book apparently represents the ideas of the majority of Buddhist [clergy]” (TSUJI 1900, 76). By the end of the nineteenth century, at the same time as some social groups strove for the separation of church and state, the movement for public recognition of Buddhism was moving in the opposite direction. Its basic claim was that the recognition of traditional Buddhist schools as an “official” state mechanism would enable them to work even more effectively to benefit the Japanese nation. Thus Okamoto’s goal in this book is to present a historical overview of the relation between “state” and “religion” in Japanese society, then to show that both the state and clergy could benefit from the recognition of Buddhism as an “official religion.”

While he points out several historical inaccuracies in Okamoto’s narrative, Tsuji recognizes his assertion that in Tokugawa Japan Buddhism played the role of what one could call a “state religion” (*kokkyō* 国教). Nevertheless, Tsuji harshly criticizes Okamoto by saying that the fact that something was a certain way in the past is not sufficient reason to suggest that it should remain so in the present:

In the Tokugawa period, the state utilization of Buddhism virtually as a state religion, was in order to suppress Christianity, which was perceived as a threat to the life of the state. The basic standard set by the state was its own existence, and everything was arranged based on that. It is not the case that this was done for the benefit of any one religion
(TSUJI 1900, 78)

The state saw it as necessary for its own existence [to favor Buddhism]. If political measures served to protect Buddhism, it was less for the sake of protecting it, and more as a means of prohibiting Christianity. Buddhism was used as a

29. For an overview on the movement, see KASHIWAHARA 1990, 141–44.

mere expedient. Such protection should not be understood as part of the state's essence (TSUJI 1900, 84)

According to Tsuji, Okamoto still asserts that there was no reason for the state to break off relations with Buddhism, which made such important contributions to the “cultural development” of Japan (*ikkoku bunka no hattatsu* 一國文化ノ発達); such a rupture would end up causing Buddhism to “fall into ruin” (*suimetsu ni ochirashimuru* 衰滅ニ陥ラシムル). To this assertion in particular Tsuji responds that “*the state gains by not being involved with the kind of clergy (shukyōka 宗教家) that becomes decadent when there is no [government] tutelage; such clergy is already only relying on this tutelage to keep up appearances*” (TSUJI 1900, 79. **Emphasis in original**). **Tsuji emphasizes that throughout Japanese history**, “religion” has adapted itself to the “state’s *Geist*” (*kokkateki seishin* 国家的精神), “Japanizing” whenever necessary (Tsuji gives the rise of New Kamakura Buddhism as an example of such a process). However, in the Meiji period, the Buddhist sects seemed to be following a path completely opposite to what Tsuji perceived to be the modern Japanese *Geist*.

It is a fact that, historically, each of the Buddhist sects has adjusted well to the national *Geist*. Buddhism cannot remain indefinitely the same way, without any sort of *adaptation*. That which does not *progress* along with national thought, shall end up as a relic (*ibutsu* 遺物) from a previous era. Thus, even though [Buddhist] sects might be able to continue existing as something from a dead historical past, they will not be able to live on as active and living religions. The kind of religion mentioned by the author [Okamoto], which cannot stand when there is no protection from the government, is already close to its period of decay. No matter how much protection it is given, if it remains in the same state it will perish when the time comes. (TSUJI 1900, 83, *emphasis in original*)

Some pages later Tsuji goes on to criticize his contemporary priests who, promoting the movement for public recognition of Buddhism, “dreamed of the splendor of the old Tokugawa times” (TSUJI 1900, 87). For Tsuji, the Edo and Meiji periods were different in terms of *essence*,³⁰ hence his emphasis, when

30. Here the word “essence” has a very specific meaning, and is crucial for the understanding of Tsuji’s narrative. During his formative years as a historian at Tokyo Imperial University, he was under direct influence of Ludwig Riess (1861–1928), and through him in dialogue with the “scientific” historical tradition of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), considered by some to be the father of “history” as an academic discipline. The quest for a “scientific” history is better represented by one of the most important aphorisms left by Ranke: that the historian’s duty was to show the past “as it was essentially (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).” However, regarding this famous dictum, Peter Novick asserts that:

[t]he phrase has habitually been translated “as it really was” or “as it actually was.” In fact, as Georg Iggers has recently pointed out [1973, xix–xx], in the nineteenth century,

dealing with Buddhism, on the continuities and ruptures between both periods; continuities that contradicted the current “spirit of the age” were characterized as “relics.” The motor of history, the changing essence which the historian needs to capture in his narrative, is **presented as the “state” or “national thought.”** “Religion” and all other aspects of society are nothing but *manifestations* that need to be understood according to this basic essence.

Some decades later, in a 1936 article in which Tsuji calls attention to the similarities between the Kamakura and Meiji periods, we can see that this disappointment with a large part of the Buddhist world did not change over time. While the Heian and the Edo periods were both characterized by a “formalist,” “static,” and “frozen” culture, the culture of the Kamakura and Meiji periods was “realistic” and “pragmatic” (TSUJI 1936, 1). When speaking of the Kamakura period, Tsuji emphasizes that “religion, also, became deeply practical” (*shūkyō mo kiwamete jissaiteki ni natta* 宗教も極めて実際的になつた), which according to him was exemplified by the rise of the new Buddhist sects and the movement for precept restoration within the “old ones” (1936, 3). Nevertheless, when speaking of the “practical” character of Meiji culture, he does not pay attention to Buddhism or religion in general, which confirms the idea that, for Tsuji, there was no rupture between Edo and Meiji periods in terms of “religion,” but rather continuity. And as we have seen above, such “anachronism,” was something to which Tsuji was not very sympathetic.

It is also very meaningful that the last words of the last volume of Tsuji’s *opus magnum*, published in the year of his death in 1955, are directed at contemporary clergy and steeped in pessimism:

It was only Buddhism that, due to the idleness in which it dwelled from the Edo Period, did not follow the progress of society in general. Equality between all people, abolition of [social] classes, **improvement of the commoner’s culture**, despite all these remarkable [achievements], the temple clergy became the

eigentlich had an ambiguity it no longer has: it also meant “essentially” and it was in this sense that Ranke characteristically used it. (NOVICK 1988, 28)

For Ranke, every epoch had an “essence,” and it was the historian’s task to penetrate it. But again, as BROWNLEE asserts, at the same time he emphasized objectivity Ranke “also believed that the facts of history were interrelated and expressed a spiritual reality that cohered in a nation. The spirit of a nation was to be understood intuitively, not scientifically. Furthermore, historical understanding required religious faith, for he believed that God ultimately orchestrates history, for good and for bad” (1997, 74). But as Brownlee aptly states, while Japanese historians were deeply attracted to Ranke’s method, they detached it from its Christian premises. No longer God’s deed, the conducting of history was now the responsibility of the actors themselves: they were the ones who had to first *comprehend* the national essence of their times, and then follow it properly. As we will see below, for Tsuji the Buddhist clergy was particularly blameful for failing in both comprehending and then acting accordingly to the *essence* of modern Japan.

only social failures. Keeping the very same aspect they held in the Edo period, they are proud of themselves, immersed in notions of hierarchy. They alone sustain [such] arrogance, some of them struttingly self-satisfied. I think that the culture of temple clergy, in comparison to outside society, is at least 50 or 60 years behind the times... now, far behind [the rest of] society, most temples are about to turn precisely into historical relics. What will happen hereafter? In these circumstances we can do nothing but sigh deeply. (TSUJI 1955, 497)

Tsuji's disappointment with contemporary priests is aggravated by the fact that he perceived Buddhism as having been given a chance to change. This is particularly clear in his consideration of the *haibutsu-kishaku*. In his introduction to the *Meiji Ishin shinbutsu bunri shiryō* [Historical documents on the separation of Kami and Buddhas during the Meiji Restoration], TSUJI asserts that one of the reasons "why the *shinbutsu bunri* could easily take place must be explained by the influence of the *haibutsu-ron* and the decadence of Buddhist priests" (1926, 79–80). Again, in 1931 he would explain in even more detail the connections between the religious policy of Early Meiji and the actions of the "decadent clergy":

[A]s for the causes of the *shinbutsu bunri*, we can think of many things... [For example] the influence of the *haibutsu-ron*. [Among these], some came out of theoretical reflections, some from the perspective of national economy. The influence of the *haibutsu-ron* is indeed an important cause. We can also mention the corruption of the Buddhist priests. (TSUJI 1931, 628)

We need to add that for TSUJI, the *haibutsu-ron* were also a consequence of the "formalization" of Buddhism, and of the decadence of the Buddhist clergy (1931, 528–31). Thus the kind of criticism that in the final analysis led to the *haibutsu kishaku* was caused by nothing other than the actions of the Buddhist priests themselves. Common people, repulsed by the actions of the Buddhist clergy, could not help feeling estrangement. When such displeasure reached its limit, it appeared as the *haibutsu kishaku*. Then at the dawn of the anti-Buddhist violence, priests finally realized their own "decadence," and made efforts for reformation:

While, in a sense, the *shinbutsu bunri* had harmful effects to no small extent, in another sense it also brought a certain amount of benefit, which is as follows: Buddhist priests were prompted to wake up. During the 260 and some years of the Edo Period, the priests that had been living in idleness due to the protectionist policy of the Tokugawa, not only lost their benefactor in a brief space of time, but were also blown by the fierce storm of the *haibutsu [kishaku]*... Buddhist priests received, as a whole, a strong impetus. They had to reevaluate their position. Having no one to ask for things, they realized they had to stand by themselves.... That the *sangha*, wherein lies the responsibility for preserving

Buddhist spirituality, was awakened, is indeed cause for joy for the Meiji Buddhist world.
(TSUJI 1931, 758)

Thus via the *haibutsu kishaku*, Buddhists first understood the necessity of “reformation.” But as we have seen, for Tsuji, even though some priests tried to lead Buddhism into the new era, the bulk of the Buddhist world seemed to be satisfied with the way things were before. A dozen of the “great men” notwithstanding, Buddhism ended up turning down the chance it had been given to change.

Throughout Tsuji’s career, the criticism of Buddhism as an anachronism in modern society is a constant. The “social project”³¹ informing Tsuji’s historical narrative envisaged raising the level of awareness of the Buddhist clergy to the fact that they now lived in times *essentially different* from the Edo period. Although we cannot conclude much about his expectations towards Buddhism as a “religion” *per se*, we can say that the very least he hoped was for the clergy to act according to Japan’s national *Geist*. In this context, Tsuji’s image of a decadent early modern Buddhism can perhaps be understood as a sort of antithesis, a sort of guideline for the ruptures the Buddhist clergy had to make in order to adjust to “modernity.”

Still, although his reasons might have been different and his stance much more critical, the fact that in terms of narrative Tsuji reproduced basically the same discourse of pro-Buddhist reformists remains unchanged. This is because both Tsuji and the latter, in different ways, intended Buddhism to “adjust” to what was perceived as a new age.

Conclusion

We can find the following historical meaning in the discourse of Edo Period Buddhist decadence: by the time of the Meiji Restoration, as a means to overcome the crisis brought by the (re-)introduction of Christianity and the new political structure, “Buddhism” exclaims a *mea culpa*. However, Buddhists do this with the necessity of finding a place for themselves in the world to come in mind. It was not “Buddhism itself” that was evil, but “Buddhist priests that had not been acting as they should.” By this defense, Buddhists expected “Buddhism itself” to be absolved. For many Buddhist priests, the answer in the debate as to what was Japan’s future religion, was of course, Buddhism. But if asked if Buddhism could become Japan’s religion right at that moment, the answer would have been “no, Buddhism at present is far from what it should be.” Still, when the topic was what

31. I have borrowed this very useful concept from Josep FONTANA, for whom the writing of history *per se* is inseparable from two other aspects: a “political economy” (by which he means an understanding of the present) and a “social project” (which constitutes a political proposal for the future). See FONTANA 1982, especially 9–13.

should be the basis for future Buddhism, there were different answers: “Early Buddhism” and “Kamakura Buddhism” come to mind. In any case, Tokugawa Buddhism was not to become the standard by **which to approach things here-**after. It would serve, at the most, as an antithesis: what Buddhism *should not* be. The discourse on Edo-Period Buddhist decadence was, in terms of intellectual background, a necessary step for Buddhist sects to rise again as “modern,” and exorcize the ghosts of their recent past.

However, one question remains: if a discourse on Edo-period Buddhist decadence has existed within modern academia at least since the time of Inoue Enryō, why did it become so intrinsically associated with Tsuji? While we could not provide a definitive answer to that question, we can infer that if, among the several people who railed against the “decadence of Tokugawa Buddhist priests,” it was Tsuji who was to last as the “father” of such a historical view, it is due to his more “scientific” position as an “empiricist,” and his position not as a “Buddhist Studies Scholar,” nor as a “Religious Studies Scholar,” but as a “National Historian.”

To sum up, the discourse on the decadence of early modern Buddhism passed, due to the establishment of modern academia, from the realm of “religion” to the realm of “scholarship,” gaining strength as it was reinforced by “scientific” knowledge. In the context of modernity, the discourse first carried by “priests,” is now also carried by academic scholars (who in most cases were also priests), thus becoming “scientific knowledge” and reaching a wider audience, in a complex context of power-knowledge relations. Tsuji’s ideas on early modern Buddhism are, as we have seen, closely related to those of Buddhist priests (who, in many cases, were also scholars) of the period. If we emphasize the “empirical” side of Tsuji’s works, and forget that “in spite” of being an “impartial” University of Tokyo Professor of the Department of National History, Tsuji, too, reproduced a discourse that called for Buddhist reformation, we might overlook his intentions and political stances in writing history. By overlooking such aspects there is also a chance that we might, unconsciously (and maybe undesirably), also inherit his political positions. We can perhaps never over emphasize the importance of self-awareness while performing the extremely political activity of writing the past. Such self-awareness becomes even more important when we speak of what modern scholarship (now more reluctantly than before) still agrees to call “religion.”

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