

Japan's Modernization and the Persecution of Buddhism

Chisato Hotta*

Abstract

This paper explores the purposes and consequences of the persecution of Buddhism in the early Meiji period (1868–1912). The Meiji government attempted to establish the legitimacy of the new state through the Shinto-based divine status of the emperor while pursuing anti-Buddhism policies and promoting Shinto as the state religion. By reinventing Shinto as an independent religion and ending the Shinto-Buddhism syncretism, the policy of *shinbutsu bunri* (separation of Shinto and Buddhism) aimed at the elimination of Buddhism's influence on society in order to construct a new political and social order; simultaneously, the state tried to form national unity based on loyalty toward the emperor. As soon as the Separation Edict was ordered in April 1868, the persecution of Buddhism took place throughout Japan, resulting in the destruction of many temples, statues, and images (*haibutsu kishaku*). In this process, followers of Hirata Atsutane, the school of National Learning (*Kokugaku* or Nativism), played an important role in executing anti-Buddhist policies and violent actions. Although some Buddhists like the Shin sect fought back, the damages inflicted on Buddhism were immense and resulted in an indelible change of Japanese cultural history.

Buddhism was persecuted partly because of its association with the stagnant, hierarchical order of the Tokugawa *bakufu* (1603–1868). Since Buddhism enjoyed a privileged position under the patronage of the old regime, many Buddhist temples became rich and powerful and performed the function of social control. However, many temples collapsed which evoked anger among ordinary people and low-ranking samurai who were faced with harsh economic realities. Furthermore, Buddhism was regarded as a foreign religion and its characteristics, including passivity and resignation were incompatible with *bunmei kaika* (Civilization and Enlightenment), which meant adopting the utilitarian, rational, and scientific aspects of Western civilization. Moreover, the state tried to modernize Japan to catch up with the West under a slogan of *fukoku kyohei* (a wealthy nation and a strong army) while proclaiming “returning to ancient time” (*osei fukko*) to unite a new nation under the emperor. Buddhism became the major obstacle to achieving such goals. Consequently, Buddhism's status and governmental role were replaced by Shinto. By persecuting Buddhism, the Meiji government aimed to control the institutional power of religion, as well as people's daily lives and consciousness, through the emperor ideology. Although Buddhists struggled to find a way to regain their position in society, they had little choice but to conform with the new national policy.

Introduction

Intending to establish the legitimacy of a new state based on the authority of the emperor, early Meiji government policy attempted a separation of Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri*) at the expense of Buddhism.

The Meiji government promoted Shinto as the state religion in order to construct a new political and social order centering on the Shinto-based divine status of the emperor. In 1868, the new government issued the Separation Edict ordering the dissociation of the Shinto and Buddhist divinities. The proponents of Restoration Shinto of the school of Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), the most influential ideologue of

* Adjunct Lecturer, Hiroshima University of Economics, Hiroshima, Japan

the school of National Learning (*Kokugaku* or Nativism), by advocating a restoration of direct imperial rule, played a major role in executing this policy.

The purpose of the order was the removal of Buddhist influence from Shinto shrines; simultaneously, it aimed to control the institutional power of religion. Accordingly, Buddhist priests and their institutions were deprived of the privileged status which they enjoyed under the Tokugawa regime (1603–1868). While trying to eliminate all Buddhist elements from Shinto shrines, the government also invented the Shinto tradition. Since Shinto and Buddhism had been associated in a syncretic whole—a prominent aspect of Japan’s tradition—the *shinbutsu bunri* eventually struck a blow to the continuity of Japanese cultural history.

Meanwhile, the Separation Edict provoked a wave of attacks upon Buddhism throughout the country called *haibutsu kishaku*, resulting in the destruction of many temples, statues, and images. The central government was reluctant to take decisive measures in response to this movement. Except in a few cases, Buddhist sects could do little to protect Buddhism. Although anti-Buddhist thought and policies spread widely in the late Tokugawa period, Japanese Buddhism had never had such a traumatic experience in its history. The government’s anti-Buddhist policy not only dealt Buddhism a heavy blow, it also caused Buddhist leaders to call for reforms that tended to conform to the state ideology and “modernization”. This paper examines the government’s anti-Buddhism policy and its intention as well as its impact on Buddhism. Additionally, I hope to clarify the historical meaning of the *shinbutsu*

bunri and the *haibutsu kishaku*, including their effects on the inner lives and religious attitudes of the Japanese.

1. The Restoration of Imperial Rule and the Separation of Shinto from Buddhism

1.1 The Administrative Machinery of Separation

After the proclamation of the “ancient” Japanese system of “unity of ritual and government” (*saisei-itchi*), in March 1868, the Meiji government established the Department of Shinto (*Jingikan*) and issued the Separation Edict (Murakami 1980, 21). This edict ordered the separation of Shinto and Buddhism on the grounds that the associations between Buddhism and Shinto divinities that had been accepted since the Nara period (710–794) were contrary to the indigenous Japanese way (Kitagawa 1990, 201). Because the Meiji government had prioritized the “restoration of Imperial rule” (*osei fukko*), which attempted to recover the authority of the Emperor who ruled the ancient state (Ketelaar 1990, 6), it was an urgent matter for the government to support this intention through legislation. In accordance with the revival of imperial rule, the Department of Shinto, which was instituted as the highest organ of government even above the Council of State (*Dajokan*), functioned to supervise the *kami*, rituals, Shinto priests, and Shinto precincts (Murakami 1980, 21).

Moreover, the Meiji government made further efforts to nationalize Shinto. For example, in 1869, the government established the Tokyo Shrine where only soldiers who died in the civil war of the Meiji Restoration were enshrined.

This shrine later became the Yasukuni Shrine (Murakami 1980, 21). In addition, prior to the Meiji era, each Shinto shrine had maintained its autonomy. Nevertheless, in 1871 for the purpose of the nationalization of Shinto, the state organized all Shinto shrines hierarchically with the Ise Shrine at the top. The Ise Shrine was believed to be the place of worship of the deity Amaterasu Omikami (Hardacre 1989b, 28-32). In this manner, the state tried to make the shrine play a role in education and politics in just the same way as the Buddhist temples had in the previous era (Murakami 1980, 27). By doing so, the Meiji leaders created the preconditions for state control of religion; at the same time, they tried to establish the political authority of the state.

1.2 Implementation of anti-Buddhist Policies

In order to “reestablish” Shinto’s autonomy in accordance with the religious policy of the *shinbutsu bunri*, the Meiji state attempted to remove all Buddhist elements from Shinto shrines. The policy of the *shinbutsu bunri* aimed at the elimination of Buddhism’s influence on society through the removal of Buddhism from any public place (Ketelaar 1990, 69). Because Buddhism was tightly connected with previous *Bakufu* rule, it was an essential task for the Meiji leaders to execute this policy in order to establish the legitimacy of the new state, which was based on the emperor system and linked to Shinto (Ketelaar 1990, 69; Murakami 1980, 22).

The order was accompanied by the following measures. First, all Buddhist priests were ordered to relinquish their positions in Shinto shrines throughout the nation. In the past,

Buddhist priests had gained administrative control of a large proportion of Shinto shrines through the so-called Dual Shinto (*Ryobu Shinto*) system (Thelle 1987, 21). In place of the Buddhist priests, the Shinto priests took over all administrative duties of the shrines (Ketelaar 1990, 9). Some former Shinto-Buddhist priests who were forced to enter secular life joined the Shinto clergy; however, the government soon prohibited this practice (Murakami 1980, 22). Furthermore, the state not only prohibited the use of Buddhist icons as images of kami (*shintai*), but also ordered the removal of all Buddhist images and objects from Shinto shrines. The state also banned “the use of Buddhist names attached to Shinto deities” (*kami*) (Ketelaar 1990, 9). James E. Ketelaar describes the enforcement of these orders by the Shinto priest Juge Shigekuni at the Hiyoshi Shrine, Mt. Hiei, in this passage:

Juge and his band of self-proclaimed “restorations” (*fukkosha*) proceeded to remove every statue, bell, sutra, tapestry, scroll, and article of clothing that could be even remotely linked to Buddhism from the shrine complex. All inflammable materials were gathered together and burned; all metals were confiscated to be refashioned into cannon or coin; stone statues were decapitated and buried or thrown into the nearby river; and wooden statues were used for target practice, or their heads for impromptu games of kickball, and then burned (Ketelaar 1990, 9).

These orders ended the Shinto-Buddhism syncretism which had been practiced for nearly

ten centuries (Collcutt 1986, 152). Dual Shinto had deeply penetrated into the consciousness of the people. Therefore, the Meiji government's policy of *shinbutsu bunri* conversely demonstrated the previously deep association of Shinto and Buddhist divinities (Grapard 1984, 242). Buddhism was rejected as alien, and the associations between Shinto and Buddhism were now considered a "defilement" of Shinto (Thelle 1987, 21). According to Martin Collcutt, "It was, in effect, a mortal blow at what had become the prevalent syncretic expression of Japanese religion" (Collcutt 1986, 152). Furthermore, one can see the changes in people's attitudes toward religion in the confiscation of temple bells and bronze objects to be used for cannons; that is, practical concerns prevailed. Other such measures included the government's total ban on the Buddhist ceremonies which had been intricately connected to the syncretic religious services of Shinto shrines (Ienaga 1965a, 9). In particular, they rejected Buddhist funeral services and created Shinto funerals (Kitagawa 1990, 201). The Meiji ideologues believed that those who controlled death controlled life (Ketelaar 1990, 45).

The government attempted to weaken the economic power of Buddhist institutions through the abolition of the old networks of lay sponsors (*danka*) (Collcutt 1986, 152). In addition, the government carried out temple closings or amalgamations, shrine relocations, and tax reassessments (Ketelaar 1990, 69). However, the most decisive blow to Buddhism came with the confiscation of temple estates (Collcutt 1986, 152). This order resulted in the elimination of most of the temple's external incomes. The government accomplished the nationaliza-

tion of all temple and shrine estates in 1871 (Ketelaar 1990, 69). Although the confiscation order was devastating to all Buddhist sects, the Shingon sects suffered the most because of their heavy reliance on the temple estates. On the other hand, the Shin sects, especially Honganji, were less affected due to their lay-oriented organization (Murakami 1980, 26). The Meiji government, furthermore, initiated compulsory shrine registration (*ujiko-shirabe*) instead of registration in temples (Ketelaar 1990, 69). As a result, Buddhist temples lost their right to control land as well as people (Murakami 1980, 26).

2. Haibutsu Kishaku

2.1 Haibutsu Kishaku and its Outcome

After the order for the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, a total persecution of Buddhism known as "*haibutsu kishaku*" was launched throughout the country. Meanwhile, the movement accelerated through the spread of rumors about the government's intention to exterminate Buddhism. The Shinto priests, who had been forcibly subordinated in Shinto-Buddhist monasteries, unleashed their pent-up fury and initiated persecutions of Buddhism (Hardacre 1989a, 28; Murakami 1980, 24). In fact, there had been a long-term intellectual and emotional hostility between Shinto and Buddhism. Such elements contributed to the swift spread of this violence (Kishimoto 1956, 114).

One can see the nature of this violence in the following examples. In the domains (*han*) of Satsuma, present-day Kagoshima and Oki province, which consisted of four islands in the Sea of Japan and is now a part of Shimane Prefec-

ture, the most severe persecution occurred. In 1869, the Satsuma domain not only ordered 1,066 temples to be abolished, but also obliged 2,964 priests to return to lay life. In addition, all subjects were ordered to become Shintoists. The domain officials, moreover, destroyed Buddhist images, sutras, and accessories (Thelle 1987, 22-24). The Satsuma domain adopted Shinto ceremonies and restructured the local festival calendar (Ketelaar 1990, 61). By the end of 1869, Buddhism in Satsuma had almost disappeared. Similarly, Buddhism in Oki had become totally extinct. In the Mito domain, which implemented the earliest and most thorough anti-Buddhist policies (Murakami 1980, 21), strong waves of anti-Buddhist violence took place (Thelle 1987, 22-24). In some domains, people led by the Shinto priests even destroyed the roadside stone statues of Jizo and Kannon. These domains also forbade the celebration of the traditional Buddhist Bon festival (Murakami 1980, 25-26).

In fact, the domains where Buddhist persecution was most ruthless had been led by followers of Hirata Atsutane, who had already adopted anti-Buddhist policies during the Tokugawa period and had a considerable impact on samurai who supported the *Sonno Jōi* (Revere the Emperor and Expel the Barbarians) movement, which was centered in Satsuma. Reflecting this, Satsuma ideologues were successful in building a Shinto education and shrine system throughout the domain (Ketelaar 1990, 65). However, Shibata Doken provides different perspectives on this issue than most other scholars. According to Shibata, the persecution of Buddhism during the Tokugawa period was not merely a religious policy which was influ-

enced by the Hirata school, but rather a timely economic policy which aimed at stabilization of the people's livelihood in the above-mentioned domain (Shibata 1978, 75-78).

As I noted earlier, the violence accompanying *haibutsu kishaku*, which reached a peak in 1871, clearly indicated an explosion of extreme anger by the masses toward Buddhism as the essential link of authority in the old feudal hierarchical order. The lowest officials in the new government—those who had been most oppressed under the previous regime—assumed leadership roles in this Buddhist persecution (Murakami 1980, 25-26). This fact is also supported by Shigeyoshi Murakami, who writes: "This spectacle of ruined temples was an event that clearly indicated in the eyes of the people the collapse of the feudal government and the restoration of the imperial court" (Murakami 1980, 25). For the people, this action denoted the process of purification through the destruction of the past.

In addition to these reasons, the relationship between influential Western ideas and *haibutsu kishaku* was another important factor—though under-recognized by most scholars—that contributed to how the persecution of Buddhism was executed. According to Tsuji Zennosuke, in the early Meiji period, with the encouragement of the government, people made frantic efforts to adopt Western concepts, practices, and productions in order to become "civilized." The adoption of the utilitarian aspects of Western civilization led to criticism of the traditional way of life and values. Under these circumstances, people could easily destroy Buddhist arts and architectures regardless of their cultural value (Tsuji 1984, 317).

As a result of the *haibutsu kishaku*, by the fifth year of Meiji, over 40,000 temples had been victimized. This process was accompanied by the forced laicization of thousands of priests, and the destruction of countless temple artifacts (Ketelaar 1990, 7). Japanese Buddhism had never before experienced in its history such intense persecution (Ienaga 1965a, 9).

2.2 The Meiji State's Response to Haibutsu Kishaku

The central government's responses to the *haibutsu kishaku* were aroused not so much out of concern over the destruction, but out of a deep fear of provoking the masses' anger. Although the government denied that the elimination of Buddhism was politically motivated, and even publicly condemned acts of destruction, they made very little effort to contain the violence or punish the perpetrators (Collcult 1986, 131). The government only stated that the Shintoists were solely responsible (Ketelaar 1990, 12). However, there were some considerations behind the government's responses. The government could not help being sensitive to intervention in affairs of the domains since the political situation in the late 1860s and early 1870s was still extremely fluid. They had to respect local authorities because each domain still maintained considerable autonomy (Collcult 1986, 131). Therefore, the state authorities did not act as quickly as expected.

The government, however, began to take direct action as soon as they recognized the dangerous elements in peasant population. The central government was, in fact, afraid that the *haibutsu kishaku* would generate peasant rebellions. In spite of being denied their political

status, priests, especially Shin and Nichiren priests, still maintained extensive local networks of true believers. The government feared that these priests would organize a grass-roots opposition movement. Accordingly, the government's direct intervention in anti-Buddhist policies was implemented by local authorities and took place only when a violent protest in Toyama in late 1870, an uprising in Mikawa (present-day Shizuoka) and Ise in 1871, and several other places in 1872 and 1873 broke out against *haibutsu kishaku* (Ketelaar 1990, 7). In short, for the government, anti-Buddhist actions were acceptable insofar as they did not impede state interests.

2.3 Buddhist Response to Haibutsu Kishaku

As I stated earlier, in response to *haibutsu kishaku*, people resisted violently in a number of cases. The most outstanding rebellion was the case of Mikawa, Ohama. Immediately after the government's dispatch of a new official to carry out the enforcement of its religious policies, the uprising at Mikawa took place. Since Mikawa traditionally had a large number of the faithful in the Shin sect, Shin priests attempted to resist these oppressive new policies through the formation of a coalition. Their resistance erupted in violence and some members of the movement killed a number of the clan officials with bamboo spears (Kishimoto 1956, 122-23). However, there are some differences in scholarly interpretations of the Mikawa Incident.

According to Kishimoto Hideo, in order to combat the religious policies, Buddhists and their supporters spread the rumor that the official policies targeted Christianity, not

Buddhism. As a result, many people joined in this protest movement against the official religious policies (Kishimoto 1956, 122-123). Tsuji Zennosuke and Shibata Doken, on the other hand, state that people in Mikawa believed that an official of the domain, Hattori, was a Christian; therefore, he wanted to suppress Buddhism to spread Christianity. Since Hattori took decisive measures to reform the domain, he incurred anger of the masses at that time (Tsuji 1984, 295-297; Shibata 1978, 180-182).

Tamamuro Taijo has a different opinion from the above-mentioned scholars. He tries to explain government policies in favor of the Shinto activists who executed religious policies. Tamamuro justifies the activities of Hattori, who was very much influenced by Nativism. Except for a few incidents involving direct resistance of *haibutsu kishaku*, faced with the anger of the masses, Buddhist sects in most places maintained a powerless silence (Murakami 1980, 26).

2.4 Anti-Buddhist Thought and its Roots

The criticism of Buddhism began in the Tokugawa period. Confucian thinkers such as Hayashi Razan (1583-1657), Ogyu Sorai (1660-1728), Kumazawa Banzai (1583-1657), and Yamagata Banto (1748-1825) leveled harsh attacks against the ethics, politics, and economics of Buddhism (Davis 1992, 160). They strongly criticized its socially useless elements and its inability to provide an adequate base for effective action. Hayashi and Ogyu denounced priests as *yumin*, idle people, who lived a parasitic life (Ketelaar 1990, 19). Kumazawa Banzai also contended that "They are an extravagant drain on the national treasury" (Thelle 1987, 20). The nationalistic Mito school, which gradu-

ally developed anti-Tokugawa thought, was particularly harsh in its denunciations of the financial drain caused by Buddhism (Kishimoto 1956, 15).

However, as I mentioned above, the strongest anti-Buddhism force came from the school of National Learning at the end of the Tokugawa period. They attacked Buddhism as a main agent of the distortion of Japan's authentic way of life. In particular, Hirata Atsutane severely attacked Buddhism as a "foreign" religion which led to the contamination of pure Japanese culture. Its teachings impaired the unity of the nation and thus were not compatible with the policy of the Imperial Nation (Davis 1992, 160; Ketelaar 1990, 132). Hirata had many followers among Shinto priests. They became the main force of anti-Buddhism in the domains as well as in the new government. Moreover, in the early Meiji period Inoue Tesujiro (1855-1944), an influential philosopher who opposed Christianity as incompatible with Japanese culture, also denounced Buddhism's spirit as resigned and passive (Davis 1992, 160). Thus, Buddhism was an obstacle to the nation's entering "civilization." Such criticism culminated in an outburst of Buddhist persecution.

Even during the Tokugawa period, the persecution of Buddhism had begun in domains such as Mito, Satsuma, Tsuwano, and Choshu, present day Yamaguchi. These domains were under the influence of either the Mito school or the Hirata school. Their anti-Buddhist policies provided the government with precedent for its religious policy as well as a basic pattern for anti-Buddhist action (Ketelaar 1990, 61).

2.5 Haibutsu Kishaku and its Justification

Although the persecution of Buddhism, which had its roots in the Tokugawa period, had been justified in various ways, these arguments were ideological rather than actual justifications. As previously stated, Buddhism had been closely associated with the Tokugawa system of social control (Davis 1992, 160). People viewed Buddhism as a protégé of the Tokugawa feudal regime; therefore, anti-Bakufu rhetoric could easily be linked with anti-Buddhist action (Collcult 1986, 130).

Scholars such as Tsuji Zennosuke justified the persecution of Buddhism on the grounds of Buddhism's decadent character. Its inner corruption was characterized by the prevalence of womanizers and drunkards, and the practice of money lending for profit and title selling (Ketelaar 1990, 11-12). Tsuji states that Buddhism's privileged social position invited spiritual and moral decay, resulting in indolence and degeneration among the priests (Thelle 1986, 19; Ienaga 1965a, 4-5). Echoing the critique of Inoue Tetsuji, many scholars, therefore, argue that Buddhism could not comply with the needs of the age of "modernization" (Ketelaar 1990, 10). However, one cannot place the blame solely on Buddhism. According to Ienaga Saburo:

The policy of the Shogunate which banned the discussion and advocacy of new ideas in all things, made it possible for the priests, already living in idleness and bound by tradition, to slip into a state of stagnation. Not only was the development of new thought and new faith inhibited,

even the enthusiastic, though ritualistic, religious faith of the past was (Ienaga, 1965a, 5).

Except for "decadence" there were not enough reasons to justify the persecution, which was conceived to aim at the betterment of the nation and "Buddhism." As a matter of fact, for restorationist bureaucrats, Buddhism was portrayed as decadent and inherently evil as a necessary precondition for the establishment of Shinto as the state religion (Ketelaar 1990, 10-12).

3. The Meiji State's Anti-Buddhist Policy and Japan's Modernization

3.1 Main Reasons for Government's Anti-Buddhist Stance

There are several reasons why the Meiji state took an anti-Buddhism stance. First, the Meiji leaders intended to establish a new nation based on the authority of the emperor. The political ideal of the Meiji Restoration was the "Revival of Imperial Rule" (Kishimoto 1956, 112). This process necessitated minimizing the power of Buddhism and promoting Shinto as the state religion. In Shinto the emperor was regarded as a descendant of Amaterasu Omikami, sun goddess and divine founder of Japan. In such a scheme, the emperor was considered to be a living *kami*. On the basis of this belief, people were forced to worship the *tenno* as *kami*.

However, most scholars have overlooked this very change in religious consciousness of Japanese people which arose due to the government's religious policy. Prior to this change the Japanese worshipped their ancestors as *kami*. In this way, Shinto posited the emperor's relig-

ious authority in order to establish his political authority (Murakami 1980, 20). Thus, while trying to eliminate Buddhist influence from Shinto as well as from society through the *shinbutsu bunri*, the government strove to invent Shinto tradition to establish its own legitimacy (Hardacre 1989a, 3).

In fact, Shinto had had neither an autonomous existence nor a clear doctrine before the Meiji period. Shinto had been rather a mere attachment to Buddhist institutions or tutelary deities in the cult of a local community. Shinto's relations with the state before 1868 were vague and limited. Shinto's claim that it was Japan's "indigenous religion" was totally false. In fact, the state and Shinto priests tried to rewrite the past in order to support such a claim (1989b Hardacre, 4-5). Through this effort, the Meiji leaders attempted to gain legitimacy for the new Meiji government. Unlike Hardacre, Japanese scholars such as Tamamuro Taijo and Tsuji Zennosuke, who have written a great deal on the issue of the *haibutsu kishaku*, have ignored or denied that Shinto was an invented tradition. Neither Tamamuro nor Tsuji discuss a linkage between the *tennosei* and Shinto.

Secondly, the new government tried to unify the people under the emperor in order to pursue Japan's modernization. At first, the government strove to construct a cultural identity for the Japanese. Before the Meiji period, people made sense of their own identity not in terms of the state, but in terms of their local community. Beyond its religious component, Shinto represented the essence of cultural identity for the Japanese; it was an "irreducible" element of Japaneseness. Through the idea of a homogeneous population, the state tried to cre-

ate the unity of the people as a "single spiritual essence" which was symbolized by *tenno* (Hardacre 1989b, 5).

Scholars such as Shibata Doken and Murakami Shigeyoshi note that Buddhism was regarded as "other"; therefore, it became an object of persecution. However, in contrast to Hardacre, they do not mention that Shinto could be a component of Japan's cultural identity. Moreover, in contrast to Buddhism, Shinto possessed nationalistic elements which, enhanced by much of Nativist scholarship, contributed to the development of unity among the people. In this process, the government created a new form of rites and symbols that constituted Shinto and signified its particular and nationalistic meanings. In this period, the government created its first national ceremonial calendar, flag, and national anthem (1989b Hardacre, 4). At the same time, the government tried to foster loyalty to the nation as embodied by the emperor. The new Meiji government promoted the virtues of loyalty and filial piety as the twin pillars of national morality. In this context, the people owed loyalty to the emperor (Gluck, 1985, 111).

At the beginning of the Meiji period, political and social conflicts such as peasant uprisings still prevailed throughout the country (Gordon 2003, 87). Also, because of the perceived threat of Western imperial powers, the Japanese leaders were convinced that Japan had to strengthen and enrich the nation (*fukoku kyohei*) for its defense (Gordon 2003, 70-73). For the purpose of achieving the national goal of *fukoku kyohei*, unification of the people was indispensable. *Tennosei* ideology served to mobilize people with selfless devotion to pursue pub-

lic interests. It was essential for the state to eliminate real opposition by depoliticizing the masses. By moralizing and mystifying the nature of the state, politics was depoliticized. People were socialized to obey and to sacrifice for the collectivity, which was symbolized by the *tenno* (Gluck, 1985).

Third, the government executed anti-Buddhism policies because Buddhism could no longer serve as a counter-measure to the Christian threat. As soon as the order of *shinbutsu bunri* was issued in 1868, the government banned Christianity (the ban remained in effect until 1873) (Hane 1986, 108). The oppression of Christianity intensified (Thelle 1987, 2). The persecution of Christian followers in the village of Urakami, Nagasaki, is one such example. Since “Christianity preached God as a spiritual authority above any earthly lord,” Christian theology was contrary to the notion of the emperor as divinity. In spite of its severe persecution under the Tokugawa regime, Christianity gradually penetrated into the Japanese population. Christianity, therefore, became constituted as a threat to the state in many respects (Ienaga 1965a, 13).

The Meiji leaders perceived that the infiltration of Christian influence was inevitable under the modernization policy (Yasumaru 1979, 4). Since Christianity was the religion of the advanced Western nations, the Meiji leaders considered it a promoter of “civilization and enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika*) (Ienaga, 1965a, 12). On the other hand, Christian missions whose tasks were to “civilize” people in non-Western countries through propagating Christian faith always served the interests of colonialism and expansionism (Miyoshi 1991,

93). Miyoshi Masao’s argument is very important, since most scholars of Japanese Buddhism lack such a viewpoint. In particular, Thelle’s book, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan*, does not point out the deleterious aspects of Christianity. In order to cope with Christian influence, the government considered that the unity of people was essential and Shinto was suitable for this purpose (Yasumaru 1979, 4).

Another factor which contributed to the promotion of the government’s anti-Buddhism policies was that Buddhism was no longer effective as a means of social control. Buddhism was an ideology of feudal authority and the temples played a major role in controlling the people. During the Tokugawa period, people were forced to belong to Buddhist temples in order to enforce the prohibition of Christianity. Buddhism, in its original form, was neither closely linked with political power nor the support of hierarchy. On the contrary, Buddhism strongly advocated the equality of all men. It goes without saying that some Buddhists, such as Gyoki and Shinran, maintained the Buddhist tradition of an anti-authoritarian faith and tried to help the underprivileged masses (Ienaga 1965a, 4).

Once Buddhism became an oppressive tool in the lives of the masses, people who lived wretched lives no longer perceived Buddhism as a means of salvation. Instead, they started to look for something else. The *eijanaika* (“does it matter?”) riots, which spread nationwide between the end of the Tokugawa period and the beginning of the Meiji, were an example of this phenomenon. The *eijanaika* activity developed into a belief in a kind of religious-political expectation. The followers of this movement

believed that the sacred power of Amaterasu Omikami in Ise Shrine would bring on a change into the world (Murakami 1980, 19). They found salvation in *kami*. However, this *kami* never meant *tenno* (Yasumaru 1979, 8).

One of the reasons that the government harshly persecuted Buddhism was that a large number of people who subscribed to anti-Buddhism thought participated in the new government. In particular, the proponents of Restoration Shinto of the Hirata school, who established the Shinto Office, played a dominant role in planning and executing the religious policy (Murakami 1980, 21-22). Kamei Korekiyo and Fukuba Bisei of Tsuwano were the ones most responsible for drafting the Separation Edict (Ketelaar 1990, 8). Furthermore, the leaders in the new government, who were mainly from Satsuma and Choshu, had known *shinbutsu bunri* in their domains. As a result, they devoted themselves to promoting Shinto beliefs that would contribute to a strengthened imperial ideology. They had no sympathy for Buddhism (Collcut 1986, 130-31).

Finally, the aspects of Buddhist doctrine that were unsuitable for Japan's modernization were responsible for its persecution. According to Ketelaar, "The national policy which quested for a "wealthy nation and a strong army" (*fukoku kyohei*) had "profound implications for the very possibility of certain forms of thought and action" (Ketelaar 1990, x). When Japan began to modernize, most Asian and African nations had been completely divided up among the Western imperial powers (Ienaga 1978b, 4). There is no doubt that Japanese leaders who were subject to the influence of Social Darwinist ideology keenly felt that new ideas were neces-

sary if Japan was to survive in the modern international arena. In addition, "Civilization and Enlightenment" meant the adoption of the utilitarian, rational, and scientific aspects of Western culture. In this context, as I have explained, Buddhism, which emphasized resignation, passivity, and pacifism (Davis 1992, 160), was not compatible with Japan's modernization and the development of a capitalist economy.

3.2 Buddhism's Changes in Order to Cope with Contemporary Conditions

In order to survive, Buddhism made special efforts to recover its influence by conforming to the state. As a result of *haibutsu kishaku*, Buddhism suffered deep and far-reaching setbacks. Its priests were led to humble reflection on the Buddhism of the past, and those who were strong in faith committed themselves to revive Buddhism (Kishimoto 1956, 121). However, most Buddhist leaders strove to gain support through ingratiating themselves with the new authorities and the ruling class (Ienaga, 1965a, 11). To begin with, Buddhism launched massive anti-Christianity agitation since the government had banned Catholicism for many years as an "evil faith" (*jashumon*). Although it is an obvious fact, very few scholars have pointed out that Buddhism was not aware that by attacking Christianity, it was ultimately denying the principle of religious freedom (Komuro 1987, 5).

In the meanwhile, Buddhist apologists took a conciliatory position towards Confucianism, Shinto, and other popular movements, despite rejecting their ideas (Thelle 1987, 24). The Hongan-ji promoted the idea of "the inseparability of the Kingly Law and the Buddhist Law"

during the summer of 1868. As a way of asserting the unity of Buddhism and the imperial system, Hongan-ji sent donations to the Imperial House when the new government got into financial trouble. Moreover, Hongan-ji temples actively participated in Hokkaido colonization, which aimed at protecting the homeland from European and Christian expansion. Through making such efforts, Hongan-ji attempted to prove the worth of Buddhism to the state (Ketelaar 1990, 71-73). Later, Buddhist leaders advocated the ancient theme of “Buddhism for the protection of the state” (*goho bukkyo*), and they were ultimately reduced to apologists for imperialism and war (Hardacre, 1989a, 216). All these efforts made by Buddhism were aimed at justifying itself as a religion compatible with modern Japan.

Conclusion

The Meiji government took decisive measures against Buddhism as if they meant to eliminate it totally. *Haibutsu Kishaku* exemplified a policy whereby religion without state authority was prohibited. Through the total control of religion, the state attempted to intervene in and control the daily lives and the consciousness of the people. At the same time, state authorities attempted to change the pre-modern religious consciousness that permeated the social system and popular consciousness. However, Buddhism had deeply penetrated into the people. In the *eijanaika* activity, which was a reaction to oppression and anxiety, people found salvation in the “*kam*” of Ise Shrine. The suppression of Buddhism, nevertheless, did not emerge from an earnest desire of the masses. Rather the state authority initiated the persecution of

Buddhism for its own political purposes. The government’s thoroughgoing suppression demonstrated how firmly Buddhism was entrenched in the Japanese mind.

The Meiji Restoration in 1868 was the start of Japan’s modernization, the race to catch up with West. The Restoration government attempted to achieve two contradictory goals. While trying to modernize the country, the state simultaneously established a political regime that rested on a notion of a return to the ancient order. Since the modern Japanese state was based on the principle of imperial absolutism, it was essential to the Meiji leadership that a notion of loyalty to the emperor would develop among the people. For this purpose, National Learning and Confucianism-not Buddhism or Christianity-were convenient ideas. The *tennoso* ideology was needed to protect Japan from the Western influence which accompanied modernization. In addition, this ideology was necessary to secure support for Japan’s modernization by means of the development of a national consciousness. Meanwhile, in order to achieve Japan’s modernization in a competitive world, the state encouraged the people to adopt new ideas and attitudes. In this sense, Buddhism was an obstacle to this purpose.

Moreover, the government’s anti-Buddhist policy brought other significant developments. The establishment of a notion that only the people who served a worldly authority and rendered distinguished services would be enshrined (i.e., in Yasukuni Shrine) as *kami* resulted in a transformation of the ideas about the death. In addition, the *shinbutsu bunri* policy led to the denial of a syncretic expression and practice which had a long tradition and impor-

tant impact upon the cultural history of Japan. Finally, under the existing conditions, every religion had to comply with the values promulgated by the new state. Consequently, the capitulation of most Buddhist sects to the nationalistic demands of the new regime demonstrated the extent to which all religion in Japan became a tool of the state.

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