Buddhist Kingship, the *Kami*, and Modernity

Comparative Considerations

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Abstract: In this paper I address the issue of Buddhist combinatory traditions (*shinbutsu shūgō*) and modernity by focusing on Indian ideas on kingship and their impact on premodern Japanese emperorship; by tracing their development and their ultimate demise, I attempt to suggest some political and cultural reasons for the rejection of Buddhist syncretism by the modern Japanese nation-state. In particular, the Buddhist discourse on kingship in Japan is usually treated as a single entity. However, I argue that it was in fact a plural formation in which Indian ideas on kingship developed in at least three distinct, if partially overlapping, areas. These three discursive regimes of Buddhist kingship are, respectively, a Buddhist discourse on ideal types of rulers (the "Great Elect" or Mahāsammata, the Dharma-king or *dharmarāja*, and the Universal emperor or *cakravartin*) that was applied in various ways to the Japanese rulers; a second Buddhist discourse on kingship, running parallel to the first one, which was intended mostly for internal use by religious institutions and had few direct connections with the *imperium*; and a third, originally Brahmanical discourse on the "god-king" (*devarāja*) which developed within so-called Ryōbu Shinto and Ise Shinto. The first Buddhist discourse contains almost no combinatory (*shinbutsu shūgō*) elements, which can be found instead in the second and third discursive regimes. While the first discourse has been studied in depth, the second and the third ones have been largely neglected despite their significant contributions to Japanese ideas on the ontological foundations and the symbolism of kingship. The third discourse (on *devarāja*) in particular, after it had been purged of Indian references, came to constitute one of the intellectual sources of the modern sacralization of the emperor.

Keywords: Buddhist kingship, *devarāja*, Ryōbu Shinto, Ise Shinto, Indian culture—impact on Japanese culture

仏教的王権論・神仏習合・モダニティ ——比較文化論的考察——

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論文要旨　本論は、王権に関するインド思想が前近代の天皇制に与えた影響に焦点を合わせることで、神仏習合とモダニティの問題を考えようとするものである。特に、日本において仏教的王権論は、単一の体系として扱われるのが通例であるが、それは実は多元的なものであり、三つの言説において展開してきた。支配者に直接適用された言説は神仏習合の要素をほとんど含まず、それらが見出されるのは寺社内部で利用された王権論とそのシンボリズム、そして両部神道や伊勢神道などで展開された「天王」(デーヴァラージャ)

型王権論である。中でもデーヴァラージャ論は、インドとの関連を剝奪された後、天皇の近代的神聖化を支える知的源泉の一つとなってきたのである。しかし、神仏習合の弾圧は、これらの王権論を否定する意味もあった。本論では、こうした王権論の特徴を描くと同時に、日本のモダニティがそれらを否定した理由について幾つかの仮説を立てる。

キーワード　仏教的王権、デーヴァラージャ、両部神道、伊勢神道、インド文化―日本文化への影響

Everywhere it spread, Buddhism became deeply entrenched with local cults, and the combinations that resulted constituted the traditional religiosity of those countries in premodern times. It is interesting that among Buddhist countries, only Japan chose a path to modernization that involved the rejection of such traditional ideas and practices and the imposition instead of Shinto, a "new" religion that had been constructed in nativistic terms as an alleged revitalization of pristine and ancestral cults. For instance, modernization in Thailand resulted in the reduction of Brahmanical influence and of cults dedicated to local deities at court and the concomitant reformation and strengthening of Buddhism as the symbolic core of national identity. In a more militant Buddhist context, such as that of Sri Lanka, Buddhism provided the base for nativistic discourses that eventually resulted in a clash with the Hindu Tamil minority. In other words, Buddhism was not intrinsically a force countering modernization or preventing the development of forms of nativism deemed necessary to establish modern nation states in Asia.

In the case of Japan, we should situate its modernization process within the broader geopolitical context of East Asia. In China, the Korean peninsula, Vietnam, and Japan, modernization was the result of a general dismantling of traditional religious forms (Buddhism, Daoism, shamanism, Confucian cults, etc.) in favor of a systematic adoption of Western ideas and practices, together with the preservation (or rather, reinvention) of traditionalizing nativistic discourses heavily influenced by Confucian ideas of social order and morality. Any discussion of the dismissal of the Buddhist syncretistic tradition in Japan, especially related to the state and primarily the court, should be based on the awareness of more general Buddhist syncretistic tendencies on the one hand, and geopolitical considerations on the other. In this paper, I will limit myself to propose some possible suggestions as to why modernity in Japan ended up destroying *shūgō* 習合-types of practices, by focusing on Japanese

Buddhist discourses on kingship (*ōkenron* 王権論), their political effects, and their fundamental incompatibility with the political strategies of the Meiji oligarchs and, before them, of those who implemented anti-Buddhist policies aimed at the separation of *kami* 神 and buddhas during the Edo period.

Much has been written on the connection between the Japanese emperor, the buddhas, and the *kami*—or, in more general terms, between kingship, Buddhism, and various discourses on the *kami* in premodern Japan. One would expect that, given the cultural hegemony of religious discourses combining Buddhism and local deities (what is currently known as *shinbutsu shūgō* 神仏習合) throughout Japanese history, such syncretistic positions should also affect the status and the representations of the emperor. However, there appears to have been no unified and dominant discourse on the emperor. Instead, kingship was a polyphonic arena, in which Buddhist institutions, *kami* specialists, and court ritualists (in the Edo period, these groups were joined by Kokugaku 国学 nativists, Confucians, and Westernizers) each developed their own versions of kingship, with related doctrinal grounds, ritual apparatus, systems of representations, and paraphernalia. These multifarious discursive regimes coexisted in more or less strained relationships. It is somehow striking that, within the context of the Meiji Restoration, the new political authorities decided to exclude most of these traditional discourses on kingship and to create instead a new discourse—even though it was presented as a return to an alleged pristine, autochthonous formation. In other Asian countries, such as Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and Laos, modernization (each in its own variant) was carried out by placing a new emphasis on Buddhism as an essential component of national culture and identity—and not by persecuting it in the name of an alleged autochthonous religious tradition. It is worth noting that in all these countries local cults exist (local forms of what came to be called "Shinto" 神道 in Japan), that are more or less related to Buddhism and, significantly, more or less directly connected to traditional forms of kingship.

In this respect, a striking aspect of the field of Japanese studies (especially in Japan) is the lack of explicit comparative concerns. I believe that comparison with Western ideas of kingship (mostly for the purpose of theoretical cross-fertilization) and, especially, with other Buddhist polities in Asia, would yield valuable heuristic results. In this

paper I focus almost exclusively on Indian ideas on kingship and their impact on premodern Japanese emperorship; also, I will refer primarily to scholarship in foreign languages—as a modest contribution towards liberating the debate on Japanese kingship from its insular, nativistic dimension, and open it up to new, and larger, world-historical concerns and geopolitical re-positionings. In particular, I argue that, as far as Indian ideas on kingship are concerned, there were at least three major discursive areas, namely, a Buddhist discourse on ideal types of rulers (the "Great Elect" or Mahāsammata, the Dharma-king or *dharmarāja*, and the Universal emperor or *cakravartin*) that was applied more or less directly, and in various ways, to the Japanese rulers; a second Buddhist discourse on kingship mostly for internal use by religious institutions with few direct connections with the *imperium*; and a third, Brahmanical discourse on the "god-king" (*devarāja*) which originally developed within so-called Ryōbu 両部 Shinto and Ise 伊勢 Shinto. The mainstream Buddhist discourse contains almost no combinatory (*shinbutsu shūgō*) elements; they can be found primarily in the second and third discursive regimes. While the first has been studied in depth, the second and the third have been largely neglected as significant contributions to Japanese ideas about the status and the symbolism of kingship. The third discourse in particular constituted one of the intellectual sources of the modern sacralization of the emperor (once it had been purged of Indian references). By focusing on the diversity of Indian-based discourses on kingship and their different stances concerning the *kami*, I hope I can bring a contribution towards the identification of some political reasons for the rejection of Buddhist syncretism by the modern Japanese nation-state.

Buddhist Ideas of Kingship

As Balkrishna Gokhale wrote, "early Buddhists betray feelings of disquiet, bordering on fear, about the nature and functions of kingship."[1] This "disquiet" was due essentially to the violence and arbitrariness intrinsic to the institution of kingship.[2] It is significant that according to the Buddhist origin myth of kingship, the first king was *elected* by the people for the purpose to preserve the social order, which had degenerated after a Golden Age because of human ignorance, greed, and anger.[3] This myth of an elected king (Mahāsammata) reflects a Buddhist nostalgia for the

political organization of the ancient tribal republics of north-central India, in one of which Śuddhodana, Buddha's father, held the office of elected king.[4]

This myth also shows that kingship is just a means to preserve social order against violent degenerations caused by the lack of enlightenment, and cannot by itself provide a durable solution to such fundamental cause. It is not by chance that the Buddha decided not to follow his father's steps and become a king himself, but chose instead the life as a renunciant ascetic. Early Buddhist texts thus describe a fundamental distinction between *artha* (the realm of political economy and governmentality) and *dharma* (the moral, religious path of Buddhism), and stressed the superiority of the latter. However, the Buddhist communities could not survive without protection by secular authorities, and it became necessary to formulate guidelines to orient secular political activity informed by Buddhist ideas of society and morality. In other words, Buddhist authors tried to bring the realm of secular politics within the larger sphere of Buddhism. This operation required the creation of a new model of kingship, the Dharma-king (Sk. *dharmarāja*, Jp. *hōō* 法王), i.e., the king as an upholder of Buddhist Dharma (Pāli *dhammiko dhammarāja*). This is the basic template of what became known, in early medieval Japan, as the interrelation between the king's duties (Sk. *rājadharmā*, Jp. *ōbō* 王法) and Buddhism (*buppō* 仏法).

King's duties were traditionally defined in India in the Brahmanical literature known as *arthaśāstra*.[5] Buddhists tried to formulate an alternative vision of governmentality that emphasized nonviolence, compassion, and a general Buddhist outlook.[6] The Buddhist concept of *dharmarāja* influenced Japanese kingship in several ways. First, retired emperors who took the tonsure called themselves "Dharma-emperor" (*hōō* or *hōkō* 法皇), the Japanese equivalent of *dharmarāja*. While this phenomenon was on the one hand a significant modification of the original Indian concept, because the dharma-emperor was no longer officially and directly in charge of the *imperium* (even though in actual practice things may have been quite different), on the other hand it signified that a secular ruler cannot fully perform the duties imposed upon him by the Buddhist Dharma—thus confirming the original Buddhist position privileging renunciation to political rule. As a side effect, the notion of *dharmarāja* in its Japanese version legitimized the received idea that emperors cannot become monks

while in office, and thus diluted any potential tensions related to common practices of separation of Buddhism from *kami* cults (*jingi* 神祇) at court (what is known as *shinbutsu kakuri* 神仏隔離).

Furthermore, the Dharma-emperor was an attempt to overcome the antithesis of *artha* (governmentality) and *dharma* (religion), by positing a higher figure in which both could be synthesized. Finally, *dharmarāja* was also associated with other principles that undermined ancient Japanese notions of kingship based on divine descent in which the emperor was envisioned as a living *kami* (*akitsumikami* 現御神 or *arahitokami* 現人神). In particular, it made it possible to argue that one became emperor not just because of descent, but also and especially because of his morality. This was connected to the Buddhist idea that a king was such because of his past karma (*karmarāja*), namely, the fact that he had kept the fundamental moral principles and fulfilled the duties of a virtuous king. The notion of *karmarāja* was commonly known in premodern Japan as "king endowed with the ten virtues" (*jūzen no ō* 十善王). This concept served to reduce the symbolic importance of the imperial lineage, because it made birth in that lineage no longer a purely physiological event unrelated to the Buddhist worldview, but the result of one's past karma explicitly defined in Buddhist terms. It also served to justify the dismissal (and, in at least one case, the homicide) of emperors who were deemed immoral and unworthy of their position.[7] In other words, Buddhist ideas of kingship as they were adopted in Japan relativized potential claims to absolute authority based on divinity, because becoming an emperor was the result of a previous, virtuous life, and anybody could become an emperor through rebirth.[8] As we can see, this concept of kingship was very different from standard accounts of modern emperorship, in which divine descent, patrilinearity, and first male sons transmission serve to justify supreme and exclusive rule.

Absolute imperial authority was also undermined in other ways. The *imperium* was fragmented: the emperor was reduced to ceremonial, sacerdotal (shall we call them "symbolic"?) functions, whereas the feudal power of the imperial family was in the hands of the retired emperor (*jōkō* 上皇) who, as we have seen, was often formally a monk;[9] at times, there was more than one retired emperor, with a consequent further fragmentation of power. Moreover, power and authority were also distributed between the Bakufu and religious institutions, as first suggested by

Kuroda Toshio (in his *kenmon taisei* 権門体制 theory) and further explained by Satō Hiroo.[10] Thus, the shoguns at times appropriated the notion of Dharma-king for their own purposes, and there is a long tradition in Japan of a discourse on kingship applied not to the emperors but to the actual policy-makers, from Shōtoku Taishi to Tokugawa Ieyasu. At the same time, Buddhist institutions gradually proliferated references to kingship for their internal uses—especially in the realm of esoteric consecration rituals (*kanjō* 灌頂). I will return to this subject below, but here I would like to stress once more that Buddhist discourses on kingship were not always directed to political suzerainty; in fact, a large part of these discourses were metaphorical applications of Buddhist ideal notions of virtue (*dharma*) to the religious field in a feudal society—without any direct relationship to the actual political power. Thus, even though historians tend to consider the idea of three centers of power (the court, the Bakufu, and religious institutions) as incompatible with the more mainstream idea according to which kingship prerogatives were divided between the court and the Bakufu, I think it is possible to combine both models. There were *de facto* discourses on kingship for each center of power, with the related accoutrements and ritual apparatuses; however, "political" kingship was shared among various agencies at court and the Bakufu.

A third ideal type of Buddhist king is the "holy emperor who turns the wheel of Dharma" (Sk. *cakravartin*, Jp. *tenrinshōō* 転輪聖王). The doctrines concerning the *cakravartin* developed most likely after the impact of the personality and the policies of King Aśoka (269-232 BCE), the most successful ruler of the Maurya dynasty, who became the model for subsequent Indian kings and rulers in the Buddhist world.[11] The *cakravartin* is a development of the theme of the *dharmarāja*. He is envisioned as a universal emperor, who subjugates all peoples and countries not by violence or political ruses, but simply because of his overwhelming virtue. Obviously, the *cakravartin* represents an ideal type of ruler (in fact, a very abstract one), even though many rulers throughout Asia (some of them vicious and violent despots) were called *cakravartin*. The ideal of the *cakravartin* was an attempt to overcome the distinction between the ruler and the Buddha—and, ultimately, between secular politics (*artha*) and renunciant religiosity (*dharma*); kings elevated to the status of *cakravartin* also claimed to be manifestations of deities (Indra, Śiva, Viṣṇu),

bodhisattvas (Maitreya), and even buddhas (Dainichi 大日). In Japan, especially since the Heian Period most Buddhist imperial rituals aim at the transformation of the emperor into a *cakravartin*—or treat the emperor as a living *cakravartin*, as is particularly evident in the case of the *Goshichinichi no mishihō* 後七日御修法 and the *Taigensui no hō* 大元帥法.[12] It should be mentioned, however, that also in this case the Buddhist discourse on *cakravartin* kingship in premodern Japan was split between the emperor and the actual center of political power (from Shōtoku Taishi to the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu).

A further development of the theme of the *cakravartin* in Japan was the imperial consecration ceremony known as *sokui kanjō* 即位灌頂. Based on the consecration ritual in esoteric Buddhism, in which an adept was elevated to the rank of master (Sk. *ācārya*, Jp. *ajari* 阿闍梨), it was performed at the time of the enthronement of a new emperor by the regent, the head of the Nijō 二条 branch of the Fujiwara 藤原 House.[13] In this case, the head of the Nijō house played the role of the Brahmans in India, even though the ritual and its intellectual premises were drawn mainly from the Shingon tradition. As in other Buddhist countries, the imperial consecration ceremony turned the emperor into a superhuman being—in the specific case of Japan, the emperor became Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来. However, the essential difference between Japan and other Buddhist monarchies is that in Japan the emperor, even though consecrated as Dainichi, never had the political power (including the control over the Buddhist clergy) of most South-east Asian kings. Moreover, Dainichi, the supreme and fundamental Buddha of the entire *kenmitsu* 顕密 system, was in fact the least personal and the least directly involved in concrete and specific soteriological activity.[14]

Buddhist institutions in Japan never submitted themselves to the authority of a so-called *dharmarāja* or *cakravartin*, as was normally the case in South-East Asian Buddhist polities. On the contrary, they tried to control the political institutions by reformulating the latter's vocabulary, ritual protocols, and symbolism; they never lost their traditional independence, even despite violent persecutions by Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the restrictive religious policies of the Tokugawa Bakufu.

A Parallel Buddhist Discourse on Kingship for Religious Institutions

In addition to the classical discourse on kingship aimed at the political sphere of society, Buddhism in Japan also developed another discourse on kingship, equally important and even more pervasive, directed primarily at the monastic institutions and their practitioners; these two discourses were distinct even though many of their features (terminology and rituals) overlapped in practice. According to this parallel discourse, ordination rituals turned monks (*ajari*) into *cakravartin* through the ceremony of aspersion/consecration (Sk. *abhiṣeka*, Jp. *kanjō*). In fact, most esoteric rituals of consecration, from *shittan kanjō* 悉曇灌頂 and *shintō kanjō* 神道灌頂 to rituals for professional categories such as carpenters, farmers, and tree-cutters, treated the initiand as a universal king by bestowing upon him the aspersion and a set of imperial regalia representing his level of spiritual attainment.[15]

The monastic discourse on kingship was produced mainly by esoteric Buddhism on the basis of Indian antecedents. As Ronald Davidson has written, "the central and defining metaphor for mature esoteric Buddhism [in India] is that of an individual assuming kingship and exercising dominion"; in this process, that person would become the king of kings (*rājādhirāja*) or the *cakravartin*. This is "the Buddhist version of the early medieval feudalization of divinity seen in the Purāṇas and elsewhere, applied to the Buddhist path by its ritual enactment in which either monks or laity may participate."[16] What was the goal of such rituals? As Davidson convincingly argues concerning the Indian case (but this can be applied to Japan as well), "the mission of Buddhist cloisters was a consensual effort at sanctifying society [...] These monks [...] attempted to transform power and hierarchy into community and congregation."[17] In addition, "the visualizations and meditations of esoteric Buddhism did not make a monk the overlord, but the developing relationship between the great monasteries where feudal law was exercised and the lords of the land made the metaphor all the more resonant."[18]

In Japan, the significance of this attribution to religious practitioners of symbols that were typical to the ruler has never been investigated in full; usually, it is understood as a mere consequence of a general internalization of the imperial system. I would like to argue that this was not the case. As I just noted, Buddhist institutions in general did not internalize

the imperial system, but instead created a set of representations in order to give it new shapes and meanings as means to control it and to secure their own autonomy. Moreover, the general use of imperial metaphors and symbols within the religious institutions themselves constituted a major instance of marginalization and relativization of the imperial institution. Within this religious discourse, anyone anywhere could become equal to the emperor (that is, another emperor) just by adhering to specific doctrines and performing specific rituals. In this way, the emperor was no longer the sancta sanctorum of the entire polity, but just one symbol among many others that could be used for a number of purposes, including religious ones. Mark Teeuwen has called this situation "dispersed emperorship."[19] Esoteric consecrations on *kami* matters (*shintō kanjō* or *jingi kanjō*) focusing on the *Reikiki* 麗気記 are particularly significant in this respect. In them, the initiand gradually acquires awareness of his intrinsic *kami*-nature and becomes the "emperor" by identifying himself with him; after he has "become a *kami*" in this way he is ready for the final step, "becoming a buddha in the present body" (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏) on the basis of the principle that *kami* are variant forms (*suijakui* 垂迹) of the buddhas (*honji* 本地).[20] In other words, the "emperor" is of course not a concrete, historical political agent, but just a symbolic step in the soteriological process. Imperial consecration ceremonies performed at temples for monks (*not* for the emperor) are another instance of the same phenomenon: the initiand becomes the emperor and thus embodies Dainichi.

It is in this parallel discourse on kingship that imperial metaphors are fully exploited and associated with both Buddhist deities and the *kami*—one of the more extensive domains in which combinatory ideas about the *kami* and the buddhas (*shinbutsu shūgō*) were developed and actively pursued. In fact, this combinatory discourse has little importance in official Japanese Buddhist discourses on kingship as we have discussed it. The fact that the emperor was a descendant of the heavenly *kami*, especially Amaterasu 天照, may have been the pretext to proclaim the emperor a manifestation of Dainichi in the enthronement consecration (*sokui kanjō*), but overall, the emperor and the retired emperor, especially the Dharma emperor, were usually treated as Buddhist entities and no particular emphasis was placed on their connections with the *kami*. In this respect, it is striking that Japanese Buddhists chose not to exploit the idea

of the Sun Lineage (*nisshu* 日種 or *nichizoku* 日族), which would have allowed them to relate the Japanese emperor directly to the Śākya clan (Buddha's family), and thus to claim control over both the realm of the buddhas and that of the *kami*.[21] In general, the discourse on the *kami* seems to be on the margins of Japanese Buddhist discourses on kingship, in the important sense that kingship involving forms of syncretism between buddhas and *kami* plays a role not in official rituals for the court and the emperor, but in discursive formations directed primarily to the priesthood and the laity such as *jingi kanjō* and consecration rituals for professions.

To sum up, we have seen that Buddhist institutions in Japan were not docile and submissive, subordinate to the political power. Far from that, they always tried actively to undermine the political power by framing it within their own discourses, by legitimating (or de-legitimating) it, and by fragmenting it through the proliferation of doctrines and rituals concerning kingship. In this sense, and somehow surprisingly, Japanese Buddhist institutions appear to have inherited some of the original Buddhist distrust of state and kingship, and followed the ancient, proto-democratic model presented in the Āgama scriptures. It is not by chance if the Meiji oligarchs decided that, in order to restore the absolute power of the emperor, it was necessary to persecute Buddhism. The Meiji government's ideas on kingship have a complex genealogy that cannot be summarized here. However, one thread is worth pursuing in the remaining part of this paper, namely, the idea that the emperor is a divine being defined in non-Buddhist terms.

The "God-King" (*Devarāja*)

There was one more discourse on kingship in Japan that began to emerge in the middle ages, one which is related to the Indian and South-east Asian notion of *devarāja* ("god-king"; the Japanese equivalents would be *tennō* 天王 and *jinnō* 神皇). This notion is multifarious and was developed in different ways in distinct countries, but in general its basic tenet was that the king and/or the symbols of kingship were manifestations or receptacles of a deity. In Hinduized Arakan (present-day Myanmar) this god was Indra; in Buddhist Burma the kingly deities were Viṣṇu and Sakka (Indra); in the well-known case of Angkor, the capital of the Khmer

empire, it was Śiva. Jāyavarman II (r. 802-850), in particular, followed by other Khmer kings, enshrined the symbol of the their sacredness, a linga, in a special temple attended by Brahmans; the linga was believe to embody Śiva and thus was the principle of legitimacy of the king and his power.[22] Subsequent versions of this doctrine described rulers as bodhisattvas (Maitreya=Metteyya in Burma, "embryo Buddha" in Thailand, Avalokiteśvara in Tibet). According to this theory, the king acted as a mediator between the buddhas and the gods, and between the deities and the humans; this mediation was based on the power of the king's regalia which were believed to embody a god, ultimate source of the power of the *imperium*.

In Japan, a *devarāja*-like discourse on kingship developed within Ryōbu Shinto and Ise Shinto. The *kami* were envisioned as the ultimate masters and rulers of Japan; they had bequeathed the realm to their descendants, the human lineage of emperors beginning with Jinmu 神武.[23] In this context, imperial legitimacy was grounded in particular sacred objects (the imperial regalia: *jingi*) and sacred places.[24] The *Reikiki* 麗気記 and its entire intertextual corpus offer a very interesting attempt to chart places and objects that legitimize kingship, while at same time connecting ideas of kingship to a discourse of amalgamation of *kami* and buddhas (*shinbutsu shūgō*). Furthermore, certain Ise Shinto texts deeply influenced by combinatory ideas emphasized the divine origin of the Japanese emperors. For instance, the *Korenshū* traces the origin of the human emperors back to the primordial *kami* that precedes the creation of the universe;[25] analogously, the *Jinnō jitsuroku* claims that the primordial *kami* is the original state (*honji*) of all deities and the ancestor of the Japanese emperors.[26] This interpretation was followed by Yoshida 吉田 Shinto, and later became a received idea in Kokugaku nativist circles, influencing the definition of modern emperorship.

As with Buddhist temple lineages, also in this case religious institutions (in particular, Ise Outer Shrine and the Yoshida House) at the beginning employed this notion of kingship in order to emphasize their own relevance, if not even a sort of superiority over the emperor—but without any direct effect on the actual imperial system. However, their emphasis on a primordial age, which supposedly constituted the basis for actual historical developments and political arrangements, ended up assuming unexpected and momentous political consequences. In fact, the primeval

time was defined as the original condition before the appearance of the first Buddha; a condition of fullness of being and moral perfection. This condition was presented as embodied by the *kami* (in particular, Ise), their cultic sites, and a range of objects associated with them, and it was possible to return to such a condition through specific ritual practices unrelated to Buddhism.[27] Morality was also defined in terms different from those of Buddhism.[28] It should be noted also that, since the entire Buddhist discourse on kingship is an attempt to control the moral degeneration caused by the end of the Golden Age, it was easy for the new brand of Shinto nativism to claim political superiority to Buddhism, because it grounded its legitimacy on a mythical past predating even the Buddhist Golden Age. These tendencies gradually spread at court and among several intellectuals, and ultimately coagulated, together with other political threads, in the modern discourse on the emperor.

In this way, modern emperorship rejected Buddhism also on the basis of such mythological, cosmological assumptions, as a political formation rooted in the origin not only of Japan, but of the entire world of the deities and upholding primordial values that had been obfuscated by Buddhism with its super-political, ultra-mundane sphere of morality.

Conclusion: Modernization and Anti-Syncretistic Nativism

In Japan, Buddhist institutions were never as closely related to the state, and dependent from it, as in East and South-east Asia. They were largely autonomous from the state, in competition with each other, and fragmented; there was never a unified center or supervising figure.[29] Contrary to a more general cultural trend toward amalgamation, official discourses on kingship and the state treated *kami* and buddhas as separate domains. The traditional goal of Buddhism in Japan was that of controlling the secular institutions in order to secure its own autonomy and prosperity without establishing a theocracy (as in Tibet) but at the same time without becoming too dependent on the state (as in Southeast Asia). In these conditions, it is not surprising that the great unifiers of early modern Japan targeted Buddhist institutions as major obstacles to the realization of their plans. They were inspired perhaps also by developments abroad (China, Korea, and ultimately India), in which the influence of Buddhist institutions had been dramatically reduced, if not completely eliminated,

in the process of creation of stronger secular polities.

Lack of space prevents me from discussing in depth actual Meiji policies against the Buddhist discourses on kingship I have outlined so far. I will therefore limit myself to a few considerations. Buddhism and its combinatory tradition were persecuted for a number of reasons which were not necessarily motivated in strictly defined religious terms (even though Shinto fanaticism did play initially a role). More significant factors are to be found in the basic features of Western modernity, such as critiques against "premodern superstitions" (which, in the case of Japan, included a popular religiosity deeply infused of combinatory ideas and practices); and the rejection of "old" (in the sense of obsolete) "Oriental" culture represented by Buddhism (to counterbalance a massive import of new foreign culture from the West). The persecution of Buddhist syncretism and the neutralization of Buddhist discourses on kingship—which began to take place already during the Edo period on a regional level and were carried out in a systematic fashion at the beginning of the Meiji era—were aimed at achieving a number of results. In particular, they virtually eliminated the possibility to establish a republican discourse based on Asian thought (as in the Mahāsammata tradition); they freed the state, and especially the imperial institutions, from the influence of Buddhism as an autonomous set of institutions, thus allowing for the formation of independent doctrines about the foundation of power and its legitimization that could be directly controlled by the state; they got rid of the potential contrast between secular politics and a transcendent religious morality by reducing everything to the mundane dimension. The "separation of the *kami* from the buddhas" (*shinbutsu bunri*) at court happened comparatively late (1871), at a time when the official Buddhist discourse on kingship could be easily eliminated without major political consequences. More crucial was the initial persecution of the parallel discourse on "dispersed emperorship"; the Meiji government secured the monopoly on emperorship by stopping the proliferation of independent discourses and practices relating to kingship—as we have seen, a typical feature of Buddhist combinatory religiosity. Furthermore, the new Japanese ruling class appropriated the discourse on the *kami* from Buddhism in order to liberate their symbolic potentialities to become metaphysical grounds for a new nationalistic polity. This was the path followed by the Meiji oligarchs and, later, in radically visionary texts such as the *Kokutai no*

hongi 国体の本義. As a consequence, *devarāja*-like conceptions were expanded, with court ritualists taking up the role of Brahman priests; the ritual and symbolic aspects of the emperor were magnified, made visible, and spread all over the country—affecting literally every household. These developments produced an imperial system that was very different from traditional Chinese emperorship but also from contemporary European kingship, and can be defined tentatively as a unique form of "mass *devarāja* cult." I leave a systematic study of this topic to a subsequent research.

Notes

[1] Balkrishna G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26/1, 1966, p. 15. See also John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 42.

[2] On violence, in particular the administration of punishment, see Michael Zimmermann, "Only a Fool Becomes a King: Buddhist Stances on Punishment," in Michael Zimmermann, ed., *Buddhism and Violence*, Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2006, pp. 213-242 (available online at http://www.stanford.edu/~mizi/Only%20a%20Fool%20Becomes%20a%20King.pdf).

[3] *Aggañña suttanta*, Chinese trans. in *Zhang Ahan jing* 長阿含経 6 (*Xiao yuan jing* 小緣経); see also *Zhang Ahan jing* 22 (*Shiqi jing* 世起経).

[4] See Romila Thapar, *Early India*, London: Penguin Books, 2002, pp. 146-150; J. P. Sharma, *Republics in Ancient India*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968.

[5] The most famous example of which are the *Arthaśāstra* attributed to Kauṭalya or Kauṭilya around the 4th century BCE, but most probably composed in the first or second centuries CE (*Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra*, ed. R. P. Kangle. Bombay: University of Bombay, 1960), and the *Śāntiparvam* chapter of the *Mahābhārata* (trans. Kisari Mohan Ganguli. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1975, vols. 8-10).

[6] See Michael Zimmermann, "A Mahāyānist Criticism of Arthaśāstra: The Chapter on Royal Ethics in the *Bodhisattva-gocaropāya-viṣaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa-sūtra*," *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 1999*, pp. 177-211. Two Chinese translations of this sutra are known: the *Fo shuo pusa xing fangbian jingie shentong bianhua jing* 仏説菩薩行方便境界神通変化経, by Guṇabhadra (394-468), in T 9, n. 271, pp. 300 b-316 b; and the *Da sazheniganzi suo shuo jing* 大薩遮尼乾子所説経, by Bodhiruci (572-727 [sic]), in T 9, n. 272, pp. 317 a-365 c.

[7] Typcal examples of "evil" emperors are Kōgyoku 皇極, Daigo 醍醐, and Go-Daigo 後醍醐; Sushun 崇峻 was murdered by Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子. Other emperors (such as Horikawa 堀川, Go-Reizei 後冷泉, Go-Sanjō 後三条, and Antoku 安徳) died because of alleged divine punishment.

[8] For instance, the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本霊異記 (fasc. 3 n. 39) reports that the monk Jakusen 寂仙 was reborn as the heir to Emperor Kanmu 桓武, who would later become Emperor Saga 嵯峨.

[9] Since the Heian period, forty-five emperors did become Dharma-emperors (Murakami Shigeyoshi 村上重良, *Nihonshi no naka no tennō* 日本史の中の天皇, Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2003, p. 131).

[10] Kuroda Toshio 黒田俊雄, *Nihon chūsei no kokka to shūkyō* 日本中世の国家と宗教. Tokyo: Iwanami, 1975; Satō Hiroo 佐藤弘夫, *Nihon chūsei no kokka to bukkyō* 日本中世の国家と仏教. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1986; *Kami, hotoke, ōken no chūsei* 神・仏・王権の中世, Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1998.

[11] See Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 (rev. ed.); see also John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka*, cit. On the *cakravartin* doctrine, see Stanley J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

[12] See Fabio Rambelli, "The Emperor's New Robes," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 13 (Buddhist Priests, Kings, and Marginals: Studies on Medieval Japanese Buddhism), 2002-2003, pp. 427-453.

[13] On *sokui kanjō* there is now a vast, and growing, literature. For the purpose of the present article, see in particular Kamikawa Michio, "Accession Rituals and Buddhism in Medieval Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17/2-3, 1990, pp. 243-280; Iyanaga Nobumi, "Ḍākiṇī et l'Empereur: Mystique bouddhique de la royauté dans le Japon médiéval," *VS* (*Versus*) 83/84, 1999, pp. 41-111; Mark Teeuwen, "Knowing vs. Owning a Secret," in Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 172-203; and Matsumoto Ikuyo 松本郁代, *Chūsei ōken to sokui kanjō* 中世王権と即位灌頂. Tokyo: Shinwasha 森話社, 2005. It should be remembered, however, that the *sokui kanjō* was derived from the Neo-Brahmanical, Purāṇic coronation ritual (*rājyābhiṣeka*), through which Brahmanical tendencies attempted, often successfully, to undermine the political impact of Buddhist institutions in India.

[14] As far as I know, there are no tales or folkloric representations extolling Dainichi's virtues and concrete miracles—as different from, say, Amida 阿弥陀 or Yakushi 薬師. Dainichi is indeed mentioned in *kishōmon* 起請文 at the top of the punishing agencies, but the threat of punishment (*butsubachi* 仏罰) from Dainichi of the Twofold mandala would have sounded rather abstract in comparison to that meted out by Hachiman 八幡 or even Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師.

[15] See Fabio Rambelli, "The Ritual World of Buddhist 'Shinto,'" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29/3-4, 2002, pp. 265-297; "Honji Suijaku at Work," in Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, eds., *Buddhas and Kami in Japan*, London and New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2003, pp. 255-286

[16] Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, New York: Columbia University

Press, 2002, p. 121.

[17] Ibid., p. 161.

[18] Ibid., p. 162.

[19] Mark Teeuwen, "Comparative Perspectives on the Emergence of *Jindō* and Shinto," paper presented at the Columbia University Symposium on Medieval Shinto, April 26-29, 2007.

[20] See Rambelli, "The Ritual World of Buddhist 'Shinto.'"

[21] Ruling dynasties in Burma, for example, claimed to be descendants of the Śākyas as a way to legitimize their suzerainty.

[22] See Hermann Kulke, *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*, Delhi: Manohar, 1993, esp. pp. 327-381 (a reprint of the classical study on the subject originally published in 1978); G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968.

[23] These ideas, which appear already in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 and the *Kojiki* 古事記, are reiterated in medieval Ise texts such as *Gochinza shidai ki* 御鎮座次第記 (*Shintō taikei* 神道大系, *Ronsetsu-hen* 論説篇, *Ise shintō* 伊勢神道 *jō* 上, p. 5), *Gochinza denki* 御鎮座伝記 (Ibid., p. 16), *Yamatohime no mikoto seiki* 倭姫命世記 (Ibid., pp. 72-73), and *Jinnō jitsuroku* 神皇実録 (Ibid., p. 156).

[24] On medieval imperial regalia, see Kadoya Atsushi, "Myths, Rites, and Icons," in Scheid and Teeuwen, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, pp. 269-283.

[25] *Korenshū* 瑚璉集 (*Shintō taikei, Ronsetsu-hen, Ise shintō jō*, pp. 576-577).

[26] *Jinnō jitsuroku*, pp. 156-157. *Honji* is written with the two characters 本致.

[27] See Fabio Rambelli, "Re-positioning the Gods," paper presented at the Columbia University Symposium on Medieval Shinto, April 26-29, 2007.

[28] See Mark Teeuwen, *Watarai Shinto*, Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University, 1996, pp. 110-112.

[29] In the middle ages, the retired emperor (*jōkō*) tended to play that role and, in different form, also the Agency for religious affairs (Jisha bugyō 寺社奉行) of the Tokugawa Bakufu, but they never succeeded in placing the *samgha* under the direct control of the state in ways comparable to that of Southeast Asian countries.