

# *The Way of the Sword: Japanese Buddhist Justifications During World War II*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper traces the development of certain aspects of Japanese Buddhist ethics in the period immediately leading to, during, and following the Second World War, with specific focus on the justifications of warfare on the part of several prominent Buddhist scholars during this period. I will look, particularly, at some of the prewar and wartime writings of D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966), Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), and Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960). Suzuki, of course, is the man responsible for bringing Zen to the West in the early to mid-twentieth century; Nishida was the founder and long-time *doyen* of the important Japanese religio-philosophical movement called the Kyoto School; while Watsuji, less known in the West, wrote a highly influential work called *Rinrigaku (Ethics)* during the War. All three of these authors, in various ways, used Buddhism to justify and explain the Japanese war effort. In the past decade, with the birth of a movement in Japan called Critical Buddhism and the publication of a number of books in the West like *Rude Awakenings: Zen, Nationalism, and the Kyoto School* and Brian Victoria's *Zen at War*, the issue of specifically Buddhist motivations, guilt and collaboration with wartime militarism and 'fascism' has become a prominent issue. I would like to use some of the insights of the Critical Buddhist in order to move the discussion beyond the largely descriptive analysis of works like *Zen at War* and Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*. In the final section of my paper, I will examine the contentious claim of certain scholars that the development of Imperial Way Zen was less an aberration than an inevitability—that is, that Japanese Zen, by the early twentieth century, has already been 'infected' with the seeds of militarism and fascism.

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The history of Buddhism, especially of Mahayana, is no less rich and profound than that of Western philosophy and religion... Yet, this 'history of heresy' that Buddhism manifests has evolved without serious bloody inquisitions, religious wars or crusades... I would like to suggest that it was the application of *kyōsō-hanjaku*, backed up by the notions of *anātman* and *sūnyata*, that may have made the decisive difference.

– Masao Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, p. 18

Speaking from the point of view of the ideal outcome, this [the North China Incident of 1937] is a righteous and moral war of self-sacrifice in which we will rescue China from the dangers of Communist takeover and economic slavery. We will help the Chinese live as true Orientals. It would therefore, I dare say, not be unreasonable to call this a sacred war incorporating the great practice of a bodhisattva.

– Hitane Jōzan, "The Current Incident and the Vow and Practice of a Bodhisattva," cited in Victoria, *Zen at War*, p. 134

It is a sad but irrefutable fact that the connection between religion, violence and warfare has a long history. Whether the ancient Israelites battling the Canaanites in God's name, the medieval Christian crusaders waging righteous battle against the infidel, or the modern Algerian Muslim plotting *jihād* against the military government, religion and warfare seem inextricably interlinked. For every Gandhi, Mother Teresa or Dalai Lama, there seem to be dozens of lesser-known but formidable figures ready and willing to stoke the flames of conflict with the torch of religious truth. And *pace* those such as Abe Masao<sup>1</sup> who wish to make Buddhism the sole exception to this sad litany, Buddhism, as well, has a chapter in this story.

To cite a recent and still controversial case, the question of Buddhist involvement—or collaboration, to use

the more loaded term—in twentieth-century Japanese militarism has been re-opened in the West of late by a number of books, including the compilation *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (1994) and Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* (1997). Another book, Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997), tells the grim story of the carnage levied upon the Chinese city of Nanking by marauding Japanese troops over a several month period in 1937—an event still downplayed by Japanese authorities, textbooks and even some mainstream politicians. Though Chang speaks little, if at all, about the role or effect of Buddhism on the events at Nanking, she does allow herself to ask some searching questions about the incident, which has been, until recently, virtually "forgotten" by the world. "What broke down on the scene," she asks, "to allow the behaviour of Japanese soldiers to escape so totally the restraints that govern most human conduct," and "Why did the Japanese officers permit and even encourage such a breakdown?" (1997, 19). Of course, to assume that these soldiers were acting as "Buddhists" would be irresponsible and impossible to defend. However, Chang does allude to the tradition of *bushidō*, and the trickle-down effect of the "code of the samurai":

The twentieth century Japanese identity was forged in a thousand-year-old system in which social hierarchy was established and sustained through martial competition... In time the code of the samurai, initially followed by only a small percentage of the population, penetrated deep into the Japanese culture and [by the eighteenth-century] became the model of honorable behavior among all young men (Chang 1997, 20).

Brian Victoria, in his 1997 book *Zen at War*, asks a question that is more to the point of this paper: what was specifically "Buddhist" about prewar and wartime militarism in Japan, including not only the actions and

beliefs of soldiers but also intellectual and political justifications for these actions and beliefs? It would seem that the attempt to justify and support the Japanese war effort in Buddhist terms was a fairly common occurrence, and not simply the work of a few zealots and hard-liners. A number of Zen masters, as well as most prominent intellectuals of the day were, at one time or another, quite ready to express their support of the war in terms that were often explicitly religious.<sup>2</sup> Here is D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966)—the man who singlehandedly brought Zen to the West in the early to mid-twentieth century—writing in 1938:

Zen has sustained [the military classes] in two ways, morally and philosophically. Morally, because Zen is a religion which teaches us not to look backward once the course is decided upon; philosophically, because it treats life and death indifferently... The military mind, being—and this is one of the essential qualities of the fighter—comparatively simple and not at all addicted to philosophizing finds a congenial spirit in Zen. (Suzuki 1959, 61)

Statements such as these, coming not just from intellectuals but also—perhaps more problematically—from a number of high-ranking Buddhist leaders, have recently prompted much reflection among Buddhologists and Japanologists alike. Of course, at the most basic and banal level, criticism of the wartime complicity of major twentieth-century Japanese religious leaders and philosophical figures is simple and straightforward. As the story goes, the Japanese people were faced with an increasingly brutal regime—manipulated by a cadre of hypocritical and power-hungry militarists—which, since the late nineteenth century, had become increasingly authoritarian, ready and willing to eliminate resistance to “Imperial” policy in whatever form it might take. Thus, the story continues, the issue of individual responsibility is complicated by the power and authority of the Japanese state to squelch all glimmers of resistance. But all of this begs an important question: were those—and they were many—who not only abided but actively promoted and supported the war effort acting out of fear or out of a genuine commitment to the growing nationalistic fervor? To be sure, to some extent we can attribute the complicity of these figures to a simple matter of survival, not simply in terms of one’s career, but increasingly, as the “Great East Asia War” began, in terms of one’s life. But this hardly seems sufficient by itself.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the case of the collaboration of intellectuals, we might note the *déformation professionnelle* which seems to effect prominent scholars everywhere when it comes to dubious political ideologies. Hannah Arendt provides evidence for this by pointing to the history of Western philosophy, where we see an almost unbroken line of support—largely theoretical, it is true—for “tyrants and *Führers*.” The idea is quite simple: philosophically-minded men—men with very little social power—intent on building abstract systems of thought easily fall prey to the delusion that their ideas can or should find fruition in political systems, particularly those which preach purity or single-mindedness as part of their ideology (Arendt 1978). Robert Sharf, reflecting upon Arendt’s thesis, notes that “[i]t may well be that the apostles of ‘pure Zen’ [such as Nishida and Suzuki] fell prey to this *déformation professionnelle*; they yearned to realize in the world of human affairs the ‘perfection’ they

found in their Zen” (Sharf 1994, 50). Arima Tatsuo supports this in the following comment: “The primary sin of a Nishida or a Watsuji was not that their ideal of harmony in the individual might be untenable, but that they confused the realities of politics with personal longings for serenity and harmony” (Arima 1969, 12).

With respect to the religious element, we should ask the following question: was Buddhism being “used” (in the sense, one might say, of “misused”) in service of a more powerful nationalist ideology, or, as others suggest, was the connection deeper than one of pure expediency, perhaps traceable to certain fatal flaws or weaknesses within Buddhism itself? In other words, *Was the spirit of nationalism intrinsic or incidental to the spirit of Buddhism?* Moreover, *What specific ideas, values or doctrines were utilized in creating “The Way of the Sword”?* We might also ask: *Why was Buddhism so easily “manipulated” to suit militarism?* And more generally, *What is the relation—if any—between Buddhist doctrine, violence, warfare and social ethics?* It is these deeply troubling questions that I would like to consider in this essay. I come to this issue as a comparative religious ethicist, not as a social or political historian. Yet in order to examine this complex issue fruitfully, we need to set the historical and political context.

#### **The Odour of Chrysanthemums: “Imperial Way Zen”**

Modern Japanese nationalism was born out of the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In what surely remains a unique historical event, a self-appointed new government in that year effectively “invented” a modern nation out of a largely feudal assemblage of warring states. This invention involved not only the centralization of authority, both literally and symbolically, in the Emperor, but also, somewhat paradoxically, the drive to “modernize” Japan—to create an industrial and military power to rival those of the West. With the “restoration” of the Emperor came a concomitant drive to “re-establish” the indigenous religion of Japan, Shinto. In the preceding Tokugawa Period (1600–1868), the ruling shoguns had adopted Buddhism as the *de facto* state religion, and thus the Meiji restorationists felt compelled to launch a sustained critique of Buddhism as “non-Japanese.” However, Buddhism had been in Japan for over 1300 years, and was not going to be disestablished without severe disruptions to the national fabric (see Holton 1963, 127–28). Thus, official attitudes towards Buddhism—and the specific relations between the two religions—shifted much during the final years of the nineteenth-century.<sup>4</sup>

In 1894, Japan and China became engaged in a war over the Korean peninsula, and thus began a period of intermittent hostilities between the two countries that was to last for fifty years. Response to the war in Japan was enthusiastic, on all sides. The Meiji regime, supported by intellectuals and public figures of all stripes, had for some time been propagating the notion of a “Japanese essence” connected with loyalty to the nation and Emperor. This ideology, which came to be called “Japanism” (*nihon shugi* or *nihon jinron*),<sup>5</sup> denoted a belief in the cultural, spiritual, military, and sometimes, in its more extreme forms, racial superiority of the Japanese people. Within the rhetoric or philosophy of Japanism, foreign ideals were not simply rejected, they were severely criticized as both inferior and dangerous. Though Western science and technology continued to be adopted wholesale, Japanese people were urged to follow the Japanese way of life, and to avoid especially Western ways.

Not surprisingly, it was around the time of the Sino-Japanese War that the phenomenon of “Zen nationalism” became apparent for the first time. A young D. T. Suzuki wrote:

There is a violent country [China], and insofar as it obstructs our commerce and infringes upon our rights, it directly interrupts the progress of all humankind. In the name of religion, our country refuses to submit itself to this. For this reason, unavoidably we have taken up arms. For the sake of justice and justice alone, we are simply chastising the country that represents injustice, and there is nothing else we seek. *This is a religious action.* (Ives 1994, 17, my emphasis)

Suzuki makes no bones about it. The war with China was not simply a war for land or an act of aggression: it was an act of righteous chastisement, and, as such, must be seen as part of Japan’s *religious* mandate—a mandate which clearly extended beyond its national borders and into the very land from whence Zen had come!<sup>6</sup>

By 1904, Japan was again at war, this time fulfilling what just a generation before would have been merely a vain hope. Not only were they able to equitably battle a European power, they were able to hand the Russians a resounding defeat.<sup>7</sup> The boost this war gave to national pride was enormous: Japan had officially become a world power. According to Ichikawa Hakugen, one of the few postwar Japanese scholars to raise the issue of Zen complicity in militarism, it is during the Russo-Japanese conflict that the phenomena of “Imperial Way Zen” began.<sup>8</sup> Suzuki’s vague remarks about the religious underpinnings of Japanese military activity were soon to be given surer Buddhist foundation.

But it was not really until the 1930s, when Japan again became engaged in outright hostilities with China in Manchuria, that the rhetoric of Imperial Way Zen reached its most virulent heights. In 1934, Iida Tōin declared that “There is no Buddha-Dharma apart from loyalty... The Imperial wind and the Buddha’s sun are nondual” (Ives 1994, 18). Iida went on to urge Buddhists to relish “how much power Zen gave to the Way of the Warrior.” Horada Sōgaku, a Zen master who receives favourable treatment in a number of recent Western studies, wrote, in 1939, “[If ordered to] march: tramp, tramp, or shoot: bang, bang. This is the manifestation of the highest Wisdom [of Enlightenment]. The unity of Zen and war of which I speak extends to the farthest reaches of the holy war [now under way]” (Victoria 1997, x). Such comments, while not necessarily representative of any “official” Zen stance on the war effort, are also not by any means unrepresentative of a very strong trend within Zen in the period up to and including the Second World War (see Ives 1994, 19). Which leads us back to the key question: *How or why did this happen?*

#### Attempts at an Explanation: Some Historical and Cultural Factors

It should be noted...that the Buddhism found in Japan is not the Buddhism that was born in India and raised in China. At the hands of the Japanese people, Buddhism was consciously or unconsciously ‘indigenized’.

– Hori et al., *Japanese Religion*, p. 16

Besides the more obvious impact of Meiji “Japanism” and *bushidō*, to be discussed below, we must note the possible role of religious syncretism on the development of Buddhist ethics in Japan. The question of syncretism is one that is central to the work of the Critical Buddhists—Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō—who suggest that Buddhism, in the course of its long march from India through China and finally to Japan, was inevitably infected with indigenous ideas from Taoism and Shinto (the effect of Confucianism, it would see, has been largely beneficial and thus is exempt from critique). According to the Critical Buddhists, first Taoism and then Shinto have caused untold harm to Buddhist ethics, mostly through importation of doctrines which emphasize silence, harmony and non-discrimination over the use of language, reason, and critical thought.

It is, of course, an indisputable fact of history that the importation of any foreign religion on to a different culture will—if the new religion is to ‘succeed’ at all—produce a certain amount of syncretism. This is no less true of East Asian Buddhism than it is of European Christianity. Beyond this general statement, however, the specific implications of such intermingling of traditions on ritual as well as doctrinal levels is notoriously difficult to ascertain. While “originalists” tend to argue that there is a pure essence which can usually be located in the historical origins of a traditions (e.g., the “Jesus movement” or the small group of Śākyamuni’s followers), others, especially those of a more patriotic strain, will make the case that the merger of traditions actually helped to illuminate the true “intention” of the religion’s founder(s). This latter argument is common in Japanese Buddhist writing. Buddhist apologists are forced to acknowledge (unlike Western orientologists) the vast cultural differences between Śākyamuni’s India and Japan (in any era), yet rather than lament this incongruity, the Eastward advance of Buddhism is more often celebrated as necessary, fortuitous, even preordained, fulfillment—or “flowering”—of the true Dharma.<sup>9</sup>

#### Taoism

In the classic Buddhist text, the *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*) of Kenko, a clear Taoist sentiment of “beyondness” is expressed with reference to Chuang-tzu:

True knowledge is not what one hears from others or acquires through study. What, then, are we to call knowledge? Proper and improper come to one and the same thing—can we call anything ‘good’? The truly enlightened man has no learning, no virtue, no accomplishments, no fame. Who knows of him, who will report his glory? It is not that he conceals his virtue or pretends to be stupid; it is because from the outset he is above distinctions between wise and foolish, between profit and loss. If, in your delusion, you seek fame and profit, the results will be as I have described. All is unreality. Nothing is worth discussing, worth desiring.

– Kenkō 1999 ¶41, pp. 129–31

Ichikawa Hakugen, in his analysis of the socio-ethical “lapses” of Japanese Zen, looks to the historical context of the development of Chan in sixth-century China, that is, as a force for cohesion in a period of great turmoil in that country. As such, Hakugen argues, Chan

(and by extension its Japanese offshoot Zen) absorbed some fundamental notions of “harmony,” fusion and non-discrimination from Taoism, ideas which, for Ichikawa as well as Hakamaya and Matsumoto, have since had disastrous effects on Buddhist social ethics. Hakugen’s point is that the fusion of Taoist non-discrimination and appeals to harmony and unity corrupted, in some fashion, the discriminating and critical element that is central to Buddhism, and this legacy has been passed over into modern Zen. In short, under this Taoist-inspired ideal, adaptation in the name of harmony slides imperceptibly into accommodation with whatever ideology or powers that be.

### Shinto

If Buddhism in China was affected or “contaminated” by Taoist and Confucian ideas, Buddhism in Japan, from its inception in the middle of the sixth century, was faced with the indigenous Japanese “way of the gods”—Shinto. According to Hori et al., “The tendency toward a harmonious fusion of Buddhism and Shinto (*shinbutsu shūgō*) became in fact one of the primary means by which Buddhism was assimilated in Japan” (1972, 17). Of course, the affirmation of some pre-existent “tendency” here merely begs the question as to *why* there was this tendency. One reason might be the “general Buddhist conception of *upāya* or skillful means, by which it was taught that the Dharma might travel in a number of diverse “vehicles” (see below for more on *upāya*). Moreover, unlike Confucianism, a self-conscious program promoted by the elite in the Middle Kingdom, and unlike Taoism, which, though more abstract and “spiritual” than Confucianism, was identifiable by a locus of classic texts like the *Daodejing* and the writings of Zhuangzi, Shinto in sixth-century Japan was without an identifiable locus or a coherent set of doctrines or rituals. This is not to say that it was not, however, deeply rooted within the lives of ordinary Japanese folk. However, the doctrinal laxity and unsystematic character of the indigenous way no doubt smoothed the way for Buddhism, since there were very few areas in which the two “religions” overlapped.

Eventually, Buddhist writers formulated an elaborate supercessionist theory to account for and justify the promiscuity between Buddhism and Shinto, one if not based on then certainly reflective of Chinese metaphysical teachings of essence and manifestation (see Wright 1998). According to the theory of *honji suijaku* (“the prime entity and its manifestations”), the Shinto *kami* are secondary manifestations of certain Buddhas or bodhisattvas. By the Kamakura period, that time of great religious and political transformation, *honji suijaku* found expression in the creation of syncretistic sects such as Ryōbu Shinto and Sunnō Shinto. Somewhat later, when Shinto scholars began to question the “Japaneseness” of Buddhism, this theory was reversed, and the buddhas and bodhisattvas became manifestations of the singular prime entity constituted by the *kami* (or, at a later stage in politicized Shinto apologetics, the Emperor).<sup>10</sup>

In the Tokugawa Period, even while Buddhism became a *de facto* state religion wielded by the shogunate as an instrument of social control (or, perhaps, due in no small part to this politicization of Buddhism), the *kokugaku* (“national learning” or “nativist”<sup>11</sup>) movement arose. Spearheaded by the voluminous writings of Motoori Norinaga, (1730–1801), this Shinto-nationalist

movement refused to continue the tradition of *shinbutsu shūgō*, however hierarchically ordered. As already mentioned, prompted by the revival of Shinto nationalism, the Meiji Restorationists decreed that Shinto and Buddhism were to be henceforth officially separated. However, thirteen centuries of amalgamation could hardly be wished away overnight, and it is doubtful that, for the ordinary Japanese believer, this official separation held anything more than a vague symbolic resonance.

Of course, relying on syncretism as an explanation or causal factor in Zen militarism or Buddhist war justifications is hardly sufficient, and may itself betray an apologetic thrust: If the lapses in Zen can be attributed to “contamination” by other sources, its purity or essence is thereby upheld. This will be discussed in greater detail below.

### *Sōhei*: The Fruits of “Secular Buddhism”

Before turning to an analysis of the ethics of *bushidō*—a relatively modern martial ideology—an interesting and little-studied case of Buddhist militarism from an earlier period bears mention. In the late Heian Period (794–1191), from the tenth century until the thirteenth, the monks and *jinin* of the most powerful temples and shrines in the Kyoto and Nara regions frequently formed armed bands to wage battle against not only rival temples but occasionally to challenge even the court itself.<sup>12</sup> Reviewing this situation, Funazaki Takeshi (2001, 7) is prompted to ask why? “Why did these monks comport themselves in such a blasphemous, warlike manner?... [given the fact that] Buddhist teachings forbade the destruction of life and the possession of weapons [and that monks and nuns alike took vows to live lives of compassion.”

According to Funazaki, the answer has to do with the long historical development of what he calls “secular Buddhism.” Virtually since its introduction—more precisely dated to 593 CE, when the Empress Suiko (r. 592–628) established Buddhism by Imperial edict—until the Meiji disestablishment in 1868, Buddhism had been protected by the ruling classes. As Funazaki explains, “this was especially apparent during the Nara and Heian Periods, when the officials, emperors, and noblemen entertained the deep-seated belief that peace within the nation could be ensured only when politics and Buddhism were interconnected. At that time the relation between Buddhism and the body politic was likened to the two wheels of the vehicle called ‘the nation’” (Funazaki 2001, 7). The Taika Reforms of 645 CE, which served to unite the country for the first time, also established Buddhism further by putting all temples under “quasi-jurisdiction” of the Court as well as the local clans. A 741 CE edict promulgated by the Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–749), himself a devout Buddhist, sought to further unify politics and religion by “nationalizing” (i.e., bringing under direct court control) one temple (called *kokubunji*) in each of the sixty-eight provinces. By the ninth century, the most powerful *kokubunji* were those in the Kyoto-Nara region, particularly Tōdaiji, Kōfukuji, and Enryakuji. At these temples court-appointed priests were instructed to pray for the peace and prosperity of the nation. Moreover, other temples were subsidized by the government as well as by the local clans by way of donations of land and servants, and thus continued to increase in wealth and prosperity. By the tenth century, disputes over land ownership between

clans were frequent, and manor lords began to organize their servants and peasants (*shōmin*) into armed bands. “At the same time, the influential temples began to use *sōhei* to protect the rights of the large religious institutions and manors” (8–9).

Lest it be thought that, in the early stages, these court-appointed monks and nuns were political freeloaders unconcerned with Buddhist doctrine, it should be noted that the examinations a would-be “national priest” had to undergo were strenuous—involving, just as a preliminary stage, the memorization of the full text of either the *Hokkēkyō* (Lotus Sutra) or the *Saishōgyō* (Suvāna-prabhasa Sutra) as well as tests on Buddhist concepts and cultic practices. However, as more and more peasants began to want to enter the priesthood, these standards were drastically lowered. By the mid-ninth century, Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki (847–918), in a report to the Emperor Daigo on the existing state of affairs, complained that “At each temple the number of those who enter the Buddhist priesthood annually reaches two or three hundred, more than half of whom are possessed of no morals whatever.... Only outwardly are these men priests; inwardly their minds are as vicious as slaughterers” (Funazaki 2001, 10–11). Funazaki provides a contemporary commentary no less awash in critical bile: “As ambitious and greedy men who sought honor and high social standing rather than spiritual enlightenment flocked into these powerful temples in greater and greater numbers, the Buddhist world degenerated into a cockpit of corruption, trickery and ambition” (12). In short, this is the inevitable outcome of what Funazaki calls “secularized Buddhism.” The *sōhei* phenomenon diminished significantly in the Kamakura Period, and came to an official end with Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s government decree (the *katanagari*), which forbade all men but samurai from possessing weapons.

It would indeed be scurrilous to try to uncover some sort of deeper, perhaps doctrinal, reason for the phenomenon of the *sōhei*. In this case, the reasons seem quite abundantly clear. However, having said that, it is important to see the *sōhei* as a precedent of sorts for the fusion of politics and religion that was to once again emerge in the Meiji and prewar periods.

### ***Bushidō: The Way of the Warrior***

We have now examined some of the general historical forces at work in the transformation of Buddhism from its Indian roots through China and into Japan. But in order to understand the place of violence and the martial spirit in Japanese tradition, we have to speak of the indigenous Japanese phenomenon of *bushidō*—the samurai warrior code. *Bushidō* is basically an ethic for Japanese warriors which, though it has long roots, was given full expression in the seventeenth century by writers like Yamaga Sokō (1622–85). The qualities emphasized in *bushidō* are not unlike the ideals presented in medieval European codes of chivalry, though the level of asceticism and loyalty to one’s military superior is somewhat more pronounced. Though *bushidō* ethics were intended for soldiers and fighters, by the late-nineteenth century the ideals had, to an extent, trickled down to include all loyal Japanese subjects. In fact, the imposition of *bushidō* ideals onto the general populace was part of a conscious effort by the Meiji government to instil patriotism and loyalty into the people.<sup>13</sup>

It is, however, important to note that initially *bushidō* had no direct link to Buddhism, or even to Shinto for that matter (not a few of its proponents were Confucianists, like Yamage, or Christian, like Nitabe Inazō<sup>14</sup>). This does not mean that there was no cross-fertilization, however. As we see in a number of Suzuki writings, certain values of Buddhism—especially Zen, with its emphasis on mindfulness, concentration, calmness, and rigour—have long been used to solidify and support *bushidō* ethics.<sup>15</sup> By the late nineteenth century, the use of Zen to provide support for the way of the warrior had become commonplace.

### ***Nihonjinron: Japanese Uniqueness; Japanese Fatalism***

Ultimately *bushidō* ethics came to be wedded with the ideology of “Japanism” already mentioned, and, at the same time, Buddhism became more deeply embroiled in the rhetoric of Japanese nationalism. Matsumoto Shirō argues that one of the key documents in the establishment of Japanism as an entrenched ideology by the time of the Pacific War was the *Kokutai no hongī* (“Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan,” published in March, 1937). The *Kokutai* did not reject Buddhism as a foreign religion (as might be expected given the growing Shinto-based nationalist spirit), but rather absorbed Buddhism into a singular homogeneous Japanese “spirit.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, the tension between Buddhism and Shinto that had existed since the Restoration was largely diminished, at the expense of the possibility of Buddhist criticism at the institutional level.

As previously mentioned, the term Japanism<sup>17</sup>, tied to what has in other places been called “the myth of Japanese uniqueness,” is shorthand for a nationalistic understanding of Japanese cultural superiority, including the realms of religion and spirituality. Japanism in the early part of the century was channeled into the war effort, leading to a kind of “manifest destiny” approach to military conquest. After the war, of course, this was no longer acceptable or allowable. However, one could make the case that Japanism did not die, but was sublimated into the desire for economic and technological superiority.

But the critique of Japanism extends deeper than simply a critique of Buddhist absorption by nationalists or Buddhist collaboration with the military ideology of the period. Matsumoto points to the *metaphysical* negativity and pessimism underlying Japanism, citing the life, work, and death of Mishima Yukio as a prime example of a “purified” form of Japanism. Unlike the “hypocritical” Japanism of the war leaders and followers, that of Mishima is distinguished by its rejection of the former and a retreat to a more aestheticized and spiritualized form of self-sacrifice, culminating, of course, in the act of *seppuku*—ritual self-disembowelment—in 1970. But ultimately Mishima’s “pure Japanism” is no better than the corrupt and self-serving form of the wartime ideologues: “As a Buddhist,” says Matsumoto, “I stand opposed to any and all philosophies of death, and must therefore renounce pure Japanism in its entirety” (371).

The question of pessimism is one that has a number of important implications for Japanese Buddhism, and, indeed, Buddhism more generally. It is widely conceived, by Westerners in particular (from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to Pope John Paul II), that Buddhism is at root a “pessimistic” religion, rooted in a denial of the world (*samsara*) in favour of some sort of “transcendent” release or extinction of the self (*nirvana*). Without

getting into the many counterarguments to this claim, which, it must be said, is usually a normative rather than simply a descriptive one, this opinion is also one which carries some weight in Japan, only with a significant difference. In Japan, those who note the “pessimistic” nature of Buddhism are most often those who hold that Shinto is the “indigenous” religion on Japan, and that, before the arrival of Buddhism, the Japanese were an “optimistic” and life-affirming people.<sup>18</sup> This line of thinking is roundly dismissed by Matsumoto, who calls it “nonsense propagated by those who know not the first thing about the meaning of religion. “In fact, the ancient Japanese had no ground for any kind of hope. Their lives were spent in the frightened but stoic anticipation of death and the journey to the dreaded land of darkness (*gami no kuni*). Their first hope for life, the first conviction of resurrection in the next world, came through the encounter with Buddhism” (1997e, 373).

Suzuki, in “The Zen Sect of Buddhism,” also rejects the stereotype of “oriental fatalism,” but in doing so, he again presents Zen as the ultimate source for military virtues:

The Lebenschauung of *Bushidō* is no more nor less than that of Zen. The calmness and joyfulness of heart at the moment of death which is conspicuously observable in the Japanese, the intrepidity which is generally shown by the Japanese soldiers in the face of an overwhelming enemy; and the fairness of play to an opponent, so strongly taught by *Bushidō*—all these come from the spirit of Zen training, and not from any such blind, fatalistic conception as is sometimes thought to be a trait peculiar to Orientals (quoted in Victoria 1997, 105).

### Three Levels of Criticism: Sharf, Victoria, Critical Buddhism

Understanding the historical context is crucial in any reflection upon Buddhism and violence. Yet contextualization can itself lead to other perhaps unwarranted conclusions. For instance, Robert Sharf argues that modern Zen, as developed in the various writings of Zen-philosophers like Nishida and Suzuki—came to be conceived as a “mystical or spiritual gnosis that transcends sectarian boundaries.” Such an understanding of Zen, says Sharf, is quite distinct from anything preceding the Meiji period, and vastly different from what goes on in the regular Zen monastery to this day.

Yet, while it is important to recognize the changes in twentieth-century Zen, and the influence of Japanese intellectuals and Western philosophy on those changes, Sharf’s thesis holds the corollary danger of suggesting that the modern “lapses” of Zen social ethics are historically anomalous, specific to a particular period of restlessness, cultural and spiritual anxiety, coupled with insurgent nationalism. Other commentators have made this suggestion even more strongly, and with less nuance than Sharf. In such a scenario, Zen is exempt from association with modern militarism not because it had been blatantly misused, but because Zen “itself” had become corrupted by circumstances—including, we should note, the pernicious effects of Western philosophy.

Brian Victoria, author of *Zen at War*, is wary of such an analysis of modern Zen militarism. He makes it quite clear that the development of Zen from the Meiji Restoration in 1868 up to the end of the Pacific War in 1945,

while not an inevitable or necessary culmination of the historical connection between Zen and warfare, was also not entirely unique. “[T]he unity of Zen and the sword,” has avers, “has deep roots in Zen Buddhist doctrine and history.” Yet for all the historical cases and incidents cited by Victoria, his work is limited, as he is quick to point out (in personal communication and in the introduction to *Zen at War*) by the fact that he is a historian, not an ethicist, a philosopher, or a “religious critic.” Thus, while the tone of the book expresses an undisguised “evaluation” of Buddhist betrayal (or “emasculatation”) of the Buddhadharma, Victoria is not willing to pursue just what this means in terms of Buddhist ethics during the war or today. That is to say, in his work the question of “what,” though very much infected with the question of “how,” stopped short of a full exploration of “why.” *Why* did these things come about? *Why* was Buddhism so easily “manipulated” to suit militarism?

In the late 1980s Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō, picking up on Ichikawa Hakugen’s critical work, began to fulminate, in ways which make Victoria’s later work look decidedly tame by comparison, against what they felt was a deformed and degenerate vision of Japanese Buddhism and Buddhist ethics. Calling their movement Critical Buddhism (*hihan buddhō*), they proceeded to attack—in a forthright and highly polemical manner virtually unheard of in modern Japanese scholarship—prominent Japanese philosophical figures like Suzuki, Nishida and Nishitani of the Kyoto School, specific Buddhist doctrines such as Buddha-nature and original enlightenment, and even entire sects of Buddhism, including the one to which they belonged—Zen.<sup>19</sup> The Critical Buddhists, unlike Victoria, are primarily interested in the issue of specific relations between Buddhist *doctrines* and the historical cases of Buddhist promotion of violence and warfare. I would like now to look more closely at some of these doctrines in light of the issue of Zen violence and warfare.

### Doctrinal (Mis?) Uses

#### Suffering (*dukkha*) vs. Compassion (*karuṇā*)

The first important doctrine to examine is the bedrock statement of the Buddha’s teachings: the first of the so-called Four Noble Truths (*Ārya Satyas*): “All life is *dukkha*”—a word which is usually, though insufficiently, translated as “suffering.” This teaching suggests that all of life’s experiences, from birth to death, yield an unsatisfactoriness, which takes numerous forms, including physical pain, change and conditioned phenomena.<sup>20</sup> Important for our sake is the fact that this teaching does allow for a certain amount of lee-way in terms of the ultimate importance of life, one’s own or that of another. Put quite simply, the drive to eliminate *dukkha* can be interpreted in ways that have little to do with the desire or vow to reduce physical pain or save a life. The specific ethical precept of *ahimsā*—which prohibits not only taking life but causing injury to sentient beings—can be subverted by the greater goals of liberating beings from their false attachment to life and freeing them from the chains of worldly existence.

This line of reasoning became explicit in a series of proclamations in support of Japan’s war effort that were signed by leaders from all major Buddhist sects in July, 1937: “In order to establish eternal peace in East Asia, arousing the great benevolence and compassion of Buddhism, we are sometimes accepting and sometimes

forceful. We now have no choice but to exercise the benevolent forcefulness of ‘killing in order than many may live’ (*issatsu tashō*). This is something which Mahayana Buddhism approves of only with the greatest of seriousness...” In other words, extreme circumstances here called for extreme, but perfectly legitimate and perfectly Buddhist, measures.<sup>21</sup>

### Skillful Means (*upāya*)

The authors of *The Buddhist View of War* also allude to another fundamental teaching in Mahayana Buddhist ethics: the doctrine of *upāya*, or “skillful means.” This notion has led to great flexibility within Mahayana tradition, for it promotes the idea of expedience: one should use whatever means are most useful in bringing about the goals of Buddhist teaching, whether these be conceived as wisdom, compassion, enlightenment, awareness, or a combination of these. Of course, the corollary is that *upāya* has been used on occasion to justify acts which in ordinary circumstances would be prohibited.<sup>22</sup> For example, the *Upāyakaṣāya Sūtra* tells a story in which the Buddha in a previous existence as a celibate religious student had sexual intercourse with a poor girl who threatened to die out of love for him. Here the vows of celibacy were trumped by the Buddha’s compassion for the girl (a considerable sacrifice in this case, we might add).

With respect to the use of violence, there is a popular Mahayana story which tells of how, again in a previous life, the Buddha killed a man—in order to prevent him from killing 500 others and consequently falling into the lowest hell for a long, long time. In this case, it is judged that the Buddha as *bodhisattva* acted out of pure compassion for the other man (and perhaps, though only secondarily, out of compassion for those who would have been killed by him). Elsewhere, in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, the Buddha speaks of how in a previous life he had killed several Brahmins to prevent them from slandering Buddhism. Again, this act of violence on the part of the Buddha himself is couched in terms of compassion—he was concerned with the punishment the Brahmins might have incurred through continuing their vicious attacks on the Dharma. Here however we see the line between pragmatic utility in teaching and a theory of just war or just violence begin to fade.<sup>23</sup>

### Zen: Beyond Words and Letters (*zetsugon*)

But now I would like to return to specifically Japanese Buddhist doctrine, and that of Zen more particularly. Here the work of the Critical Buddhists is useful.<sup>24</sup> Most important to note here are those aspects of Zen which trouble the Critical Buddhists most. Zen has long placed emphasis on its teachings being ultimately “beyond words and letters,” and on the transmission of Zen from master to student, in which the teacher’s authority over the student is virtually absolute. Critical Buddhist objections to the latter of these two notions requires little explication: Hakamaya explicitly rejects as socially dangerous the authoritarian idea that a teacher is absolute and never mistaken.<sup>25</sup> But it is really the former of these assumptions—that Zen is anti-rational and against language—which faces the most trenchant criticism.<sup>26</sup>

It is this aspect of Zen, part of a general way of thinking (or not-thinking) which they call *topica* or “topicalism,” which serves as the *bête noir* for Critical Buddhists. Also reflected in what Matsumoto, with a bit of Sanskrit neology, calls *dhātu-vāda*—the notion of “a

singular, real locus (*dhātu*) that gives rise to a plurality of phenomena...a ‘generative monism’ or a ‘transcendental realism’” (1997b, 171)—topicalism is nothing less than “an aesthetic mysticism unconcerned with critical differentiation between truth and falsity and not in need of rational demonstration” (Hubbard and Swanson 1997, vii). It is this style or way of thinking within Buddhism which, Hakamaya and Matsumoto assert, has dominated and continues to dominate the Mahayana Buddhist tradition as a whole, and its Japanese offshoots in particular, and which, in rejecting the relevance of criticism, reason, and ethics, allowed for the use of Zen as a bulwark for militarist propaganda. Thus, according to Matsumoto and the Critical Buddhists more generally, the so-called Imperial Way Zen (or Zen of the Sword) which flourished in the first half of the twentieth century was less an *aberration* than the inevitable *culmination* of Zen ethics (or, in this case, a pronounced lack of such).

### Pure Zen: Nishida and the Rhetoric of Experience

I would like to conclude this section by turning briefly to the case of Nishida Kitarō, the founder of the so-called Kyoto School, which became the most prominent philosophical school of twentieth-century Japan. Though not affiliated or grounded in religion per se, the philosophy developed by Nishida, Nishitani, and Tanabe was overwhelmingly indebted to Buddhism, and, at least for the former two, to Zen in particular. As I’ve already mentioned, Robert Sharf has argued that Nishida and company created a new form of Zen, a “pure Zen,” based on the primacy of a kind of mystical experience ultimately beyond ethics, reason, and language. According to this Zen understanding, to experience things in this way is to know things “just as they are”—that is to say, beyond the fabrications of the mind. In Nishida’s early writings, including *An Inquiry into the Good (Zen no kenkyū)* the term *basho*—translated as *topos* or “place”—indicates the “pure experience” that comes before and beyond the intellect, and thus, signifies a truth or level of reality before and beyond ethics or politics. As critics have noted, since the emphasis here is on a recognition of nondual reality rather than a discrimination of truth or falsity, the philosophy of “pure experience” effectively collapses “is” into “ought,” and thus subverts ethical practice entirely.

In Nishida’s later writings, the philosophy of “active intuition” and religious awakening come to be related to political submission: “Religiously awakened people,” writes Nishida, “become ‘master of every situation’ as the self-determination of the absolute present. In all respects these people are active. For each, ‘the place in which one stands is truth’... From a true religious awakening one can submit to the state” (quoted in Ives 1994, 23). This idea is repeated in an essay written in 1944: “True obedience to the nation should be derived from the standpoint of true religious self-awareness. Mere seeking one’s own peace of mind is selfish” (Nishida 1970, 45). Even more significantly for our purposes here, Nishida borrowed a line from Kegon Buddhism in emphasizing the importance of “See[ing] the universal in the particular thing.” This notion may be fairly innocuous in itself (one finds an identical notion in Blake and Goethe), but Nishida felt compelled to situate it in concrete terms, by locating the universal principle in the particular “place” called the Emperor. As Christopher Ives puts it, “Nishida [thus] helped provide a philosophical foundation for the ‘holy war’ being waged in the name of the emperor.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Final Reflections on the Various Analyses of Japanese Buddhist Militarism: Moral Colonialism?**

In the past decade, as books like *Rude Awakenings*, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, *The Rape of Nanking*, and *Zen at War*, have opened up new waves of criticism against religious and political figures and philosophical schools of modern Japan, the authors and contributors to these works have themselves come under criticism. One of the most common charges, faced by Brian Victoria more than the others, is that of being a “moral colonialist,” intent on imposing Western values and Western ethics on a non-Western culture and tradition.

This charge clearly emerges out of a heightened sensitivity in the past several decades towards orientalism in its many manifestations. And of course Western scholars must and should be wary of simply importing specific values from Western tradition—whether they be Judeo-Christian or Enlightenment humanist—onto a very different culture and tradition with distinct values and ideals. Working in the lengthening shadow of several centuries of orientalism, it is entirely understandable when not only Japanese, but many Western scholars, burdened by the sins of their fathers, invoke the importance of cultural relativism and an “insider’s perspective.”

However, all this being said, the charge of moral colonialism has its limits, and can itself be simply an extension of an overactive sensitivity to “political correctness.” Moreover, sometimes the mandate of cultural relativism itself relies upon stereotypes and cross-cultural generalizations which have their root in the very fabric of orientalism that its proponents are trying to deconstruct. In order to effectively study the concept of holy war or the religious use of violence in a cross-cultural perspective, we must press beyond the whole “East is East, West is West, and never the twain shall meet” business. This is a form of rhetoric whose absurdity is only matched by its pesky resilience in the popular imagination, university classrooms, and in the politically correct wings of scholarship itself. We can and should be sensitive to cultural differences without allowing ourselves or others to use relativism as an easy mask for apologetics.<sup>28</sup>

### **Criticalism or Compassion?**

The Critical Buddhists provide something of a counter-case to that of Victoria. They are consummate “insiders”: both Hakamaya and Matsumoto are highly-trained Buddhist scholars, as well as being, like Victoria, ordained priests of the Sôtô Zen sect. Moreover, though they certainly utilize Western philosophy when it suits their purposes, their work is an extended battle against Buddhist ethics from a self-consciously *Buddhist* perspective. Yet for all the good that Critical Buddhism brings to the study of the place of language and reason in Buddhist tradition, their conclusion that Buddhism needs to be founded entirely on critical rationality seems rather too much of a counterswing, and does not do justice to the potentially positive and liberatory elements of nonrational activities like art, poetry, and ritual. Moreover, Critical Buddhists lament the ethical lapses of modern Buddhism, but speak comparatively little of the Vow of Compassion, which is at the heart of classic Buddhist texts of peace like the *Bodhicaryavatara* of Shântideva.

As Ichikawa Hakugen sadly notes: the ideals of harmony, nonresistance, and uncritical tolerance, which

came to form the philosophical core of Imperial Way Zen, stand in stark contrast to the Buddhist ideal of compassion—the Way of the Bodhisattva, whose vow it is to liberate all sentient beings from suffering (Ives 1994, 21). Following Ichikawa, it would seem that the Vow of Compassion, as well as the related precepts against taking life and causing harm to sentient beings—rather than glib appeals to more “critical thinking”—must form the bulwark of Buddhist pacifism, as well as the philosophical and doctrinal basis for sustained “Buddhist” critique of The Way of the Sword.

### **The Pacific War: Just or Holy?**

Finally, it might be good to ask whether the Pacific War be understood as a Holy War? According to James Turner Johnson, there are three distinct criteria for establishing whether a conflict can reasonably be called a Holy War: 1) That the war have a transcendent authority, either given directly from God or mediated through the religious institutions in some way; 2) That the war have a purpose directly associated with religion, wither its defense or its propagation or the establishment of a social order in accord with religious requirements; 3) That the war be waged by people who are in some sense set apart, whether culturally or morally or simply by membership in the religious community, from those against whom the war is waged (Johnson 1997, 8). All of these conditions, with certain allowances made for the differences in Japanese and Western understandings of religion, are met by the “Great East Asia War.”

On the matter of Just War, it is important to note that many Japanese intellectuals—even those who did not see the conflict in religious terms—saw the Fifteen Year War as a war of liberation, not only justified but necessary. Japan, as the self-proclaimed “single remaining uncolonized nation” of the East was, in the eyes of many of its people, to break the shackles of Western—and particularly Anglo-Saxon—colonialism, liberating Asia into a realm of peace and freedom (euphemistically dubbed the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere).<sup>29</sup> The authors of *The Buddhist View of War* turn a phrase which bears striking accord with the mantra of many Western just war theorists: “The reason...for fighting a war is not to continue war, but to eliminate war” (quoted in Victoria 1997, 89). Of course, for all that may be true about the grim reality of prewar Western colonial power in Asia, there is patent hypocrisy here given the specific mouthpiece for such criticism. Japan itself had been colonizing its neighbours for fifty years: from Taiwan to Korea to Manchuria. Moreover, Japan’s Western allies, Germany and Italy, were high up among the chief colonizers of Asia and Africa. Yet for all the disingenuity of Japanese claims to defensive war, this is another important issue raised by this case: is there a line to be drawn between Just War and Holy War? Is the difference merely one of perspective; a matter of who it is that’s doing the judging? Is the fact of widespread religious promulgation and support of a military conflict enough to constitute a ‘holy war’—or does the initial or fundamental purpose of the conflict have to be ‘religious’ (whatever that may imply)?

### **Towards a Cross-Cultural Comparison of Holy War**

It is certainly not my intention to “blame” Buddhism, Zen, or specific figures like Nishida and Suzuki for the rise of Japanese militarism in the early to mid-twentieth century. I believe that more analysis is required, and that



such analysis should not only be descriptive but also critical and evaluative, but based less on Western values than on values and ideals held within Buddhist and Japanese traditions themselves. I believe that the study of the ways in which Buddhism has been used in contexts of violence, as well, of course, in contexts of peace, is an important chapter in a truly international discipline of peace and conflict studies. Certainly, much has already been written about Buddhist peace movements, whether they be of Thich Nhat Hanh or the Dalai Lama. Perhaps a study of Buddhist Holy War in its various historical manifestations would be an important chapter in a larger cross-cultural study—akin, perhaps, to the University of Chicago’s *Fundamentalism Project*—of this important issue.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay Japanese names are presented in accordance with Japanese conventions, i.e., first the family name, then the personal. An exception is made with Suzuki Daisetsu, since he has become known to the world as D. T. Suzuki.

<sup>2</sup> This usually includes the three primary figures of the Kyoto School: Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), and Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), and extends to their contemporaries Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960), and D. T. Suzuki. A recent published work edited by James Heisig and John Maraldo, entitled *Rude Awakenings*, provides a fairly comprehensive overview of the arguments to this end (both accusatory and apologetic). Since these arguments extend beyond the scope of the present project, I direct the reader’s attention to this work, specifically the articles by Chris Ives, Ueda Shizuteru, Yusa Michiko, Jan Van Bragt, and John Maraldo. Many of the arguments echo, in a number of ways, the recent splurge of books written about “The Case of Heidegger.”

<sup>3</sup> For a remarkable investigation of the issue of war responsibility, including the question of a whole population’s culpability in war or genocide, see Daniel Joseph Goldhagen’s controversial *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little Brown, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> The political relations between Buddhism and Shinto are complex, and I do not want to enter into the issue here (but see below for more on Buddhist-Shinto syncretism). I would like to say, however, that the sense of insecurity felt by many Buddhist leaders vis-à-vis the Shinto-leaning establishment in the early Meiji period seems to have contributed to their growing desire to appear nationalistic and distance themselves squarely from truly “foreign” religions such as Christianity. Also, it is important to note that the very close connection of State Shinto to the Imperial ideology, which led, among other things, to the spectacle of Hirohito’s denying his divinity in a postwar radio address, has, I believe, further obscured the relation of Buddhism to prewar and wartime militarism, by allowing postwar Buddhists to lay primary if not sole responsibility on Shinto. Indeed, after delivering this very paper at a Candian Peace Research Conference, I met with this exact response: “But wasn’t it Shinto that was to blame for Japanese nationalism?”

<sup>5</sup> These terms came to prominence in 1897 due to the writings of nationalists like Takayama Rinjirō, Kimura Takatarō, and Inouye Tetsujirō. Matsumoto Shirō defines

Japanism as “the location of ultimate or absolute value in Japan” (1997e, 357).

<sup>6</sup> In *Shinmin no Michi* (The Way of the Subject), a major government edict issued just four months before Pearl Harbor, the military ideologues dwelled on the direct descent of the emperor from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and characterized the national polity as a “theocracy” in which “the way of the subject is to be loyal to the Emperor in disregard of self, thereby supporting the Imperial Throne coextensive with the Heavens and with the Earth.” As Dower puts it, “Filial piety and loyalty were the supreme virtues of the imperial state, and *Shinmin no Michi* was at pains to denounce the ‘individualism, liberalism, utilitarianism, and materialism’ that imperiled those virtues. Emperor Hirohito was sacrosanct. His war was holy. The virtues he embodied were unique and immutable” (Dower 1999, 277).

<sup>7</sup> A defeat which so shocked and embarrassed the Tsarist regime that it had no small effect on the eventual success of the Revolution in that country.

<sup>8</sup> See, especially, *Bukkyōsha no Sensō Sekinin* (The War Responsibility of Buddhists), published in 1970.

<sup>9</sup> For whatever reasons, the metaphors invoked in such cases tend to be organic, such that the “roots” of a traditions only find full “flower” when transferred to new and more fertile “soil.”

<sup>10</sup> Yoshida Shinto, a syncretist movement of the Muromachi period (1336–1573) argued that while “Buddhism may be the flower and fruit of all principles of order (Skt. *dharma*) in the universe and Confucianism their branches and foliage... Shinto is their root and trunk” (Hori et al., 1972, 18; see previous note on the use of organic metaphors in supersecessionist apologetics).

<sup>11</sup> In his book on Tokugawa nativism, Harootyan (1988) opts to translate *kokugaku* as “nativism” or “nativist” as opposed to the more common “national learning”—a phrase which, he asserts, verges on the incomprehensible.

<sup>12</sup> A good literary source for the fighting of this period can be found in fourteenth-century epic, *Heike Monogatari*.

<sup>13</sup> One necessary change that was made was to direct absolute loyalty towards the Emperor, rather than to one’s superior or feudal lord. “By continuous effort along these lines, the samurai code of ethics (*Bushidō*) tended to become the code of ethics for all loyal citizens of the Japanese state, but particularly for the soldiers of the new national army. In the past, the military leaders were interested in the development of *Bushidō* as a means of strengthening the Tokugawa military regime; but in the hands of the post-restoration leaders, *Bushidō* not only became a powerful cohesive force within the army but served gradually as a very effective means of directing the loyalties of all Japanese citizens to the Emperor, the symbolic head of the nation” (Brown 1955, 98).

<sup>14</sup> Nitabe Inazō (1862–1933) wrote (in English) *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan*, published in 1905.

<sup>15</sup> See, as a good example of this, Sesi Seisatsu’s book *The Promotion of Bushidō*, published in 1942. “The very best of *Bushidō* is to learn that there is no enemy in the world rather than to learn to conquer the enemy. Attaining this level, Zen and the sword become completely one, just as the Way of Zen and the Way of the Warrior [*Bushidō*] united. United in this way, they become the leading spirit of society” (quoted in Victoria 1997, 113).

<sup>16</sup> Matsumoto cites the comments of the Prime Minister Nakasone and Umerharu Takeshi, both of whom insisted that Buddhism was “adapted to the Japanese spirit” (1997e, 364).

<sup>17</sup> Matsumoto defines Japanism as “the location of ultimate or absolute value in Japan” (1997e, 357). It could be argued that “Japanism” dates back to the figure of Nichiren (1222–82), one of several highly successful Buddhist innovators of the Kamakura Period (1185–1333). A fierce prophet in the style of Isaiah and Ezekiel, Nichiren denounced the errors of his day, and called on the government to suppress deviant doctrine and establish Japan as the Land of Truth. He believed that this Truth would subsequently spread from Japan to embrace the whole world, reversing the spiritual decline of the day (*mappō*) and ushering forth the Pure Land of Çākṣyamuni Buddha on earth.

<sup>18</sup> Compare this belief with that of Sobin Yamada, 26th abbot of Shinjuan, Daitokuji Temple in Kyoto, who makes the claim that “In ancient times, before the influence of China and its Confucian social regulations, the natural disposition of the Japanese people was quite an open one” (Covell 1980, 7). Of course, Yamada is making a plea for acceptance of the subject of the book, Ikkyū-san, and thus may be suspected of overstating the ‘looseness’ of the ancient Japanese character. But beyond that, consider this: Shinto nationalists argue that the pessimism of Buddhism infected the joyous life-affirming Shinto spirit; Critical Buddhists assert that, indeed, Buddhism has a life-denying strain, but that this is a Japanese ‘distortion’ of its original critical and vital spirit, and that, if anything Chinese Confucianism supports the true Buddhist way; while at least one Rinzaï Zen master makes the claim that it is precisely Confucianism with its ‘social regulations’ which distorted Japanese vitalism. It seems that all we can hope to glean from this mess is that the rhetoric of vitalism—maybe particularly since the War—is a tool readily at hand for whoever wants to distinguish their tradition from pessimistic corruptions.

<sup>19</sup> The ferment reached a peak in the early 1990s, with the publication of Hakamaya’s *Critique of the Doctrine of Original Enlightenment, Critical Buddhism, Dōgen and Zen Buddhism*, and Matsumoto’s *Critical Studies in Zen Thought*, and the subsequent session at the American Academy of Religion’s 1993 meeting in Washington, D.C., entitled “Critical Buddhism: Issues and Responses to a New Methodological Movement.” As with all storms, this one eventually passed the critical stage. Yet shores barraged by waves of such magnitude are never really the same, as much as the subsequent calm may seem to imply.

<sup>20</sup> The other three Noble Truths go on to identify the cause of *dukkha*, and the cure for such, the Eightfold Path, three stages of which have to do with the cultivation of morality. The Buddha’s statement about all life being suffering has often been taken as an example of the pessimistic nature of the religion, despite the fact that there is a cure and a hope for all living being to reach enlightenment.

<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in a 1937 book entitled *The Buddhist View of War*, the authors proclaim that, as opposed to Chinese Buddhists, who believed that war is never permissible, Japanese Buddhists “believe that war conducted for [good] reason is in accord with the great benevolence and compassion of Buddhism” (quoted in Victoria 1997, 87).

<sup>22</sup> As Paul Demiéville notes, it is a tragic paradox that Mahayana Buddhism, in making the moral code flexible in the interests of compassion, came to be used to justify killing to an extent far greater than in other forms of Buddhism (Williams 1989, 162).

<sup>23</sup> Such tales, based on a clearly pragmatic application of the doctrine of *upāya*, have provided the basis for Mahayana Buddhist participation in acts of violence well beyond the single case of the conflicts of modern Japan. One example, which many people, familiar with the joyful pacifism of the Dalai Lama, may find surprising, is the violence applied by Tibetan monks against invading Chinese forces in 1949, in defense of the Dharma. As Paul Williams notes, “We may not like the fact that Mahayana Buddhism permits killing but the texts are there and are as much a part of Buddhism as a historical phenomena as are the acts themselves” (Williams 1989, 159). Thus, it would be a mistake to see the case of modern Japan as an single anomalous instance of Buddhist recourse to and justification of violence and warfare.

<sup>24</sup> I do not want to get into the full critique of Zen offered by Critical Buddhism, though Paul Swanson, in his essay “Why They Say Zen is Not Buddhism,” has quite accurately pinpointed the several levels at which the Zen critique works. The first of these, Swanson explains, is Buddhological, and involves the consistency (or inconsistency) of specific concepts such as Buddha-nature with respect to others like *pratyasamutpāda* or codependant origination. Can these be effectively correlated? Have they been? Or has damage been done to the latter by an emphasis on the former? The second level of analysis is sectarian, and is more specific to the critique of Zen over other forms of Buddhism. Hakamaya and Matsumoto see in contemporary Sōtō Zen (their own sect) a misunderstanding of the teachings of the founder of Sōtō Zen, Dōgen (especially with respect, once again, to the question of Buddha nature). Third is the level of social criticism, where an argument is made to the effect that both of the above have led to objectionable social structures and attitudes among Zen Buddhists, culminating in wartime apathy and/or collaboration with imperial way fascism, as best exemplified in statements like Suzuki’s.

<sup>25</sup> This aspect of the critique certainly has precedents in Zen tradition, in which the antinomian character of Zen often manifests itself in the idea that not only one’s teacher, but even the Buddha himself can stand in the way of true enlightenment, and eventually must be left aside (or killed).

<sup>26</sup> As if in direct response to traditional understanding of the essence of Zen, including that of Suzuki and the one utilized so effectively by wartime militarists, Matsumoto writes that if indeed, “[t]he essence of Zen thought is the denial of conceptual thinking, or, perhaps better, the cessation of conceptual thinking,” then “it is clear that any ‘Zen thought’ that teaches the ‘cessation of thinking’ is anti-Buddhist.” Thus, Matsumoto does not deny the accuracy of the common portrayal of Zen. Rather, he argues that Zen, as it has developed over eight centuries in Japan, has become profoundly “anti-Buddhist.”

<sup>27</sup> Ives 1994, 25. At the same time, it should be noted that, particularly in his personal letters, Nishida feels some obvious discomfort as to the way ultranationalism was sweeping the country in the 1930s and 1940s. Some

commentators have suggested that, in fact, Nishida was mimicking the language of the militarists in order to bring it up from the concrete reality of war and into some higher philosophico-religious sphere (an identical argument has been used on behalf of Heidegger's flirtation with Nazism in the 1930s). But this is not a very strong claim, even when coupled with the fact that Nishida did come under suspicion by some rightists for some of his moderate writings. Though I submit that there remain points of dispute as to Nishida's culpability, there is to me little question that his Zen-based philosophy of "pure experience," absolute nothingness, and "action-intuition" did serve, as Ichikawa, Ives (1994) and Hakamaya (1997a) suggest, as a philosophical justification for nationalism, militarism and acts of violence in the name of loyalty.

<sup>28</sup> There is, I believe, a major flaw with Victoria's book. For all his claims to being merely a historian, presenting an exhaustive but purely descriptive look at the many cases of war-justification by Japanese Buddhists, there is a decisively *evaluative* feel to *Zen at War*, which becomes clear when the author uses phrases such as "the emasculation of the Buddhadharmā" to describe the use of Zen in militarist rhetoric. Clearly the author has taken sides on the issue, and his pacifist leanings are very evident. Yet, Victoria never actually states his own bias or values; he never says why it is that the "misuse" of Zen or Buddhism is, in fact, a "misuse" at all—leaving it presumably up to the reader to figure this out, or simply assume, with the author, the moral high ground. Yet, for all this, I am convinced that the charge of moral colonialism simply does not stick to *Zen at War*. Partly this has to

do with the fact that Victoria is a committed, ordained Sôtô Zen priest, who is fluent in Japanese and has spent a considerable part of his life in Japan. He is hardly an armchair critic or outsider, for all he may be a "Westerner" by name and early upbringing. But more so, despite the silence in the book itself, Victoria's sadness and sense of urgency regarding these matters has less to do with the smug superiority of a Christian missionary than with the sincere belief of a practicing Buddhist that Buddhism need not and should not be used in such a fashion. Victoria does not choose to cite scriptures or ideas or doctrines to refute those promulgated for military ends, but he certainly could do so. The assumption of his critics that only Western traditions can act as humanistic, pacifist, or human-rights-based critical buttresses is not only false, betraying a highly simplified and uncritical understanding of comparative religious ethics, it is also, quite frankly, insulting to those working within such non-Western traditions to criticize existing structures of oppression, both Western and non-Western, and to analyze some of the more negative events in their own past. On a related issue, Iris Chang, in the introduction to her exposé of *The Rape of Nanking*, writes of criticism of her own work as 'Japan bashing': "[I]t does a disservice not only to the men, women, and children whose lives were taken at Nanking but to the Japanese people to say that any criticism of Japanese behavior at a certain time and place is criticism of the Japanese as a people" (Chang 1997, 13).

<sup>29</sup> *Dai Tōa Kyōei Ken*

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