The Myth of Maitreya

in Modern Japan,

with a History of its Evolution

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the myth of Maitreya, the next Buddha to come. The myth is traced from its earliest emergence in the Buddhist scriptures, briefly through its metamorphosis in China, with a view to presenting its evolution in Japan. The myth's history in Japan spans thirteen centuries, and as a result it is interesting to explore it in its historical context to see how the myth evolves and changes according to the exigencies of the times.

Buddhism has in many ways been synthesized into the Japanese indigenous Shinto context, with the result that the myth of Maitreya has emerged not simply as a Buddhist figure, but a pan-Japanese phenomenon very much responding to the Japanese ethos of "world-mending". This underlying current has become particularly strong in the twentieth century with the result that Maitreya has become a vehicle for social rectification as well as hope.

RÉSUMÉ

La présente thèse traite de la légende de Maitreya, le prochain Bouddha à venir. La légende est remarquée dès ses premières manifestations dans les écritures bouddhistes, brièvement à travers sa métamorphose en Chine, avec une vue de présentation de son évolution au Japon. L'histoire de la légende au Japon a une étendue de treize siècles et comme résultat, il est intéressant de l'explorer dans son contexte historique pour voir comment la légende évolue et change selon les exigences des temps.

Le Bouddhisme a été de bien des façons synthétisé dans le contexte indigène japonais Shinto résultant dans le développement de la légende de Maitreya pas seulement comme une figure bouddhiste mais aussi comme un phénomène pan-japonais répondant très bien aux besoins des japonais de "guérir le monde". Ce courant sous-jacent est devenu particulièrement fort dans le vingtième siècle ayant comme résultat que Maitreya est devenu un véhicule autant pour le redressement social qu'un simple instrument d'espoir.

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INTRODUCTION

Although the historical development of the Maitreya legend is but one of many topics in the study of Buddhism, it remains one of considerable fascination; particularly so, perhaps, for scholars outside of the tradition, for it seems to afford a link, some common ground, between the theistic and non-theistic belief systems. Here is what appears to be a messiah figure, a theme found in virtually all the world's traditions, nestled within the very heart of a non-theistic philosophical system, for Buddhism does not admit of any God or Cause outside of creation. Maitreya, then, the promised Buddha to come, must be understood within the context of Buddhism itself where the figure has enjoyed a multi-valenced career, attracting the veneration of Buddhist practitioners as well as the attention of scholars of Buddhism. As Sponberg puts it (p.285):

> For those within the tradition, Maitreya has held a place of honour and reverence comparable to that of Śākyamuni himself. His ongoing presence within this world system has maintained the immediacy of Gautama's teaching, and the certainty of his future Buddhahood, ensuring both the continuity and the legitimacy of the Dharma

As Buddhism swept from its homeland in India via the Silk Road into China, and onwards to Korea, Japan and throughout the whole Asian theatre, the conceptualization of Maitreya underwent subtle, and often radical transformations, very much dependent upon the varying cultural milieux. In addition, his prominence waxed and waned according to the social climate. Now, twenty-five centuries after the inception of Buddhism and the emergence of Maitreya, one wonders how he has weathered. Is he any longer a figure of importance within the tradition? More specifically, in today's Japan, is Maitreya (Miroku) still a prominent figure, a promised saviour to come who will usher in " Miroku's World", the ancient utopian hope of Japan, or has he been largely forgotten? What signs do we see of Maitreya in the profusion of " New Religions" spawned in the wake of cataclysmic World War Two?

In order to do justice to the topic, we will divide our study of Maitreya into three periods: the early classical period of the inception and development of the myth; the Japanese medieval period of the evolution of the myth; and finally, the modern manifestations of Maitreya in Japan.

The initial classical period establishes the roots and validity of the figure of Maitreya Buddha in the Buddhist tradition, its inception and development within the early Theravāda scriptures and later Mahāyāna literature. In the course of this study we will look at the fundamental Buddhist philosophical concepts essential to the coherence of the myth.

Once Buddhism left its Indian nest, the Maitreyan myth continued to evolve and transform. Its history in China is of great importance. We will briefly summarize the developments there before we go on to pick up the thread in Japan which received the Chinese versions of the myth via Korea. In fact, Maitreya was intimately connected with the transmission of Buddhism itself to Japan in the sixth century CE. Also, to understand the myth's medieval Japanese development we will necessarily have to examine the spiritual milieu into which it was immersed, namely, Japan's Shinto flavour.

Finally, the modern period will be taken from 1868, the moment of the historic re-opening of Japan to foreign influence after two centuries of intense insularity. Galvanic change is nowhere more readily perceptible in society than in the domain of religion, the heart of the people. Here the agony and confusion are played out as a population grapples with uncertainty and searches for stability while time-honoured standards are uprooted. The proliferation of " New Religions" in Japan in the wake of one recent upheaval after another provides a fascinating glimpse into the minds of the people. It is our task to examine this phenomenon in the light of the Maitreyan myth and uncover its role. Is Maitreya indeed there?

PART I

THE EARLY INDIAN CLASSICAL PERIOD OF THE FORMATION OF THE MAITREYAN MYTH.

Introduction

It has been stated that "every religion, every culture, and every civilization has a characteristic view of the future". There is also an ubiquitous notion that "the future promises to be better than the present, leading to the triumph of good at the end of the world", and that there will come "a cosmic ruler, a universal king or world saviour at the end" (Kitagawa, 1988, P.8). What is so intriguing, as we have already pointed out, is that Buddhism is unique among all the world's soteriological religions in acknowledging no "Revealer" behind the process, no Entity of any kind behind the Buddha's enlightenment experience. Although Maitreya most certainly does represent an eschatological dimension in Buddhist thinking, a manifestation of the "universal yearning of homo religioso", he must be understood within the Buddhist philosophical context, a cohesive system devoid of any direct divine intervention. Such intervention is seen as a violation of the natural flow, the natural unfolding of the cosmic pattern of existence. Human life and all life is part of this natural flow, which is without beginning and without end.

The story of Maitreya is a tradition that has played some role, and often a central one, in the cultural history of virtually every period and every area of Buddhist Asia. Along with the figure of the historical Śākyamuni Buddha himself, Maitreya is acknowledged as one of the few truly universal symbols occurring throughout the Buddhist tradition. In every Buddhist culture "Maitreya is seen as the fulfillment of the Buddha's Law as well as the establishment of universal concord without conflict"(Kitagawa 1987, p.233). Although his role is seen as pivotal, it is,

however, largely under-defined and open-ended, and this has logically left the way open within the tradition to speculate and to weave rich designs around his enigmatic person.

The Zoroastrian Factor

The roots of the myth, as indeed Buddhism itself, were put down in the rich cross-cultural soil of northern India circa 500 BCE. It has been the contention of many scholars that Maitreya was borrowed wholesale from earlier Zoroastrian messianic thought, imported along with the goods and trade, not to mention the invading armies, of the Persians, and grafted to the emerging Buddhist tradition. In order to appreciate truly the many facets of Maitreya it is particularly interesting to look at the Zoroastrian myth of the Saošyant (saviour). As Sponberg states (p.9):

> According to Zoroastrian eschatology,at the end of the cosmic cycle of 12,000 years, the saviour and judge, Saošyant,born miraculously from a maiden and seed of Zoroaster, will appear and revivify creation, casting the devil into hell and purging the human race of the stain of sin. Then the entire human race will enter a paradise where all will enjoy eternal bliss and happiness, and the material world will become immortal for ever and ever.

Zaehner (p.209) states that "it is widely accepted by Biblical scholars that the later Jewish concepts of the devil, hell, an after-life, the resurrection, the end of the world, and the saviour imagery were all coloured by Zoroastrianism, beliefs which have affected the very foundations of Christianity", and, we could add, Islam. According to Parrinder (p.177), Zoroaster is thought to have lived and taught in northeast Iran between 628-551 BCE. These dates are questionable, and many put him earlier. However, what is so striking here is his proximity to the times of the Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tse, the apocalyptic Jewish prophets, Aristotle - all of whom lived circa 500 BCE in their various corners of civilization. Furthermore, all these peoples were in contact with each other through the great trade routes both overland and by sea. We discern a further common theme here (Gnoli, p.70):

> Upon his (Saosyant's) arrival, humankind will no longer be subject to old age, death, or corruption, and will be granted unlimited power At that time the dead will be resurrected He and his comrades will engage in a great battle with the forces of evil, which will be destroyed (Gnoli, p 70)

Basham (p.274) suggests that it was this powerful Zoroastrian influence which flowed into northwestern India thus sparking off the concept of Maitreya. Kitagawa also feels that Zoroastrianism had a decisive influence on Buddhist eschatological views of Maitreya who is seen both as the fulfillment of Buddhist Law and the instrument for the future establishment of universal peace (Sponberg, p.10).

Thomas (p.147) points out that by the time of the Indian king Aśoka in the third century BCE, (within two centuries of the time of the Buddha), the belief in past Buddhas (leading up to the time of Śākyamuni Buddha) was well established because of known *stupas* (holy spots usually housing Buddhist relics) dedicated to their memory. It is perhaps logical to assume that the concomitant idea of future Buddhas had also been established by then. Certainly by the time of the *"Questions of Menander"*, scriptures dating from the first century CE, the cult of the future Buddha Maitreya was widespread among all the Buddhist sects (Basham, p.274).

Having said all this, it is difficult to deny the influence of the Saośyant on the development of the Maitreyan myth. However, as Kawamura says (p.43), it would perhaps be wrong to say that the doctrine of the Maitreya (or the notion of the heavenly *bodhisattva*) was deliberately grafted to Buddhism. His position is that it is more accurate to say that Iranian influence prepared the ground for the people to accept certain ideas such as the idea of a heavenly helper, the importance of making right decisions and striving for righteousness, the hope of a great day in the future when a divine saviour would purify the world, and the ultimate salvation of all living things. These are fundamental Mahāyāna Buddhist concepts, ideas which would grow out of the earlier Theravāda tradition. If all this is so, then Zoroastrianism exerted a powerful influence, not simply on the idea of Maitreya, but on Buddhism as a whole. Zachner put it very

aptly when he said that "the significance of Zoroastrianism lies not in the number of those who profess it, but rather in the influence it has excercised on other religions" (Sponberg, p.9).

The argument for the Buddhist origins of Maitreya rests squarely on the Buddhist scriptural sources of the myth. As we shall see, there is very little evidence of the grandiose eschatological vision inherent in the Zoroastrian texts in these earliest scriptures mentioning the coming Buddha Maitreya. There is certainly no concept of an all powerful God at the helm. Maitreya is rather seen as a conservative figure, given that he will be a Buddha, one in a long chain of Buddhas beginning in the far distant aeons of the past and going on into the far-distant future. There is no concept of any beginning or end. Maitreya is seen as a part of cyclical renewal, an essential part of an ongoing and endless pattern.

This does not preclude the fact, however, that the Maitreyan myth would gather colour from non-Buddhist sources over the years, be they Zoroastrian or otherwise. This is precisely the reason for the diversity and richness of the myth as it evolved. Maitreya can be seen as the embodiment of the hopes of the people wherever the myth was implanted throughout the whole vast arena of Buddhist influence. And one essential factor never changes; no matter what vicissitudes of fortune prevailed, the Maitreya Buddha is consistently elevated to the station of the next Buddha to come, the annointed successor to Śākyamuni, over the heads of later more powerful heavenly *bodhisattvas* (beings of enlightenment and mercy) such as Manjusri, Avalokiteśvara, Amitābha, etc. This would not have been logically possible if Maitreya had not been rooted irreversibly in the tradition.

The Anatomy of the Maitreyan Myth

> Praise to that Lord, Arahant, perfect Buddha Thus have I heard: At one time the Lord was staying near Kapilavatthu in the Banyan monastery on the bank of the river Rohani. Then the venerable Sariputta questioned the Lord about the future Conqueror:

"The Hero that shall follow you,
The Buddha - of what sort will he be?
I want to hear of him in full
Let the Visioned One describe him."

When he heard the Elder's speech
The Lord spoke thus:
"I will tell you, Sariputta,
Listen to my speech.

In this auspicious aeon
Three leaders have there been,
Kakusandha, Konagamana,
And the leader Kassapa, too.

I am now the perfect Buddha
And there will be Metteya, too,
Before this same auspicious aeon
Runs to the end of its years.

The perfect Buddha, Metteya,
By name, supreme of men.

Anāgatavamsa (Eliade 1977, p.391)

This is the most basic form of the myth within the Buddhist tradition. Maitreya, the fifth Buddha, will follow Śākyamuni just as he himself had followed other Buddhas of the past. He would be a Buddha like all the others, not distinguished in any way from them. His appearance is not seen as intervening in history, but rather as part of a natural cosmic flow.

Cycles:

This cosmic flow is understood in terms of cycles. Indian speculation gives the endless process of time form. Time is divided into vast aeons, known as *mahāyugas* or *mahākalpas*, which are further broken down into more comprehensible *yugas* or "ages". Zurcher explains (p.6) that at the end of each of the mahāyugas, the physical universe is destroyed by catastrophes of water, fire, and wind. There ensues a period of emptiness and darkness on the physical plane. But, the highest heavens are spared. All sentient beings reborn there before the catastrophe will again be reborn into this physical world when a new "receptacle world" has evolved. Also, (p.7) in each

kalpa or yuga there are ups and downs, the climaxes marked by prosperity under the reign of a perfect "Monarch of the Wheel" (to be discussed presently). The highest and rarest points are reached when a Buddha appears to reveal the *Dharma* (Doctrine). The lowest points are marked by intense suffering, a time when the Dharma has been forgotten and the world is sunk in misery.

In terms of the Dharma, which will be discussed in more detail later, Buddhists believe that the initial purity of the Dharma, the period of the True Dharma, will endure 1000 years, followed by 1000 years of the Counterfeit Dharma, and then will come the last millenium, the latter days of the Degeneration of the Dharma when the teachings of the Buddha will go into decline and disappear (Kitagawa, 1966, 366).

The Buddha's Vision

The Buddha Śākyamuni is the supremely Enlightened One, the Lord of this Age. He is believed to have acquired his omniscient vision and wisdom not through the operation of a God and his revelation, but rather through countless rebirths through the natural operation of the law of *karma* (the law of cause and effect), culminating in his final rebirth as the Buddha. During that final lifetime on this earth he sought enlightenment under the fabled bodhi tree at which time he pierced the veils of knowledge and saw all that had been and all that would be. Here is an abridged version of two exerpts from the *Mahāpadāna Suttanta XIV.4* and *XIV.33* illustrating this omniscient vision:

> It is now ninety-one aeons ago, brethren,since Vipassi, the Exalted One...arose in the world. It is now thirty-one aeons ago...since Sikhi...arose in the world. It was in that same thirty-first aeon...that Vessabhu.. arose in the world. It was in this auspicious aeon...that Kakusandha...arose in the world, ...that Konagamana...arose in the world,. .that Kassapa ...arose in the world. It is in this auspicious aeon, brethren, that I, an Arahant, Buddha Supreme, have arisen in the world
>
> Thus, brethren, through this clear discernment of that principle of Truth, is the Tathagatha able to remember the Buddhas of old, who attained final completion, who cut down barriers, who have escaped from all sorrow - so that he can remember as to their birth, their names, their families...
>
> *(Sacred Books of the Buddhists: vol.III, pp.5, 41)*

The Law of Karma and Rebirth

The Buddha did not discuss the origin of the Universe, it is simply accepted as there, that all came about in the natural course of events through the cosmic law of karma, the law of cause and effect on the grandest of scales. No "beginning" or "end" is accepted. All existence is in a perpetual state of "becoming". On the human level karma can be understood as the result of volitional action, that every action or thought brings in its train future effects. A nudged ball will roll. All creation, all existence both seen and unseen, is caught in the beginningless meshes of karma. Buddhism teaches the doctrine of rebirth, that according to one's karma one is reborn endlessly back into this world, the cycle of *saṃsāra*, until the bonds of karma are broken.

The Buddhist Path to Salvation

The Buddha taught that the fundamental nature of life, the nature of karma, is suffering. Birth is suffering, illness, old age, and death are suffering. Attachments to the transient things of life is suffering. And yet, despite this seemingly gloomy outlook, Buddhism is fundamentally happy! Having accepted the truth of suffering one can then look at its eradication through the Noble Eight Fold Path, the Dharma of the Buddha, which proceeds to map out one's salvation. Salvation, i.e. *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment), the happiness and peace resulting from total release from suffering, and hence total release from karma and rebirth, rests in one's own hands. Such an exalted level of detachment and wisdom is attained only through determined striving in the Buddha's Way. Once every last vestige of attachment is eradicated the shackles of karma are broken, and further rebirths are impossible. At physical death one passes beyond the bounds of the created Universe and has no further effect in this realm.

No Permanent "Self"

According to the Buddha, the human being is not possessed of any unchanging eternal essence. Rather, the individual human "self" is an aggregate of psychical processes which are in a constant state of change, a constant unremitting evolution that admits of no stasis, no underlying, unchanging substrate. Karma, the natural law at the root of all processes, dictates this ceaseless process of change. To rid oneself of all karma, one must cease utterly to desire anything so that karma cannot arise. The arrival at this rarefied "motionlessness" is to arrive at nirvāṇa. The Universe is laid bare, there are no further rebirths.

Cyclical Renewal of the Dharma

Returning to our theme, it is understood that within the concept of cosmic karma there is an ongoing cyclical renewal of the Dharma of the Buddhas. It is seen as inevitable that the Dharma, which at its inception is clear and fresh, will eventually deteriorate and finally be forgotten or changed beyond recognition. Coupled with this fact is the knowledge that the Buddha Śākyamuni himself, having entered his *parinirvāṇa*, i.e. final nirvāṇa, has, irreversibly, no further influence on existence.

In the *Anāgatavaṃsa* we read of the disappearance of the Dharma (Eliade, 1977, p.391):

> How will it occur? After my (the Buddha's) decease there will first be five disappearances. What five? The disappearance of proper conduct, the disappearance of learning, the disappearance of the outward form, the disappearance of the relics..
>
> ...Attainment means that for a thousand years only after the Lord's complete Nirvana will the monks be able to practice analytical insights. As time goes on and on, these disciples of mine are non-returners and stream-winners. There will be no disappearance of attainment for these. But, with the extinction of the last stream-winner's life, attainment will have disappeared

In this deteriorating situation the advent of Maitreya Buddha is awaited to renew the Dharma. He is the guarantee that the world will not be left without hope. It is no wonder that

over the centuries he has been looked to for help and has bolstered the flagging heart. However, it is not at this low ebb of humanity's fortunes, understood to begin 1000 years after the Buddha's decease, that Maitreya will appear. According to the *Dīghanikāya (3:3)* this desperate state will continue for 5000 years until human life will have reached its nadir of ten years' lifespan. There then follows the long recovery period of thousands of years before the life expectancy reaches more than 80,000 years (3:76). This reversal of human fortunes comes about only after a long period of spiritual exertion, of diligently searching and building up a collective karma. Then Maitreya's advent will be merited (Jaini, p.62). Only then will there be a receptive audience, as we read in the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta:XXVI:22-25:*

> So, they will practice virtues...And because of the good they will do they will increase in the length of life, and in comeliness...Among such humans, this India will be mighty and prosperous ... Among such humans...there will arise Sankha, a Wheel-turning King, righteous and ruling in righteousness ,protector of his people ...At that period, brethren, there will arise in the world an Exalted One named Maitreya, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led,. a Buddha, even as I am now. He, by himself, will thoroughly know and see, as it were face to face, this universe.. even as I now, by myself, thoroughly know and see...
>
> *(Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol.4, p.73)*

The Mahāpuruśa

What signs will attend his coming? How will he be recognized? In the *Mahāpadāna Suttanta XIV.31* we read the signs accompanying his birth.

> Rejoice, lord, for one of the Mighty Ones is born!...For this babe.. is endowed with the thirty-two marks of the Great Man (Mahā-puruśa), and to one so endowed two careers lie open, and none other. If he lives the life of the House, he becomes Lord of the Wheel, a righteous Lord of the Right, ruler of the four quarters...But, if such a boy go forth from the life of the House into the Homeless state, he becomes an Arahant, a Buddha Supreme, rolling back the veil from the world.
>
> *(Sacred Books of the Buddhists: Vol. 3, p.13)*

As pointed out by Rhys Davids (p.414), the signs accompanying the coming of Maitreya are in strict imitation of the signs accompanying the coming of Śākyamuni Buddha. The child

will immediately be recognized as a Great Being bearing thirty-two distinctive physical marks. He is a *Mahāpuruśa* (Great Man).

The ideal of the mahāpuruśa is found within Indian mythology in general and is picked up by the Buddhist scriptures. As we see in the above quote, the mahāpuruśa has two aspects, the temporal and the spiritual. Zimmer (Sponberg, p.9) traces the idea of the Wheel-turning Monarch, the *cakravartin*, to pre-Aryan sources, claiming it as an Indian, rather than imported, concept. He indicates that it is found in all Indian traditions, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist alike. As Kitagawa points out, it was the Buddhists who elevated the concept to the spiritual domain (1987,p.236):

> The word Cakravartin initially appeared in the *Maitreyāna Upaniśad* where it denoted a famous king of great power. In the Puranas the word carries the meaning of a universal monarch who possesses fabulous attributes. Buddhists further elevated the importance of the cakravartin, even to the point that both the Buddha and the Cakravartin are believed to have the thirty-two marks.

It is particularly intriguing to note that the name Maitreya is the principal figure of an *Upaniśad*, an Indian Brahmanic scripture, where he denoted, presumably, a pre-Buddhic notion of a great king. Within the Buddhist tradition Maitreya becomes a Buddha, a spiritual monarch, who will appear at the time of the temporal Cakravartin, Sankha. The "either-or" roles of the Mahāpuruśa within the Śākyamuni's context become "both", two contemporaneous figures at the time of Maitreya, as we have seen in the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta* of the *Dīghanikāya*. Also, as a further nuance, as in the *Maitreyāna Upaniśad*, king-like power is accorded Maitreya in the *Maitreyavadāna* of the *Dīvyavadāna* (Conze, pp.548-549):

> He shall conquer the whole wide earth to the limits of the ocean, and then he will rule without punishing, through the Dharma and peacefulness.

The Bodhisattva

Maitreya is not seen exclusively as a far-distant figure, however. He has always been understood to already exist in his *bodhisattva* (enlightenment being) form in Tuṣita Heaven, the last "port-of-call" before the day of his final rebirth on this earth. It is in his heavenly bodhisattva form that he has long been active on behalf of his devotees and this is the primary reason for the growth of a cult around the Maitreya figure.

The concept of the bodhisattva was born out of the tradition of the previous lives, the multitude of previous rebirths, which led up to the final appearance of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. As a result, the Theravāda school of Buddhism accepts Maitreya as the only extant bodhisattva (Kitagawa 1987, p.233), and hence the only heavenly being of wisdom and mercy active in the universe. The concept of the bodhisattva is seen by the earliest Buddhists as non-transferrable to other lesser beings.

The Theravādins teach the path of arahant-ship as a path of personal salvation. The term *arahant* is a term denoting a person of consummate wisdom, as in the case of the Buddha, and is often used in the early scriptures as we have already seen. To become an arahant is to achieve enlightenment only through one's own personal spiritual struggle and through no other agency. The Mahāyānists, on the other hand, appropriate and teach the bodhisattva path. The bodhisattva is understood to be an enlightened being full of compassion and mercy who foregoes his own passing away, nirvāṇa, the immediate goal of the arahant, to remain in this karmic existence, this endless cycle of rebirth known as saṃsāra, in order to help all sentient beings gain salvation. This desire is the only karmic link to this realm of existence. The ramifications of the bodhisattva vow are illustrated in the *Vajradhvaja Sūtra* as follows (Basham, p.275):

> I take upon myself...the deeds of all beings, even those in the hells...I take their suffering upon me I bear it, I do not draw back from it , I do not tremble at it...I have no fear of it. .I do not lose heart...I must bear the burden of all living things, to bring them safe through the forest of birth, age, disease,

> death, and rebirth I think not of my own salvation, but strive to bestow on all beings the royalty of supreme wisdom ..I agree to suffer as a ransom for all beings ..Truly I will not abandon them For I have resolved to gain supreme wisdom for the sake of all that lives, to save the world

This salvic path, and indeed, salvic intervention, is seen by the Theravādins as an innovation, but by the Mahāyānists as a logical outgrowth of the pre-Buddhic lives of Maitreya, and the only laudable salvic path for a true Buddhist to espouse. As applied to Maitreya, it is believed by the Mahāyānists, that Maitreya does not simply exist, but is active in the Universe on behalf of all sentient beings from his abode in Tuşita Heaven. He is not seen as far removed from the present and active only in the future, but rather has been constantly active down through the centuries, a bridge between the "now" and the distant "then".

World Views

The early Buddhists viewed the world as a closed system comprising four main island continents arranged around a central sacred mountain known as Meru, identified as Mt. Kailasa in western Tibet. Mahāyāna teachings, on the other hand, were greatly affected by the views that envisioned the Universe as whole galaxies of world systems extending endlessly throughout all directions of space. It followed logically from this that there should also be Buddhas operative in all these world systems. A whole new mythology emerged in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Since only one Buddha can operate at one time in any given system, it was visualized as one Buddha per " Buddha-field" (Snellgrove, p.135). As can be well-imagined, Maitreya developed a lot of company over the years, and it is due to these emerging heavenly bodhisattvas or heavenly buddhas that his popularity was actively rivalled.

Jaini points out (p.71) that it is in the important Mahāyāna *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra (Lotus Sūtra)* that the first canonical reference is made to Tusita Heaven being the home of an "annointed" bodhisattva, i.e., a Buddha-to-be, and specifically, Maitreya.

> O Lord, in the future I shall protect those who recite this sutra and those who write it down. Such people will never be born in the purgatories nor in the lower destinies. They will certainly be born in the company of the heavenly beings in Tuṣita, where the bodhisattva Maitreya, the great being, resides, endowed with the thirty two marks, and surrounded by hundreds and thousands of other bodhisattvas and heavenly damsels, preaching the Law.

As the galactical concepts of Mahāyāna grew, Tuṣita Heaven, initially seen as the only heavenly realm, became simply a part of the whole picture, one "Buddha-field" among many others: e.g., Amitābha's Sukhāvatī Heaven in the far West, Akośobya's Land of Bliss in the Far East, etc. (Snellgrove, p.136). However, Maitreya alone has always been understood to have two spheres of influence, not only heavenly but earthly. He, alone of all the Mahāyāna heavenly bodhisattvas, is designated as the next historical Buddha. And, as Basham puts it, "by his mere existence he sets a limit to all present experiences of evil"; he is ready now "to cope with the task of reversing the negative consequences of our common actions" (Kawamura, p.13), and thus help actively to prepare the karmic conditions required for his earthly manifestation.

Maitreya's Bodhisattva Career

Interestingly, Jaini notes (p.74) that despite the unanimity throughout the Buddhist tradition concerning Maitreya's succession to Śākyamuni, only early Mahāsāṅghika texts, not later Mahāyāna texts, give details of the future Buddha's place of appearance or of his family life. It is in the *Dīghanikāya*, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, and the *Maitreyavyākarana* where all this takes place, and apparently these all seem to draw on one common source (a Buddhist "Q Source"!). Mahāyāna texts, on the whole, have a strangely ambivalent attitude toward Maitreya, portraying him sometimes as stupid or slothful! Jaini suggests that possibly Maitreya was a Mahāsāṅghika invention (p.77), thus being seen merely as a rival bodhisattva to other Mahāyāna sects' supreme beings. It is probably true that the myth of Maitreya developed considerably during this period in reaction to these challenges, but it is fairly unlikely that he was a Mahāsāṅghika innovation, for then the Mahāyānists would have had no

qualms in supplanting him with their own candidate(s) for the next Buddha. Although his wisdom is often challenged by the Mahāyānists for their own purposes, his position as the next Buddha is never questioned.

The Mahāsāṅghika scriptures describe the early bodhisattva career of Maitreya before his arrival in Tuṣita Heaven. He is given the name Ajita (Victorious) in the *Mahāvastu (3:330)* and is listed fifth of a list of 1000 Buddhas to come (Jaini, p.62). In the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, Ajita was the son of a king, in later sūtras the son of a rich merchant, etc. All agree, however, that Ajita earned the good pleasure of Śākyamuni, that he was an actual disciple of the historical Buddha. These scriptures evidently felt the need to anchor Maitreya's legitimacy in terms of being well-versed in the Dharma and hence capable in the distant future of restoring the self-same Dharma when it will have utterly ceased to exist. He is seen as the only bridge linking the historic Buddha, who has passed eternally beyond our sphere, to that distant time.

The Time of Maitreya

To round off this portrait of Maitreya we will look at the sweeping vista offered in the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* (Conze, p.238-241) of the conditions that will prevail when Maitreya finally makes his appearance.

> Sariputta, the great general of the doctrine, most wise and resplendent, from compassion for the world asked the Lord: "Some time ago you have spoken to us of the future Buddha, who will bear the name Maitreya. I would wish to hear more about his powers and miraculous gifts..."
>
> The Lord replied: "At that time, the ocean will lose much of its water, and there will be much less of it than now. In consequence, a world-ruler will have no difficulties in passing over it. India, this island of Jambu, will be quite flat everywhere...It will have innumerable inhabitants who will commit no crimes..
>
> The city of Ketumati will at that time be the capital. In it will reside the world-ruler, Sankha by name, who will rule over the earth up to the confines of the ocean, and he will make the Dharma prevail..
>
> Maitreya, the best of men, will then leave the Tuşita Heavens and go for his last re-birth into the womb of that woman...As soon as he is born he will walk seven steps forward, and where he puts his feet a jewel will spring up. He will raise his eyes in the ten directions and will speak these words:

> "This is my last birth. There will be no re-birth after this one Never will I come back here, but, all pure, I shall win Nirvāṇa."
>
> And when his father sees that his son has the thirty-two marks of the Mahāpuruśa, and considers their implications ..he will know that.. he will either be a universal monarch or a supreme Buddha But, as Maitreya grows up, the Dharma will increasingly take possession of him He will have a heavenly voice. .And then. he will . preach the true Dharma, which is auspicious and removes all ills
>
> For 60,000 years Maitreya...will preach the true Dharma. and after the great sage has entered Nirvāṇa, his true Dharma endures another 10,000 years
>
> Raise, therefore, your thoughts in faith to Śākyamuni, the Conqueror! For you shall see Maitreya, the perfect Buddha, the best of all men!

Having surveyed the development of the core of the Maitreyan myth in Indian scriptures, we now turn to the all-important passage of Maitreya through China in preparation for the myth's entry into Japan.

The Chinese Metamorphosis of Maitreya

It was Mahāyāna Buddhism which took root in China in the first century CE, close on the heels of the early maturation of the Maitreyan myth. According to Lancaster (p.138), Buddhist monastics were received with considerable interest in China due to the Taoist belief in "the ever possible appearance of a sage capable of giving salvation to an elite band of devotees". The Buddhist monastics and the Dharma were accepted readily and flourished. As Hirakawa puts it (p.5):

> When Buddhism spread beyond India to South-east Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, and other lands, certain aspects of Buddhism were emphasized in each locale, generating a wide variety of interpretations and practices. Buddhism was adapted to meet the requirements of the people of each area

Buddhist tolerance and flexiblitiy were not seen within the tradition as mistaken, but rather as necessary, allowing for free evolution and interpretation in each given context according to the need. Kitagawa quotes Hocking (1987: p.204) as saying that "historically, when Buddhism entered a new area, it usually presented itself as a 'supplement' to , rather than as a 'contestant'

with, existing religions". Maitreya also found his niche, being readily adopted by the various Chinese dynasties as a spiritual protector of just rulers (Lancaster, p.138). This royal patronage led to a flourishing of sculpture and art depicting Maitreya both in his guise as a compassionate bodhisattva and as the coming Buddha. Simultaneously, popular cults grew among the people around the figure of Maitreya and his salvic powers.

According to Zurcher (p.6), Mahāyāna Buddhism brought five new philosphical concepts to China: The cyclical conception of time coupled with the belief in the periodic destruction of our Universe; the degeneration and final disappearance of the Dharma; the appearance of future Buddhas in the world; the saving powers of advanced bodhisattvas; and, the segregation of pious believers in paradise-like regions outside our Universe. These Buddhist ideas conflated with the prevailing Chinese notions of the heavens and celestial beings to produce interesting popular Buddhist texts such as the *Baozhuan* (Sponberg, p.112):

> (It is the) mother goddess, Wu-sheng lao-mu, the Eternal Venerable Mother, who sends down to earth ninety-six mynads of her children Though they are originally all "Buddhas" and "immortals", once on earth they forget their true home in paradise and become attached to fame, profit , and sensual pleasures. Trapped by their desires they are immersed in saṃsāra, the sea of suffering, repeatedly encountering death and rebirth and suffering punishments in purgatory. The Venerable Mother, grieved by this, sends down messenger deities to remind her lost children of their true nature and the way home

And, in the *Huadubaozhuan* we meet Maitreya (Sponberg, p.123-124):

> The Buddha Maitreya took leave of the Venerable Mother and descended to the Han land of nine divisions City gods and the locality gods received his carriage, bowed and said: "We hope the Buddha in his compassion will save all sentient beings".
>
> The Buddha (Maitreya) replied: "In obedience to the Venerable Mother's edict I have descended to the world to save all people. You should each with sincerity aid the task of universal salvation (so as to) together attain the Buddha Way and sit on the heart of the lotus..
>
> I have now descended into the world only so that people on the great earth can drive away heresy and return to orthodoxy, realize enlightenment and not reject the Venerable Mother's saving intentions...
>
> Maitreya transformed himself to save living beings, holding a staff, he roamed about every-where observing how the people of the world piled up sins as high as the mountains and as deep as the sea.

In his Mahāyāna manifestation, Maitreya is a celestial bodhisattva in Tuṣita Heaven, available and ready as a great being of compassion to intervene in this world on behalf of his sincere devotees. He is seen as a consoler in one's woes and a saviour eager to extricate the penitent from their predicaments. As Lamotte puts it (p.787):

> Maitreya y apparaît (dans le Mahāyāna) comme: un dieu de lumière, un consolateur recevant la "confession des péchés", un guide des âmes après la mort. Il est surtout l'inspirateur, le soutien des maîtres de la Loi dans leurs doutes et leurs crises de découragement, entrant en extase, les docteurs peuvent monter en ciel de Tusita, auprès de Maitreya, pour recevoir ses lumières, au besoin, Maitreya descend lui-meme sur terre pour y reciter des textes .

Permutations and Combinations of Maitreyan Themes

It is evident that there are many inter-woven themes at work. Jan Nattier (p.25) has analyzed the Maitreyan themes and arrived at four different paradigms: Maitreya will appear 1) here/later, 2) there/later, 3) there/now, and 4) here/now. This analysis grows out of two basic areas of controversy: where the encounter between Maitreya and the believer will take place, and when - during this present lifetime or after death.

The here/later theme is the most common and the one in greatest harmony with the original myth, suggesting that the devotee can, through his own determined efforts and cultivated karma, earn rebirth in this world at the distant time when Maitreya will finally preside over his "Golden Age". He would then hear the Maitreya preach the Dharma and ultimately attain his final goal of nirvāṇa. In this configuration Maitreya appears simply as a traditional Buddha, whose preaching reaches only those whose own karma has prepared them to hear his message. "Maitreya's actions are 'intransitive', as it were, in contrast to the 'transitive' efforts of those Buddhas and bodhisattvas who intervene directly in the cosmic process in order to save their followers" (Nattier,p.36).

The there/later configuration is a Mahāyāna "Pure Land" theme, for the devotee believes that he can be reborn in Tuṣita Heaven to be with Maitreya while awaiting his final rebirth, at which time he will also descend with Maitreya and hear him deliver his sermons. Tuṣita Heaven is no longer seen as the exclusive realm of the "anointed" Buddha, but a Pure Land to be shared with the faithful. In fact, it no longer matters when or even whether Maitreya appears, because one is in his constant company anyhow. This notion of Tuṣita Heaven is strongly attuned to Chinese cosmic ideas, eliminating the round of saṃsāra in effect.

The there/now theme refers to the realm of the mystic visionary, as referred to by Lamotte, where the adept is able to converse with Maitreya, ask his advice, ask for textual explications, etc. There is a fine line between Maitreya 'descending' at the behest of his devotee, or the latter 'rising' to the rarified spiritual atmosphere of Tuṣita to meet Maitreya.

Finally, we have the here/now variant. This rendition collapses time, and short-circuits the Maitreyan tradition. This particularly Chinese version (and one that would be repeated elsewhere) follows two lines, the apocalyptic and the devotional. Warring leaders were known to usurp Maitreya for their own political purposes, using the conflated role of cakravartin-Maitreya to further their personal claims. In claiming to be Maitreya, to be true restorers of order and prosperity, they totally overlooked Maitreya's essential role in re-establishing the eternal Dharma. The devotional mode, as illustrated in *Huadubaozhuan*, visualizes the Maitreya bodhisattva as a living being, who has descended to this earth to be among sufferers.

Another theme, which Nattier does not include, is the Chinese view of the "time of the end" brought into sharp focus in the "Seven Days of the Sword", a theme that emerges in the Tao-Buddhist scriptures. Zurcher explains (p.38) that according to the *Shouluo jing* and the *Zhenming jing*, a great apocalyptic event is stalking the heels of humanity. Three scourges of deluge, plagues and evil powers will ravage the world and a great darkness will envelope the globe for

seven days and seven nights. Then the demon king will appear at the head of a horde of demons set upon destroying all sinners. A great final conflagration takes place, the mountains melt, the earth becomes a scorched plain, and then Prince Moonlight (Maitreya) descends and does battle. It is total titanic armageddon. Maitreya, victorious, separates the pious from the impious and establishes his "Golden Age" of peace and justice. This apocalyptic vision, so akin to western traditions, and particularly to the ancient Zoroastrian themes, introduces alien elements into the Maitreyan myth. Maitreya is seen here as part of violent intervention in this world and also as the instigator of the "Golden Age".

Conclusion

Maitreya emerged from China at the height of his popularity to go on to Korea in the fourth century CE and from there on to Japan in the sixth century. He obviously meant different things to different people. At the court level of society he was regarded as a protector of justice, a power for order, a power that could be invoked at will politically. He was regarded ambivalently as a cakravartin-bodhisattva-Buddha. On the popular front, among the illiterate populace, he was a folk hero, a compassionate companion-saviour-consoler, ever a source of hope both for now and the future. It is perhaps understandable that as the distance lengthened historically and geographically between the Buddhist practitioners and Śākyamuni Buddha, that Maitreya would gain a more immediate appeal in the minds of the people. In times of difficulty Maitreya was at hand, whereas the Śākyamuni had, centuries before, removed himself from this sphere of influence.

PART II

MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENT OF MAITREYA IN JAPAN: 6TH-19TH C CE

Introduction

Maitreya emerged from China in the fourth century to go on to Korea and from there to Japan in the sixth century CE. The myth crested and flowed at the height of its popularity into each of these countries. As Kitagawa points out (1987,p.13), Maitreya was understood as a very real presence, a dynamic and living presence. Before we delve into Maitreya's colourful career in Japan, however, it is necessary to look at the roots of Japanese spirituality to appreciate truly the flavour of the Japanese ethos before the arrival of Buddhism, the force which would shape not only the Maitreyan myth, but Buddhism itself. As Suzuki puts it (pp.61,66):

> Japanese spirituality existed within the Japanese from the very beginning; when it fortuitously encountered Buddhism, the Japanese manifested within themselves what was their original endowment... I prefer to think that the seeds and the seedlings - spirituality - were in the earth from the beginning, and that this (spirituality) began to avail itself of the opportunity (Buddhism) afforded.

Japanese Roots of Spirituality

The ancient Japanese, according to Suzuki (p.27) were "a simple, natural and child-like people", who "really had no religion". All life and creation, with the Japanese archipelago at its heart, were seen as integral parts of the cosmos; all shared in the mystery, the sacred nature of the whole. As Kitagawa puts it (1966, p.11), the sense of the sacred was "a sympathetic response of the heart" rather than any organized systematic approach. He goes on to say (p.12):

> (The ancient Japanese) felt a deep kinship with the world of nature so that 'no tree could be marked for felling, no bush tapped for lacquer juice, no oven built for smelting or for pottery and no forge fire lit' without special appeal to the kami (spirit) residing in each.

The term *kami* sums up this sense of the sacred. "This force (kami) may reside in the substance of the object or its form; a rock reveals itself to be sacred because of its very

existence", for it is "incomprehensible, invulnerable, it is that which man is not" (Eliade, 1959,p.4). Each and every level of existence, both visible and invisible, whether part of this world of manifest creation, the Heavenly Plain of the ancestors and gods, or the netherworld of evil spirits - all are imbued with this kami nature.

The Japanese are inherently a "this worldly" people. Rather than desiring to escape this existence, their ethos is a love of life and a deep commitment to their ancestors to bring about and maintain harmony in this manifest world. It is the ancestors who bestow this power on their descendents to work on their behalf in this world (Kitagawa, 1966, p.13). There is a great veneration and gratitude felt by the Japanese for their forbears, not to mention this huge sense of responsiblity. If disharmony exists it must at all costs be remedied. This strong emphasis on "world-mending" is deep in the Japanese psyche.

Emergent Shinto: 7th and 8th C CE

It was the shock-wave of Sino-Korean economic, political, cultural and religious contact in the fifth and sixth centuries CE which awakened Japan to an entirely new self-consciousness and interest in her own unique heritage. The ruling house of Japan, much impressed by Chinese civilization, adopted the Chinese script and as a result inherited Chinese art, literature, and philosophy, including Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. This impact brought in its wake a determination to preserve the heart of the old Japanese ways as well as integrating the best of the new.

Thus, in 673 CE Emperor Temmu ordered the compilation of the *Chronicles of Japan*, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, modelled on the histories of China. For the first time the *Chronicles* brought together in some systematic order the myths and traditions of the ancients.

Temmu also had his own personal agenda for compiling the *Chronicles*, that of establishing his genealogical rights to the throne. He traced his lineage back to the first legendary emperor of Japan, Jimmi, who was believed to have inherited the throne in 660 BCE from his great-grandfather, Ninigi, the grandson of the Sun Goddess, *Amaterasu* (Kitagawa 1966, p.14). In every respect, the *Chronicles* were intended to establish continuity, cohesion, and, very importantly, a sense of Japan's unique part in the scheme of things. It was in the *Nihonshoki*, according to Ono (p2), that first mention was made of *Shinto*:

> There it (Shinto) was newly employed for the purpose of distinguishing the traditional faith of the Japanese people from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, the continental ways of thinking and believing which had recently entered the country.

The word *Shinto* is a Japanese adaptation of the two Chinese ideographs, *shen* (*kami* or gods) and *tao* (*michi* or way), which translates variously as the Sacred Way or the Way of the Gods. The Shinto tradition is basically an amalgam, "a racial religion inextricably interwoven with the fabric of Japanese customs and ways of thinking" (Ono, p.II). This Sacred Way sees all beings on all levels, whether animate and inanimate nature, as kami: as such, all merit respect and honour. This Japanese reverence includes the sun, mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, etc., as well as human and ancestral relationships.

It is important to note that within the Shinto framework, society is ordered along sacred lines as well. The emperor occupies the pre-eminent position by virtue of his celestial ancestry, and all else is subsumed to his religio-secular authority. Often a woman, the shaman is a person endowed with potent powers of interacting with the spirit world, is the bearer of oracles, a diviner, medium, or exorcist, and is consulted by high and low alike. The Shinto priests carry on the ritual life of the adherents, rites of marriage, birth, holidays, purification etc. As we recall:

> The world of the kami does not transcend that of man and man does not seek to enter a divine, transcendental world to attain salvation. He seeks salvation by bringing the kami into the human world, into daily life...developing the harmoniousness of the world (Ono, p.107).

The main preoccupation of Shinto is not with moral sins. Evil is not understood as a moral reality, but rather as physical and mental defilements caused by evil kami. As such, these kami can be exorcised through ritual purification. Evil is seen as "a lack of harmony and beauty" (Kitagawa, 1966, p.12), a kami force outside man himself. Man is seen as inherently free of evil.

> If man is a child of the kami, he is also inherently good Man owes his life to the kami and to his ancestors. He therefore is loved and protected by them and in turn feels gratitude The mission of life becomes a quest to realize the hopes and ideals of the ancestors and to honour the inescapable duty of treating 'us own descendents with even greater love and care as they too will work to realize the hopes and ideals of the ancestral spirits (Ono, p 104).

Finally, Shinto sees only death as truly evil. Shinto priests never involve themselves in the impurity of death rites, but leave those entirely to the families themselves. No aspect of life itself, then, has any set standard of good and evil, be it sex, wealth, or killing. The Shinto manner of grasping truth is to realize that there are no fixed standards. Moral judgments vary considerably depending on each specific situation (Ono, p.105).

In a word, the Shinto world is all-inclusive. It is imbued with the idea of inherent justice and order. The kami spirits of the ancestors rejoice in all evidences of harmony and cooperation. Harmony and order are seen by the Japanese as not only possible, but their solemn duty to achieve. Ono sums it up (p.102):

> This world in which we live is progressing from chaos to order, from confusion and contradictions to a state of harmony and unity. Just as organic life develops, so in society good order is evolving as a result of mutual aid and cooperation. Shinto believes that this world gives promise of unlimited development and lifepower.

Enter Maitreya: Asuka Period: 500 - 710 CE:

> The power of indigenous traditions to shape and transform Maitreya is remarkable and distinctive (Hardacre, 1987, p.174)

Maitreya emerged from China and Korea, as we have mentioned, as a powerful cult figure, having gained a solid presence in the minds of Buddhist devotees. The Chinese

cosmological world view had transformed the Bodhisattva Maitreya into a high god at work in the Universe. As Kitagawa puts it (1987, p.13):

> Maitreya, unlike the Buddhas before him, is alive, so he can respond to the prayers of worshippers. Being compassionate ..he willingly grants help; and being a high god in his present birth, he has the power to do so His cult thus offers his devotees the advantages of theism and Buddhism combined.

Maitreya was received in Japan as a foreign kami. As with the Chinese, many of the original concepts of Indian Buddhism were utterly alien. The doctrines of cyclical time, rebirth, karma, etc., would take time to gain ground. Initially, the most understandable elements would be adopted. As we have seen, the Japanese are inherently a "this-worldly" people, not seeking escape from the toils and coils of this existence as taught by Buddhism, but revelling in its beauty. Maitreya would become inextricably intertwined in the Japanese notion of "world-mending", a powerful kami spirit to protect harmony, order and justice in this world of existence.

It is traditionally understood that Buddhism was introduced into Japan in 552 CE (Saunders, p.91), although the Japanese court may have been aware of it before. Buddhism was very much involved in foreign political missions with the mainland. It was apparently the practice of Korean rulers to offer gifts in exchange for favours, and it was thus that statues of Śākyamuni and Maitreya were sent to Japan. These statues must have been considered most prestigious and potent, helpful gods for one's allies. Maitreya had already become associated with kingship, and he would now conflate with the quest of the Japanese ruling house to realize the hopes and ideals of their ancestors.

Emperor Kimmei decided to test the "kami waters" when these statues were introduced. According to Saunders (p.93), in 574 CE a prince of the Soga clan, Soga no Umako (d. 626 CE), built a shrine to house a figure of Śākyamuni to see if it would offend the Soga clan kami. It apparently did. Plagues and pestilence broke out and the statue was unceremoniously tossed into a canal (Saunders, p.92). In 584 CE the Paekche rulers sent a replacement, a stone figure of

Maitreya in his bodhisattva form of Ajita, the Victorious. Somehow no untoward events followed its installation, and as Kitagawa states (1966, p.245) the *Nihonshoki* marks this event as the official inception of Buddhism in Japan. Another Maitreyan image in gold would arrive from the rival kingdom of Silla in 623 CE.

As we have noted before, Maitreyan devotionalism reached its zenith in Korea at the moment of the introduction of Buddhism into Japan. The successful adoption of Maitreya as a Soga kami may have been instrumental in helping Buddhism itself to gain its first footholds in Japan.

Japanese Buddhism of the sixth and seventh centuries has often been referred to as "national" in form, since it was intimately connected to national interests. It was initially a "state religion" practiced by the Soga clan that contained many elements not necessarily true to Buddhism itself (Saunders 98). Prince Shotoku (573 - 621), however, marked a new chapter in the development of Buddhism in Japan (Kitagawa, 1987, p.525) and brought Maitreya into prominence.

Prince Shotoku as Maitreya

Prince Shotoku was himself a devout Buddhist, a thinker, writer and legislator. He was very much moved by the principles of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The fundamental proposition of this Sutra is that Śākyamuni Buddha was once an ordinary man and therefore any person, through the practice of the Buddha's Way, may become a buddha. At the heart of all things is a world that from the beginning of the Universe has been unchanging. This one truth is totally undifferentiated, formless. It is the one law, karma, that calls all things into being and moves them. This great life-force of the Universe appears in unlimited operation in both animate and inanimate things. Its underlying thrust is evolution and progress toward higher degrees of

freedom (Niwano, p.18-25). Man's noble destiny is to walk the way of spiritual progress and its goal is none other than the state of buddhahood (Niwano, p.39).

One is struck immediately by similarities in the Shinto creed, such as the Shinto concept of unlimited human potential. It is most likely that this idea was borrowed from the Lotus. Also, the idea of universal harmony found in the Lotus is akin to original indigenous Japanese ideas.

Maitreya plays a fairly prominent supporting role in the *Lotus Sūtra*, and Guth (p.194) states that it is likely that Shotoku was a Maitreyan devotee. As a powerful "guardian" kami Maitreya would be seen as offering great benefits to his imperial devotees from Tuṣita Heaven. Of course this role conflated with the Japanese concept of the interactive roles of the kami and human worlds. It is probably true that Shotoku took the principle of Maitreya as the ideal for a Buddhist king. Following Shotoku's death, (621 CE), veneration of his person merged with the concept of Maitreya-Ajita and the cult of Shotoku-Maitreya was born. Of seven known temples erected in Shotoku's honour, six have half-length images of Maitreya "made to his (Shotoku's) size" (Guth, p. 194,198). Shotoku was seen as the embodiment of the Maitreyan virtues of protection, peace, order, and prosperity. He was seen very much in the role of the "world-mender".

The Maitreya of this early period was represented in art as a bodhisattva, the princely, pensive, compassionate leader of a just society, as reflected in the graceful *Chuguji* figure (Guth, p.207). As yet he had not assumed a role independent of the imperial house, nor had he yet regained his spiritual stature as the coming Buddha.

What we do have, though, is an interesting twist on one of Nattier's themes, of the here\now. Through a very Japanese interpretation of Maitreya, we see him as a kami spirit active in this world to change this world now for the better through Shotoku. Add to this cakravartin-Maitreyan theme the dimension of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which says that any man may become a

buddha, and Shotoku becomes a buddha. Since the next buddha is Maitreya, then he, Shotoku, must be Maitreya. Suffice it to say, in the mind of Shotoku's devotees, that is how he was viewed (Guth, p.208).

Shotoku's death brought in its wake a bloody power struggle, and Guth sees the massacre of all Soga males in 643 CE as the turning point in the development of the Maitreyan myth. It was at this point that Maitreya emerged from the confines of the Soga clan and "acquired expanded spiritual and political meaning" (p.194).

Nara Period: 710 - 784 CE

In 645 CE a coup d'état was followed by sweeping reforms. The sovereign was elevated to the status of a living or manifest kami, an outgrowth of his mythical solar ancestry. It was at this point that Temmu ordered the compilation of the *Chronicles* (673 CE) to justify his taking power (Kitagawa, E.R.1987, p.525). In 710 CE the city of Nara was built on the Chinese model as the first permanent capital of Japan (Saunders, p.101); laws were adapted from the Chinese legal code, and Buddhism expanded rapidly. Buddhism would, however, take on a distinctively Japanese flavour under the *Ritsuryo* synthesis.

Three syncretistic principles emerged: the mutual dependence of the Emperor's Law and the Buddha's Law, Buddhist-Shinto institutional syncretism, and finally, the belief that Japanese deities are manifestations of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of India. All was subsumed under the power of the throne and sacred kingship (Kitagawa, 1966, pp. xii, xiii). As a result, Buddhist temples were dedicated to Shinto kami and Shinto shrines were built within Buddhist temple grounds. The fundamental principle of harmony so inherent in the Japanese ethos was remolding the Buddhist institutions and thought in its own image.

It was during this eclectic swirl of the Nara period that Mahāyāna Pure Land cults and several other rival schools took root in Japanese soil and the Buddhist monastic community flourished. The success of Buddhism was in no small measure due to its fusion with Shinto thought. As mentioned earlier, Buddhism's strength lay in its adaptability, seeing itself largely as a supplement, not a substitute for prevailing beliefs. According to Kitagawa (1987, p.209), out of this synthesis grew three distinctly Japanese forms of Buddhism: nature cults involving austere mountain practices; folk Buddhism involving shamans, priests and diviners; and Shinto Buddhism, an amalgam of interactive shrines and temples performing complementary functions (e.g. the Buddhists took on the death rites).

Maitreya was still very much identified with kingship, the Emperor's personal kami. A Maitreya chapel was established by Emperor Shomu in the early eighth century (Kitagawa, 1987, p.248) within the compound of the Shrine of the venerated Shinto kami, *Usa Hachiman.* In keeping with the Ritsuryo synthesis, Usa Hachiman would translate to *Daijizaiten-bosatsu* (bodhisattva) in 783 CE (Kitagawa, 1966, p.38).

The Nara period was one of grandiose schemes. Shomu had visions of establishing a great commonwealth guided by the Buddha's Law, and to that end he planned to erect a huge Buddha statue at Lochana as its earthly symbol. For this he needed funds and according to Kitagawa (1987, p.248), he sent a messenger to Mt. Yoshino to pray for help. The messenger returned with an oracle to the effect that the gold of that mountain could be used only when Maitreya appeared in the world. Shomu then turned to the venerated Gyogi Bosatsu (670 - 749 CE), a devotee of the Pure Land Maitreya cult, to help him win over the populace and thereby get funds. In 749 CE the Lochana Buddha was completed (Kitagawa, 1966, p.42,43). Gyogi helps to establish the fact that Maitreya's devotional Pure Land cult of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven had

taken root by the early eighth century in Japan, and that Maitreya was associated with Mt. Yoshino.

Kasagi Colossus of Maitreya

We now turn to the colossus of Maitreya carved into the side of Mt. Kasagi close to its summit. Although the legend of the founding of Kasagidera dates the colossus from the time of Emperor Tenchi (r.668 - 671), it was completely uncharacteristic of the period. Brock (p.217) and other modern scholars feel it was much more characteristic of the Nara Period. This colossal carving, the height of a thirteen-story pagoda, was obviously a feat of deep devotion. Kasagidera is difficult of access, but it was on the way to the great Ise Shinto Shrine, and this signifies a relationship to the latter. The Ise Shrine, central to Shinto worship, was the shrine that Gyogi visited with Buddhist relics to gain the good pleasure of the imperial Kami, *Amaterasu*, to build the Lochana Buddha (Kitagawa, 1966, p.42).

The Kasagi Maitreya is a symbol of grandeur and continuity, a bridge between the past and the distant future. Maitreya is flanked by two half-scale arahants. One holds a robe, and most likely represents Mahākāśyapa presenting the Buddha's robe to Maitreya on his descent. It is thought that the audience of this image must have been the monastics, rather than lay people (Brock, p.234). Their main desire seems to have been to link the Maitreya Buddha both to his Indian roots and to the soil of Japan. Considering later Maitreyan "descent" themes and the Japanese reverence of the mountains as the home of the gods, the intersection of the High Plain with the earth, it is possible that Kasagi was thought of as a place for Maitreya's descent in the very heart of Japan. It evokes a strong plea for protection and peace in the midst of a volatile society. It also makes a very affirmative statement about Maitreyan worship. He obviously had a wide following among the Nara monastics at this point. And, as we shall see, Kasagidera was

a very popular place of pilgrimage for the aristocracy whose lives must have been constantly fraught with uncertainty.

Maitreyan Ascent Theme

Maitreyan sūtras proliferated during the eighth century, the earliest ones dealing with the Pure Land "ascent" theme (Nattier's there\later theme), and the cult of *Miroku Jōdo* (Maitreya's Pure Land) prospered (Noboru, p.177). The Hosso school, one of six schools established during the Nara period, traced its roots to the Indian monk Asanga, reputed to have studied under the spiritual guidance of Maitreya (Nattier's there\now theme), who taught Asanga the ten steps of meditation necessary for entrance into blissful Tusita Heaven (Kitagawa, 1987, p.246). According to Noboru (pp.176,177), the descent motif, that of Maitreya's descent from Tuṣita 56,760,000 years hence, as taught in scriptures such as the *Miroku geshō kyō* and *Miroku jōbutsu kyō*, would appear only later.

At this point in the eighth century Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven and Amida's Sukhāvatī Heaven were the two main Pure Land cults vying for the loyalty of the people. However, as before in China and Korea, Maitreya's Pure Land would gradually lose ground. Whereas Maitreya had a very real presence in the mind of the Buddhist monastics as the promised Buddha to come, the celestial Buddha Amida gained ascendancy in the popular mind. There was a deep reason for this.

The Maitreyan cult taught that one could earn rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven only through one's own efforts, as evidenced in the Hosso School. This connotes the monastic life and the foregoing of family life. Amidism taught, however, that one could gain rebirth in Sukhāvatī Heaven through the intercession of one's descendants - an idea more akin to the Japanese world-view, and hence much more readily accepted. Amida was also visualized as a god of Great Compassion, a saviour

now and always. Maitreya, although a god of compassion, demanded much more than devotion, and it is most likely that in the popular mind Maitreya slipped away as a distant figure who would someday appear, but in the meantime there was always Amida. To the Japanese mind it is this life, now, that matters, and the essential progeneration of the next generation which would look after one's welfare in both this world and the next. Amida's Pure Land kept this cycle alive, whereas Maitreya answered the monastics' needs of preserving the Buddhist Dharma and the sāṇgha in the face of these pressures.

Heian Period: 794 - 1133 CE

As we enter the Heian period changes are afoot once again. Under the patronage of the Nara rulers, Buddhist temples and monastics had been exempt from taxation and the latter had thus proliferated out of all proportion. The burden of their upkeep had fallen to the lay people. The *sāṇgha* (monastic community) may have become an escape hatch from many of the responsibilities of society, as well as a tax shelter; and thus it was that monks became viewed as unproductive parasites (Saunders, p.105). The "ecclesiasticism" of culture as envisaged by the Nara emperors under the *Ritsuryo* Synthesis, the amalgamation of the Buddha's Law and the Emperor's Law, had brought neither peace nor prosperity to the people (Kitagawa, 1966, p.45). In 748 CE the imperial capital was moved from Nara to Nagako, and from there to Heian (Kyoto) in 794 CE. As Saunders points out (p.134), "there is no doubt that as the power of Buddhism grew, its interest in secular matters increased" and that it was in no small measure due to this "that Emperor Kammu (r.782-805) decided to remove from Nara...to escape ecclesiastical influence".

Brock points out that "in reaction to the degenerating political and religious climate of the post-Great Buddha era, monks fled the capital and the highly politicized atmosphere of the sangha

in great numbers" (p.237). These monks went on to establish hermitages in the mountains, giving rise to "mountain Buddhism".

Maitreyan Descent Theme and Mountain Cults

As a result of this massive change of fortune for the Nara Buddhist schools that suddenly found themselves deserted and orphaned by the imperial court, new schools emerged. It is here that we pick up the thread of the Maitreyan "descent" motif in the teachings of Saicho (767 - 822 CE), known as *Dengyō-daishi*, and Kukai (774 - 835 CE), called *Kōbō-Daishi*. Each of these Buddhist schools embraced eclectic philosophical ideas.

Saicho founded the Tendai school based on the *Lotus Sūtra*, embracing Shinto, Tantric mysticism, Zen meditation practices along with monastic discipline. The *Lotus* lay at the heart of Tendai, with its emphasis on ekayāna (single vehicle) which was to supersede and embrace all other vehicles (Mahāyāna, Hinayāna, etc.). It taught one ultimate reality, encouraging harmony with Shinto concepts, so that all kami spirits had their place (Parrinder, p.366).

Kūkai established the Shingon school, an esoteric philosophy based on an amalgam of Shinto, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Tao (Kitagawa, E.R. 1987, p.527). Parrinder (p.366) credits Kūkai as author of the fusion of Buddhism and Shinto into a distinctively Japanese religion. It is here that Shinto kami become manifestations of the Buddhas who are seen as the original realities.

Saichō called Mt. Hi'ei the "chief seat of religion for ensuring the safety of the nation" and considered himself the spiritual heir of Prince Shotoku. Kūkai, on the other hand, followed the footsteps of Gyogi-bosatsu in promoting social and philanthropic works throughout the country as well as regarding his religion as the protection of the nation (Kitagawa, 1987, p.210).

The Maitreyan "descent" theme, here\then, emerges strongly in these two schools. Kūkai was believed to have especially descended to earth between the appearances of Śākyamuni Buddha and the future Maitreya Buddha. He was revered to such an extent that he became the Japanese counterpart of Maitreya in the popular mind (Kitagawa, 1987, p.247). He settled on Mt. Kōya which he saw as the Matrix Realm (Garbha-dhatu):

> (Maitreya) lives in his place of honour in the Matrix Realm and assists Mahāvairocana in his acts of virtue. Residing in Tuṣita Heaven, he makes Śākyamuni's teachings flourish. Maitreya has already attained enlightenment, but for now he (waits to succeed Śākyamuni) in the eastern palace (Brock, pp.238,239)

After his "death", Kūkai and Mt. Kōya became inextricably linked and it was believed that here Maitreya would descend to earth. Kūkai is believed to be awaiting Maitreya to this day in a state of death-like trance (Noboru, p. 178), a "living" link between earth and Tuṣita Heaven. Before going on, it is interesting to note here the mention of an "eastern palace", an abode which could have both celestial and terrestrial connotations. Later developments of the myth suggest the latter. It is also worth noting that at this point the Kasagi Maitreya has sunk into eclipse in the popular mind. In fact, it may never have had any real relation to the common people as a whole. Although the Kasagi Maitreya continued to be faithfully tended by the Nara monks and to receive pilgrims, these were largely the aristocracy (Brock, p.239). Of the two sites, Mt. Kōya also provided an easier site for large buildings to house the flocks of pilgrims who came to pray at Kūkai's shrine.

We have interesting socio-religious themes emerging here; Kasagi for the aristocracy and Kōya for the common man. The Kasagi Maitreya answered the aristocratic needs of personal preservation and guidance in the face of the constant intrigues at court as well as spiritual salvation. Mt Kōya, on the other hand, answered the needs of personal security and deliverance for those caught helpless in the webs of change. Kūkai's spiritual, kami powers, the gift of Maitreya, became a folk belief.

That it was a period of increasing unrest is reflected in in the poignant longing for Maitreya in Saichō's work:

> The phenomenal world, from remote past to distant future, is full of suffering, and there is no room for peacefulness The lives of all beings, tangled as they are with difficulties and complications, present only sorrows and no happiness The sun-light of Buddha Śākyamuni has been hidden in the distant cloud and we have not yet seen the glimpse of the moonlight of the merciful Buddha Maitreya. (Sponberg, 15)

Mappo and Maitreyan Expectation

During the Heian period frequent occurrences of natural calamities precipitated a growing and widespread belief that the apocalyptic age of *Mappō* (the Letter Days) predicted in the Buddhist scriptures was at hand (Kitagawa, E.R. 1987, p.528). The concept inherited by Japan set the onset of Mappō, which was to last 10,000 years, at 552 CE, 1000 years after the parinirvana of the Buddha. However, another date, 1,052 CE, one millenium after the introduction of Buddhism into Japan, was also widely accepted (Ono, p.183).

Coupled with the natural disasters was the growing social strife and disorder brought on by weak rulers, greedy clergy, and the generally flagrant disintegration of morals which characterized the late Heian period (Saunders, p.137). Both the Shingon and Tendai schools expounded on the subject. Suzuki pictures the Japanese culture of that period as nobility clustered around an effete central court which "congealed the spirit in a sea of materiality", so that religion could not truly arise. "The cry that comes from the ground of the human soul is nowhere heard", for "religion does not spring from prayers for worldly gain, nor is it merely concerned with future existence" (p.39). For Suzuki, the emancipation of Buddhism had not yet happened. The awakening of the spiritual dimensions of the Japanese psyche had not yet arrived.

> The Heian people embraced beautiful women, but forgot the affectionate mother able to embrace even a dead child, and this is an essential reason why religion is found nowhere in their culture. (Suzuki, p.40)

A feeling of anticipation took root, in the face of Mappō, that Maitreya was near, spurring pilgrimages to sites believed to be places of Maitreya's descent. These included Mt. Kōya, Mt. Kimpusan and nearby Mt. Kasagi. Noboru notes (p.178) that pilgrimages were often made to these sites, particularly by the aristocracy, because "Heian aristocrats were not satisfied with rebirth in a Pure Land alone"; they rather wished for Maitreya's descent, linking it "to their own desire to achieve final salvation through participation in Maitreya's three sermons beneath the Dragon Flower Tree".

On the popular front, along with the Maitreyan mountain cults, there appeared in the countryside along Japan's coasts new Maitreyan agrarian themes which will be discussed shortly. These were all appearing in a seemingly universal reaction of both high and low alike, whether ruler or peasant, whether monk or merchant, to the natural and social calamities of the times.

Kamakura Period and Japanese Renaissance: 1192 - 1333 CE

> Unless one has at one time "rolled in the swells " of karmic suffering he has no chance to realize spirituality... They (Heian) had not yet penetrated to the basic ground of self...As long as he leads an artless and primitive existence, man does not leave his infancy. (Suzuki, pp.75,76)

The Kamakura period marked the "coming of age" of the Japanese people, their awakening to a new level of spirituality, a Japanese renaissance. The degeneracy of the times and the seeming insolubility of their massive problems, had finally brought the Japanese to the point of contemplating the meaning of existence, provoking an extraordinary efflorescence of religious thought. As Suzuki goes on to point out (p.56), the *mono no aware* (sensitivity to things) so deeply seated in the psyche of the Japanese, which had begun to express itself in the teeth of the Heian decline, came into full expression over the next few centuries.

Pure Land Movements

The "waiting for Maitreya" theme, so common in Saichō and Kūkai's teachings, and hopeless longing for Maitreya's descent, gave way to the solace and compassion offered by the Pure Land cults of Amida. As Unno puts it, "the Pure Land Path emerged claiming to have been especially prepared by the Buddha for the age of Mappō" (p.182). The Pure Land cult of Honen (1133 - 1212 CE) "built the bridge between the Heian and Kamakura times" (Suzuki, p.52). Uddo notes (p.184) that whereas Mappō spelled doom and despair for established Buddhist schools, it was a source of boundless hope for the disenfranchised, the Pure Land cults which relied not on monastic self-cultivation, but upon simple, whole-hearted love and devotion to Amida. As Suzuki puts it (p.51):

> Amida's Original Prayer does not speak of good or bad, does not consider the abundance or lack of one's acts, does not choose between a pure and impure body. Since it takes no account of time, place, or other relationships, it doesn't bother about how one dies. A sinner is a sinner, yet if he calls the Name (*Nembutsu*) he attains the Pure Land.

Shinran (1175 - 1265) amplified on this theme. According to him, faith was not separate from the everyday toil of the common man:

> For (Shinran) to live among whose who worked the plow and hoe and not to use them himself as well would have turned his faith into a kind of 'gibberish' and nonsense...with the 'Namu Amida Butsu' (Nembutsu) of each hoe stroke - one up, one down - is heard the whisper of the prayer. (Suzuki 83,84)

According to Shinran, Mappō was not a particular period of history, but a fundamental reality of life itself, embracing all ages, past, present, and future. In so saying, it was as though Shinran swept Maitreyan hopes aside and made people stare reality in the face. Maitreya was not due to appear for thousands of years, and to long for his appearance was an utter waste of time. The vow of Amida, on the other hand, is working always, " wherever man is steeped in brutish anguish" (Unno, p.185).

Zen

Of all the Buddhist schools, however, it was Zen philosophy which largely inspired the Japanese Renaissance. Founded by Dogen (1200 - 1253CE), he taught that the "whole man" should participate in the experience of enlightenment with no thought of personal gain or acquisition. For Dogen, buddhahood was not a "sudden understanding", but a cultivated state of consciousness constant throughout one's life (Saunders, p.224). Zen, perhaps more than any other sect of Buddhism, has penetrated into and profoundly influenced the secular life of the Japanese. The awakening to the ultimate meaning of life is reflected in sumie ink washes with their blank spaces suggesting the inexpressible (the Emptiness, *Śunyata*); in poetry, the *haikku* word-sketch suggests ultimate meaning, an awakened comprehension of existence; Zen imbued the *Samurai* swordsman with simplicity and economy of action in the art of protecting life; and Zen transformed the Japanese approach to architecture and landscaping (Saunders, p.225).

Ise Shinto

Ise Shinto and Shinto-Gobugaki (Five Classics Shinto) reached new heights of expression, although Suzuki feels Shinto at no time ever became truly spiritual. Rather, its basic ethos was one of consolidation and conforming to the will of the gods. Suzuki sees the Shinto '*mono no aware*' expressed at the emotional, mental and moral levels, as the first "childish stages of spiritual development" where " no insight is required, no awakening, no concept of Absolute Love or supra-individual, intuitively-known religious experience" (pp.106, 107). The major preoccupation in Shinto, then as always, has been a pervasive concern for this world, one's family's welfare, a very necessary anchor to maintain and perpetuate society.

Nichiren

The last Kamakura flourish before returning to the Maitreyan theme is the emergence of one of Japan's most charismatic and controversial religious figures. Nichiren (1222 - 1282 CE), whose philosophy was based on the *Lotus Sūtra* (Kitagawa, 1966, p.321). His quest was to find "true Buddhism" amongst all the vying sects. He felt the need to return to the Buddha's Path which had become obscured by Amidist devotionalism.

The *Lotus Sūtra*, to his mind, provided the single consummate path (*ekayāna*) to the truth. In repudiating the Amidist *Nembutsu*, Nichiren replaced it with the invocation of *Namu Renge kyō* (Adoration to the Lotus of the Wonderful Law), called the *Daimoku* (Sacred Title). As McFarland puts it (p.181), Nichiren " capsuled the whole of Buddhism in the simple invocation of the Sacred Title", recitation of which invoked the consummate saving powers of the Lotus. Nichiren taught that Mappō was upon them and that according to the scriptures the people thus had no capacity for complicated doctrine. Only the Lotus could save them. According to Nichiren, the Lotus states that Japan would be the country where true Buddhism would prevail world-wide, and that" all other previous forms of Buddhism had completed their mission and now awaited fulfillment in the universal acceptance of the perfect truth". According to Nichiren, he himself was the person foretold to accomplish this mission (McFarland, p.181). There is no mention whatever of Maitreya. Instead Nichiren arrogates to his own person the power of restoring "true" Buddhism. As McFarland goes on to say (p.183), Nichiren "bequeathed to the Japanese people their most conspicuous example of resolute faith and belief and their first tradition of arrant exclusivism".

Maitreyan Agrarian Themes

During the Kamakura times when Maitreyan cults were being thoroughly upstaged and replaced by Pure Land, Zen, Shinto, and Nichiren, Maitreyan folk cults were emerging from under

the skirts of organized religion. Folk traditions have deep roots and tend to come to the surface in times of stress. Apparently there was an underlying utopian theme abroad in the countryside, in particular along Japan's eastern coasts, ready to merge with Maitreya to give birth to the notion of *Miroku no yo*, Maitreya's World (Noboru, p.179). This concept can perhaps be understood as a "horizontal" theme as compared to the more normal "vertical" Maitreyan themes. Here Miroku's World is a utopian eternal world across the eastern seas, an Eden in this realm of existence, not a Tuṣita Heaven in the High Plain. Miroku's World is found in *Hitachi no kuni* (the place where the sun rises). In the eleventh century non-canonical text, the *Genji monogatari*, we read of an aristocrat named Gengi making a pilgrimage to Kimpusan where he worshipped Maitreya and prayed to be reborn in *Miroku no yo*. As Noboru notes, this is not the term used in the Buddhist texts and can only represent this latent folk tradition (p.179).

Apparently Kashima, on the eastern coast of Honshu, "the eastern edge of the world" looking out towards Maitreya's '*Miroku no yo*', was the site of twelfth and thirteenth century pilgimages where people came to pray for respite. The "*Ship of Maitreya*" is one song illustrating this folk theme:

> Maitreya's ship is coming!
> The deities of Kashima, Ise, and Kasuga are
> at the helm.
> On a cloud come thirteen princesses from India
> They come scattering rice, much rice before them,
> And after them will come Maitreya, also scattering rice.
>
> The earth is abundant, and the harvest is rich.
> The five grains are ripening and the people
> of the world rejoice.
> Shall we go forward or back?
> Afterwards, Maitreya is coming! (Noboru 180)

These songs proclaimed that Maitreya would bring abundance and that myriads of kami and buddhas would appear along with him. They believed that Maitreya would mend the world. During earthquakes it was the custom to chant "*Yanaoshi, yanaoshi*" a transitive form of the verb

meaning to mend the world and which implies, according to Noboru (p.186), an active human initiative in the process as opposed to the intransitive *yanaori* which suggests a suprahuman flow of nature, a natural outcome of the workings of the universe. There is the human desire to mend and counteract natural destruction and Maitreya became intimately connected to this folk tradition of world-mending.

Maitreyan dances *(Miroku odori)* were also performed in the temples and shrines to ward off epidemics and disasters. Here we have the local shamanesses, the *miko*, involved in foretelling the future through cultic rituals. As Kitagawa points out, the Japanese folk religions appropriated the Maitreya cult solely for this-worldly benefits (1987, p.249). Maitreya is viewed very much as a kami to be invoked on behalf of the people, a complete synthesis of folk, Shinto, and Buddhist notions. This conflation would become the emergent and dominant characteristic of the Maitreyan myth.

The Fate of Maitreya's Kasagidera

During the eleventh to thirteenth centuries the Maitreyan Kasagidera was still a popular site of pilgrimage for the aristocracy on their way to the Ise Shrine. According to Brock (p.218) it was under the direction of two monks of the old Nara school, Jokei (1155 -1213 CE) and Sosho (1202 - 1278 CE), that Kasagidera received imperial support and reached its maximum size, including halls and residences. Apparently Soshu wrote a compendium of all the references to Maitreya found in the Buddhist texts, his *Miroku myorai kan'ō shō* (The Digest of the Miraculous Response of Maitreya). This must have been an attempt on his part to preserve the integrity of Maitreya in the face of increasing challenges from rival sects.

But utter catastrophe, the Genko incident, overtook Kasagidera in 1331 CE. Emperor Godaigo (1288-1399 CE) took refuge there after his plot against the Kamakura military regime

was discovered. In the ensuing battle all the buildings were burnt to the ground (Brock, p.214). Today all that can be seen of Kasagidera and the once-impressive carving is an indistinct outline of a sadly eroded figure hidden away in its isolated mountain fastness. Although it is evident that Godaigo survived the seige, Maitreya's 'miraculous response' did not extend to the protection of the sanctuary.

Muromachi Shogunate: 1338 - 1573 CE

The Kamakura period ended with the attempted Mongol invasion which depleted the Kamakura shogunate militarily. Kyoto (Heian) was re-established as the capital under the Muromachi shogunate. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the rise of a new "townsmen's culture". " All classes had one particular outlook in common, the wish to "enjoy life in this world to the fullest and to have a positive view of human desires" (Nichiren, pp.179, 181).

The sixteenth century, known as the "Warring States" period, witnessed uprisings between the peasantry and townspeople, and it is thought that the laities of the Buddhist sects had a large hand in these uprisings (Nichiren, p.181). At the same time there were constant and intense battles between the warlords, the new supplanting the old (Noboru, p.181). The violence visited on Buddhist institutions relying on state patronage was devastating. Thousands of priests and lay believers alike perished either by sword or fire as one Buddhist hall after another was torched (Nichiren, p.181).

Maitreya Years

It was during this period of intense disunity in the sixteenth century, "the time of the greatest civil strife in Japanese history", that the use of the *Miroku shinengo*, Maitreya years, became prevalent (Noboru, p.181). These Maitreya years "represented a denial of the era name

established by the emperor", and were used to ensure good fortune. It was believed that by simply changing the imperial year name to a more auspicious one, (and obviously Maitreya must have represented the height of auspiciousness in their view), disaster could be averted. This belief was abroad in eastern Japan and was intimately connected with the Kashima Shrine.

It would seem that the cult of Maitreya as a distinctly Buddhist cult has entirely disappeared. In fact, Buddhist institutions had once again suffered a grievous blow. If ever proof were needed of the reality of Mappō, this was the time when the Dharma seemingly all but perished.

Edo Period: 1603 - 1868 CE

Buddhism was dramatically reinstated as the state religion in 1603 under Shogun Iyeyasu Tokugawa. Although the Tokugawa regime was based on "Neo-Confucian principles of natural laws and natural norms implicit in human, social and political order, all grounded under the Will of Heaven", it was nevertheless "Buddhist institutions which fortified its claims" (Kitagawa, 1987, pp.xiii, xiv). The cardinal principle of the Ritsuryo synthesis was still operative. Iyeyasu was a Pure Land Buddhist who also patronized Shinto. Kitagawa goes on to say that, in return, Iyeyasu was called "Sun God of the East" in contrast to the Emperor who was "Sun God of the West".

The Cult of the Samurai versus Maitreya

The cult of the *samurai* warrior, the highest "caste" of Tokugawa feudal society, was based on Confucian ethics of order, duty, loyalty, and firmness of resolve in Shinto guise. As Tsunoda puts it (p.399):

> The business of the samurai consists in reflecting on his own station in life, in discharging loyal service to his master, ..in deepening his fidelity in associations with friends, (etc.) ...and in devoting himself to duty above all...The samurai dispenses with the business of the farmer, artisan, and merchant and confines himself to practicing this Way.

The "Way" consists outwardly in standing in readiness for any call to service, and inwardly in striving to perfect relationships: that of lord and subject, friend-to-friend, father and son, younger and older brother. He is both example and teacher for the common classes, and this is the means by which he earns his clothing, shelter and food (Tsunoda, pp. 399, 400).

To be a samurai became a goal in life, a way of life. If Amida devotionalism replaced the Maitreyan cult of Tuṣita Heaven on the popular front, the Shinto-Confucian norms of order and world-mending embodied in the Samurai philosophy replaced the Maitreyan cult of the ruling classes. The Samurai evoke echoes of the Korean Maitreyan Dragonflower cult, but there is no mention of Maitreya in the Samurai cult, either as a protective or inspirational kami, or as the Bodhisattva Maitreya ready to aid from Tuṣita Heaven. It is probable that belief in Maitreya's efficacy and availability disappeared in the rubble of Kasagidera. It also would seem that Buddhism may have been used by the Tokugawa regime, but did not penetrate to its norms.

Yamaga Soko (1622-1685) became convinced that Japanese civilization was even more glorious than that of China. He stated that the truths taught by Confucius had already been revealed by the divine ancestors of the imperial house, that "the Japanese alone had been true to the highest concept of duty as set forth by Emperor Jimmu and Confucius" (Tsunoda, p.397). Here we capture the seeds of nationalistic fervor which would continue to propel the Samurai ethos and propel Japan.

The Edo period was one of severe restrictions. We are told that pilgrimages such as those to the mountain fastnesses and to the shores, where the name of Maitreya could still be heard, were the only occasions when common folk could break away from "conventional patterns of behaviour" (Parrinder, p.375). Every household was ordered to affiliate with a specific Buddhist temple, "a parochial system hitherto completely unknown in Japanese Buddhism". Buddhism was thus guaranteed large numbers, but it would pay a price. Government patronage and the financial

security that came with it enabled the Buddhist schools to develop huge ecclesiastical structures, but " they were robbed of nearly all their freedom, influence and initiative" (Kitagawa, 1987, p.211).

Nowhere within institutional Buddhism do we hear the name Maitreya. Had disillusionment set in? The court no longer paid him tribute, the colossus of Kasagi was a thing of the distant past. In the Tokugawa concern for the present he seems to have been forgotten and no longer relevant. But in the countryside around Kashima he lived on, and in the mountains.

Mt Fuji and Maitreya

As we have already noted, mountains have traditionally played a central role in Japanese religious life. We have seen evidences of Maitreyan Pure Land beliefs associated with Mt. Yoshima, Kōya and Kasagi. Kitagawa states that Maitreya was also associated with Mt. Kiso, Asma and Hi'ei (1987, p.248) and Noboru mentions the Golden Pure Land of Maitreya associated with the peak of Mt. Kimpusan (p.183). But, no mountain dominates the Japanese psyche or draws a more powerful emotional response than the majestic Mt. Fuji. Fuji, from ancient times, was considered the home of the gods. It was believed to have great healing, spiritual and magical powers (Collcutt, p.256).

It was apparently the practice of the Buddhist mountain cults to bury sūtras for the day when Maitreya would descend from Tuṣita Heaven to preach his three sermons to his companions. Such a cache was found on Mt Fuji in 1930. Collcutt says (p.253):

> Although it is not certain that these sūtras were dedicated to Maitreya...the burial of sūtras was a common practice in Maitreyan devotion in the age of the Latter Days of the Law which was believed to have beset Japan from the late eleventh century. Thus, although Maitreya may not have been a principal focus of worship within the complex of the early Fuji cult, the fact that Fuji was a location of sūtra burying in the medieval period suggests that the future Buddha may have been associated with the volcano, whose summit would have seemed to many devotees to soar into Tuṣita Heaven.

From the ninth century and probably earlier, the deity most associated with Mt. Fuji was *Asama* (Fiery Mountain) *Daimyojin* (also called *Asama Gongen* and *Sengen Daibosatsu*). Fuji was thought of as a kami in its own right, *Kono-hana-saku-ya-hime-no-mikoto*, a divine force of unpredictable moods which spelled plenty or hardship for the surrounding countryside (Collcutt, p.251). As Buddhism took root Fuji became associated with the powerful Buddhas and their Pure Lands, in particular Buddha Vairocana. As mentioned above, the discovery of the cache of sūtras then includes Buddha Maitreya.

In 1572 an ascetic, Kakugyō, climbed to the summit of Mt. Fuji, and through rigorous austerities he believed he had become one with the mountain and the universe. He was believed to have great powers of healing and this was extended to the messianic quality of healing the nation (Collcutt, p.257). Thus was founded the *Fujikō* cult, a blend of Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism, Tao yin-yang philosphy, folk belief, magic and practical experience, a very representative example of Japanese synthesis. The sixth patriarch of Fujikō, Jikigyō Miroku (b. 1671 CE) proclaimed the coming of Maitreya to establish a world of eternal peace and prosperity. According to the practice of many mountain ascetics, he self-mummified and his cult spread among the masses of the eastern provinces in the eighteenth century (Noboru, p.184).

The Fujikō believers made regular pilgrimages to Mt. Fuji. A great feeling of expectation must have pervaded society, and as Noboru remarks (p.186), little is known about the possible association of Maitreyan belief with the peasant revolts of the Edo period. Colcutt (p.263) emphasizes the point, however, that Fujikō Maitreyan belief did not challenge the Tokugawa regime. There is no mention of any apocalyptic vision of social or religious reforms in the literature. Instead Jikigyō emphasized stability, that Maitreya's World would be brought about through spiritual effort in the human heart. Colcutt quotes a chant (p.263):

> When you climb Mt. Fuji there is nothing.
> Good and evil both come from our hearts.

Don't think that Paradise is one thousand leagues away.
If the Way is straight it doesn't take a single step.
When you look for Paradise it is in yourself.
When you eat with pleasure the heart is joyful.

Conclusion

This medieval period of the career of Maitreya is truly multi-valenced. We have seen many permutations and combinations revealed in the myth. Initially in Japan Maitreya was overtly associated only with kingship, and latterly associated only with common folk. Buddhist cults which grew up around his person ranged from Pure Land devotionalism to Mountain austerities. The myth transformed from a Buddhist concept to embrace all prevailing traditions, synthesizing ancient beliefs of the mountains and the seaboard. We explored vertical and horizontal cosmological configurations; ascent and descent themes; ascetic there\now, Pure Land there\later, monastic and imperial here\later and here\now themes. We have seen Buddhism and Maitreya ebb and flow. When disaster overcame one aspect, the myth popped up elsewhere. In Japan, thus far, Maitreya has not been associated with any apocalyptic trend as was the case in China. Rather, Maitreya has had a history of spiritual power, as evidenced in the syncretistic teachings of the Fujikō-Maitreyan cult.

As we prepare to enter the modern period and new developments in the Maitreyan myth it is not necessary to ask whether these cults are all "genuine" Maitreyan manifestations. As pointed out throughout this text, Maitreya has never ceased to evolve. The very essence of the myth is to take on the colour of its surroundings wherever Buddhism has taken root. The open-endedness of the myth has guaranteed precisely this phenomenon. Sir Charles Eliot's remarks (p.179) about Japanese Buddhism are equally applicable to the myth of Maitreya:

> The most salient feature of Japanese Buddhism is its intimate connection with the general condition of the nation, both political and social. It has vibrated in response to many and abrupt changes, it has registered them in its sects and expressed in its art the special note of each.

PART 111

MAITREYA IN MODERN JAPAN: 1868 TO THE PRESENT.

Introduction

The opening of the modern era in Japan dates from the Meiji restoration of imperial power in the wake of the disintegration of the Tokugawa shogunate. On January 25, 1868, Mutsuhito (1852-1912), later known as Emperor Meiji, abolished the feudal regime and established his seat of government in Tokyo, the former city of Edo (Kitagawa, 1966, p.182). The Tokugawa feudal system had taken a sad toll of the Japanese people. As Reischauer puts it (McFarland, p.46):

> The bellicose, adventurous Japanese of the sixteenth century became by the nineteenth century a docile people looking meekly to their rulers for all leadership and following without question all orders from above. They grew accustomed to firmly established patterns of conduct. A thousand rules of etiquette, supplementing instructions from their rulers, governed all their actions.

Confusion and chaos ensued in the wake of the abolition of a complete way of life. The new regime recognized the revolutionary right of individuals to choose their means of livelihood, but initially this did not so much solve problems as create new ones. The disparity between rich and poor increased, misery and consternation prevailed. In 1872 universal education was introduced, followed in the same year by the introduction of military conscription. Every able-bodied male was expected to serve, regardless of his social or economic status. This re-allocation of the sacred domain of the elite samurai, and all its accompanying unaccustomed responsibilities, was whole-heartedly resented by a population already reeling under the effects of massive social dislocation. Out of this military service, however, eventually emerged a new "samurai", an elite corps glorying in Japan's developing nationalistic aspirations, its own military prowess, and the adulation of its fellow countrymen (McFarland, p. 48).

The radical Meiji reorientation was dictated not only by internal pressures but by external ones as well. The arrival of Perry's "black ships" in the summer of 1853 heralded in earnest the arrival of the West at Japan's doors. "It was no longer possible or desirable for Japan to maintain her policy of national seclusion" (Kitagawa 1966, p.177). Thus, with the opening of her doors, Japan was precipitated into the age of industrialization.

Before 1868, Japan had been a "loose federation of autonomous units, particularist in outlook, suspicious of their neighbours and jealous of central authority" (Kitagawa, 1987, 214). It fell to the Meiji emperor, seen as the "magico-religious figure capable of achieving world-mending traditionally" (Noboru, p. 189), to knit the nation together. To that end a "non-religious" form of religion, State Shinto, with the throne as its object of worship, was instated. The Meiji restoration marks a determination to pull the nation together under the sacrality of the throne, to instill anew in the population a firm faith in the sacred destiny of Japan, to confront changes in her relations with the outside world, and to meet head on the consequent new technological challenges. On the one hand Japan plumbed her ancient depths, and on the other set out on new uncharted seas. Cohesion and control were of the essence. National pride became the glue, the throne the sacred force behind it.

The new regime once again sought to destroy the privileged status of Buddhism and to recover a "more authentically Japanese state", *saisei itchi* (the unity of rites and government), and thus rescue Shinto from its secondary role and establish it as a separate religion (McFarland, pp. 50, 51). Overnight Buddhism was deprived of state support, while facing a new technological age, and the added challenge of proselytizing Christianity, tacitly encouraged by the regime (Saunders, p. 264). By decree, in 1872 all Buddhist sects had to affiliate themselves with one of seven approved major sects: Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo, Zen, Shin, Nichiren, and Ji (Nichiren, p. 211).

On the popular front, however, attempting to separate Buddhism and Shinto in the minds of the common people led only to more confusion. The synthesis of Buddhism and Shinto had over the centuries become "far too intrinsic a part of the life of the masses" (McFarland, p. 51). Also, this new control of religious freedom led to problems with western relations. As a result, less stringent measures were adopted in 1889 in article 28 of the constitution. McFarland quotes (p.52):

> Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief.

It is not surprising, given the disarray of feudally-oriented organized religion and the general churning of society, that the population cast about for firm ground on which to build some sense of security. In the latter half of the nineteenth century there emerged new folk religions which vibrated to the needs of the people, new spiritual paths unattached in any formal sense to prevailing formalized Shinto or Buddhist schools.

Modern Utopian Movements and Maitreya

The agrarian Maitreyan cults which had grown out of the eighteenth century exposed the deepening social unrest, the yearning in the Japanese breast for peace and security and for salvation from conditions beyond one's own control. The Maitreyan myth, translated to the folk level, had either inspired or conflated with the latent utopian folk belief in a paradise across the sea, the belief in *Miroku no yo*. Whatever their origins, Maitreya's ship, Maitreya dances, and Maitreya years were the harbingers of a powerful and growing desire within the populace to find respite not only from the recurrent devastation caused by natural calamities but also from the equally devastating fickleness of the policies of the ruling classes visited on the heads of the masses.

Liberation of Miroku

Blacker makes the very interesting and significant comment (p. 591) regarding the development of the Maitreyan myth in modern Japan, that "the cult of Miroku never seems to have been a widespread or popular one before modern times", and Kitagawa concurs. He goes on to say (1987, 249):

> Only in the modern period when the foundation of the Tokugawa feudal regime was shaken prior to the establishment of the Meiji imperial regime, has the descent motif of the figure of Maitreya inspired the notion of the rectification of the social order (yanaoshi). This corrective to the social order precipitated the emergence of many folk-based new religions such as Tenri-kyō, Konko-kyō, and Ōmoto-kyō.

It was only when the cult of Maitreya was "liberated" from the halls of power that the myth seems to have gained a new expression among the common people and Maitreya was able finally to become their own hero and saviour who would come to their aid in their hour of need. A grass-roots movement was gaining cohesion and momentum. On the whole it was a peaceful force, spiritual rather than political in nature. Whereas in China and Burma and some other Buddhist countries in the eastern Asian theatre Maitreya was used as the inspiration for uprisings. that was not so in Japan except for one possible and notable exception, *Ōmoto-kyō* (Kitagawa, 1987,p.238).

Thus, according to Kitagawa, these new folk religions, such as *Tenri-kyō* (Religion of Divine Wisdom), *Konkō-kyō* (Religion of Golden Light) and *Ōmoto-kyō* (Religion of the Great Source), were inspired largely by the hopes and promises found in the Japanese manifestations of the Maitreyan myth. Each New Religion was founded by an illiterate peasant who claimed to have been possessed by an all-powerful kami spirit and to act as the channel through which the divinity could give instructions to establish a new spiritual civilization on earth. There was a great emphasis on miracles, and the capacity to bestow health, happiness, and prosperity. Indeed, it was proclaimed that the day for establishing peace had arrived and these charismatic mystics, often women, gave a powerful voice to the deepest yearnings of the people.

Simple doctrines were presented in uncomplicated language "without the Chinese flourishes of Buddhism and Confucianism, or the archaisms of traditional Shinto" (Saunders, pp. 267, 268). Each of these movements, although concerned with personal salvation, more importantly preached the salvation of the world as a whole, embodying a vision of a new world order in which justice and happiness would prevail, the "New Jerusalem". As Blacker puts it (p.600), this "active millenarism...is a feature of Japanese religious history peculiar to the modern scene". The new world order would come about not through a passive and natural meliorism, a *yanaori* transformation stretched over eons of time, but through the concerted efforts, the *yanaoshi* world-mending efforts here and now of the devotees themselves, inspired and guided by the powerful kami spirits speaking through their human media. All the New Religions, both of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, espouse this ethos of active world-mending.

Ōmoto-kyō and Maitreya's Age

The foundress of the *Ōmoto* movement, Deguchi Nao (1837-1918), was originally a Buddhist Pure Land devotee who turned to the teachings of the nineteenth century *Konkō-kyō* religion (Offner, p.64). Konkokyo teaches that man is the child of the god *Tenchi kane no kami* (God of Heavenly and Terrestrial Brightness), an infinitely merciful deity through whose love humankind can be happy. Suffering is caused by forgetting this deity. "The god wills to save mankind but cannot if man remains ignorant of his desire" (Saunders, p.274).

However, in 1892 Deguchi Nao herself claimed to be possessed by a kami spirit which inspired the writing of the *Ofudesaki* (With the Tip of the Brush) (Parrinder, p.377). She was convinced that she had become the only legitimate channel, the chosen medium, between the sacred and profane worlds and that the doctrines of other religions were merely human in origin (Young, p.267). In the *Ofudesaki* Deguchi Nao urges the salvation of the people through the

realization of Miroku's Age when "the three thousand worlds shall burst into full bloom as the plum blossoms do" (Shigeyoshi, p.71).

It was with the emergence of Kisaburo Ueda (1840-1948), later known as Deguchi Ōnisaburō, that Ōmoto took on the character of an organized religion (Offner, p.69). Deguchi Ōnisaburō transformed Ōmoto from an insignificant local sectarian movement into "a religion which perceived itself as the fountainhead of all religions, including those that were chronologically prior to it", and he embarked upon a world-wide mission to convince others that this was so (Young, p.265).

Ōnisaburō's spiritual journey had begun in 1867 when he rejected all existing religions and retired to Mt. Takakuma to meditate. There he underwent a most critical and extraordinary spiritual experience during which his soul left its body and "soared into the spiritual world" where it "gained knowledge of the Universe and for the first time (Ōnisaburō) was fully conscious of his mission as the Saviour of Mankind" (Offner, p.66). As Murakami puts it, " Ōnisaburō experienced the self-enlightenment that he himself was the Buddhist saviour Miroku and advocated a reorganization of the world" (p.74). Deguchi Nao recognized Ōnisaburō as Maitreya. He was married to her daughter in 1900, and adopted into the family, becoming the progenitor of future generations of Deguchi females to carry on the leadership of the religion. Although the sixth patriarch of *Fujikō* was believed to have declared himself as Maitreya, it was for the first time, in the person of Deguchi Ōnisaburō, that the figure of Maitreya takes on truly messianic proportions in Japan.

The basic Ōmoto philosophical position states that the prime source of the universe is vitality which is God; the universe is the manifestation of vitality, the fragments of God; and man is the chief embodiment of vitality and the minister in the government of Heaven and Earth. Kitagawa notes (1966, p.312) the re-emergence of the ancient Japanese theme of the inherent

unsullied nature of humankind, that man is indeed capable of rising above chaos and dissension and creating peace:

> Unlike the historic Buddhist notion of mappō that led the Japanese Pure Land Buddhists of the thirteenth century to the realization of the utter sinfulness of human nature, Ōmoto holds an optimistic view of man and does not recognize sin as an inevitable element in human nature. Ōmoto attempts to commend itself as a universal religion for modern man, advocationg world peace,and brotherhood of all mankind.

It was Ōnisaburō's "skillful management of doctrine to conform to prevailing political trends that also was instrumental in its achieving increased popularity" (Offner, p.69). In 1920 he built Miroku Hall in Ayabe as their central sanctuary, and in the same year Ōnisaburō bought the Osaka daily newspaper which he used extensively to propagate Ōmoto teachings and "the approaching end of the world" as we know it. Murakami goes on to say (p.74) that the government could not overlook the mounting power of Ōmoto and labelled their philosophy as heretical, i.e., against the throne. Ōnisaburō was arrested in 1921 and Miroku Hall was destroyed.

With the change of emperor in 1928, Ōnisaburō was released. There followed a period of intense spiritual activity. According to Noboru (p.188) Ōnisaburō declared himself publicly, on March 3, 1928, as Maitreya. He expected the Year of the Dragon, which he called the Year of Maitreya, to bring great changes. He "preached world transformation not by radical eschaton, but by many small renewals, eventually bringing forth the world of Maitreya".

He also compiled his eighty-one volumes of the *Reikai Monogatari* (Spirit World Stories) which were considered by his devotees to be pure revelation. These scriptures include the history of creation, the birth of mankind, the structure of the spiritual world, the relationship between the spiritual world and the present world, life after death, the purpose of human life, the devil's plan, and the Divine Plan to build the Kingdom of God on earth on fundamental principles governing politics, economy, education, arts and science. Esperanto was introduced as a tool for more

extensive propagation of his principles (Offner, p.69). The texts present a thorough-going reorganization of society based on religious precepts.

During the 1920's Ōnisaburō turned his attention to China, Manchuria and Mongolia. In Peking he founded the "Universal Federation of Religions" and the "Universal Love and Brotherhood Association" (Offner,p.69). To this end he worked with Do-in, the "Red Swastika Society" which was "more advanced in conceptualizing and denominating a theory of interreligious unity" (Young, p.264). He espoused inter-religious cooperation especially with Taoist and Lamaist groups in China and the Bahá'í Faith in the West (Kitagawa,1966, p.223).

On the political front, Ōnisaburō adopted a "nationalistic line, sponsoring semi-militaristic groups for young men and women and adults for the purpose of restoring the Kingdom of God in Ayabe" (Kitagawa, 1987, p.223). Offner states (p.70) that by 1935 millions had rallied behind Ōnisaburō's leadership and the government again moved against the religion. It was either Ōnisaburō or the Emperor, there wasn't room for both. Ōnisaburō and other leaders were arrested and charged with insurrection, for "purposing to usurp the place of the imperial family and Ōnisaburō himself to become ruler of Japan" (McFarland, p.63). All Ōmoto property was utterly destroyed and Ōnisaburō would be released from prison only under the Allied Occupation at the end of the Second World War.

In 1946 a revival of sorts took place under the name of *Alizen-en* (the Garden of Love of Goodness), and two years later, in 1948, after a most extraordinary life, Ōnisaburō, co-founder of Ōmoto and claimant to be Maitreya, died at a very old age. According to the stipulation of Deguchi Nao, the spiritual leadership of Ōmoto passed to a Deguchi female, Ōnisaburō's wife (Deguchi Nao's daughter) and then to their daughter in 1952, and the religion continues to the present, again under the name of Ōmoto (Offner, p.70).

Derivatives of Omoto such as Taniguchi Masaharu's *Seichō-no-iye* (The Household of Growth), Okada Mokichi's *Sekaikyuseikyō* (Religion of World Messianity), and Nakano Yonosuki's *Ananai-kyō* (Doctrine of the Three and Five) continue alongside present-day Ōmoto. These are all highly syncretistic movements. Sekaikyuseikyō recognizes Miroku as the Great God, and as Parrinder quotes (p.378):

> Miroku the Great God comes forth endowed with the strength of the three in one: Fire, Water, Earth Miroku, the Great God, from of old has planted the heaven upon earth Miroku, the Great God, even as a thief, has secretly been born below. Leaving behind the highly exalted throne, to bring salvation, Miroku has been born below.

Although messianic Maitreyan hopes may have died with Ōnisaburō, this is but one strong manifestation of the aura of purpose and expectation, a pervasive movement toward the rectification of society which pervades this whole modern period.

Japan's Global Aspirations

By the end of World War One, "Japan had progressed in all her endeavours to the point where she ranked as one of the Big Five among international powers" (McFarland, p.42), an extraordinary accomplishment in the fifty years since the dissolution of the Tokugawa isolationist regime. The Japanese mission as a people, according to Ōkawa Shūmei, was "to build up a new Japanese culture by adopting and sublimating Western cultures with our national polity as a basis, and to contribute spontaneously to the advancement of world culture". Shūmei goes on to say that "it is my belief that Heaven has decided on Japan as its choice for the champion of the East" (Tsunoda p.795).

Hashimoto Kingorō saw only three avenues open to Japan's growing ambitions and the pressure of surplus population: that of emigration which he claimed was barred due to anti-Japanese immigration restrictions; advancement into world markets which was shut off by tariff barriers and abrogation of commercial treaties; and finally, the last door, that of territorial

expansion (Tsunoda,p.797). McFarland states (p.42) that for a decade or so after World War One democratic influences were able to thwart a complete commitment to militarism, but by the early 1930's it had become very apparent that more immoderate forces would prevail. With the Manchurian Incident of 1931 and the outbreak of war with China in 1937, Japan embarked on the conquest of east and southeast Asia. Then, in 1941, she attacked Pearl Harbour in an attempt to weaken the American embargo on Japan which was being enforced by naval fleets operating out of Hawaii, drawing the United States into a war against Japan, and opening the phase of World War Two in the Pacific.

This is the potent background against which Ōmoto and other modern religions were working. The first forty-five years of the twentieth century were a period of the most intense nationalistic fervour probably ever experienced in Japan's history and it involved everyone, high and low alike. Japan had an extraordinary sense of her own destiny at the helm of a world movement, both political and spiritual, toward the unity of East and West. The throne was seen as the sacred centre of the world. This sense of sacred mission of messianic proportions was the driving force of the nation up to the time of Western occupation in 1945. As Kitagawa states (1966, p.332):

> When Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces in 1945, it was not simply the end of combat. What Japan lost was far more than the divine prerogatives of the throne or the gigantic institution of State Shinto. They lost their sense of destiny and security based on a cosmological world view which had been preserved from time immemorial...(They) lost their meaning of history and traditional sense of values

On January 1, 1946, Emperor Hirohito, a sensitive and gentle man who had apparently been held in seclusion during the war, issued a statement to his people denying the divinity that had been ascribed to him. He appealed to his countrymen to find in Japanese tradition a basis and initiative to effect reforms. As McFarland says (p.52), one of Japan's great tragedies was that

"the genuine affection of the people for their emperor was misused by the politicians". McFarland (p.43) quotes two of Hirohito's poems written in 1946 and 1947 respectively:

> Be like pine trees
> Which do not change color
> Although they bear the weight
> Of continuously falling snow.
>
> The day dawns hopefully
> Upon the town of Mito;
> The sound of the hammer
> Is heard clearly.

Picking up the Pieces

Beneath the bewilderment seeds of violent revolution were brewing, according to Kawamura (p.96), for while the post-war period of occupation "liberated tenant-farmers and industrial laborers from economic oppression", it also freed religious and political prisoners, among the latter the Communists and Socialists, who "provided the masses with an opportunity to expose themselves to the Marx-Engels classics". As a result, labour unions mushroomed overnight "not as defenders of the rights of laborers, but simply as organizations to indoctrinate the masses for the proletarian revolution". That this socialist-communist resolve actually failed was largely due to the pervasive need in Japan to satisy personal needs rather than involve themselves in a revolution based on theory they could not appreciate (Kawamura, p.199).

Rush Hour of the Gods

The still struggling Buddhist community could not fill the gap left by the post-war dissolution of State Shinto. Still largely feudalistic in their orientation, older Buddhist schools could not keep apace of the desires of the people. As Jōdo Shin-shu has said, they largely "failed to minister to the Japanese people in the period of their greatest social crisis", and this is one of the reasons for the extraordinary post-war explosion of New Religions, dubbed the "Rush Hour

of the Gods" (McFarland, p.225). In 1945 there were 43 registered religious bodies, whereas in 1951 there were 720! Of these, 258 were classified as Shinto, 260 as Buddhist, 46 as Christian, and 156 "unclassified". Among these latter were the pre-war Omoto, Seicho-no-Ie, and Hito-no-michi Kyodan, Tenrikyō,etc. However, many of the "newly arisen" post-war movements found liberally sprinkled through all the categories proved to be fraudulent freeloaders taking advantage of tax exemptions, and by 1964 the total of registered groups had been reduced to 378 (Blacker, p.567).

As Saunders puts it (p.285), today there is a "general foment rather than an organised evolution of Buddhism or Shinto, often disorganised and indiscriminate in its borrowings from Buddhism, Christianity, and Shinto". Kitagawa says (1966, p.335), that these New Religions are characterized as being "anti-intellectual and anti-modern,...anti-leftist and anti-communist in their political outlook". He goes on to say that what they do stand for is a positive goal for the future which is a "peculiar mixture of naive utopianism, traditionalism, magic, and promises of mundane satisfactions". Hardacre points out (1986, p.11) that these diverse New Religions do share a very Japanese world view:

> The world view of the Japanese new religions conceives of the individual, society, nature, and the universe as an integrated system vitalized by a single principle. Every level represents the manifestation of that principle on a larger scale. The relations among the levels, however, are not static. They must be maintained in balance, harmony, and congruence.

McFarland makes a strong statement to the effect that the New Religions arose "primarily to shelter the masses from the impact of a larger threatening world", but the irony is in fact that "some of these sects are turning out to be also the means of a contact with and admission to the larger world" (p.229). He refers to them as "pressure chambers" in which the socially disadvantaged or the fearful can work out their frustrations and find salvation and security.

Buddhist Responses to "Miroku's Age"

Out of the confusion within the Buddhist community in modern times, there have emerged in the twentieth century several powerful Nichiren movements. Nichiren had declared that Japan was the "small country to the northeast of India" mentioned in the *Lotus Sūtra* by the Buddha, where, with the elapse of 2000 years from the inception of the Dharma, a great bodhisattva would arise who would lead the world to "True Buddhism". This messianic theme, although rooted in the *Lotus Sūtra*, makes no mention of Maitreya. To all intents and purposes, Nichiren saw himself as this "climactic figure in Buddhist history", that it would be he "who would establish True Buddhism and prepare for the salvation of all mankind" (McFarland, pp.101, 102).

Soka Gakkai

The three Nichiren movements which have played a strong role in the twentieth century are *Soka Gakkai*, *Rissho Koseikai*, and *Reiyū-kai*. Of all the Nichiren sects, Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society), founded in 1930 by Makiguchi Tsunesaburo (1871-1944), is by far the most powerful, numbering about 17,000,000 adherents according to 1989 statistics (Ministry of Education, 1991). Saunders (p.283) describes the sect as somewhat fanatical, espousing the doctrine of happiness based on the three values of profit, goodness and beauty. Most importantly, as Blacker points out (pp. 588, 589):

> (Soka Gakkai) looks forward to a new era, a spiritual revolution of the world, by applying to the present age all the prophesies delivered by Nichiren in the thirteenth century...All the warnings of Nichiren regarding mappō have been taken by Soka Gakkai to apply as much to the present age as to the time of Nichiren. All the horrors ...(including) defeat and invasion by a foreign foe ..can thus be attributed to...a divine punishment to the people for their intransingence

Soka Gakkai is structured along hierarchical military lines with corps leaders, squad leaders, executives, and branch heads (Kawamura, p.205), and its platform of social rectification

is aimed at the time when *Nichiren Shoshu* (True Nichiren) will become the state religion of Japan (Saunders, p.283).

At a rally in 1963, Soka Gakkai President Ikeda Daisaku told an extraordinary audience of 80,000 followers that "they were becoming Japan's indispensable citizens" (McFarland, p.195). McFarland sees "frightening potential" in this most powerful popular movement, a movement composed of thousands of lonely and dispirited people. As Kawamura points out (p.202), "Nichiren's Buddhism has consistently championed the causes of the underdogs and identified itself as an anti-establishment group since it was founded in the thirteenth century". Having gone through post-war reorganization, Soka Gakkai is today what Eric Hoffer describes as a "monumental reality" (McFarland, p.196), spreading throughout the world. No longer confined to strictly exclusivistic doctrines, since 1972 Soka Gakkai has worked with other world religions and organizations in "attacking social evils" (Morioka, 1, p.10).

The principle of *obutsumyogo*, the agreement in purpose of government and Buddhism, advocated by Nichiren, provides the ideological basis for Soka Gakkai's entrance into politics, and in 1955 the *Komeito* (Clean Government Party) was organized as a separate political arm of Soka Gakkai (McFarland, p.214). Today the Komeito holds considerable sway in Japan. Again we see powerful political implications in Soka Gakkai's messianic vision of social rectification, which is even more successfully rooted than Ōmoto's platform. Soka Gakkai's Komeito may win the day through the democratic process! This is certainly a dramatic new twist to the *yanaoshi* world-mending theme. How paradoxical it is to find a messianic Buddhist movement minus Maitreya to have been rivalling an alternative non-Buddhist Ōmoto movement espousing Maitreya.

Rissho Koseikai

Niwano Nik-kyo (b.1906) and Naganuma Myoko (1889-1957) founded *Rissho Koseikai* (Society Establishing Righteousness and Harmony) in 1938. They had become disillusioned with Soka Gakkai and advocated a return of focus to the Eternal Buddha as actually found in the *Lotus Sūtra* (Morioka, 1987, p.379) with Nichiren taking a secondary role. Whereas Soka Gakkai initially condemned all other religions and demanded that their converts discard former religious affiliations, Rissho Koseikai has always been more compromising and more in tune with Buddhist tradition.

Its initial thrust was "the attainment of happiness through the elimination of negative karma effects" which changed in the 1960's to "the perfection of personality and the realization of peace on earth". It is today the second largest New Religion in Japan and is unique in that it stresses basic bodhisattva practices as well as faith in the Eternal Buddha and has authored the "Brighter Society Movement" aimed at bringing together secular, religious and governmental organizations "to create a better society and international movement for world peace" (Morioka, 1987, pp.379,380). Rather than using the militant and more coercive methods of Soka Gakkai, Rissho Koseikai's approach to world-mending emphasizes harmony and collaboration through fellowship, an ecumenical spirit more in keeping with Buddhist philosophy.

Reiyu-kei and Mirokusan

Alone of these three important world-mending Nichiren-inspired movements, *Reiyū-kai* (The Spiritual Friends Association) admits a role for Maitreya. Reiyū-kai was founded in 1925 by Kubo Kakutaro (1890-1944) and Kotami Kimi (1900-1971). The movement takes its rituals from Nichiren, but its ethos reflects the strong magico-religious currents of folk traditions, laying great emphasis on ancestor cults, faith healing, and this world as the arena of man's salvation

(Kitagawa 1966, p.322). It is also dedicated to reviving Japanese family-centred values, with women playing an active role, especially in teaching the youth (Hardacre, 1987, p.271). Reiyūkai is also one of the most affluent sponsors of Buddhist scholarship in the world. Not only has the organization a massive library, but it funds Buddhist scholars around the world, and also publishes and distributes works of high scholarly quality on Buddhism.

Reiyū-kai maintains that through constant rebirths all human beings are related as friends, and that this oneness of humanity extends to one's ancestors. Although the acts of the ancestors formed humankind as it is now, the deeds of the descendents can modify their ancestors' karma. As a result, one of the main religious activities of the religion is offering memorial services to the dead (Saunders, p.282). Indeed, one's personal salvation is believed to follow upon the salvation of one's ancestors (Hardacre, 1988, p.270).

In 1964 followers of Reiyū-kai built a sanctuary for pilgrims at Izu called Mirokusan and adopted faith in Miroku as the saviour bodhisattva of the Buddhist age of decadence (Murakami p.163), a deliberate demotion of Nichiren and an equally determined effort to reinstate the coming Buddha Maitreya to his rightful position. In Reiyū-kai, with all its own permutations and combinations of unorthodoxy, we have a Buddhist New Religion which actually returns to the ascent theme of Tuṣita Heaven.

The *Maitreya Sūtra*, a remarkable compendium of Maitreya lore, was compiled in 1964 by Watanabe Shoko and has been used ever since at Mirokusan to exhort the faithful to listen to the Dharma as revealed in the Sūtra. Mirokusan is seen as a mountain utopia symbolizing the "other world", the abode of the deities, ancestors and spirits, the meeting place of heaven and earth (Hardacre, 1988, p.275). Once again we find the mountain ascent theme so common to Japanese Maitreyan cults of the past. The whole purpose of pilgrimage to Mirokusan is to change one's karma. Rigorous rules of abstinence are imposed, rituals and lengthy sūtra recitations

enforced, and over the three day period the pilgrim often goes through emotional as well as spiritual transitions which are eased by leaders and group discussions.

Unlike the folk-based Ōmoto, there is no idea in the Reiyūkai sect of Maitreya's direct intervention. We return here to the Buddhist norm that Maitreya may preside in Tuṣita Heaven over the undertakings of his devotees, but will not actively intervene in this world until the prescribed time in the future. In the meantime there is the long up-hill battle of improving one's own karma and that of the world in general through collective moral amelioration in order to provide the setting for Maitreya's descent. According to Hardacre (1987, p.283) Reiyukai holds that:

> Nothing but human effort can be counted upon to effect substantive betterment It is naive to expect supernatural aid...Maitreya may preside over a perfected world, but he has no role in perfecting it...Mirokusan pilgrimage represents not a radical break with the past, but a continuing effort to apply knowledge of Maitreya to collective improvement, exactly what the bodhisattva should strive for

In terminating our discussion of modern Maitreyan themes to date, it is interesting to note that apart from the "older" New Religions which we have discussed, the post-war "Rush Hour of the Gods" does not seem to have produced any overt Maitreyan themes. Little has been found to date in any of these movements to suggest that Maitreya has any active role whatever. What we have found, however, is the pervasive world-mending, social rectification theme and a sense of impending momentous change.

Agonshū and the Shifting Sands

Agonshū, a New Religion founded as recently as 1978 by Kiriyama Seiyu, has "picked up on and articulated in the religious sense, the fears and worries of many, especially young, Japanese", for they are particularly concerned about the future, especially increasing environmental pollution and the spectre of nuclear weapons (Reader,pp.208, 213). Agonshū is rooted in Japanese folk religion and sees the present state of affairs as an outgrowth of the unhappy spirits of the

dead inflicting the living and causing spiritual hindrances which perpetuate the present problems in the world. The religion teaches that "Kiriyama's own transgressions are a result of bad karma inherited from the past and hence not his fault as an individual". One needs to "cut his own karma", and" grasp his own destiny" (Reader, p.210). Already, in fourteen years Agonshū claims 500,000 members (Ministry of Education, 1991).

In Japan at present there is a compulsively competitive political and economic climate directly related to mitigating the humiliation brought about by military defeat in World War Two. Hans Küng calls this extraordinary drive "Japanism", and its aim is supremacy in the world through economic clout. Implementing such an aggressive program has raised many concerns in Japan itself, and criticism of the government has been voiced during the 1980's up to the present as a result of financial and political scandals. Modern Japan is a secular state, no longer driven by Confucian-Shinto or Buddhist ethics. Religion has been divorced from the state and political expediency has become the norm. As Küng says (p.10):

> This should make us look again at efficiency without other considerations, flexibility without principles, authoritarian leadership without responsibility, politics and economics without a moral vision, trade and business without reciprocity, war guilt without consciousness of guilt.

Agonshū argues that only going to the heart of the problems through looking at their spiritual causes can a remedy be found, not through superficial political solutions (Reader, p.214). There is a millenial flavour to the Agonshū ideology, messianic sentiments attached to the coming of the twenty-first century when some major change of fortunes is expected. Reader says (p.215) that in a dramatic recent video based on Kiriyama's book, *1999: Salvation from Karma and Spiritual Hindrances* it is stated that:

> The ruin foretold by Nostradamus could come by the end of the century as a result of the escalating hordes of unhappy spirits unless a religious answer is found.

CONCLUSION

We are left, then, with a big question mark regarding Maitreya's present role in Japan. Ōmoto's overt Maitreyan ambitions have largely given way to a very secular Soka Gakkai and the quiet role of Maitreya in Reiyūkai. But, quiet or not, Maitreya has not been forgotten. As in the past, the strength of the myth has been its capacity to emerge as a vessel to contain the aspirations of the Japanese for a better world. The deepest drive of the Japanese is to create and restore equilibrium between all the interlocking and inter-acting aspects of life. That the Japanese state is today barrenly secular will most likely change tomorrow as the profoundly spiritual nature of the Japanese makes itself felt once again in a "new" and innovative way. That the Japanese have to be among the world's most adaptable people has been made amply clear.

Maitreya has come to embody the Japanese ethos of world-mending which, in the twentieth century, has become synonymous with social rectification. This being the spirit of the times, and increasingly so not only in Japan, but world-wide, Maitreya will doubtless continue to play either a passive role from Tuṣita Heaven or possibly periodic active roles in this world. As we have seen, in times of dire stress Maitreya is expected to appear momentarily. Maitreya's manifestations are tuned to the times, a product of the needs of the people, and as such the myth has an original and enduring quality not found in any other Buddhist or non-Buddhist figures. Its durability is not due to a fixed static notion, but to the fact that it can evolve and respond actively within its own mythical framework.

One of the greatest reasons for the success of Maitreya in Japan has to be the happy mesh of the idea of the powerful kami spirits working through human agencies and the bodhisattva principle which allows Maitreya to do so from Tuṣita Heaven. The original concept of winning rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven has largely given way to an active role for Maitreya in this world. Although Pure Land Buddhism offered sanctuary to millions in the past, the Japanese today are

primarily interested in social rectification, not escape. Inherent in the Japanese psyche is the belief that humankind CAN effect change for the better.

The Japanese are preponderantly concerned about this world. It is here that their salvation is worked out, not in the next world. The happiness of one's ancestors, and consequently oneself, is dependent upon doing the utmost to rectify the wrongs of this world here and now. This has never been more apparent than in this last century when the masses suddenly emerged from the massive grip of feudalism and for the first time had a hand in guiding the destiny of their country. At the same time, ascetic cults and monasticism have given way to the lay community as the matrix for religious expression. A massive movement is underfoot, a revolution, and Maitreya, one way or another, can be seen as a guiding principle leading onwards to the day when society as a whole will have reached the happy state warranting his descent.

There are fascinating tensions at work in the Japanese manifestations of Maitreya. These are directly related to the relationship between the believer on the one hand and Maitreya on the other. There are differing active and passive roles. In the past it is fair to say that the masses took a very passive role in the world as a whole, being servants of the ruling class, and they related to Maitreya in a more passive mode. The rulers, on the other hand, were in the active mode. They definitely saw Maitreya as empowering them to act. Today, in a more democratic milieu, the power resides in society as a whole, and consequently Maitreya has been seen as an activator for world-mending or social rectification, and empowerer of the masses. There is less of the passive *yanaori* world-mending attitude of letting fate take care of things and more of the *yanaoshi* world-mending attitude that one must take things in hand or nothing will ever improve.

To what extent do we perceive the *tariki* notion of dependence on a higher power and the *jiriki* notion of self-power in the Maitreyan manifestations in Japan? The *jiriki* notion of self-power holds that no one can alter anyone else's karma and no one can come and empower us to

do what we know we ought to do ourselves. On the other hand, the *tariki* notion holds that it is possible for an outside agency to alter one's karma and to empower one to change.

Here we have two potentially competing views of Maitreya. If Maitreya is going to enter an essentially *jiriki* world and say "here is the medicine, take it", then it is not yet time, because we know what the medicine is, we just aren't willing to take it. Maitreya doesn't have the power to enlighten, it is up to us. In the *tariki* sense, Maitreya empowers us to take the medicine, an infusion of grace, a change of karma, which can melt the most recalcitrant of sinners.

Since on the popular front in Japan there have traditionally never existed purely Buddhist beliefs, but rather a fortuitous amalgam of folk-Shinto and Buddhist ideas, it is hard to sort out the puzzle. It is perhaps fair to say that the notion which best responds to the Japanese mentality is the *tariki* notion, for in karmic terms, the Japanese most definitely do wish to effect change, and they do see Maitreya as a powerful kami-bodhisattva spirit, endowed with the power to effect change through human agents. This does not differ radically from the original Indian idea of the striving that would be necessary to emerge from the claws of mappō in order to bring about the necessary conditions so that finally Maitreya could indeed step out from behind the veil and hand the remedy to a ready *jiriki* audience.

Today the battle being waged is skewed more towards self-power without religion, namely secularism, versus other-power embodied in the New Religions. The Japanese, on the whole, do not consider themselves "religious" today, at least not in the formal sense. The modern urban Japanese have been uprooted from the settled rural life of Tokugawa days. A pattern has emerged of being born Shinto and dying Buddhist in terms of rituals, possibly, but there is little time left in industrialized Japan for old ways, and hence the powerful attraction of the New Religions and their simplicity in responding to the individual and social needs of today. Many consider their work as their religion and are virtual "workaholics". But, as Hans Küng has pointed

out, there is a danger here, a vacuum which needs to be addressed. Agonshū is one example of a recent movement trying to bring the spiritual needs of the moment home to roost. Reiyūkai sponsors pilgrimages for weary souls to travel to Mirokusan to renew themselves spiritually, to change their karma, to remember Maitreya and work with him to change the world.

One is struck by the distance this myth has travelled in the twenty-five centuries of its existence, and we have only looked at the ramifications of the myth in Japan. The fact that Maitreyan themes of hope and renewal have conflated with a pan-Japanese phenomenon of world-mending has led to the adoption of the myth by non-Buddhist Shinto-folk movements in the past and particularly by Ōmoto in the twentieth century. Ignoring the fundamental concept of cyclical renewal which dictates a lengthy process of world-mending before Maitreya's arrival, these folk traditions tend to collapse time and optimistically expect a compassionate Maitreya's intervention at any time, and especially in times of crisis.

On the whole Japanese Buddhism is pessimistic about the immediate future, believing that a discouragingly long, uneven, and uphill battle still faces humanity before Maitreya's advent. This is still the period of mappō. The New Religions, including the Buddhist Nichiren movements, battle this negative, rather defeatist attitude. By bringing Maitreya back into focus, Reiyūkai again introduces this theme of hope and assurance, a positive note about the future, instilling a desire to persevere. There is a resilience in the new movements which makes them by far the most dynamic and overriding sector of religious activity in Japan.

The Japanese psyche cannot long endure or succumb to pessimism. In times of crisis the overriding, quite compulsive reaction is to somehow mend the situation; not simply to survive, but to rebuild. From earliest times this ethos of world-mending has been a spiritual goal. Based on our historical data, it is probably fair to conclude that in Japan the myth of Maitreya will continue to develop and appear in new guises in the future in answer to the exigencies of the

times, and that the reality of the myth within the Buddhist scriptures will continue to inspire world-mending themes in Japanese religion beyond the confines of Buddhism itself.

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