3 Japanese and Other East-Asian Religious Traditions
Two Challenges

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3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify and discuss those factors that I deem relevant to address the theme of Japanese and other Asian religious traditions in the most comprehensive and nuanced way possi-

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ble, especially in order to avoid possible appropriation and accommodation to Euro-American modern cultural perspectives. These factors are discussed 'negatively' in the sense that I treat them as 'challenges' to be adequately reckoned with. I will identify these challenges by starting from topics previously discussed in ch. 2 to which I will add some further nuances and qualifications. Subsequently, for each challenge I will provide and discuss some relevant examples and case-studies from Japanese and other Asian religions. My aim is to highlight two needs: first, the necessity to be wary of the inadequacy of what I call 'Modern Euro-centric/ Christian-centric epistemologies'; secondly, a serious consideration of the historical-cultural entanglements brought about by the legacy of modernity and colonialism, also in a contemporary global perspective.

It must be added that these two challenges may also be conceived as different aspects of the same complex issue. In a nutshell, modern Christian-centric epistemologies not only represent a possible hindrance to a rounded understanding of extra-European religions in the present days, but especially in the case of East-Asian traditions, they have also historically influenced the way in which both colonizers and the colonized people understood and acted upon these religious traditions. In this way they engendered 'modern' variations and interpretations that reinforced, and still reinforce, modern Euro-American expectations, in particular those processes of marketization and *bricolage* typical of the contemporary globalized religious landscape. Similarly, as explained below, the various aspects concerning the inadequacy of the Euro-centric/Christian-centric epistemologies are mutually related as well.

3.2 First Challenge: Inadequacy of the Euro-Centric/ Christian-Centric Epistemologies

We have seen in ch. 2 how the modern concept of religion based on Christian, more specifically Protestant, self-understanding came to have a prototypical and normative character, which is still influential nowadays. In this understanding, religion is considered to be a universal phenomenon, and what we can find in all societies are just particular species of a common genus 'Religion', which are different and clearly distinguishable from other cultural phenomena such as 'science', 'politics' or 'economics' because they center on what is variously identified as the 'sacred', or the 'divine'. Through the 'sacred' the individual is expected to entertain a fundamentally private, inner relationship, concerned with 'transcendent' matters such as other-worldly salvation, knowledge or experience of 'the Truth'. Religions' doctrines, usually thought to be derived from an enlightened founder, explain and articulate this fundamental relationship. Therefore,

the most relevant modality of being religious is to know and hold belief in these doctrines, which are often organized as propositions explicitly expressing truth claims. Such pivotal doctrines are thus inscribed in a closed canon of 'sacred texts', expressed and transmitted through rituals managed by an organization. Despite this common structure, different religions are thought to be discrete entities with clear differences in terms of beliefs, texts, typology of their rituals, structure of their organization and, above all, the exclusive affiliation of their members. In this way they can be conceived as homogeneous actors. However, given the common focus on 'the Sacred' or 'the Truth', these actors share a common public space in which they dialogue or battle over the monopoly of 'the Sacred'. Therefore, any evidence of 'mixture' between religions is seen as a contamination of these competing truths and practices. This way of understanding religions replaced the old division between Christians, Jews, Mohammedans and heathens, with the paradigms of 'world religions', which may span from a core of five (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism) to roughly a dozen well-distinct religions, including e.g. Daoism, Shintō, Baha'i and Confucianism.

We can extrapolate four interrelated aspects of this prototypical understanding of religion which I find particularly problematic in respect to Japanese and Asian traditions. First, the aspect of discreteness, in the sense of exclusive affiliation by practitioners, of adherence to distinct doctrines and practices, and with the maintenance of a high degree of 'purity' and separation between religious traditions, and between the religious and not religious sphere. Secondly, the importance given to the cognitive aspects, i.e. the centrality of a coherent system of beliefs (and of texts in which they are inscribed). Beliefs are considered the core components of religions, both in the sense of being what give distinctiveness and peculiarity to each religion, but also of representing the key modality of being religions, i.e. 'to believe'. This emphasis on belief can be seen as a component of the third problematic aspect, namely the emphasis on the inner (psychological, intellectual, moral) world of the individual practitioner as the fundamental dimension in which the relationship with a transcendent 'sacred' takes place. This automatically implies the downplay of the social, ritual, bodily and pragmatic dimensions, and the often-related idea of an enchanted and magically manipulable phenomenal world. Fourthly, this emphasis on the inner dimension of the individual as the most authentic root of any religions has fostered certain cultural developments according to which this dimension of religiosity can paradoxically be extrapolated from the religions themselves, and even put in contrast with them, thus creating the rhetoric of 'spirituality *versus* religion'. We will now examine in detail each of these four aspects, contrasting them with various examples taken from Japanese and other Asian traditions.

3.2.1 Inadequacy of the Paradigm of Religious Traditions as Discrete, Separate Entities

We have already seen (§ 2.1.5) how religion came to be seen as a discrete sphere of human action. Concerning the cliché of religions as necessarily mutually exclusive, Ramey suggests that it can be explained on the base that "in European thought, it is not possible for two different, conflicting propositions to be equally correct" (Ramey 2017, 91), and this can be seen in various contexts, from the harsh debates over Christological nature in the early Church councils to the conflicts that arose in Europe in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. Shifting the scope of enquiry further back in time, this focus and emphasis on the intellectual distinction between 'true' and 'false' religion have been ascribed by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann to what he called the "Mosaic distinction" (Assmann 1996), i.e. the invention of exclusivist monotheism. According to Assmann, in the Old Testament we can find a tension between a previous polytheistic context and a subsequent monotheistic revolution. This latter can be labeled as such because it brought a noteworthy

> break with the past that rests on the distinction between truth and falsehood and generates, over the subsequent course of its reception, the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, Christians and pagans, Christians and Jews, Muslims and infidels, true believers and heretics. (Assaman 2009, 11)

While this has been criticized and deconstructed within the academic study of religion\s, everyday experience shows that the most common understanding of religion and religious affiliation in Euro-American contexts (and widespread also beyond it) is still framed in the terms of 'one person, one religion'. The extent of how much this cliché is disseminated, unnoticed and undiscussed can be gauged in seemingly unrelated contexts, such as demographic census or surveys, which usually ask to 'check one (and only one) religion', therefore contributing to the pervasiveness of the cliché (Ramey 2017, 83-7). This is further reinforced by modern national legal systems. As Schonthal (2016, esp. 372-4) explains, while modern state law is commonly understood, especially in Euro-American contexts, as being a stable and bounded social phenomenon, clearly separated from religion, it betrays "traces of its historical links with Christianity" (Schonthal 2016, 372). Modern state law, "like religion, has its own approach to reality, its own epistemology, hermeneutics, even its own aesthetics" (Schonthal 2016, 374), and ultimately has also its own implicit theologies, often reproducing general protestant features. Among such features there is the idea of discreteness among religions, in the sense of exclusive affiliation and maintenance of separation between other beliefs and practices.

3.2.1.1 Blurred Boundaries Between Traditions

Given this situation, it is not surprising that, when discussing epistemological problems in studying religion outside Euro-American contexts (especially Japan and China), scholars indicate the fact that "the exclusivist orientation and emphasis on institutional membership so prominent in the West lack cultural significance within Chinese society" is a major issue (Fan 2011, 105). Indeed, within the Chinese cultural context it is absolutely not uncommon for the individual religious practitioner not only to remain quite comfortable with the beliefs and rituals of others, but to identify himself/herself to a greater or lesser degree with all the so-called *san jiao*, the three teachings of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Furthermore, in his/her everyday religious life, s/he would articulate this identification within various aspects of what is generically referred to as 'Chinese folk religion', notably the cult of ancestors.

These observations seem even more relevant in the case of Japan, since, as we will see many times in this chapter, the blurring between traditions takes place in prominent ways, in close continuity with the institutional, ideological and philosophical background. For Japan, to talk about Buddhism, Shintō, Shugendō and Onmyōdō as *ab origine* separate and discrete traditions is misleading, and these terms "can no longer be used in a generic or supra-historical fashion" (Hayashi 2021, 199). An exemplary case of the difficulties in individuating well-defined borders between religious traditions is the question of Buddhism *vis-à-vis* Shintō, and the questions of different Buddhist schools *vis-à-vis* each other.

Let us start with Buddhism and Shintō. Before going into detail, I need first to qualify the use of this latter term: I use here the word Shintō as a shorthand to loosely identify all those practices and discourses, present in the Japanese archipelago before the arrival of Buddhism, concerning superhuman beings called *kami*. Eventually, through various historical circumstance, starting from the sixth century, such practices gradually developed into a systematic, self-conscious religious tradition self-identifying as Shintō. I will briefly explore the issue of Shintō history in relation to the critique of the paradigm of religion as system of beliefs in the next section (§ 3.2.2.3). What interest us now is to note how Buddhism and the *kami* worship developed an increasingly complex and intimate relationship which lasted till the nineteenth century (Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003a). In the first century after the arrival of Buddhism in Japan (mid-sixth century) Buddhist divinities were treated as foreign, and in a certain sense 'competitor' *kami*. Subsequent developments

(commonly found also in other Asian Buddhist countries)[1] interpreted local *kami* as wrathful beings in need of being quelled by Buddhist doctrine, or as deities whose role was to protect and propagate Buddhist teachings. For these reasons, from the seventh century onwards, Buddhist temples were built near *kami* shrines and vice versa, creating temple-shrine complexes (*jingūji*). Around the eleventh to twelfth centuries, *kami* began to be envisioned instead as local manifestations (Jp. *gongen*; Sk. *avatāra*) of buddhas, bodhisattvas or other deities of the Indian pantheon brought to Japan by Buddhism. The doctrinal ground for this operation was formed by the concepts of *honji suijaku* and *wakō dōjin*. The former is originally a Chinese interpretation of the influential *Lotus Sūtra* (Sk. *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*) by Tientai school founder Zhiyi (538-97), who distinguished within this scripture a provisional and fundamental teaching. In Japan, instead, this idea came to indicate the original ground (*honji*), the Buddhist deities, from their traces (*suijaku*), the manifestation as local *kami*. Buddhist deities were thought to act in this way out of compassion: they "dim the light and become like the dust" (*wakō dōjin*, a reference to ch. 4 of Daoist scripture *Daodejing*), i.e. they 'coarsen' their form into lesser *kami* in order to become more understandable. However, these connections between *kami* and Buddhist deities were not simple nor unilateral. In fact, they were all conceptualized within the framework of esoteric Buddhist discourse, which we need to touch on briefly.

As argued by Abé (1999), when the Shingon school founder, Kūkai, brought esoteric[2] Buddhist teaching or *mikkyō* to Japan, he did so not with the intention of merely creating a separate lineage or school (*shū*), as those were already present in Japan. Instead, he sought to introduce a "new religious discourse" (Abé 1999, 4) that would also subsume and harmonize the other teachings, classified as exoteric (*kengyō*). This new discourse, among other things, envisioned the whole universe, which is in itself the body of the supreme Buddha Dainichi (Sk. Mahāvairocana), as timelessly expounding his teaching not only through ordinary scriptures, but through the articulation and differentiation of any kind of linguistic or material phenomena (sinographs, sounds, ritual objects, natural elements, landscape,

1 Space prevents further treatment, but even in what is commonly considered the most 'orthodox' tradition of Buddhism, i.e. Theravāda Buddhism of South-East-Asia, Buddhist monks cope with and accommodate local spirits in various ways, such as the *phī* in Thailand or the *nat* in Burma. Often the strategy has been to incorporate these spirits as low-ranking superhuman beings within an overall Buddhist soteriological framework. Cf. Crosby 2013, 132-4; cf. also *infra*, § 3.2.3.4 for what concerns the relation of the first Buddhist communities with local spirits.

2 Esoteric Buddhism can be seen as a part of one the most widespread tradition of religious discourses and practices throughout all Asia, generally called by scholars 'Tantrism'. On this topic cf. more in detail *infra*, § 3.2.3.2

etc.), which were thus considered as meaningful signifiers (*ji*). The entire world is thus a text in a constant state of "semiogenic process" (Abé 1999, 282; cf. also 273-358) which requires however the right initiation (Jp. *kanjō*, Sk. *abhiṣeka*) and guidance to be read and actualized through the right ritual action. This kind of discourse was proven successful and was adopted by other Buddhist schools. Tendai school even developed its own and very influential kind of esotericism (cf. Dolce 2011). This situation created what has been termed, by the influential Japanese scholar Kuroda, the *kenmitsu* (exoteric-esoteric) system of Buddhist thought (cf. Dobbins 1996), which was dominant in medieval Japan (twelfth-seventeenth century). In a nutshell, all the various teachings, including 'non religious' ones, such as those concerning poetry or theatre (Klein 2006), were understood as the exoteric articulation of a hidden, esoteric truth, to be unveiled through a process of interpretation of various kinds of signifiers.

This framework also included ideas and practices related to the *kami*. The above-mentioned *honji suijaku* discourse

> employed all strategies of correlation and combination developed by exoteric-esoteric Buddhist hermeneutics. As a result, it construed macrosemiotic entities in which Japanese, Chinese, and Indian elements were clustered on the basis of similarities of the signifiers (linguistic and/or iconographic), and of the signifieds (functions, religious meanings, etc.). These similarities were identified by particular interpretations of myths, histories, doctrines, practices, and so forth. In this sense, a *honji suijaku* combinatory deity was often not just a dual entity (a buddha or bodhisattva and a kami), but a multiplicity in which different images of the sacred, ritual elements, myths, and narrative elements interacted in complex ways. (Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003a, 48)

As a brief example of Shintō-Buddhism combination, (cf. Teewen 2003; Teeuwen, Rambelli 2003a, 48-9), let us take the tutelary and ancestor *kami* of the imperial line, Amaterasu Ōmikami. She is worshipped at the Ise shrine, which is divided into an Inner and Outer shrine. These two shrines are linked by means of two important visual and intellectual devices of *mikkyō*: the *maṇḍala* of the womb and the *maṇḍala* of the diamond, which are meant to graphically reproduce the two fundamental *mikkyō sūtras*: *Dainichikyō* (Sk. *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*) and *Kongōchōkyō* (Sk. *Vajraśekhara Sūtra*). In this way Amaterasu is connected with the supreme esoteric buddha Dainichi. The numerological symbolism of two recalls, on the Buddhist side, the two main manifestation of Dainichi, i.e. the wisdom

kings (Jp. *myōō*, Sk. *vidyārāja*) Aizen and Fudō.[3] On the shintoist side, the number two recalls Izanami and Izanagi, the two primordial *kami* who created Japan by stirring the ocean with a halberd. The place where the halberd struck corresponds to the central pillars of Ise shrine, underneath which white snakes are supposed to live. Snakes bring a connection with the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, the mythical founder of *mikkyō*. The link is also etymological, as the *nāgā* are the well-known snake/dragon divinities that guard Buddhist teaching. As any *kami*, also Amaterasu has a wrathful side (*aramitama*), which conceptually links her to Buddhist deities in charge of punishments, such as Enma, the king/judge of Buddhist hell.

This picture, however, should not lead us to straightforwardly consider Buddhism as the 'container' and Shintō as the 'contained'. *Kenmitsu* hermeneutics also made use of other Chinese ideas, adding further layers of meaning. For example, the above cited dualisms were understood in terms of *yin-yang* correlative thinking and practices, and astronomical numerology linking the seven auxiliary shrines of Ise with the seven stars of the Big Dipper (Jp. Hokutō, 'northern dipper'), a divinized asterism in Daoism. Furthermore, we may speak of the combination between Shintō and Buddhism, but not of a total assimilation. In fact, medieval Japan developed the idea that not all *kami* are manifestations of buddhas or bodhisattvas, and that some deities lack a Buddhist correspondent. They were mainly considered malevolent entities and identified with local, primitive and wrathful *kami* (Teeuween, Rambelli 2003, 31-3). Similarly, there have been various discourses and practices that tried to isolate Buddhism from *kami* worship, such as the prohibition of monks and nuns to enter in the imperial palace during certain Shintō rituals, or the tabooing of the use of Buddhist terms at the Ise shrine (Teeuween, Rambelli 2003, 21-3).

Our treatment of the dominant *kenmitsu* discourse in Medieval Japan allows us not only to avoid a simple contraposition between Buddhism and Shintō, but also to see how, even within the large phenomena of Japanese Buddhism, the borders between various schools have not always been so distinct. However, until recent times there has been a largely unquestioned narrative concerning the development of Buddhism in Japan, and to some extent it is still current (cf. for example the introductory monograph on Japanese religions by Ellwood 2016, edited by Routledge). In the Nara period (710-94), six schools were established: Kusha, Sanron, Jōjitsu, Kegon, Hossō, and Ritsu. Being just preliminary, 'scholiastic' steps, these schools were then superseded by the two first 'indigenous' schools, Tendai and Shingon. However, even these latter, due to their excessive intricacies of rituals and doctrines, which appealed the aesthetic taste of imperi-

3 On Fudō cf. *infra*, § 3.2.2.

al courtesans, and due to the corruption engendered by this connection with power, were eventually replaced by the medieval schools of Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren. These became traditionally understood as the 'real' Japanese Buddhism, representing a sort of "oriental version of Protestantism" because they rejected the elitism of the previous esoteric practices and offered instead simplified means of salvation to the larger population (Raveri 2014, 452; cf. also Dobbins 1998). However, more recent research, drawing and developing from Kuroda's seminal theories,[4] greatly diverges from this narrative. Firstly, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Buddhist landscape was still dominated by the so-called eight orthodox schools (the six from Nara plus Tendai and Shingon). Moreover, they all shared the same esoteric theories and practices, which functioned as a sort of metalanguage which easily allowed exchanges between schools. Deal and Ruppert (2015, 142-70; cf. also Ruppert 2017, 333-9) illustrate the networking attitude among many medieval monks, who belonged to multiple lineages and studied in multiple temples, driven by a general culture of Buddhist learning that pushed practitioners to undergo multiple initiations and receive relative secret transmissions of doctrines and rituals. This was grounded by the general idea that each exoteric teaching had its own esoteric key to a common hidden truth. Furthermore, this networking *milieu* also included the so-called new schools of Zen, Pure Lands and Nichiren. If the initial rejection of the *kenmitsu* discourse by their 'founders' set them outside the mainstream, these schools gradually started to incorporate esoteric practices and doctrines. For example Zen monks, especially Sōtō, not only have been employing *darani*, formulae typical of esoteric Buddhism, but have even incorporated key *mikkyō* rituals such *goma* fire ritual[5] and the practices of esoteric initiations in the form of transmission of secret documents called *kirigami* (lit. 'cut paper'). Most importantly, they shared all those esoteric rituals specialized in warding off evil influences and in bestowing various types of blessing (Bodiford 2011).

Indeed, it was this strategy that helped medieval schools to slowly but steadily thrive and to become prominent after Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), and the following Tokugawa shogunate, exerted a new and total control on the Japanese Buddhist institutions that basically erased the previous *kenmitsu* system. As a result of the strict management of the shogunate, the various schools increasingly developed as separated 'denominations'. In order to be officially recognized, each temple had to be inserted into a bureaucratic system such

4 Cf. Kuroda (1996) and the other essays discussing its legacy in Dobbins (1996).

5 From Sk. *homa*. It is a ritual virtually common to any esoteric/tantric religious tradition. Cf. more *infra* in § 3.2.3.2 and fn. 27.

as the *jidan seido* ('temple-household system'), in which all citizens had to register as parishioners to only one temple, or the *honmatsu seido* ('head-branch system'), in which each temple had to be inserted into a fixed hierarchy within a well precise lineage. In order to fit into such systems, schools developed strictly mono-sectarian chronicles that blurred the fact that such sectarian consciousness developed only in the recent past (Abé 1999, 409-13; Deal, Ruppert 2015, 171-209). In turn, these sectarian histories formed the basis on which the first modern Japanese historians, from Meiji period (1868-1912) onwards, construed the history of Japanese Buddhist through the lenses of Euro-American understanding of religion (Abé 1999, 414-16; Klautau 2011, 82-5; cf. *infra*, § 3.3.1).[6]

6 These early modern developments (1603-1868) may make us think that a 'denominational' paradigm may have been at work also outside a modern Euro-American context. Indeed, we must also note that there are recent strands of scholarship which aim to curb oversimplified post-colonial narratives which, by using a 'Western' religious-secular divide, tend to present an 'East' unable to think about any possible way to separate 'religious' from 'non-religious' phenomena, or among 'religious' phenomena themselves. Instead, there are arguments for seeing in East-Asian pre-modern contexts those emic condition that led to what are called today 'diverse secularities' (cf. Kleine 2018 for the case of Japan). However, I do not think that this may affect my general argumentation. First, on a general level, that I am contrasting clichéd, stereotyped – albeit diffused – ways of conceptualizing religions with some examples of East-Asian religiosity, is far from arguing that there exists a certain kind of homogeneous 'modern Euro-American religiosity' antithetical to a likewise homogeneous 'pre-modern East-Asian religiosity'. On the contrary, I will argue that this contrast may fruitfully highlight unsuspected similarities (cf. *infra*, ch. 5). Concerning the issue at hand, i.e. Edo Buddhism sectarianization, while it is true that it may be similar to denominational division within Protestantism, we should note that it has been an extrinsic factor (a new political regime) that pushed Buddhist schools to concentrate on internal study and chronicle, while the *kenmitsu* system that facilitates the inter-school network had intrinsic factors (Shingon and Tendai esotericism). Furthermore, especially in the early Edo period, inter-school networks and mutual study was still taking place (cf. Mohor 1994; Deal, Ruppert 2015, 197). Again, even if *honmatsu seido* fostered a focus on 'sectarian' doctrinal scholarship and institutionalized the separation of practices between schools (Deal, Ruppert 2015, 184-5, 197) this does not entail that transectarian phenomena, especially at the level of less intellectual practices, was completely erased. One example is the distribution of talismans by certain Shingon itinerant priest, called *koya hijiri*, to temples which belonged to other schools, such as Tendai, Sōtō, Rinzai, and even to those school which were more 'sectarian', such as Jōdo shin or Hokke (Ambros, Williams 2001, 216-17). In summary, by pointing to the shortcomings of what I call 'denominational' epistemological paradigm I am not saying that sectarian consciousness did not exist at all in Japanese Buddhism nor that this consciousness had not been reinforced from the Edo period on, but that treating Buddhist schools as separated cultural and social worlds misses a great deal of the overall picture of Japanese Buddhism.

3.2.1.2 Blurring Between 'Religious' and Other Spheres of Society

The Japanese and Chinese cases show us that not only is it difficult to pinpoint a religious tradition through precise and exclusive borders, but, if we are to follow other Christian-centric parameters, we encounter difficulties in individuating precise morphological contours, especially if we look for elements such as conversion, institutional organization or the existence of an official priesthood or clergy. This is particularly true for that tradition that has always puzzled scholars and not only them: Confucianism.

The first interesting point is that, differently from Daoism and Buddhism, its status as 'religion' has always been hotly debated. Sun (2013, 17-96) individuates four main controversies. The first is the well-known Rites Controversy from 1579-1724, when it was debated whether Chinese Catholic converts were allowed to worship/venerate their ancestors and Confucius. The second controversy (1877-91), sparked by the missionary-sinologist James Legge (1815-1897), consisted of debates on whether 'the cult of Confucius' or 'Confucianism' (a term coined in those years) should be considered a religion. In the third controversy (1911-20), Chinese intellectuals such as Kang Youwei (1858-1927), considering Christianity as a major force behind Euro-American powers, argued for the establishment of 'Confucianity' (*kongjao*) as a state religion (*guojao*). Sun sets the last controversy between the years 2000 and 2004, when a debate initially limited to intellectual arguments over the religious nature of Confucianism reached a higher level, so that from 2004 onwards, the government started endorsing Confucianism by presiding the annual ceremony in Qufu on Confucius's birthday and by creating the network of the so-called 'Confucius Institutes' all over the world. The government has still not, however, recognized it among the other five official religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam).

Setting apart for the moment (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.1) the political/ideological factors in these debates, there are indeed some epistemological difficulties in looking at Confucianism with a Christian-modeled concept of religion. Due to the absence of a religious authority in charge of the acceptance of new members, or to administer official certificates for conversions, it is difficult to speak of membership in Confucianism (Sun 2013, 79-80, 124). Also, the settings in which it is practiced are somewhat 'unusual' (Adler 2014, 7-8); at the individual level there is the work of self-cultivation especially through study of the classics, and (for some, especially after the Song dynasty) meditation. In the family and clan, there is filial behavior and ancestor worship. At what could be taken as the community level, there are the private Confucian schools or academies – a setting especially fitting since Confucianism is the tradition of *ru* or literati. In these

academies, among other things, daily ritual observances, including prayers to Confucius and other sages and worthies were (and still are) carried on. Finally, through out the whole imperial period – but also recently, as we have just seen – we find a complex ritual apparatus at the state level honoring Confucius and other sages, which inscribe the role of the emperors and other governmental actors within a cosmic framework informed by Confucian ideas such as filial piety, sagehood, heavenly mandate, and so on. The critical point, as Adler (2014, 8) notes, is that these settings we have just named are what we (modern Euro-Americans) would call 'secular', or at least what we would not consider to be a 'separated' or 'special' sphere of social behavior. This is highly relevant also in connection to our previous discussion on the twin birth of the religious and the secular (cf. § 2.1.8).

Indeed, a major source of puzzlement is the close relationship between Confucianism and statecraft, and not surprisingly various contemporary scholars do not engage Confucianism as a religion, but as an ideology, a social and political ethos, a tradition of thought or a philosophy (cf. Sun 2013, 25-7). From the Han (206 BC-220 CE) till the Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, the central textual component of Confucianism kept informing the administrative structure of the empire through the system of imperial examination (*keju*), based on the Confucian canon. Similarly, if we shift to Japan, Confucianism was initially (seventh-eleventh centuries) limited to the construction of the state ideology and the formation of low-to-mid rank officials, and, especially in comparison to Buddhism, had limited influences on large social scale (Paramore 2016a, 16-31).

Another relevant issue is the 'plasticity' of Confucianism. On one side, "the Confucian conceptual framework was flexible enough that it was always possible to incorporate opponents' ideas and practices" (Knapp 2012, 147).[7] On the other side, it was co-opted by other traditions, especially by Chan Buddhists during the Song dynasty, who incorporated the dominant form of Confucianism at that time, established by Zhu Xi (1130-1200) in their training, along with other forms of Song elite culture and learning. It was in fact through the Chan/Zen mediation of the so-called Gozan temple network that Confucianism, in medieval Japan, started to become more broadly culturally integrated than it had been in ancient times, albeit not in a clearly systematized way. According to Paramore (2016a, 35-40), the influence of medieval Japanese Confucianism can be seen in the Buddhist funerary rites, whose mainstream form is based on Chan rituals, which in turn were inspired by Confucian ones. Confucian-

7 With this statement I do not intend to infer that influences and borrowings did not occur from and to Daoism and Buddhism. On the contrary, especially during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1636-1912) dynasties exchanges between the three teachings were common; cf. Meulenbeld 2012, 135-8.

ism also exerted an influence in the conceptualization of Shintō as a separate tradition (cf. *infra* 3.2.2.3).

However, it would be misleading to treat Confucianism as something 'lesser' in comparison to Daoism or Buddhism. As Adler notes, the very fact that these three traditions were equally treated as *jiao* means that Confucianism "must have been playing the same game" (Adler 2014, 5), and indeed, at least

> by the Song period, *ru* were clearly understood to be the literate followers of the Confucian-Mencian tradition, as opposed to followers of the Buddha, who were usually called *shi* […] and to Daoist adepts (*daoshi*). (Adler 2014, 3)

According to Sun, "Confucian rituals have been and will possibly remain the most salient component of this complex tradition" (Sun 2013, 7), and indeed a great deal of her study is focused on the revival of Confucian ritual practices in contemporary China, including initiatives aimed at establishing

> Confucianism in a full-blown form of religion, with rigorous religious doctrines and rituals, as well as an institutionalized clergy that has the possession of all Confucian temple properties. (xv; cf. also 77-96, 178-9)

Similarly, if we shift to early modern Japan, also the above cited 'embedded' medieval Confucianism eventually developed as an independent tradition on its own, characterized by various teachers, movements and practices, whose practitioners often explicitly self-identified as followers of Confucius, Mencius, Zhu Xi and others, especially in contrast to Buddhism (Paramore 2016a, 41-65).

Probably, an even more puzzling phenomenon than Confucianism is Japanese Onmyōdo (lit. 'the way of *yin-yang*'). Indeed, there are scholars who tend to deny it the status of religion (cf. Faure 2012a, 5). With Onmyōdo we refer to those practices, techniques, doctrines and more or less defined institutions which can be traced from the reign of emperor Tenmu (r. 673-686) down to some degree even to present days. What is interesting in our discussion is the difficulty in defining it. Is it a corpus of 'technical' knowledge and practices, and thus not engaged, transmitted, and perceived as somehow analogous from other established traditions? Otherwise, does it have 'religious' features? If so, do these have a distinct character from other Buddhist, *kami*-related, or even Chinese Daoist-traditions?

In its initial period, it is more appropriate to speak of Onmyōryō, the 'Bureau of *yin-yang*' established by the 701 Taihō Code in order to secure, manage and apply all those various knowledges, practices and techniques imported from mainland which were based on frame-

work of *yin-yang* principles, Five Agents and *qi* energy theories. They dealt with divination, geomancy, astronomy/astrology, calendar creation and time regulation, and were critical in forecasting auspicious and inauspicious times and directions, interpreting strange events, establishing the right construction sites and preventing harmful energies (*gaiki*) (Yamashita 2012). The fact that Buddhist monks, who also figure among the first importers (cf. Como 2015, 26), were prohibited to practice these techniques, underlines the critical role attributed to them (Masuo 2013, 23-5).

Towards the ninth century various natural disasters or unusual events spurred a widespread belief in *onryō* (vengeful ghosts) and in *mono* (spirits) causing or announcing catastrophes. In such context, the activities of Onmyōryō officials exceeded previous 'institutional' duties as they began to enact rituals in public ceremony, often together with Buddhists or *kami*-related specialists. They also began to respond to the increasing requests of individual nobles. Here we may see a shift towards Onmyōdō in a proper sense. Quelling rituals or life-prolonging rituals often invoked many Chinese deities, such as Tianguan, Diguan, Shuiguan (the 'Magistrates' of Heaven, Earth and Water), or Siming, the 'Director of Fate', an asterism-deity linked to the Big Dipper and believed to overseen humans' destinies and lifespan (Masuo 2013). Furthermore, many other deities, who initially were little more than hemerological indicators in calendars, gradually acquired a personality and become individual worshipped deities. This is the case of Dajangjung ('Great General', jp. Daishōgun). Originally, he was considered a malevolent entity said to descended down to earth at specific cardinal points. However, during the late Heian and Kamakura periods (eleventh-fourteenth centuries) he eventually became a popular deity, especially among samurai, and was the main object of worship in shrines and temples named after him (such as present-day Daishōgun Hachi Jinja in Kyōto). Faure (2012b) argues that *mikkyō* combinatory though was pivotal in construing his 'personality' as deity, by interpreting him as an emanation within a network of other more prominent deities, such as the Buddhist deity of the polar star Myōken Bosatsu. This allowed Daishōgun to retain both his 'technical' role in Onmyōdō calendars and to partake at the same time in the rich pantheon of Japanese super-empirical beings. Similarly, Onmyōdō motifs and themes permeated *mikkyō* discourses and practices (cf. also *infra*, § 3.2.2.3).

Other details and historical developments further underline this tension within Onmyōdō between its traits as a 'technical tradition' and as a 'religious tradition'.

First, notwithstanding the clear influx of Chinese and eminently Daoist traditions, the main practice of Onmyōdō remained divination, which does not seem to be a prominent element in Chinese Daoism (Miura 2015). This suggests that it should be considered an original

and creative Japanese re-elaboration. However, notwithstanding the establishment of the two family-lineages (Abe and Kamo) carried on the tradition throughout history, no special religious facility such as shrine or temple was ever built. Furthermore Yamashita (2012, 90) argues that Onmyōdō was lacking a view and a direct connection with the theme of the afterlife. *Onmyōji* ('*yin-yang* masters') did not deal directly, for example, with the individual *onryō* (a task left for Buddhists), but only detected their malicious influences. Indeed, Abe and Kamo *onmyoji* took Buddhist vows in their later years.

We can see at the onset of Edo Period a certain institutionalization of Onmyōdō,[8] with the appointment of the Tsuchimikado family (descendants of Abe family) by the Bakufu in order to manage, through licenses, the activity of all practitioners of Onmyōdō (Hayashi 2013). These included both the 'institutional' ones, i.e. involved in the 'mainstream' ritual and divination services for the imperial court and the shogunate, and those who practiced that kind of Onmyōdō which permeated Buddhist and *kami*-related discourses and practices. This latter case often results in disputes with other religious practitioners (Hayashi 2013, 162), which underlines how the social status of Onmyōdō as a 'separate' or 'competitor' tradition was contested even among practitioners. However, such a situation did not evolve towards Onmyōdō as a separate tradition. Quite the contrary, the Tsuchimikado family increasingly endeavored to involve all those who practiced some form of divination, irrespectively of their prominent religious affiliation. Moreover, with the establishment of the Tenmongata ('Office of astronomy') by the Bakufu and the production of standardized calendars for the general population, the deities, knowledge and practices of Onmyōdō, traditional prerogative of the imperial court, spread among commoners.

In 1870 all Onmyōdō practices or organizations were strictly banned by the Meiji government as they were considered to be 'superstitions' and part of the past Bakufu's ruling system. However, they did survive in folk religious practices still extant in the Shikoku Island, which scholars call *Izanagi-ryū* (Pang 2015). In the early twenty-first century Japan witnessed a 'revival' of these themes, especially through the semi-legendary figure of Abe no Seimei (921-1005), a Heian *onmyoji* who become a protagonist of novels, manga and the main topic of museum exhibitions (Hayashi, Hayek 2013, 8-9).

8 This one parallels the re-organization of the Buddhist lineages through the *honmatsu seido* and the appointment of the Yoshida family as the head of all *kami* affairs (cf. *infra*, § 3.2.2.3).

3.2.1.3 Multiple Affiliations and Different Modalities of Doing Religion

Chau (2011; 2019, 23-33) emphasizes the fact that in China it is epistemologically pointless to sort out which tradition this or that person belongs to, and he proposes instead to substitute the "conceptual fetishes" of Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism with a framework that focuses on the ways in which people *engage religion in practice*, instead of focusing on what they *belong to* or *believe in*. He in fact individuates five modalities of *doing religion*.

The pivotal point is that these modalities crosscut among religious traditions – which, as historical realities, nevertheless maintain a certain degree of internal coherence and self-consciousness, and provide contents to the said modalities. Moreover, while it is common to find people preferring one or two of the particular modalities, they have absolutely no exclusive character. The first modality is the *discursive* or *scriptural* one, based on the composition and use of religious texts. We can think about late imperial state officials, whose career was dedicated to the study of classic Confucian texts. Nonetheless, since they were trained in such modality, they would often be drawn to other intricate and highly symbolic texts, like the Buddhist *sūtra* or the Daoist scriptures. The second modality is the *liturgical* one, involving elaborate procedures conducted by priests, monks or other ritual specialists. This modality is especially apt to show the porous boundaries between traditions: a community may hire Daoist specialists for performing a *jiao*, a large-scale blessing ceremony to ensure a prosperous renewing of the life-cycle (cf. Andersen 2008). However, when it comes to funerary rites, the same persons who participated in this *jiao* will probably choose to have their deceased buried in accordance with Buddhist practices. As example of small-scale rituals, we can think of exorcisms, which may be offered by Daoist or Buddhists specialists, local spiritual mediums (*wu*) and even Confucian affiliates (cf. Sutton 2004). The third modality is the *personal-cultivational* one, involving a long-term interest in cultivating and transforming oneself. People interested in this modality usually have a lofty religious aim, such as obtaining long life as result of attunement with the Dao, to achieve *nirvāṇa* or a better reincarnation, or to gain the sagehood preached by Confucians, or even a combination of these three. To achieve such goals they may undergo self-cultivation practices, which range from more elitist forms such as Buddhist meditation, Daoist internal or outer alchemy, *qigong*, etc., to more popular and accessible forms such as *sūtra* and

mantra chanting, or keeping a merit/demerit ledger.[9] Other people, inclined to more practical matters, would nonetheless often resolve to *immediate-practical* modality, such as drawing divination lots for deciding whether or not to start a new business, or burning incense in front of a deity to ask for assistance in the same regard. Finally, most of the people take part in the *relational* modality of doing religion. One typical example is the veneration of one's clan's ancestors, when family members will bring offerings and burn incense in a hall dedicated to the ancestors. Family members who work far from the village return on these special days, which act also as family gatherings (Wai Lun 2011, 37-41).

This approach, I will argue, can likewise be fruitfully applied to the Japanese case. Concerning the crosscutting between traditions in the *discursive* or *scriptural* modality, a prominent example is the Shingon Buddhist school funder Kūkai (774-835), who shows mastery of Chinese Confucian and Daoist texts – albeit in order to criticize them – in his early work *Sangō shiiki* (Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings, 797 CE). Closer textual cross-fertilization examples come from medieval Japan, when theological developments in the Outer Shrine of Ise, which paved the way for the rise of Shintō as a self-conscious tradition, benefitted philosophically and ideologically from an incorporation of Daoist themes (Tewueen, Breen 2017, 83-97). Moreover, it seems that these Daoist sources were brought to Japan by Chinese Chan masters patronaged by the Kamakura shogunate. We have already seen how the monks of the Gozan network of Zen temples played a key role in disseminating various strands of the artistic and literary culture of Song China, among which texts of Neo-Confucianism figured prominently, and whose tenets, moreover, were often integrated into a Chan/Zen doctrinal framework (Paramore 2016a, 31-40, esp. 35). A final recent example is provided by an intellectual trend, at its apex from the 1980s to the early 1990s, whose actors have been labelled 'spiritual intellectuals' (Shimazono 2004, 275-92; Gebhardt 2012). These thinkers, coming from academic or journalistic background, address many Japanese religious traditions simultaneously, often in connection with other Asian regions such as India or Tibet. The overarching theme is a call for a rediscovery of traditional Japanese (and other Asian) religions, often in contraposition to a 'Western' and modern worldview which is to be overcome.

We have already seen how in pre-modern Japan it is almost useless to approach Shintō and Buddhism as two separate entities, espe-

9 One of a type of morality books that achieved sudden and widespread popularity in China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They consist of lists of good and bad deeds, each assigned a certain number of merit or demerit points. These ledgers offered the hope of divine reward to users that behaved 'good' enough to accumulate a substantial sum of merits.

cially for what concerns the *discursive* or *scriptural* and the *liturgical* modality. Nonetheless, there is evidence of people also engaging with additional religious practices outside the Shintō-Buddhism complex. Aristocrats from the Heian period (794-1185) performed an apotropaic ritual called *Shihō hai* ('salute to the four directions') at the start of the New Year which has clearly Daoist features, as attested by certain markers such as the formula "Quickly, quickly in accordance with the statutes!",[10] the instruction to face towards the direction of ascending *qi*, and the mention of the deities called Jade Women,[11] which in China were mostly identified with the stars of the Northern Dipper (Como 2015). Shifting to contemporary Japan, one would expect a separation in ritual practices between Shintō and Buddhism. However, there is a resurgence of rituals involving actors (human and superhuman) from both sides. In many cases, the institutions involved are those which, in pre-modern times, were closely connected through a combinatory framework, such as the Kasuga shrine and the Kōfukuji temple, or the Hiyoshi shrine and the Enryakuji temple in Kyōto. These rituals are important annual events in both Shintō and Buddhist liturgical calendars and feature pre-modern protocols such as recitation or debating of *sūtra*s by monks in the presence of *kami*. More interestingly, new combinatory rituals are also emerging, such as a pilgrimage linking together famous shrines and temples, organized by a Shintō-Buddhist association, or new rituals which symbolically create a bond between a temple and a shrine through a common element, e.g. the water (*mizu*) in the case of the Kiyo*mizu* temple and the Iwashi*mizu* Shrine, the first characterized by a waterfall, the other by a water well (Dolce 2021).

Concerning the *personal-cultivational* modality, a striking example is provided by the Zen monk Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769), a widely known religious personality of pre-modern Japan. He recounts in his *Yasekanna* (Idle Talk on a Night Boat) what is probably a fictious encounter with a hermit named Hakuyū, to whom he asks help to overcome his sickness caused by unrelenting zen practice. Not only is this hermit portrayed as being versed in both Daoist, Confucian and Buddhist traditions, but Hakuin even asserts that the Daoist-based meditation techniques he learnt from Hakuyū, apart from healing his sickness, actually helped him in achieving illumination (Waddel 2002). According to Conway (2015), we can infer that Buddhists monks engaged with Daoist practices from lengthy polemical excerpts in Shinran's (1173-1263) *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which discuss various Chinese sources in order to debunk meditative and astrological Daoist practices and assert how they are harmful to the Buddhist path. In contemporary times, Lobetti (2014) observes that the

10 Jp. *kyu kyu nyo ritsurei*; Ch. *ji ji ru luling*.

11 Jp. *gyokunyu*; Ch. *yunu*.

> characteristics of ascetic performance in Japan seems to be its transectarian nature, where ascetics acts or practices cannot be identified as a particular feature of one specific religious environment alone. (104)

Buddhist themes seem prevalent; however, participants have very different backgrounds (lay people, confraternities, religious specialists) and, while many acknowledge that there are specific doctrinal backgrounds and contexts (Tendai, Zen, Shintō, etc.), a doctrinal proficiency is deemed irrelevant to the success of ascetic performance. Indeed, many participate in various ascetic retreats organized by different religious institutions.

The *relational* modality is indeed one of the most conspicuous features of Japanese religiosity, and Japanese ritual culture in general. The contemporary range for the application of the term *matsuri* (often translated with 'communal celebration' but usually left untranslated), provides some hints in this regard. It may span, in fact, from Shintō-related communal ritual events, to Buddhist-related ritual events, to various celebrations of sporting, civic or commercial nature.[12] Scholarship has clearly described at length how the majority of Japanese people attend to such events independently from affiliation to any religious traditions, institutions or sets of beliefs.[13] 'Relations', just as we saw in the Chinese case, extend beyond the living and touch the realm of the ancestors. There are in fact many rites of passage marking important social stages of both life and death, from birth, marriage, death and the bestowing of the status of ancestors, in which different religious traditions and specialists are involved.[14] Concerning ancestors and the theme of relationality, Fujiwara (2019) argues that the relational dimension of Japanese religiosity, based on the system of *ie* ('household') and the worship of ancestors, has a remarkably pervading character. She sees various contemporary practices, emically defined both as 'religious' and 'non-religious', as rituals worshipping the concept of *tsunagari* ('relationships', 'belonging'). These rituals, she argues, can be seen as an updated version of a previous "religion as human relationships", of which the *ie* and the ancestor's worship were primary expressions. A change brought about by a shift toward the nuclear family system.

Finally, the *immediate-practical* modality, which also has struck many scholars as being a common theme among the various religious traditions in Japan, will be briefly discussed below in § 3.2.3.5.

12 Cf. s.vv. *nihon kokugo daijiten*; *daijisen*; *meikyō kokugo jiten*; Bocking (1997).

13 Reader 1991; Davis 1992; Swyngedouw 1993; Reader, Tanabe, 1998; Pye 2009; cf. also *infra* § 3.2.3.5.

14 Cf. Raveri 2006, 93-102, 178-83; Bulian 2018, 119-32, 144-63. Often, especially in case of marriage, Christianity is also involved (LeFebre 2015).

3.2.1.4 Conclusion

In this section we saw how Japanese and other East-Asian religions easily defy what we may call a 'denominational' epistemological paradigm, i.e. the expectation of easily finding well-defined socio-cultural phenomena characterized by exclusive affiliation, separation from non-religious systems, and mutual exclusion not only among religious traditions, but also among internal divisions. Borders between traditions and other spheres of human action are fuzzy, as in the case of Confucianism, Onmyōdō or Shintō. In the case of the latter, its relationship with Buddhism is more 'combinatory' than pertaining to a process of absorption or simple syncretism.[15] The same peculiar hermeneutical framework that permitted Shintō-Buddhist coexistence, moreover, also allowed a closer networking among different Buddhist schools, at least until early modernity. Both in the Chinese and the Japanese case, it has been showed how different traditions crosscut and coalescent in different modalities of practices.

In the modern Euro-American perspective, one of the criteria by which religions have been traditionally distinguished among each other was the mutual incompatibility of their set of beliefs. These were in fact understood as forming the essential, immutable core that characterizes any religious tradition. We now proceed to examine this paradigm in relation to the East-Asian context.

3.2.2 Inadequacy of the Paradigm of Religion as Systems of Beliefs

We have already seen in § 2.1.5 how, from the Renaissance onwards, religions were progressively understood especially as sets of belief. This characterization was indeed useful, on the internal side, to differentiate among the various confessions within Christianity. On the extra-European side, it heavily contributed to the construction of the system of 'taxonomic equivalence' (cf. § 2.1.8) to compare similar phenomena. This brought the category of belief to occupy a central place in the study of religion\s, which only recently has been put under critical scrutiny (Bivis 2016). In the prehistory of the study of religion\s, belief, in the sense of metaphysical assumptions and/or mental dispositions, was understood as the place of the real authentic religiosity, to the detriment of external expressions such as ritual. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the scope of the discipline enlarged, but nonetheless the concept of belief re-

15 For a discussion on the limits and possibility of the theoretical concept of syncretism, cf. Johnson 2016.

mained central, shifting from philosophical interrogations to sociological and psychological functionalist interpretations. According to these latter, beliefs are what is mainly enacted in a ritual, or what is reinforced by prayers and meditation. In general, it was considered the pivotal modality through which practitioners relate to superhuman dimension. Alternatively, as in Marxist perspective, it was seen also as a tool of legitimation (500-1).

Contemporary approaches in the field have grown increasingly skeptical and critical on the centrality of this concept (Vasquez 2011) and now beliefs are considered to be a part of a more complicated picture of lived religiosity, which involves a complex of both sensorial, intellectual, and emotional experiences. For Bivis (2016, 503), no longer the compass of the study of religion\s, beliefs can be understood

> as a mode by which religionists recognize and articulate their own identities and experiences, and as a conceptual habitus which facilitates the pursuit and understanding of particular practices and social location.

For Jensen (2014, 60-76) beliefs are still a viable category in terms of complex mental phenomena, that could be defined as "propositional attitude", in the sense of an attitude (that may be emotive, cognitive, volitional, and so on) toward a certain proposition (not necessarily involving superhuman dimension). More importantly, the limited conception of belief as private and/or as an epistemologically impermeable affair must be re-examined. Indeed, beliefs are also social facts, in that they are discussed, redefined, cultivated, etc. – in a word, *externalized* among people. Afterwards, they are *internalized* again through both cognitive and emotional channels, then further externalized, and so on.

Notwithstanding these recent academic developments, since religion is a category often unconsciously linked with interiority and the private sphere, the preeminence of beliefs is still culturally present, especially when it comes to demographic surveys, or to issues related to the legal and political recognition of religions. Often such recognition requires that beliefs are 'sincerely' or 'genuinely' held as key criteria, for example in the UK or US (cf. Agrama 2015, 304; Sherwood 2015, 36). Not to mentions, of course, that in the Euro-American context beliefs are still pivotal in the self-understanding of many religionists (Bivins 2016, 503). Therefore, it makes sense to speak about a widely current stereotype of religion as essentially a "system of beliefs" (McCloud 2017). In what follows, I would like to show how illusory it could be to look for 'typical' or 'coherent' traits of a religious tradition by focusing on its allegedly orthodoxy of beliefs persistent throughout time.

3.2.2.1 Resistance to the Application of the 'Belief' Category

If this stereotype shows its limitation even in the contemporary American context (McCloud 2017, 15-20), much more discrepancy is to be expected when it comes to the extra-Euro-American context. Let us start with an example concerning Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism, as it tangibly shows the obstacles that the Euro-American epistemology of religion actually encountered in looking for a logically and tidily systematized set of beliefs. Then we will argue that these observations would apply to many other cases, with Japan being the foremost example.

Lopez (1998) has aptly illustrated how the preconceived idea of 'religion=beliefs', when forcibly imported and applied as it is in Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism, clashed at first with the native cultural *milieu*. This is the case of Henry Steel Colcott (1832-1907), co-founder of the Teosophical Society,[16] when he came to Sri Lanka because it was considered the land in which the original teaching of the historical Buddha had been preserved. Being shocked by the "ignorance of the Sinhalese about Buddhism" (Prothero 1996, 100), he set out to produce a *Buddhist Catechism* (1881), which was articulated in 384 'articles of faith' in the form of questions and answers. Interestingly, initially he sought some Sri Lankan monks to lay down such articles of faith, but since he found no one willing to undertake such work, he ultimately endeavored to write the Catechism by himself.

Furthermore, reception and dissemination of this work proved very difficult: the Sri Lankan monk that initially attested the 'orthodoxy' of this work later withdraw his certification. Moreover, in order to prove the 'value' of his *Catechism*, and to gain trust for the Theosophical Society's activities in general, Olcott had no choice but to perform healing practices through his knowledge of mesmerism, attributing the healing magical properties, ironically, to his version of Buddha's teaching 'purified' by superstitions. Additionally, Olcott's disdain for those 'superstitious practices', which he considered a later corruption of Buddhism's fundamental principles, drew the wrath of local Buddhist leaders who were offended by his mocking of their practice of worshipping the tooth relic of the Buddha at Kandy (Lopez 1998, 29-32).

Eventually, the Teosophical Society's modernized version of Buddhism proved influential in Sri Lanka, but this was basically thanks to the involvement of the dawning native bourgeois elite represented by Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933). However, this latter was more interested in presenting Buddhism as a scientific philosophy than as a set of propositions of faith (Obeyesekera 1992, 6 ff.; cf. also *infra*, § 3.3.3).

16 Cf. more *infra* § 3.3.2.

3.2.2.2 Fluidity of Beliefs in China and Japan

Shifting to the Chinese context, Bell (2002) observes how a strict, regulatory idea of belief overshadows empirical variety and incoherence, and even self-perceived diversity. Bell takes the example of the widely accepted notion that "the Chinese believe in ancestral spirit" and argues that, if this is to be understood in the same way in which

> Christian colleagues believe in a central doctrine like the divinity of Jesus Christ, then the statement that the Chinese believe in ancestral spirits is, at best, a very vague generalization that ignores everything interesting. (110)

Indeed, as Nadeau (2012) explains, gods, ancestors and ghosts are actually interrelated concepts. Ancestors are not limited to familiar context and revered out of filial piety (*xiao*), but they may also be contacted by 'shamans' or 'spiritual mediums' (*wu* or *wushi*) hired by families for the purpose of curing an illness or resolving a dispute within the family. If ancestors are venerated dead, ghosts (*gui*) are unvenerated dead who, due to the lack of offerings, are 'hungry' and resentful. Dealing with this threat is one of the main duties of the ordained or religious specialist class, be they Buddhist, Daoist (even Confucian, cf. Sutton 2004), etc. This fact also makes us notice that such ghosts can be treated within a variety of different metaphysical frameworks and with different ritual practices.

Furthermore, 'spirit beliefs' may evolve and spread as well. Many gods (*shen*), especially in the so-called 'Chinese popular religion', are actually deified spirits of the dead. One of the most famous is the Goddess Mazu (cf. Bosco, Ho 1999). According to historical records, she was originally a female *wu* born in a coastal area of Fujan region during the Song period, and allegedly she was able to send spirits to save fishermen in distress. Upon her death at young age, instead of becoming a ghost due to the lack of descendants to provide ancestral cult, the local custom of invoking her powers for help in times of misfortune made her a tutelary god. Furthermore, the burgeoning mercantilism during the Song created a network that disseminated her worship (especially as protector of sailors), so that even nowadays she is known widely not only in the coastal regions of China, but also in Taiwan and in other sea-faring communities of Chinese diaspora, each one with their local practices and peculiarities.

Even in loftier literary and intellectual contexts it is difficult to find any 'orthodoxy' concerning spirit beliefs: if Confucius (551-479 BCE) is known for his reluctance to speculate about them, Mozi (c. 470-c. 391 BCE) argued that the 'unbelief' towards spirits is a cause of social ills, while Wang Chong (27-c. 97 BCE) explicitly denied their existence through an argumentation, the rational and critical stances

of which are quite appealing to modern standards (Bell 2002, 110-11; Nadeau 2012a, 380-93). Bell further reinforces her argument adding that "any village or urban neighborhood in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong also yields a wide spectrum of positions on spirits" (Bell 2002, 111), and that such differences are acknowledged without any particular problem, evidencing that positions on spirits are often a matter of individual choice and deliberation, instead of adherence to certain text or any explicit indication.[17]

'Spirits' are an elusive matter also for what concerns Japan. Rambelli (2019, 10) affirms that in Japan "ontology, agency, and representations of spirits and energies […] are very different, if not even in contradiction with each other". While it is safe to consider ancestor's worship a salient feature of Japanese religiosity, one should not overlook the changes due to historical, social and cultural shifting contexts. Satō (2019) shows that in medieval times the dead were believed to be rescued and transferred to an other-worldly Buddhist Pure Land, thanks to the intercession of powerful Buddhist super-empirical beings. The only 'spirits' to be concerned about were those left behind in this world, whom humans had to take care of because they were malicious presences, such as the above cited *onryō* (§ 3.2.2.2), whose ties with this world need to be severed by Buddhist specialists.

This changed by the early modern period, when the Buddhist metaphysics of powerful, other-worldly beings who took care of the dead had gradually weakened. The task of assuring a smooth and long transition from corpse to unharmful spirit was thus entrusted to humans. Important factors in this shift were also the introduction of Buddhist funerals within a framework of Neo-Confucian filial piety towards ancestors, the establishment of the already cited temple-parishioner

17 These observations do not imply that in China a certain kind of authority with the role of overseeing 'orthodoxy' has never existed. It has been, and still is, the state. In pre-modern times it has been so in the form of the empire, informed by Confucianism and its own worship system of the emperor as mediator between *Tian* (Heaven) and *Di* (Earth). Nowadays it oversees religions in the form of the PRC, informed by its peculiar interpretation of Marxism. However, unable to impose its own orthodoxy and to monitor 'violations of system of faith proposition', the empire system always sought convergence with established traditions, especially Buddhist and Daoist ones, by exchanging patronage for legitimation. Concerning popular practices, as the above cited Mazu worship, most of the time the state employed strategies of control, accommodation and cooptation, instead of censorship, granting honorary titles to these deities and inserting them in a celestial bureaucracy (such as the City Gods, cf. Gossaert 2015) to avoid potential subversive interpretation. From the fall of the Qing (1911) onwards, the influence of modernization and Marxism actually resulted in a stricter control of the five institutional religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism) and a harsher censorship of the popular practices now termed 'superstitions' (*mixin*). However, since the beginning of the reform period in 1978, a gradual resurgence of both ancestor worship and local cults has been observed, together with more accommodating tendencies of the local administrators. On these issues cf. Yu 2005; Laliberté 2011; Clart 2012, 232-4. Cf. also *infra*, § 3.3.1.

system *jidan-seido* (§ 3.2.1.1), and a stable system of land ownership which also allowed commoners to build enduring extended households, which were ideologically sustained by ancestor's worship.

Towards the end of the early modern period a further theological consolidation of the idea of an invisible world parallel to the visible world can be seen in the influential work by the *kokugakusha* Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843). He argued for the existence of the *kamigoto*, an invisible realm shared by both *kami* and the soul of the departed, in which the latter gain a *kami*-status so they can bring blessing to their offspring (Zhong 2016, 123-4). Hirata's ideas gained a wide audience, which was already acquainted with a world of invisible entities able to intervene directly in human affairs through the influence of Chinese Ming and Qing popular supernatural tales (Rambelli 2019a, 5). In the modern period, especially during the apex of the nationalistic regime, such ideas 'theologically' sustained the government's ideology by envisioning a common ancestorship linking all Japanese to a divine root embodied by the emperor and the *kami* Amaterasu, as well by enshrining the soul of the fallen in war as national protective *kami*, as in the case of the controversial Yasukuni Jinja (Breen, Teeuwen 2010, 241-5).

However, in present day this is still undergoing a change. There are instances of funeral practices such as scattering of ashes in natural settings, which means that the dead are no longer enduring entities, identified by a posthumous Buddhist name and to be collectively worshipped. Instead, they become more a matter of personal remembrance with less connection to traditional religions. This is clearly a consequence of a shift toward smaller nuclear families in urban settings (Satō 2019, 25-7).

Let us shift from the case of beliefs concerning a super-empirical being to the beliefs involved in a specific practice, taking as example the beliefs involved in the practice of the so-called *kōshin* night. We have already seen the presence of the Daoist deity Siming, the 'Director of Fate' in Japan. His role as religious object in Japan was important in that he was directly connected with the belief of the three 'corpses' (Ch. *shı*). In Chinese and Daoist contexts, these three malicious entities were said dwelling in the human body and monitor the misdeeds of their host. Every *gengshen* (Jp. *kōshin*) night, they would leave their host during his/her sleep and ascend to report to Siming, who would accordingly shorten the lifespan of that person. To avoid this, people would observe dietary restrictions in order to weaken these three entities, as well as many other means such as concoctions, meditations, and so on. Another widespread method was to hold night-long vigils to prevent the corpses from leaving the body (Kohn 2015, 148-54).

The interesting point for our discussion is the fact that the practices linked to *kōshin* night actually shifted doctrinal context through-

out history. There are proofs that in Medieval Japan a Daoist version of a *kōshin* ritual was existent, which explicitly named the three corpses (Kohn 2015, 154-5). However, this practice was readily absorbed by Buddhism, probably because, in order to constrain the three 'corpses', the power of a sort of protective deity was necessary. This role was taken by a Buddhist deity associated with healing rituals, Shōmen ('blu faced') Kongō (Sk. Vajrapāṇi).

Aristocrats (and later, warriors) usually enjoyed *kōshin* night as cheerful assemblies in which stories and poems were recited in order to pass the night, supposedly abstaining from misdeeds and bad language, and often in connection with Buddhist lectures. In monastic contexts too the practice was adopted, and vigils comprehended purifying rituals, vegetarian meals and worship of Shōmen Kongō. In time, the Daoist idea of three corpses gradually was eclipsed, leaving in its place a more general idea of healing disease and warding off misfortunes. However, some influxes still remain, such as avoiding sleep and certain aliments and maintaining a strict moral behavior during the *kōshin* night (Kohn 2015, 171-2). By the Edo period with the strengthening of *kami* worship, the *kōshin* cult spread among the general population and came to be associated also with the *kami* Sarutahiko, depicted as a wanderer who protected people from baleful influences, and whose name contains the word 'monkey' (Jp. *saru*), the Chinese zodiac animal associated with the *kōshin* day. Ethnographic data in present-day Japan shows that participants in *kōshin* vigils

> have no particular concern for the exact nature and iconography, or even the identity of the god but are more interested in performing health-supporting rituals and enhancing social coherence. (Kohn 2015, 166)

3.2.2.3 Fluidity of Beliefs in Japanese Main Traditions

It might be objected that what has been discussed this far in the Chinese and Japanese cases has regarded 'general' or 'periferal' topics such as spirits, ancestors or the *kōshin* night, and that we could expect more coherent belief statements from established religious tradition such as Buddhism or Shintō. Quite the contrary, the studies of Faure (2016a; 2016b) on Buddhist divinities in medieval Japan help to further prove the point of this section. On a first glance, the Japanese esoteric Buddhist pantheon envisions a hierarchical set of various typologies of 'gods': buddhas, bodhisattvas, 'wisdom kings' (Sk. *vidyārāja*, Jp. *myōō*), *deva* from Vedic pantheon (Jp. *ten*), astral deities, earthly deities, 'shining deities' (*myōjin*), 'temporary manifestation' (*gongen*), and *kami* (cf. chart in Faure 2016a, xii). However, as we have already seen above (§ 3.2.1.1), Japanese *mikkyō* is based

on a discourse whose logic is omni-embracing, absorbing all the other ideas, deities, concepts and practices by means of creative hermeneutical strategies. The point is that the same deities of esoteric Buddhism are not immune from this logic: instead of clear individualized entities, they should be seen more as "ever-changing nodes within a network constantly in flux" (Faure 2016a, 10). In fact, they are linked to each other through a "kind of free association, although not quite free" (28), triggered by various hermeneutical devices: semantic (e.g. the meaning of the name), symbolic (e.g. the meaning attributed to colors), thematic (e.g. the motif of the center), metonymical (e.g. snake linked to rain), numerological (e.g. seven stars of the Big Dipper linked to other groups of seven items) and many others (30-1). These links may entail strong ontological identity as well as mere affinities, such as temporary metamorphosis or functional resemblance, in the sense that, instead of identity, the relation between a certain deity and another one expresses their articulation, rather than their merging or confusion. These 'cross references' repeat themselves as if in a sort of loop, reinforcing patterns that lead to situations in which each deity can rise to a kind of henotheistic status in which s/he subsume all the other ones. In the 'explicit theology' of official religious texts this kind of association may maintain a certain systematicity, especially in binary combination – which suits the Buddhist concept of nonduality and the *yin-yang* logic (Faure 2016b, 10). However, there is also an 'implicit theology' of ritual practice or literary works in which they are even less structural and free. In these contexts, metaphysical buddhas, by becoming local, tend to become more 'mundane' *kami*, while certain local *kami* can rise to the status of bodhisattvas or buddhas, so that "ultimately, both buddha and *kami* are shorthand for highly polysemic, fluid, and elusive realities" (Faure 2016b, 6). Let us briefly examine one example.

Fudō Myōō, despite his Indian origins as Acala, became in Japan a "thoroughly naturalized citizen" (Faure 2016a, 118) and spread as an important deity. According to one of the main texts of *mikkyō*, the *Dainichikyō*, he is a servant of the Buddhas, as his dark skin and slavish appearance would confirm this. However, in subsequent commentaries he rises to the status of a tamer of those who oppose the *Dharma*, subjugating 'competitor deities' such as Daijizaiten (Sk. Maheśvara)[18] or other obstructing entities, such as personifications of passions which hinder enlightenment (120-2, 129). This ability led to the development of other functions which helped to further his dissemination. From protector of the Dharma, he also became a protector of the state in apotropaic rituals. Alternatively, he is the protector

18 Lit. 'great lord', title through which, in India, important deities such as Śiva were referred to. The motif of taming of Śiva may refer to the competition between Buddhists and Hinduists within the Indian esoteric *milieu*.

of the individual practitioner: since in esoteric Buddhism the practitioner must discover his/her identity with the main Buddha Dainichi, Fudō becomes automatically also the 'servant' protector of the practitioner. In the tradition of mountain ascetics (Shugendō), this protection occurs by means of a ritual merging between the practitioner and Fudō, who is in fact one of the major deities in this context (Faure 2016a, 134-6). The motif of ritual merging relates with that of possession, and Fudō is indeed also invoked in cases of exorcism (134). Among other factors that fostered his 'career' we can cite his name: since its meaning is 'unmovable', it came to be variously interpreted around the motifs of 'center' or 'origin'. He thus acquires a uranic nature through the association with the Big Dipper (which rotates near the Pole Star) (143). This brings then a connection with the Buddhist astral deity of the Pole Star, Myōken, which in turn, notwithstanding his initial lower rank (probably due to its Daoist origin as Siming), eventually gained the status of supreme judge of human destinies thanks probably to his cosmic position in which he symbolically escapes the karmic transmigration that binds inferior deities and humans alike (Faure 2016a, ch. 2). Back to Fudō's name, 'Unmovable' may refer also to the mind, in the sense of being unfettered by passion: this links Fudō to various key concepts of Buddhism, such as the ninth consciousness, *amarashiki* (Sk. *amala-vijñāna*, 'unsullied consciousness') – termed also as fudō*shiki* 'unmovable consciousness' (Faure 2016a, 146) – which is considered to correspond to the buddha-nature inherent in each being and, ultimately, to the enlightened mind of Dainichi, which the practitioner must actualize. In this way the former servant Fudō becomes his master Dainichi, of whom he is in fact said to be an emanation (132). Paradoxically enough, Fudō's aspect and dark skin also symbolize ignorance, and he is thus equated with one of the 'arch-villain' of Buddhism, Goutama's cousin Devadatta. However, this paradox is resolved through the esoteric doctrine of *bonnō soku bodai* ('afflictions equate with awakening') (147). Adding his iconography to the equation, since he is placed over a (unmovable) rock, he is revered as an earth-quelling deity (a noteworthy function in an earthquake-prone territory). This chthonian nature brings him to be the essence (*honji*) not only of the earthly deity and positive food dispenser Kenrō Jijin (Faure 2016a, 126, 149 ff.; 2016b, 191), but also of the fierce deity, or class of deities, "elusive yet omnipresent" (Faure 2016a, 116) named Kōjin.

If we have just seen how ideas concerning Buddhist deities were 'systematically unsystematic', any attempt to find a supposed 'immutable essence', especially in theological terms, fails even more bla-

tantly when we consider the historical development of Shintō.[19] Many scholars argue that it can be seen as a sort of 'onion', in the sense of being formed by layers and layers of various influences that cover a 'core' which does not exist (Havens 2006). At any rate, what I want to point out is the plasticity of the concept of *kami*, that, far from being fixed in a set of beliefs, aptly fits into various intellectual and ritual frameworks, while retaining a certain identity which eventually coalesced in a self-aware religious tradition.

As we have already hinted above (§ 3.2.1.1), early in the seventh century, *kami* worship came progressively and inextricably linked to Buddhism. But this latter has been only one of the influences that determined Shintō's development. Indeed, the very conception of *kami* and related practices can hardly be deemed strictly indigenous. Archeological evidence from the Yayoi (500 BCE-300 CE) and Kofun (300-600 CE) periods reveals elements of continental religiosity such as *yin-yang* thinking, ideas of immortality, divination using animal bones, burial practices and cosmological animal imagery (Deal 2017, 191-7; Hardacre 2017, 17-45). In the fifth century Korean emigrants fleeing from wars brought to Japan, among other things, literacy, Buddhist ideas and Confucian statecraft, which were eventually inserted into the first 'constitutional document' of Japan. Due to

19 As anticipated above (§ 3.2.1.1), my take on the term Shintō is highly heuristic, and with it I indicate in general terms those practices, institutions and ideas linked to superhuman beings defined as *kami* and worshipped in places called *jinja* or *jingū*, translated here as 'shrine'. To what extent Shintō can be used to identify a precise religious tradition is still a disputed matter among scholars. On one side, scholars uphold Kuroda's perspective (1981), and find no sense in searching, outside Buddhism, for a coherent system of ideas or practice related to *kami*, which are said to emerge out of Buddhism only in the seventeenth century. One of the monographs I draw from for my brief account of Shintō (Breen, Teeuwen 2010) follows this line, albeit with the acknowledgment of the existence of substantial *jingi* (heavenly and heartly deities) cults predating Buddhism. Nonetheless, they argue that this cult did not develop in a sufficiently coherent and distinct way from other traditions, and that Shintō was originally a Buddhist term indicating practices addressed to *kami* as *avatāra* of Buddhist deities (Teeuween 2002). My other main source (Hardacre 2017) argues instead that "it is reasonable to speak of Shintō in recognition of the watershed represented by the Jingikan, a structured ritual calendar, Kami Law, and the incorporation of Kami priests into the government. By comparison with this ritual, institutional, and social system, doctrinal and philosophical expositions came later and were transmitted in esoteric frameworks restricting their transmission to initiates" (Hardacre 2017, 44; cf. also Mizue 2003, 13). She affirms this also considering the restoration of the Jingikan in the modern period. In this context I limit myself to observing that this controversy basically relies on how one defines religions (what counts more? Doctrine or institutions?) and on how one defines a religious tradition (does a tradition need to self-consciously distance itself from other traditions? What degree of coherence is required?). From a didactical perspective, it is more fruitful to address this controversy not with the intention of siding with one interpretation or the other, but in order to reflect on issues such as the performativity of the concept of religion, on how and why it may be employed to make sense of the empirical data, on how and why certain interpretations of religion have been applied to phenomena predating this very concept, and which kind of indigenous terms we can side to religion (e.g. Jp. *dō* of 'way' or *kyō* of 'teaching').

its highly coherent and structured nature, Buddhism was strongly felt as foreign, and this engendered political clashes, especially over which practices, Buddhism or 'indigenous' *kami* worship, were most efficient for both the practical and metaphysical needs of an increasingly developing government. Both traditions were eventually officially adopted, and Buddhism became institutionalized in the sixth century. This was the context of the first attempt to systematize *kami* worship, carried out through the institution of a governmental apparatus, the Jingikan ('council of heaven and earth deities'), which oversaw the calendar of public rites and a network of related shrines. These rituals were focused on various agricultural blessings, expulsion of evil influences and protection of the country, with the overarching theme of the absolute authority of the recently established emperor (*tennō*, a Daoist term) over *kami* affairs. *Kami* at this point in time had a relatively simple character, related to blessings upon offerings, and with curses (*tatari*) upon the breachings of taboos. Laws regulating these activities heavily drew from Chinese models such as the important *Book of Rites* (Ch. *Liji*) (Hardacre 2017, 31). Rituals, especially those aimed at protecting from, or soothing vengeful *kami*, employed a *yin-yang* framework (Breen, Teeuwen 2010, 36-8). Nonetheless, as Hardacre argues,

> the court's promotion of Kami rites as part of its drive to extend its territorial control involved a *rhetoric* of indigeneity as a means to distinguish Kami ritual from its parallel promotion of Buddhism. (Hardacre 2017, 45)

However, the Jinjikan's control over *kami* matters roughly spanned only from eighth to tenth century. Instead, from tenth to the thirteenth century, new networks of shrines emerged, which were, furthermore, all shrine-temple complex (*jingūji*) except for the Ise shrine. This indicates both the growing control of local powers over *kami* affairs, and the influences of Buddhism. This affected the ways in which *kami* were conceived and engaged. From institutional deities to be publicly revered to obtain national protection there was a shift toward private worship, especially among aristocrats who visited shrines to obtain personal blessing from *kami*, which were now endowed with moral character, and were blessing or punishing ethical and unethical conduct (125-8). Buddhist priests brought other deities from India, Korea, and China to Japan. Some of them were quickly 'naturalized' and became very popular. Notable examples are Benzaiten, Shinra (Kr. Silla) Myōjin and Daikokuten (Sk. Mahākala), all of which are still worshipped today (Rambelli 2004, 769). More importantly, *kami* came to be understood as manifestations of higher Buddhist divinities, as explained in the doctrine of *honji suijaku*, and inserted in the framework of *kenmitsu* Buddhism (cf. above, § 3.2.1.1).

Kami thus progressively transformed into agents of salvation, a process that reached its peak during the medieval period in which the interaction with them as well as their theological understanding relied almost exclusively on Buddhist terms, symbols and themes. *Kami* were portrayed as compassionate beings guiding towards their hidden truth, that was, ultimately, salvation in Buddhist terms, such as karmic deliverance, rebirth in pure land, or attainment of buddhahood. Often, guidance given by *kami* was present in the form of moral lessons instead of abstract Buddhist doctrines, following the logic of 'dimming the light' (*wakō*) of Buddhist teachings (Hardacre 2017, 197-202).

However, further developments in theological thought concerning *kami* were carried out, notably by Watarai priests of the Outer Shrine of Ise, who put the concept of obtaining ritual purity, necessary to enter in contact with the *kami*, and the Buddhist concept of fulfilling one's original enlightenment through unification with the supreme Buddha Dainichi at the same level. In this way, though still firm in the *kenmitsu* framework, the *honji-suijaku* hierarchy of Buddha over *kami* started to be questioned (Hardacre 2017, 169-72). The complete reversal of the *honji-suijaku* paradigm was accomplished by Yoshida Kanetomo (1435-1511), who is credited with the first development of Shintō 'self-awareness'. He indeed used the term *shintō* to indicate a well-defined body of doctrines and practices: *yūitsu shintō* ('the one and only Shintō'). He preached that *kami* (one in particular, Kuni no Tokotachi) are the source of all creation, including also Buddhism and Confucianism. The Buddhist framework is still largely employed, for example, when he argues that Amaterasu "dim her light and become like dust" to be born as Shakyamuni in India, or when he says that the Kuni no Tokotachi created "the one-great-three thousand realms", a Tendai term (Breen, Teuween 2010, 47-9). These teachings, moreover, were still transmitted with esoteric initiation. At the start of seventeenth century, the Tokugawa shogunate gave the supervision of all *kami* affairs to Yoshida family.

During the Edo period, however, there was a growing rejection of Buddhist exo-esoteric discourse in favor of Confucianism-based paradigms. In fact, out of Yoshida Shintō new theological views developed, such as those of Yamazaki Ansai (1618-1682), who strongly criticized Buddhism and discussed *kami* in terms of *ri* and *ki*, the two Confucian moral-metaphysical principles governing the universe (Browing 2017, 93-103). He, together with other thinkers such as Hayashi Razan (1583-1657) or Yoshiwara Koretaru (1616-1694), upheld the idea of an ultimate deity, Yoshida's Kuni no Tokotachi, standing behind a vast, unorganized pantheon of lesser *kami*. Humanity's oneness with this ultimate deity is to be attained through ritual purification, moral cultivation and reverence towards institutions. Yamazaki's Shintō, in particular, preached loyalty to the emperor lin-

eage (Hardacre 2017, 245-62). On a more popular level, certain *kami* and shrines became the objects of privileged practices. The Ise shrine became the destination for *okage mairi*, 'thanksgiving pilgrimages', after abundant harvest, related to the idea of Amaterasu as the sun – and therefore, agricultural – goddess (Breen, Teeuwen 2010, 57-60). Other *kami*, such as Inari, originally related to the theme of rice and the image of the fox, a trickster animal, due to the influence of urbanization and commercial economy, become a popular deity bestowing any kind practical benefits that fitted urban society needs (Hardacre 2017, 264-76).

During the same Edo period, another influential intellectual tradition, called Kokugaku ('national study'), endeavored to uncover what was the real 'essence' of Shintō, hidden in ancient and relatively forgotten texts such as the *Kojiki* (c. 710 CE). After studying them, Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) argued that ancient Japan was a golden age of harmony between *kami*, emperors and people. He focused on the deity Amaterasu, founder of imperial dynasty, claiming that she was the source of what he considered the 'way' of Japan, based on "emotional and poetical spontaneity", and therefore different from the analytic attitude of foreign ways such as Buddhism and Confucianism. Another *kokugakusha*, Hirata Atsutane, developed Shintō theories of the soul, the afterlife, and the cosmogony under the influence of also Christian ideas. He put precise higher deities, taken from *Kojiki*, in charge of creation (Ame no Minakanushi) or of the care of the dead (Okuninushi). Deceased people were believed to become *kami* themselves, thus ancestor worship could not be done in Buddhist terms (Zhong 2016, 89-130; Breen, Tewueen 2010, 60-5). These influential ideas coalesced, near the end of Edo period, in a grass-roots movement, usually called by scholars Fukkō Shintō ('Shintō Restoration') The practices and doctrines of this movement

> were close to everyday life, full of fertility imagery, idealizing a linked harmony between the earth, human fecundity, and fulfillment of the 'imperial way.' They wrote with palpable urgency during a period of increasing unrest in village society. (Hardacre 2017, 348)

This powerful repertoire of concepts and practices became swiftly co-opted by the newly established imperial government right after the Meiji Restoration (1868) due to its strong focus on the special status of Japan as land of the gods and on the role of the emperor. These ideas fed into the construction of a strong state ideology, especially in contrast with Christianity, since at that time Japan had been forced to open to foreign influences. In fact, in 1868 the old Jingikan was (briefly) revived to exert strong control over all shrines; priest nominations were centralized; shrines with *kami* unconnected

to the throne were forced to change deity; any connection with Buddhism was abruptly severed and the Ise shrine was put at the apex of a new network of shrines. However, those were years in which the modern Euro-American concept of 'religion' was circulating (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.1), and when asked to formulate concise doctrines of Shintō in these terms, *kami* specialists reached no agreement. Buddhists took a chance and campaigned against Shintō as mere 'rituality' and not as a religion in the now accepted 'Western' sense (Breen, Teeuwen 2010, 10). Thus, the idea of establishing a creedal aspect and of considering Shintō officially as a 'religion' faded during the 1880s. This allowed the government to combine freedom of religion as requested by Euro-American powers and guaranteed in the Constitution of 1889 with a continued official state cult to be administered through shrines and state mandated observances,[20] which were to be followed irrespectively of one's religious (in modern terms) belonging. However, it must also be noted that other traditions which focused on particular *kami*, sacred places, practices or worships were legally identified as sectarian (*kyōha*) Shintō and distinguished by 'non-religious' Shintō shrines. Similarly, Japanese academicians were not all convinced of the non-religiosity of Shintō (Hardacre 2017, 410-12). Indeed, it is possible to discern a certain 'theology' embodied in Shintō shrine practices. Especially during the years of the World War II, the most preached themes were imperial divinity, its roots in Amaterasu's charge to his descendants to rule eternally over Japan, which in turn grounded the idea of Japan's superiority, of its mission to rule Asia (if not the whole world), and of the family-state connected through common lines of ancestors-patriots (Hardacre 2017, 439).

The postwar occupation of Japan dismantled all the government apparatus which controlled shrines and priests, and Shintō became officially a religion within a constitutional framework of a strict state-religion separation. Shrines had thus to be registered as religious juridical persons. The Jinja Honchō or National Association of Shrines was founded as a new umbrella organization in 1946. However, no consensus over the nature of this 'new', 'depoliticized' Shintō were reached. Positions ranged from indicating Shintō's role as unifier of the Japanese people under the spiritual guidance of the emperor, to equating it to the local rural tradition of *kami* worship, or to gradually transforming it into a universal religion (Breen, Teewen 2010, 5-6). While the latter two gained prominence, still today no theolog-

20 Some of them are still widely practiced in present days. For example, the popular *hatsumōde*, the new year visit to a shrine. This latter is actually a modern development born out of two previous practices: the medieval *onmyōdō*-related custom of visiting a shrine located in an auspicious direction, and the custom of early visit to shrines dedicated to the Seven Gods of Fortune to pray for luck in the coming year (Bocking 1997, 38; Breen, Teeuwen 2010, 12).

ically clear position can be found. Actors outside the Jinja Honchō also play active roles in re-describing Shintō character, even for touristic purposes. Furthermore, prominent shrines or shrine networks, such as Inari's one, are not presently members of the association. One of the latest of Shintō's self-representation, widely disseminated also beyond Japan, is what Rots (2015) calls the "Shintō environmentalist paradigm", which stresses Shintō as being basically animistic, worshipping the force of nature and preaching a harmonious coexistence between men and environment. Key symbols and ideas are the woodland which often surround the shrines (*chinjū no mori*, lit. 'protective forest'), and their preservation for ecological as well as cultural heritage related reasons.

3.2.2.4 The Problem of Identifying Core Traits in Hinduism

Our survey of Japanese Shintō failed to find a stable system of beliefs, even if it is a tradition that appears to be circumscribed by a brief history and a limited geographical context. What about religious phenomena which have been described as having much larger extension in time and space, are they proof of the presence of a 'core' structure of beliefs which maintains the coherence of the tradition throughout history, or an invitation to probe instead the flexibility of the system which allowed multiple developments? An exemplary case for this discussion is provided by the religious landscape of India. As we will see in § 3.3.1, our idea of Hinduism as something self-consciously aware and as an unitarian and coherent religious phenomenon is mainly a modern construct, which nonetheless also influenced the way other East-Asian traditions came to be self- and hetero-represented. Therefore, it is worth examining briefly how the epistemological lens of 'system of belief' would apply in this case.

It has been variously observed how Hinduism contains both "uniting and dispersing tendencies" (Flood 2003a, 4). The former are usually identified with the Brahmanical traditions centered on the *Veda*, the correct ritual procedures, the maintenance of caste boundaries, the interpretation of scriptures, the use of Sanskrit, and a pan-Indian scope and influence. The latter are identified with a proliferation of decentered traditions, often with local influence, founded by charismatic teachers (*guru*), or communities which expressed themselves in vernacular languages and often rely mainly on oral transmission.

Rodrigues (2017, 16-19) speaks of three main components of Hinduism, namely Āryan, Dravidian (in the sense of high culture linked to non-Sanskrit-related languages, such as Tamil), and aboriginal tribal groups. Rigopoulos (2005, 25-41) lists five 'components' of Hinduism: 1) the "brāhmaṇical civilization", linked to the ritual culture, to the *Veda* and other Sanskrit foundational texts; 2) the tra-

ditions of renunciants (*saṃnyāsin*), linked especially to Yoga beliefs and practices; 3) the devotional *bhakti* traditions developed around the deities of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Devī; 4) the "rural religiosity" and 5) the "tribal religiosity", whose deities and practices where originally external to the brāhmaṇical culture, but have been progressively incorporated through the concept of *avatāra*. Next, he goes on to discuss some "largely shared assumption" about human and divine conditions, largely based, but not limited, to the *Upaniṣad* (cf. Rigopoulos 2005, 43-88).

Indeed, scholars often identify a cluster of the main traits of Hinduism. Flood (2003a, 2) indicates

> shared ritual patterns, a shared revelation, a belief in reincarnation (*saṃsāra*), liberation (*mokṣa*), and a particular form of endogamous social organization or caste.

Knott (2016, 114) points to "the caste system, the authority of the *Veda*, the concept of *dharma*, and Aryan identity", along with "the popular narrative traditions of the *Rāmāyana*, reverence for the *Bhagavadgītā*, the presence of the divine in many names and forms, the place of the guru, and the sacred land of India". Doniger (2009, 39) indicates belief in the *Veda*, in *karma* and in *dharma*, a cosmology centered on Mount Meru, devotion (*bhakti*) to one or more members of an extensive pantheon, the ritual offering (*puja*) of fruits and flowers to a deity, the ideal of vegetarianism and nonviolence (which does not necessarily exclude blood sacrifices).

However, the same scholars would all quickly add that these traits are often fuzzy and problematic: while the centrality of *Veda*'s revelation may be distinctive, theological confrontations among and within the six orthodox *darśana*, plus the theological discourses of, e.g. the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions, disputed quite different metaphysical positions, such as monistic or dualistic ones (Flood 2003a, 5-6; cf. also Flood 2003c; Colas 2003; Clooney 2003). Other foundational ideas such as *karma*, *dharma* and *mokṣa* resonate with those of Buddhism and Jainism (Doninger 2009, 39). Therefore, such elements are best treated through the concept of family resemblance which, as Knott notices, is useful since the human metaphors of the family help to see the importance of power within it.

> Just as family members try to make their voices heard, even to get the upper hand in day-to-day disputes, so do Hindu individuals and groups struggle by whatever means to assert their beliefs and commitments, their caste interests, and sectarian viewpoints (Knott 2016, 115),

such as in the case of Hindu nationalism.

In Doninger's polythetic approach, there is no single central quality that all Hindus must have. She notes the telling case of Babur (1483-1530), founder of the Mughal dynasty, who singled out the belief of reincarnation as the defining Hindu belief but did not ascribe this belief to all Hindus (Doninger 2009, 42). She also observes that the above-cited "uniting and dispersing tendencies" do not necessarily translate into polarized groups of people: "a single person would often have both halves (as well as non-Hindu traditions) in his or her head" (Doninger 2009, 44), a kind of open-mindedness supported also by the "tendency of Hindus to be more orthoprax than orthodox" (Doninger 2009, 58), with each tradition acknowledging the existence of gods other than their god(s), suitable for others to worship. She thus concludes that "Hindus might therefore best be called polydox".

3.2.2.5 Conclusion

In the previous section I pointed out how in Japanese and many East-Asian contexts it makes little sense to ask which religion a person belongs to, as well as to expect a clear-cut affiliation and a strict maintenance of purity and distinction between religious traditions. With the cursory glances of this section on certain general as well as particular aspects of Japanese and Asian religions, I wanted to highlight instead how focusing on the category of beliefs, particularly if expected to be logically and tidily systematized, actually fails to bring to the surface 'typical', 'defining', 'core' traits – provided in the first place that they actually exist – and that this notion actually clashed with non-Christian-based self-understanding of being religious, as the case of Olcott showed.

Shifting to a broader point of view, we may argue that this focus on belief is actually part of a more general preference for the 'inner', 'rarefied', 'disenchanted' dimensions of religion, i.e. those aspects more acceptable from a modernist point of view, and therefore much more palatable for educative purposes.

3.2.3 Inadequacy of the Paradigm of The Primacy of Inner and 'Disenchanted' Dimensions in Religions

We have seen in ch. 1 (§ 2.1.8) that the discursive developments of the concept of religion progressively emphasized religion as pertaining preeminently to the inner private sphere and the other-worldly dimension, thus leaving the social sphere and this-worldly dimension to the progressively developing 'religion's twin': secularization. I add here some more nuances to this topic by briefly hinting to other important intellectual developments that further shaped and influenced both academic and folk conceptions of what is – and what ought – to be a religion, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and that to some extents have not completely waned). These two are evolutionism, as adopted in the dawning field of the study of religion\s, and the famous Weberian theory of progressive rationalization and disenchantment.

For 'evolutionism' here I mean not only a method but also a set of assumptions that were shared by three key thinkers in the field of the study of religion\s: Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917), William Robertson Smith (1846-1894) and James Frazer (1854-1941). Generally speaking, these three thinkers shared the view that human minds and cultures evolve following the same direction, so that some civilizations are more advanced than others, and this also applies to religion, which, as we have seen, was one of the main terms of comparison with non-European people. This happened also in concert with the contemporary liberal protestant theological program. This latter aimed at reconciling the biblical announcement with the contemporary *Zeitgeist* by accepting Darwin's natural selection theory and adopting historical criticism and a more humanistic view of Jesus Christ (cf. Woodhead 2005, 193-7; Lupi 2015, 92 ff., 140-4). Religion was thus conceived as moving from:

> Polytheism to monotheism, from priesthood and sacrifice to prophecy and ethical purity of heart, from hieratic and hierarchic religious structures to a godly egalitarianism, from ritual to morality, from myths to beliefs, from superstitions to rational beliefs. In short, in the nineteenth century and earlier, the religious program of the Protestant Reformation of evolution and progress in religion was simply assumed as given as a 'quasi certitude'. (Strenski 2015, 50)

The aim of the evolutionist scientists of religion was to individuate the various steps of such evolution, starting from the very beginning (e.g. animism in the case of Tylor) and to establish, especially in the case of Frazer, an evolutionary line from 'magic' to 'religion', and finally to 'science'. While it seems that Tylor and Frazer's intellectual agenda was meant to undermine religion and Christianity in particu-

lar (Strenski 2015, 45-8, 70-2), Robertson Smith, with his *Lectures on the Religion of Semites* (1889), sought to show that the 'primitive' aspects of the ancient Hebrew religion, recognizable within the Bible and in some practices still present among nomadic Arabic tribes, were able to evolve into "'higher', 'healthier', 'modern' form of spiritual religion'" (Strenski 2015, 60). We have already seen (§ 2.1.5) how such a discursive *milieu* also elicited the transformation of Buddhism from 'heathenism' to a 'world religion', insofar as it was understood as the intellectual, spiritual, 'protestant' offshoot from Brahmanism, and as a tradition that degenerated only after its expansion in Asia.

A similar line of thought can be found in Weber, albeit without the straightforward optimism in progress of the earlier cultural evolutionists. According to Gane (2002, 15-22), in Weber's sociological studies of religion one can find an account of how the rise and spread of instrumental rationalization and the accompanying disenchantment shaped Euro-American culture. This process started first with the displacement of prehistoric and naturalistic forms of magical religiosity through the systematization of a functional pantheon of symbolic gods, which then came to be substituted by a universal monotheism. This was characterized by a progressive rationality, in the sense of envisioning a fully transcendent God, immune first to any magical manipulation (as in the case of Judaism), then immune even to any kind of invocation or prayer, such as in the case of the God of Puritan Calvinism described in Weber's *Protestant Ethics and the Rise of Capitalism* (1905), whose will can only be fathomed by carrying out a rigorous ethical life.

Given (among other factors) this narrative of disenchantment,[21] it does not come as surprise that the epistemological emphasis on religion came to rely primarily on the notion of experience. As Sharf noted (2000, 268-71), the rhetoric of experience has a strong appeal, especially since it shields the idea of religion from the eclipse due to disenchantment. For the religionist it is a defense from rational/scientific critiques, while for the scholar, especially the phenomenologist, it provides the justification and primary object of enquiry, because experience becomes the *sui generis* phenomenon irreducible to any other perspective (e.g. sociological) and – most importantly – common to all the other religions. This last point also appeals to the religionist as s/he may argue that all religions stem from a common human experience, thus justifying her/his affiliation on a 'natural' base. At the same time, this discourse about a common layer of experience

21 Recently, some scholars have questioned the descriptive value of this narrative also for what concerns the modern Euro-American context. Josephson-Storm (2017) qualifies it more as a prescriptive 'myth', arguing that its various protagonists, usually considered as representatives of the progressive defeat of religion by rational science (from Giordano Bruno, to Newton, to Freud, even to Vienna neopositivists) actually entertained more nuanced relationships with magical and esoteric thought.

provides the ground on which to argue that one's own tradition is the one which expresses more truthfully this very universal experience. As Martin explains (2016, 527-31), this last strategy has characterized theologians and scholars alike, i.e. they employed a normative notion of experience. For example, William James (1842-1910) in his *Variety of Religious Experience* (1901) deprecates the outward/institutional dimension (implicitly endorsing his protestant cultural background), and subordinates it to the inward/personal dimension, the only deserving analysis, which is considered basically a matter of feeling, understandable only by undergoing the same kind of experience. Rudolph Otto argues for the superiority of Christianity, since it is the tradition where the experience of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is reached in the most complete way, through the mystery of God and the need for atonement (cf. above, § 2.1.1). We will see in § 3.3.4 the pivotal role of this rhetoric of inner experience in shaping both hetero- and self-understanding (and, to a certain extent, also the 'marketing') of East-Asian religious tradition in modern and contemporary times.

In what follows, I will provide some examples in which the disenchanted or inward 'model' of religiosity proves very partial or even distorting. I will develop my discussion around some interrelated keywords of this model, such as 'experience', 'psychologization', 'de-ritualization', 'de-somatization', 'transcendent', 'individual', 'rationalization', and so on.

3.2.3.1 Zen and the Myth of Pure Experience

Probably, the first East-Asian tradition that most people in Euro-American context would associate with such model of religiosity, especially for what concerns 'experience' and 'de-ritualization', is Chan/Zen Buddhism. This has recent cultural-historical reasons (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.4), but also relates to the very development of this tradition. From being a scattered movement still not incorporated in a distinct monastic tradition in the late Sui (581-618) and early Tang (618-907), it gradually transformed into an institutional one with an established lineage (and inner competing schools) during the Song. During this period it established the famous phrase attributed to the mythical patriarch Bodhidarma as the statement representative of its foundational approach:

> A separate transmission apart from the teachings, not relying on scriptures, pointing directly at the human mind, seeing the nature and attaining Buddhahood.[22]

22 Ch. *Jiaowai bieyun, bu li wenzi, zhi zhi renxin, jian xing cheng fo*; Jp. *kyōge betsuden, furyū monji, jikishi ninshin, kenshō jōbutsu*.

To this the idea of "transmission of the mind (of the historical Buddha) through the mind" was also added.[23] Such rhetorical devices not only served to give a peculiar identity to the Chan tradition, but also to differentiate it and put it in competition with the Tiendai tradition which clearly identified itself as the 'teachings lineage' (*jiaozong*) based mainly on scriptures (cf. Foulk 2007; Copp 2012; Chao 2012).

It is easy then to interpret Chan as championing a mode of simple, inward-oriented religiosity aimed at reenacting the same, ineffable experience of the Buddha. As a matter of fact, there have been instances of practices advocating an a-rational, un-mediated approach. The most known example is the influential master Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163) and his method of *kanhua* (Jp. *kanna*): 'viewing the (key) phrase' (of a *gong'an*, Jp. *kōan*, renowned riddle-like short narratives). However, it appears that such simplifications were more functional to obtain patronage of lay practitioners who did not have time or occasion to master both ritual and doctrinal intricacies (Chao 2012, 103-6). As a matter of fact, Sharf (2007) has showed that at least during the Song and Yuan periods (1279-1368), the *gong'an* practice not only required a thorough knowledge and understanding of the literary canon of Chan, such as the *lunyu* ('recorded sayings'), but also of *sūtra* and other treatises, as well as being versed in the relevant doctrinal debates at the time, for example those concerning the topic of buddha-nature within insentient beings (cf. Sharf 2007, 210-29). Even if Dahui's *kanhua* ultimately became the mainstream practice in late imperial China it also spread widely in Japan through the Rinzai school, as Hori (2000) observes:

> In the Rinzai monastic training curriculum, the many *kōan* are categorized and ranked; the monks progressively learn more and more sophisticated ways of seeing them; they learn how to write their own commentary to the *kōan* […]. If it were true that the *kōan* is nonrational, neither a *kōan* text tradition nor a monastic curriculum would be possible. (Hori 2000, 286)[24]

Furthermore, as the name implies ('public cases') the *gong'an* practice should be understood as a *social* practice in which the practitioner had to prove his enlightenment in front of the master. According to the monastic regulations (Ch. *qinggui*, Jp. *shingi*, 'rules of purity'), the master-disciple sessions, which often involved *gong'an*, were structured in such detailed protocol (prostration, incense offerings) that they can be interpreted as "a ritual re-enactment of the encounters

23 Ch. *Yi xin chuan xin*; Jp. *Ishin denshin*.

24 For a recent, multi-layered interpretation of *kōan* that eschew mystical or a-rational explanation, cf. Heine 2014, esp. 70-97.

between Chan masters and disciples that were contained in the flame histories" (Foulk 1993, 181).[25] A similar analysis can made for another central Chan/Zen practice, the ritual of 'ascending the (Dharma) hall' (Ch. *shangtang*, Jp. *jōdō*), in which the abbot of the monastery, on formal occasions, delivers a public sermon on Chan doctrine while seating on a highchair in the Dharma hall (Poceski 2008). This ritual was, on one side, an "elaborately choreographed event in which the monastic community and visiting patrons came face-to-face with a living buddha" (Sharf 2005, 265). On the other, it required the Chan/Zen abbot to master "a considerable body of canonical literature and internalize the complex rhetorical logic of Buddhist dialectic" (Sharf 2005, 266), which was required to perform the '*chan*nish' standard of contents and teaching style.

In other words, those facets of Chan/Zen that came to be considered as the pinnacle of anti-ritualism or non-conformity, such as the sudden enlightenment of the practitioners or the eccentric behavior of the masters, are actually results of careful study and ritualized performance. Indeed, one should not overlook all those ritual elements present in both the 'rules of purity' and the training curriculum that have been integral part of Chan/Zen monasteries up to contemporary times. In contemporary Japanese Zen, every-day life within a monastery is thoroughly formalized and ritualized. From a doctrinal point of view, such religious/ritual articulation of all activities throughout the day can be interpreted as an application of the idea of the 'every day mind is the way' (*heijōshin kore dō*) – which is found in a well-known *kōan* – in the sense of cultivating Zen practice in all aspect of life (Borup 2008, 162-3). On the other hand, this ritualization of monastic life helps also to give structure to the rigid protocols of life in the monastery, as well as to ease the embodiment, through rote learning on the part of the trainee, of the right conduct, language and ritual codes which are pivotal in many aspects of the life of the Zen specialist, especially when it comes to ritual services for the parishioners. We have already seen that the standard form of Buddhist funerals has been introduced by Chan monks. Indeed, nowadays they represent the staple activity (and financial sustenance) of the majority of temples and require a mastery of many ritual segments as well as proper ritual conduct towards parishioners (Borup 2008, 254-73).

Rituality applies even to *zazen* ('seated meditation'), which is undoubtedly the symbol of Zen, as it is constantly depicted in Zen discourses and rhetoric as a 'non-instrumental' practice which consists

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25 'Flame histories' in this context refer to biographies of individual masters and their encounter with their successors, which are the subject of the genre known as 'records of the transmission of the flame (or lamp)' (Ch. *Chuandnglu*, Jp. *dentōroku*), in which many *gong'an*/*kōan* can be found.

of merely sitting (*shikatanza*) and is to be practices anytime, anywhere. In reality, there are designated times and places for this activity, which is foremost a bodily and a communal ritual practice. It is mostly enacted in collective session (*zazenkai*), where designated persons check and correct the right bodily posture in harsh but still formalized manner, by hitting the practitioners with a stick. The application and even the request of this 'corrective' actions are punctuated by bows and other hand signals. The communal and ritual dimension is also enacted in other ways: in most meditation halls a statue of the bodhisattva Monjū (Sk. Mañjuśrī) is enshrined, which must be revered when entering and leaving the hall, and it is considered as the most senior practitioner present, followed by the abbot. Accordingly, the individual places of each practitioner are arranged by seniority. Other ritual segments are often added, such as chanting and walking meditation around the statue of the bodhisattva. Also, the occasions in which *zazenkai* are held hints to social and performative functions of this ritual. When carried out during the *rōhatsu sesshin* ('meditation retreat of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month', i.e. the period in which Śākyamuni reached awakening) it is best seen as a mythical reenactment of the founding event of Buddhism (cf. Dan Leighton 2008). Similarly, *zazenkai* are held in conjunction with events commemorating important masters or temple founders. In other occasion *zazenkai* are open to the laity, in which further elements such as Buddhist sermons, *sūtra* chanting and ritual labor (*samu*) are added in order to involve lay people in experiencing monastic life, but also to stress the uniqueness of the latter (Foulk 2008, 61-2; Borup 2008, 205-9).

Sūtra chanting amounts to much of the time in a Zen monastery and punctuates many moments of daily life. It also points to a certain 'enchanted' religious worldview at work. For example, the morning *sūtra* chanting protocols in Sōtō Monasteries explicitly states that the merit (Jp. *kudoku*, Sk. *puṇya*) acquired thanks to this activity are devolved to Śākyamuni, to the founders Dōgen (1200-1253) and Keizan (1268-1325), as well as the dharma-protecting *deva*s and the temple-protecting spirits, going further to expand the recipients of the merit to all sentient beings, including the most unfortunate ones such as the *gaki* ('hungry ghosts') (Foulk 2008, 62-5). Even meals are thoroughly formalized: "The monks must set out their bowls, receive the food, make a small offering of rice to hungry ghosts, eat, and finally clean and put away their bowls, all in a minutely prescribed manner" (Foulk 2008, 65), all punctuated by chants.

3.2.3.2 Ritual Manipulation of Body and World

Relying on an inward, de-ritualized and de-somatized model of religiosity seriously runs the risk of overlooking what is probably one of the most widespread religious phenomena in East- and South-Asia, namely 'tantrism'. Sticking to a polythetic and heuristic usage of this term,[26] scholars have sorted out working definitions or at least a series of persisting traits of Indic origins.[27] Among the traits relevant to our discussion, we may start from a metaphysical conception of the universe widely associated with tantrism. This metaphysical view is conceived as the emanation, from subtler to coarser forms, of a dynamic principle which can take the form of a supreme deity, of impersonal primordial energy or consciousness, or all three at the same time, which inform all that exists. No being is therefore ontologically separated from this principle, and human beings in particular are the microcosmic equivalent of this very essence-manifestation continuum. The key point here is that human beings have the potential to "ritually appropriate and channel" this principle, in "creative and emancipatory ways" (White 2000a, 9). Furthermore, it is the whole body-mind complex of the practitioner to be actively involved in this process. Indeed, according to many scholars (Faure 1998, 61; White 2000a, 10 ff.; Flood 2006, 11 ff.), the physical body is not an impediment but the privileged 'tool' for religious goals. As microcosmic manifestation of the supreme principle, the body is thought to host various kinds of 'energies' (such as *kuṇḍalinī* or 'she who is coiled', *prāṇa* or 'breath', *prajñā* or 'wisdom') and 'en-

26 The term 'tantrism' is surely a 'hot' one, and not only because of the commonly attributed connection with the sexual sphere, but due to its contested and discussed nature. On one side, it has been judged by early Indologist as the epitome of superstitious and bizarre magic. On the other side, past and present practitioners considered it the pinnacle of religious experience, comprehensible only to initiates. In the middle, scholars argue instead on the extent in which the Sanskrit emic term *tantra* (lit. 'loom' or the 'warp' of a loom, it refers to a certain type of ritual and doctrinal texts, often affirming to expound 'secret' and 'higher' teaching) can be conceived as indicating a well-defined and distinct tradition. In this case an artificial category 'tantrism' would be applicable, but there are also scholars arguing that it should be better considered as a sort of 'approach' or 'technique' which has been applied within Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina traditions (cf. White 2000a, 4-5; Flood 2006, 9). Moreover, the closely related category of 'esoteric Buddhism' further stirs up the debate with the question of whether or not it should be conceptually separated from 'tantrism' (Orzech, Payne, Sørensen 2011a). Such taxonomic difficulties are not surprising given the fact that religious phenomena usually associated with tantrism can be found, often in thriving forms, throughout all Asia since the first millennium CE (White 2000a, 7; Orzech, Payne, Sørensen 2011a, 3).

27 Among other peculiar traits we can cite the very common use of the *homa* fire ritual, of Vedic origins, in which offerings are made to a deity through ritual burning. Another constant is the widespread belief of the extraordinary power of language in its phonetic aspect, which is a common feature of Indian philosophies of language. This also explains why many formulae have been preserved in Sanskrit language throughout East-Asia (cf. Payne 2011).

ergetic knots' (*cackra*), whose configuration refers to hierarchies of various deities, often symbolized by Sanskrit letters, whose sounds are thought to reproduce the power of said deities. Activating these energies or godheads within the body brings to one of the most common traits of Asian 'tantrism', i.e. the identification of the practitioner with a deity. In Indic context this means to obtain *jīvanmukti*, 'liberation during life', also in the sense of corporeal immortality (Rigopoulos 2005, 262), while in Buddhist context, notably Japan, it enables the practitioner to "become a buddha with this present body" (*sokushin jōbutsu*; cf. Raveri 2014, 186-92, 205-9). The ritual devices through which to engender such process are utterances of specific formulae named *mantra* ('mental devices'), performance of hand or bodily gesture named *mudrā* ('seal') and *āsana* ('seated position'), and contemplation of diagrams symbolizing the metaphysical structure of the universe, called *maṇḍala* ('circle') and *yantra* ('instrument of restraint'; 'machine'). Especially in a Buddhist context, these three devices correspond to the three fundamental modes of action (through body, through speech and through mind) of the human being (Orzech, Sørensen 2011).

The body and bodily functions are also powerful metaphors. Very often the supreme principle is conceived as having a twofold nature, a feminine and a male one, whose separation triggered the manifestation and dispersion of energies in the phenomenal world. The goal for the practitioners is thus to re-unite these two principles, a process which is very often conceived, represented and also enacted in terms of sexual union. This interpretation further reinforces the fundamental non-dualism of the tantric worldview: the 'pure divine' can and indeed must be sought also in the most 'impure' acts of sexual intercourse, engaging the 'lowest' senses (touch, smell) and sentiments (carnal desire) (cf. White 2000a, 13-18). However, actual examples greatly vary in terms of performance and the meanings of the sexual tropes, in accord with historical and social circumstances. For example, in Kashmiri tantrism we find a ritual which, in the seventh century, involved the offering and consumption of sexual fluids to appease and control divine powers. By the tenth century, these kinds of ritual become gradually aestheticized and intellectualized, through the equation of sexual pleasure with the 'bliss' of liberation (Flood 2006, 162-70).

In a similar vein, we can find in medieval Japan rich reservoirs of sexual and reproductive imagery and concepts that underlines the pivotal role of the body in religious discourses. Initially, the scholarship on these themes concluded that it was mainly a matter of heterodox practices and teaching. The most 'infamous' example was a ritual involving the creation of a wish-fulfilling artifact made up by a skull, semen and menstrual blood. Such ritual was attributed, with clear derogatory aims, to a branch of the Shingon tradition of esoteric Buddhism, called Tachikawa-ryū (cf. Raveri 2014, 392-401).

However, it seems that these were later critiques of the fifteenth century at the expenses of a seemingly 'normal' branch which developed from the eleventh century onwards (Iyanaga 2011). Dolce (2015) argues instead that Buddhist embryological discourses usually attributed to 'heterodox' lineages were instead part of a mainstream soteriological topic. There is a common pattern in medieval Buddhist understanding of human gestation which employed many symbols and ideas from Buddhism, Chinese medicine and esoteric interpretations. The paternal and maternal fluids are represented with two 'A' Sanskrit letters, a powerful symbol which indicates both the idea of beginning (it is the first letter of Sanskrit alphabet), but also the Buddhist concept of vacuity, as in Sanskrit the 'a-' prefix correspond to negation. The fetus then develops in a two-pointed shape which is linked to the two *maṇḍala* of *mikkyō*. The next phase consists in a three-pointed shape (head and two shoulders) which is linked to the three fundamental modes of action (through body, speech and mind). The fourth phase represent the fetus as a *stūpa* constituted by five segments. Here doctrinal connections and symbology abound. First, the *stūpa* symbolizes the supreme Buddha Dainichi, then the five segments connect to the five elements (earth, wind, fire, water and ether), the five wisdoms and other correspondences (five sense organs, five colors, etc.) of *mikkyō* theory. Additionally, further connections are made with the Chinese anatomical model of the five organs which are again inserted in a whole framework of macro-microcosmic correlation. In other words, the fetus is imagined as being naturally harmonious both in its material and non-material aspects and thus epitomizing the idea – pivotal in East-Asian Buddhisms – of original enlightenment (*hongaku*). In fact, in the last phase the fetus is depicted as a completely formed human being seated in meditative position, signaling an awakened status. The birth is then interpreted as the bodhisattva vow to descend into a lower form in order to save the other sentient beings (Dolce 2015, 257-77).

This process is not employed as a mere theory only to understand conception and gestation but has also soteriological relevance to Buddhist practice and beyond. Archival research retrieved *maṇḍala*-like images depicting two figures having sexual intercourse accompanied by schemes and commentaries connecting this act with doctrinal points. While these images have been associated with heterodox teachings, other rituals pertaining to orthodox lineages instruct how to ritually represent the sexual intercourse and gestation through various uses of *mudrā* and *mantra* associated, for example, with the female and male bodies, or with the cries of pleasure during the intercourse (277-97).

We can see that corporeal and sexual tropes were well-ingrained in the religious and cultural *milieu* of medieval Japan (cf. Porath 2021), such as in the commentary *Ise monogatari zuinō* (Essence of

the *Tale of Ise*) written around the 1320s, or in the *Ise shōsho Nihongi yushiki honshō nin denki* (Transmitted Record of the Nihongi, of the Consciousness, Fundamental Nature, and Humanity, produced by Ise), colophon of 1537. In these works (cf. Klein 1997; Faure 2000), the contents of famous poetic and mythical-historical works such as the *Ise monogatari* (late ninth century) and *Nihonshoki* (720) were interpreted in tantric, non-dualistic term: the focus of both commentaries is on Izanami and Izanagi, the two creator deities of imperial mythology. These are interpreted as representing both the two *maṇḍala* of Shingon and the two principles of *yin-yang*. Their sexual union is said to bring about not only the creation of the cosmos, but also to represent enlightenment. For example, the *Ise shōsho Nihongi yushiki honshō nin denki* contains the above-mentioned embryological chart of five phases (Dolce 2015, 268), while the *Ise monogatari zuinō* more in general refers to a primordial, non-dual enlightened state of the embryo, as well as to an idea of merging of bodies and minds of the two lovers at the apex of their intercourse. Through the trope of sexual union, these commentaries conflate the theme of macrocosmic emanation with that of microcosmic soteriology. Accordingly, also the erotic desire expressed in the love poems of the *Ise monogatari* is reinterpreted under the terms of the *mikkyō* idea of *bonnō soku bodai* ('afflictions equate with awakening') as the driving force (instead of a hindrance) towards enlightenment (Klein 1997, 450 ff).

Another, somehow complementary role played by the body in religious discourses and practices in Japan can be observed in the phenomenon of *miira* or self-mummified ascetics, a practice recorded from the fourteenth till the onset of twentieth century (Raveri 1998). We are still within the framework of *mikkyō* and, in particular, of the idea of 'becoming buddha with this very body' (*sokushin jōbutsu*), a term often used to refer to the mummies themselves. In fact, legends depict Kūkai as the first monk to have successfully undertaken self-mummification (Abé 1999, 398). Additionally, it must be noted that also in China there are many hagiographic accounts of self-mummified monks or in general of ascetics (from both Buddhist and Daoist background) whose body remained uncorrupted after death (Sharf 1992, 7-9).

Still now, especially at Mount Yudono, there are temples which enshrine mummified corps of ascetics who underwent long and harsh austerities, such as eating only tree bark and forest nuts and chanting sutra under a cold waterfall. The key moment in this ordeal took place when, after a final fast of only salt and water, the ascetic drank lacquer and was buried alive, meditating in a stone chamber metres below ground, with a bamboo pole to supply air. After three years, disciples would unearth the ascetic whose body, if the practice had been successful, allegedly would not present sign of decay. The ascetic is then celebrated as the tangible example of the ideal of be-

coming 'buddha with this very body': he has overcome the suffering and decay of *saṃsāra* while maintaining his material presence within it. Accordingly, the *miira* is richly dressed and made an object of worship. There have been various scholarly interpretations of why such an extreme phenomenon exerted a noteworthy impact on Japan. A common theme seems to be the materiality of the *miira* which – literally – embodies a taxonomic contradiction between corruptibility of the flesh and the incorruptibility of a mummifying process which occurred spontaneously, i.e. it has not been performed by any external agents. This contradiction opens a variety of possible interpretations among devotees, especially in times of crisis (Raveri 2014, 408-10; Castiglioni 2019, 39-46).

However, it is difficult to distinguish between history and hagiography, and Castiglioni suggests that many *miira* displayed today are probably "ad hoc manipulations of the ascetics' corpses" (Castiglioni 2019, 25) by devotees instead of superhuman effort by solitary ascetic. However, this further reinforces the importance given, by the social contexts involved, to the bodily and tangible manifestation of religious practices, in both past (Castiglioni 2019) and present Japan (Dahl 2020). For example, Dahl (2020, 11-12) reports of a monk who vehemently affirmed the value of the *miira* enshrined in his temple and its difference from other similar phenomena such as Egyptian mummies or other *miira* precisely on the basis of its material characteristics, i.e. not having had organs extracted or its not having been treated with preserving substances.

3.2.3.3 The Body in Daoism

Speaking of the role of the body in religious theory and practice of East-Asia, one cannot avoid briefly touching on the tradition of Daoism which, as we have seen, exerted its influence on discourses and practices also in Japan, and not necessarily in connection with institutional Daoist lineages.

In very general terms, the religious aspirations of this multifaceted tradition can be summarized as pointing to an 'attunement with the Dao' in various ways (individually, collectively, cosmologically) and through various methods (meditation, rituals, scriptural study, etc.) (cf. Komjathy 2013, 12-13). However, since the body is understood as consisting of *qi* or cosmic vital energy, which is the material aspect of Dao, it follows that longevity, and even more immortality, are conceived as a proof of such superhuman attunement (cf. Penny 2000). Therefore, physicality and aliveness can be seen as fundamental concerns throughout the entire history of Daoism and beyond (Komjathy 2013, 190). Chinese life-prolonging (*yangsheng*) techniques, including breathing exercises, sexual hygiene, thera-

peutic gymnastic, massages, dietetics and drugs ingestion have a long history as pan-Chinese medical tradition since the fifth century BCE. While they developed in a distinct medical tradition, since the first formations of organized Daoism in the second century CE, these practices have always been integrated, discussed and refined in almost every Daoist school, becoming "a key foundation of Daoist practice, being located between 'Heil and Heilung', salvation and physical wholeness" (Engelhart 2000, 75).

On a theoretical level, also in Daoism we can find a focus on the body as a trope for macro-microcosmos correlations, albeit in different style. The earliest and most prominent texts are the *Huangting jing* (Scripture of the Yellow Court) and *Laozi zhongjing* (Central scripture of Lao), both dating to around the second and the third century CE. In both texts the human body is seen as animated by inner gods which are depicted, in a bureaucratic metaphor, as 'officers' (*guan*) overseeing the functioning of the viscera. These texts instruct the practitioner to visualize these deities, making petitions and feeding them by moving the various inner 'energies' (*qi*) or 'essences' (*jing*) of the body. This was meant to attain not only health and longevity, but to expel calamities, communicate with the external gods (of an equally bureaucratic pantheon), and ultimately to attune with the Dao (cf. Pregadio 2006; 2008b, 75-85).

3.2.3.4 This-Worldly Enchantments in Buddhism

In the examples sketched above we have seen a strongly somatic and ritualized religiosity, offered as a way of contrast with the inner and disenchanted protestant stereotype. I have, however, mostly focused on 'lofty' practices and discourses, revolving around issues of metaphysics and soteriology, thus implicitly endorsing another tenet of the protestant view on religion, i.e. the centrality of the theme of 'transcendence' (cf. Smith 2017) or on what Tillich would term as "ultimate concerns" (cf. above, § 2.1.2, fn. 5; Lorusso 2017, 136 ff.). Instead, reconnecting with our discussion of tantrism, White warns us about this:

> The transcendent/pragmatic religion typology is just that: an ideal construct employed to classify types of Tantric practice. In fact, the world of Tantric practice is a continuum that draws on both the transcendent and the pragmatic approaches. (White 2000, 30)

Indeed, it has been argued that one of the reasons behind the spread of esoteric Buddhism (Davidson 2002, 113-68; 2011) and *tantra* in general is the affinity of this tradition with concepts and imaginary of warfare and political power. In fact, esoteric Buddhism developed

during a period of political turmoil in medieval India, after the fall of Gupta-Vākāṭaka hegemony in the sixth century, characterized by increasing feudalization of institutions, Buddhist monasteries included. These latter responded to this situation through a renewal of their doctrinal and ritual approaches which increasingly absorbed "concepts of power relations, ritual authentication, aesthetics, gift-giving, clan associations, and sense of dominion" from the feudal world (Davidson 2002, 115). Paired with other extra-Buddhist influences such as rites concerned with this worldly needs, like the *homa* fire rituals, it is easy to see how one of the appeals of esoteric Buddhism lays in its being a kind of instrumental *techne*, especially in service to rulers. Indeed, tantric promises of the manipulation of cosmic energies through ritual did appeal to lords, king and emperors. Accordingly, they would ascent, through specific initiation,[28] to the status of a 'sorcerer sovereign' (Sk. *vidyādhararajā*) endowed with superhuman powers (Sk. *siddhi*, lit. 'perfection').

The device of the *maṇḍala*, with its function of visually organizing the cosmos, its deities and energies in geometrical and hierarchical patterns, seems to be particularly susceptible of being endowed with political meanings. Winfield (2011) argues that the geometric pattern of the two *maṇḍala* of Shingon show influences of Chinese and imperial topography. The *maṇḍala* of the womb can be read, on one hand, as closely imitating the plans of early Chinese palaces. On the other, it seems to recall a section of the important *Book of Rites* which posits the height of culture at the center of the metropolis, locus of imperial power, and depicts a gradual descent into savagery when moving towards the periphery. The same pattern appears in the *maṇḍala* of the womb, with Dainichi at its center and the outermost sides filled with lesser and fierce-looking deities. The *maṇḍala* of the diamond, instead, shows strong resemblances with both ideal and real city plans. The division in nine squares of the *maṇḍala* recalls the nine square grid plan of the prototypical imperial city, allegedly built with the supervision of the mythical Duke of Zhou (eleventh century BCE). Here we have both a convergence and a discrepancy. Concerning the former, in the imperial city plan and in the commentaries of the *maṇḍala*, the central square is indicated as the most important one. Concerning the latter, we can clearly see that in the top centre square of the *maṇḍala* there is a prominent big image of Dainichi. Interestingly enough, however, also the real city plans of Chinese and Japanese capitals of Chang'an, Heijō, Nagaoka and Heian feature a nine wards division with the imperial palace located precisely at the top centre. Through these observations Winfield also makes sense of

28 In fact, the specific term for tantric initiation, *abhiṣeka* ('anointing'), "originally used to refer to the anointment of an Indian king or the investiture of a crown prince" (Lopez, Boswell 2014, s.v. "*abhiṣeka*").

Kūkai's statement that both paintings were "as useful to the nation as walls are to a city" (Windfield 2011, 721), especially when considering that, differently from Chinese esoteric Buddhism, he aimed to adopt both *maṇḍala*, which recalls another bilateral trope, that of the division of the Japanese imperial government in the Ministry of the left and the Ministry of the right.

Outside political interest, tantric *techne* was applied to various pragmatic ends. For example, in the Japanese Shugendō tradition of mountain ascetics, which is strongly linked to esoteric Buddhism, the identification with Fudō Miyōō (cf. above, § 3.2.2.3) enables the ascetic practitioners to gain superhuman powers (*genjustu*), and therefore to meet the requests of the patronizing local communities in terms of 'worldly benefits' (Jp. *genze riyaku*), such as adverting misfortune, exorcism, soliciting good fortune, divination, and so on (cf. Miyake 1989; cf. *infra*).

As we will see in § 3.3, such 'magical-superstitious' traits of Hinduism and Buddhism were seen by the early Indologists as later and spurious accretions to the originally 'pure' doctrines of the *Veda*, or of the *Sutta* and related Pāli texts attributed to the historical Buddha and his first community. However, as De Caroli (2004) has shown, this reading of early Buddhism as inherently disenchanted, 'psychological' and 'rational', clearly overlooked textual and archeological evidence.[29] According to these latter, we know that the Buddhist *saṃgha*, from its earliest developments, acknowledged and adopted various beliefs and practices involving different sorts of spirit-deities or *genii loci*, notably those termed *yakkah* (Sk. *yakṣa*). In the texts, Buddha and monks do not forbid the making of offerings to such beings but simply prohibited the use of meat and alcohol as this would be against precepts of not harming living creatures and avoiding intoxicants. In a certain sense, this can also be read as a Buddhist appropriation of pre-existing rituals. These, in fact, as seventh century Chinese pilgrim monks attested, were actually performed by monks in India. These spirits were believed, among other things, to haunt monks who break their vows, or at least to report their deeds to the Buddha. This ambiguous malevolent-benevolent nature of *yakkah* is reflected in the way monks generally dealt with these beings. They were treated as unenlightened and potentially dangerous beings who, after conversion to Buddhism, would become tutelary spirits of the community or monastery. Such power held by monks, furthermore, helps greatly in gaining support from local lay communities. Japan, as we have seen above (§§ 3.2.1.1 and 3.2.2.3), is an exemplary case in which Buddhism strongly interacted with the local *kami* worship

29 Such as statues and notably the widely disseminated narratives of Buddha's previous lives known as *jātaka*.

endowing these traditions with further ideas and practices that eventually crystallized into a self-conscious religious system.

Some readers may object that the above discussed examples refere mostly to pre-modern cases. Indeed, nowadays we may find plenty of examples of East-Asian religious phenomena featuring 'rationalized', 'protestantized' discourses or practices, and there are historical-cultural explanations for this (cf. *infra*, § 3.3). However, more often than not, these discourses and practices involve actors coming from religious or intellectual elites, possibly speaking with an apologetic aim, and focusing mostly on philosophical, metaphysical and soteriological aspects. But once we turn to lived, everyday religiosity, the inner and disenchanted model shows again its limit.

It is a commonly held conviction that Theravāda Buddhism of South-East-Asia has remained most faithful to the original, supposedly 'pure' early Buddhism[30] (which we have just seen it was not). As a matter of fact, the religious life of *theravādin*s, especially lay practitioners, revolves around dimensions and topics certainly not limited to the soteriological goal of *nibbāna* or the practice of meditation. First of all, the concepts of *kamma* and meritorious actions (*kousala*) do not exclusively revolve around the moral conduct (*sīla*) of the individual. Instead, karmic merit can be seen as a sort of 'spiritual currency' (Gombrich 2005, 126-7) which, furthermore, goes beyond the fate of the individual. Walters (2003) has in fact labeled "sociokarma" all those many religious phenomena in Theravāda countries in which *kamma*-related discourses and practices embrace the dimension of the family, the community or even the national group. For example, the 2004 tsunami in Asia has been interpreted by Sri Lankan Buddhists as the result of the corruption of the government and the continuing warfare between the government and the Tamil Tigers (Crosby 2008, 64). This 'spiritual currency' can be earned and transferred in various way: by making donation to the *saṃgha*, by sponsoring the recitation or the copying of religious texts, by listening to sermons or to the recitations of *pāli* texts (mostly incomprehensible to the laity and even to some monks), by observing filial piety, and so on. The most common modality, however, remains the worship and

30 As we will see in the next chapter, the forms of Buddhism taken in consideration in English RE usually belong to the Theravāda cultural sphere. This equation of Theravāda Buddhism with early Buddhism is due to various factors: the preservation of a Canon in the *pāli* language, the historical self-consciousness of Sinhalese *saṃgha* itself as being directly linked to the third Buddhist Council sponsored by the convert Emperor Aśoka (304-232 BCE), and some other aspects such as the treatment of the figure of the historical Buddha in rather simpler terms, compared to the much complex pantheon of Buddhas of Mahāyāna. However, the present situation is the result of various historical processes and notably those changes engendered by the encounters with westerners. Even the adoption of the term *thera-vāda* as representative of the Buddhism in Sri Lanka and of South-East-Asia is a modern development (Crosby 2013, 1-4).

the offerings to the Buddha, particularly in occasion of annual holy days, of pilgrimage to important sites, and of the annual processions of relics. Important and common recipients for the transfer of merit are the deceased, to ease their rebirth and avoid their coming back as ghosts (cf. Crosby 2013, 118-22). Apart from *kamma*-related practices, "at the heart of many Theravāda rituals is the chanting of *paritta*" (Crosby 2013, 125). These latter are texts mainly extracted from the Pāli Canon and are regarded as having great powers such as, for example, being able to convert any kinds of malevolent spirits in any kind of place or situation because they are in *pāli*, which is considered a *lingua franca*. Another reason is because *paritta* are Buddha's words and thus are the most efficacious (in karmic sense) examples of 'right speech'. They are recited by monks and lay people alike in consecration ceremonies, funerals, death anniversaries, and so on, in order to advert misfortune or ensuring prosperity. Therefore, they may be also used in occasions such as at the opening of a new business or during weddings (Crosby 2013, 125-8). We may be tempted to consider these latter 'non-Buddhist' practices, but, as we have often observed in this chapter, to think of religious traditions as separated boxes is an epistemological bias which hinders a more comprehensive understanding.

3.2.3.5 Worldly Benefits in Contemporary Japan

In our discussion on the limits of an idea of religiosity based on individual inner-world, disenchanted and focused on transcendent goals, an exemplary case is provided by contemporary Japan. As a matter of fact, different scholars have argued that it is possible to sort out certain common patterns, across the bewildering number of Japanese religious phenomena and their mutual entanglements, so that we may speak of a "common religion" (Reader, Tanabe 1998) or "primal religion" (Pye 1996) of Japan. The point here is that the characteristic trait of these patterns is to be centered on the dimension of practice.[31] Furthermore, such practice-oriented religiosity has a strong focus on the material, communal and pragmatic aspects of everyday life.

According to Pye (2009), the patterns of this Japanese "primal religion" can be set out in four main fields of practice, each one linked to an emic key word. The first field is space, linked to the practice of *o-mairi*, 'humbly visit' to a special place, irrespectively of it being

31 It has been suggested that focusing on practice as the privileged object of enquiry (instead for example on doctrinal texts) could be the most fruitful approach to understanding Japanese religiosity, as it would allow us to explore religion as a process of interaction between various ritual, narrative, institutional, political, textual and discursive components (Dolce 2015b, 48 ff.).

a Buddhist temple, a Shintō shrine, a mausoleum or even a particular natural spot whose special nature is duly signaled. The second field is time, linked to the key word of *nenjūgyōji*, the 'annual events'. Every kind of religious organization, from local communities to nation-wide shrines or temples networks, has its own version of them. "Yet the people know that any one of such lists is simply a version of something which is generic, and indeed shared by all" (Pye 2009, 49), with the New Year as the constant common element. The third field of practice are socially integrative events, and the key word is *matsuri*, a religious festival consisting of various public events of a ritual and merrymaking nature. This is usually considered the foremost expression of Shintō religiosity, in which local *kami* are believed to take part, in order to renew the mutual interdependence between them and the participating community. However, it is often endowed with further layers of meanings, from valorization of local culture (even to attract tourists) to national identity building, highlighting e.g. an imaginary of the mythical rural roots of Japan or valorizing food-symbols such as rice and fish (cf. Bulian 2018, 27-9). *Matsuri* is therefore not an exclusive term to Shintō but pertains also to Buddhist *nenjūgyōji*, with the *hana matsuri* celebrating the birth of Buddha or the *obon matsuri* celebrating the ancestors. Notwithstanding the relaxed atmosphere, "some kind of participation is more or less obligatory" (Pye 2009, 50). The last field of practice is related to the life of the individual within society, whose critical or pivotal moments – not only most 'conspicuous' ones, such as birth, marriage, death, but also weaning, the first social appearance, or coming to adolescence or old age – are accompanied by related ritual measures. In addition, these ritually controlled stages do not end with the physical death of the individual, but continue after the funeral to ensure that the recently deceased reaches the status of ancestor without any trouble (Raveri 2006, 93-102; Bulian 2018, 119-32, 144-63). In fact, Pye (2009, 50) marks this field with the key word of *senzo kuyō* ('care of ancestors'). The pivotal point is that in all these four fields the focus is on what Pye calls "transactional rites" (Pye 2009, 48, 50-1), whose basic structure is an exchange between practitioners and a counterpart (a temple, a god, an ancestor) to receive benefits in this life. In fact, the key word here is *genze riyaku* ('wordly benefits') and, according to Reader and Tanabe (1998, 14-32), this concept and the pursuit of such benefits is what forms the bedrock of common Japanese religiosity. *Genze riyaku* relates to basically any potentially critical aspect of everyday life[32] and can be divided fundamentally into *kaiun* ('opening good luck') and *yakuyuk*e ('preven-

32 Traffic safety, recovery from illness, making a good marriage, safe childbirth, business prosperity, successful career, prevention of theft, success in study, and many others (cf. Reader, Tanabe 1998, 45-9).

tion of danger'). In order to obtain them, there can be various practices, often involving material artefacts: buying talisman or amulets (*ofuda* or *omamori*), writing petitions on votive tables (*ema*), drawing and tying divination slips (*omijuki*) onto a tree branch, or praying to a deity, usually enshrined in sites specialized in specific benefits. These practices may be performed by individuals alone, or with the involvement (and payment) of ritual specialists. These latter are hired especially on behalf of larger groups such as family or companies, and their services include, among other things, conducting *kitō* rituals ('prayer') or performing *goma* rituals, which nonetheless conclude with the petitioners usually receiving a material artefact endowed with the beneficial properties asked for.

Although being a concept crosscutting all religious traditions in Japan, the term *genze riyakyu* has Buddhist origin,[33] and figures notably in prominent *sūtra* such as the *Lotus Sūtra of Wonderful Law* (Sk. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, Jp. *Myōhōrengekyō*), the *Garland Sūtra* (Sk. *Avataṃsakasūtra*, Jp. *Kegonkyō*), the *Sūtra of the Golden Light* (Sk. *Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra*, Jp. *Konkōkyō*), and the Chinese apocryphal *Sūtra of the Benevolent King* (Ch. *Renwangjin*, Jp. *Ninnōkyō*). Modern Japanese insider interpreters usually try to explain (or explain away) the contradiction between world-affirming and world-denying aspects in Buddhist doctrine and practice by resolving to the *Lotus Sūtra*'s idea of *zenkō hōben* (Sk. *upāyakauśalya*), 'skillful mean'. That is, a 'trick' to draw practitioners towards otherworldly salvation through initial material benefits. However, Reader and Tanabe argue that even the earliest Buddhist sources – not differently from what we have also seen above – "affirm the power of Buddhism to produce practical benefits" (Reader, Tanabe 1998, 100, cf. 71-102). On the other hand, it would be misleading to address such religiosity as 'frivolous'. On the contrary, the logic of practical pursuit implies strong personal commitment in terms of a logic of exchange between petitioner and deity (cf. Reader, Tanabe 1998, 107-36, 192-205; Bulian 2019, 103-5). For example, to benefit from an *o-harae* ritual for traffic safety at Yahiko Shrine (Niigata prefecture) implies automatically a promise from the beneficiary to the *kami* to "drive while strong in body and mind, correctly and without mistake, for the benefit of the world and its people" (cit. in Pye 2008, 26). To cite another example, talismans for money-making sold at the Sōtō Zen temple of Saijōji are accompanied by a card which includes, together with the ways for accumulating wealth, the reminder to "maintain the mind that venerates the gods and buddhas", to "make your work your hobby", or to "never put your faith solely in money". Indeed, the enchanted ethos which permeates

33 As a matter of fact, we read in the *Nihonshoki* (Cronicle of Japan) that when Buddhism was officially introduced to Japan through Korean embassies in the sixth century, it was its potential for pragmatic benefits that was highlighted (Deal, Ruppert 2015, 13).

genze riyaku practices paradoxically aligns with motivations and basic values expressed in secular societies: happiness, assurances about the future, success and solace in exchange for hard work, duty and diligence (Reader, Tanabe 1998, 256-8). Since the quest for practical benefits is also considered to be conductive to the strengthening of *shinkō*, i.e. (affective) faith in a deity's power, to psychological benefit such as *anshin* ('peace of mind') and to a general idea of *kyūsai* ('salvation') (Reader, Tanabe 1998, 17-20), such religiosity, far for being 'shallow', may furthermore be considered to be pivotal when it comes to making "life shaping decisions" (Pye 2008, *passim*).

3.2.3.6 Conclusion

In this section I offered a rather arbitrary account of various 'enchanted' modes of Japanese and Asian religiosity in order to show how they would not fit the well-ingrained idea of a prototypical religion which emphasizes the individual, inner, psychological, de-somatized, experience-based, other-worldly religiosity, at the expenses of social, exterior, material, somatic, ritual-based, this-worldly religiosity. However, the increase of preference, in Euro-American contexts, for the psychological, disenchanted and de-mythologized aspects of religiosity, coupled with the relegation of religion to the private – and by definition non-institutionalized – sphere, paradoxically brought about a concept which is often considered to be in contrastive terms with religion: 'spirituality'.

3.2.4 Questioning the Distinction Between 'Religion' and 'Spirituality'

Empirical findings, particularly in Anglo-Saxon contexts, show a raising popularity of the term 'spirituality' and a growing trend of identifying oneself as 'spiritual' (Streib, Klein 2016, 73). In the US this word is used in increasingly contrastive terms to religion, as more than a quarter of Americans describe themselves as spiritual but not religious (Lipka, Gecewicz 2017). As we will see in ch. 4, 'spirituality' is a key term also in English RE and beyond, inscribed in the overall school mission of providing "spiritual, moral, social and cultural development" (Ofsted 2004b, 6), and described as

> the development of the non-material element of a human being which animates and sustains us and, depending on our point of view, either ends or continues in some form when we die. It is about the development of a sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose. (12)

Therefore, it is worth discussing it more in detail.

Just like the term 'religion' (cf. above, § 2.1.5), 'spirituality' also has its own genealogical development, that can be sketched in this way:[34] the term *spiritus* is the Latin translation of Hebrew *ruach* and Greek *pneuma*, which in the Bible indicate both the divine element of God and the vital breath donated to mankind. In Paul's epistles, *pneuma* concerns what is guided by the God's spirit, or *pneuma Theou*, and thus morally good, whereas *sarx* or 'flesh' is what hinders this divine influence. Hellenistic influences in early Christianity also introduced the ontological distinction between spirituality and materiality (Gr. *hyle*, Lt. *materialitas*). In medieval times, the semantic field expanded to indicate matters related to ecclesiastical jurisdiction and proper Christian conduct. In early modern times, starting with the *Exercitia spiritualia* (1615) of the Jesuit Ignazio of Loyola (1491-1556), 'spirituality' began to indicate a retired, contemplative religious activity, opposed to corporeal activity. Due to the weight given by Protestantism to interior faith as the individual's unmediated relationship to God, and through the influence of authors such as Schleiermacher and his emphasis on religious feeling, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the term 'spirituality' became more widespread, and its meaning

> was expanded beyond Christian theological and ecclesiastical discourse, to refer to the individualistic and subjective core of universal religion. (Huss 2014, 49)

In summary, at least till the early twentieth century, spirituality is what is concerned with metaphysical, moral, subjective, private, experiential matters. As such, it is considered the reverse of the secular realm (physical, material, public, social, economic). In other words, its development is still consistent with the genealogies of religion and secularity we explored above (§§ 2.1.5 and 2.1.8).

However, according to Heelas (2008, 25-46), Romanticism greatly influenced the way in which spirituality came to be understood in contemporary times. He identifies the following relevant romantic themes: first, an underlying neoplatonic paradigm of a primordial 'Absolute Unity' which disintegrated into multiplicity. This caused suffering and fragmentation, concretized in political divisions, industrial revolution, Enlightenment's emphasis on individuality, and so on. However, this fall is an opportunity to achieve a higher state by transfiguring oneself and reaching an 'Absolute'. This latter is often conceptualized, differently from a distant God, as a vital force residing in an immanent frame, often in the form of divinized 'Nature',

34 Cf. Principe 1983; Carrette, King 2005, 30-47; Huss 2014, 48-9.

which is an active principle behind the formation of one's own very self. In fact, one of the best paths to reach such an 'Absolute' is the individual, subjective, artistic expression, in which the romantic 'Genius' should appear (the other being philosophy). This principle that flows in various lives remain the same, so that the others are 'manifestation' of a same whole. At the same time, however, each manifestation is unique because it flows from specific life experiences. One striking example is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*:

> I am unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different. (1954, 17, cit. in Heelas 2008, 38)

Romantic themes influenced the spheres of health, agriculture and education. Macrobiotics and holistic practice aimed at well-being began to develop. In education, the idea of the positiveness of letting the inherent natural attitudes of children flow free developed. This led to the child-centered or self-centered educative philosophy later expounded by Steiner (1861-1925) and Montessori (1870-1952). In summary, around the 1910s, the general motif of a contrastive duality between, on one side, the sacrality attributed to the depths of inner life, and on the other side, the 'profane' external world filled with malfunctioning social, cultural and old-traditions-bounded arrangements was well attested (Heelas 2008, 45).

In the second half of twentieth century, the above-mentioned romantic ideas greatly contributed to a discourse shift in the field of spirituality, which started to include themes such as absolute individuality, inner awareness, personal integration, non-rational meditative practices, sense of connection to a whole, sacralization of the self through various kind of experiences, and so on. This field of discourses and practices is generally referred to with the umbrella term of New Age (cf. Chryssides 2007; Sutcliffe, Gilhus 2014, 1-6), whose participants often defined themselves as 'spirituals' (Huss 2014, 49-50). The counter-cultural movements of the 1960s reinforced the ideas of freedom and of rejection of any kind of institutions, seen as forces hindering the individual quest for self-realization. This latter, furthermore, was often understood in terms of an expansion of consciousness to be obtained with various experiential practices such the use of hallucinogens and certain kinds of music. From the 1970s onwards the duality of subjective experience *versus* the constrains of society faded, and the quest for a 'higher self' began to be more 'psychologized' and more 'mainstream-affirming'. For example, the obstacles to spiritual growth are not found anymore in society, but within one own's mind. 'Mainstream-affirming' tendencies intensified in the 1980s and early 1990s, when wealth accumulation and career development even came to be seen as manifestations of a thriv-

ing inner spirituality (Heelas 2008, 51-2). Heelas argues that present day spirituality can be briefly described as "well-being spirituality", in the sense that the lingering romantic theme of regaining unity can be seen in the quest for 'balance' or 'harmony' under various aspects: harmony of body and mind, harmony among emotions, harmony in interpersonal relationship, harmony between humans and the natural environment, all of which can be subsumed in a general idea of harmony between self and a holistic whole (52-3, 60-78).

Streib and Klein (2016) summarize the semantic stratifications of the term 'spirituality' in the following way. There is a general idea of connectedness and harmony with a living 'Cosmos/Nature'. Individuals endeavor a personal quest for meaning, for inner peace and higher self, which reflects the societal process of individualization. There are beliefs in higher powers and beings, but with a general refusal of characterizing them in detail as traditional religions do. This is linked with the idea that 'Truth', 'Life's Meaning' or 'Wisdom' are beyond rational understanding. This also adds an esoteric component, in the sense that an extra-ordinary insight is deemed necessary to be aware of a spiritual dimension behind materiality (in the sense of something hidden, invisible, subtle). However, there is a difference between this and the most common forms of esotericism, in which the authentication of having reached the 'Truth' is bestowed by external authority such as a master. By contrast, in contemporary spirituality the authority sanctioning the righteousness of the spiritual path is often the subjective experience of the practitioner itself. This is linked to a general strong opposition to mainstream religions, seen negatively as fossilized traditions, full of dogmatic rules, static and based on fixed, objective sets of beliefs, incompatible with a dynamic, subjective, experiential-based spirituality. This is consistent with the understanding of spirituality as an individual praxis. Being experiential and subjectively based, spirituality is conceived as 'doing' and 'living' certain experiences, rather than mere adhering to a system of beliefs.

Many scholars (cf. the review of the debate in Heelas 2008, 81-96) argue that discourses and practices of spirituality can be highly consistent, even functional, to the dominant forms of culture informed by consumerism and neoliberalist ideology. The centrality of the self and its spiritual realization resonates with the individualistic and competitive *milieu* of contemporary capitalism (Altglas 2014, 271-9; Huss 2014, 53-5). Privatization and personalization of one's spiritual path automatically involve the birth of a market that supplies the demands of diversified objects (e.g. books) and services (e.g. yoga lessons) necessary to carry out one's own spiritual praxis. Carrette and King (2005, 123-68) contend that, given the extreme ambivalence in the meanings of spirituality, this concept has been easily taken over by corporate ethics and management techniques, resulting in discourses that 'spiritualize' the corporate ideology of profit (i.e. giving

it additional, emotional layers of meaning), or in the invention of religion-inspired management practices, such as meditation for stress relief or the use of the *Yijing* for decision making.

Given its recent discursive construction and its strong connections with modern and contemporary Euro-American culture, Huss (2014, 52) argues against the use of 'spirituality' as an etic term, where instead it should be understood as an emic notion, developed in well-defined historical, cultural and geographical circumstances. Similarly, Streib and Klein do not see any value in considering spirituality as an analytical term distinct from religion, and propose instead to see it as follows:

> 'Privatized experience-oriented religion', which gravitates toward a segment in the religious field where access to the ultimate is not mediated by tradition, institution, or clergy, but characterized by immediacy for the individual, and where the symbolization of transcendence is not necessarily vertical (heaven; God or gods), but may include horizontal transcendence. (Streib, Klein 2016, 79)

How is this discussion on spirituality relevant to our treatment of Japanese and other Asian religions in education? My point is that East-Asian religions have come to be represented as the finest expression of a free spirituality, resonant with the 'spiritual needs' of contemporary (Euro-American) world, but exotic enough to became fashionable and commodifiable. In order to understand how this happened and what its significance is when discussing Japanese and other Asian religions and education, we need to address the impact of modernity and coloniality on East-Asian religious traditions, an impact that engendered a series of pivotal and stratified processes of Orientalism, Self-Orientalism and Occidentalism.

3.3 Second Challenge: The Historical Legacy of Modernity and Colonialism: Orientalism, Self-Orientalism and Occidentalism

We have seen above (§§ 2.1.5 and 2.1.8) how, in the construction of the Euro-American concept of 'religion' as a distinct and universal phenomenon, a pivotal role was played by the information about religious practices and doctrines coming from extra-European regions and their interpretation. This input stimulated a series of self-reflections on the identity of Christianity in front of various instances of diversity: diversity within Christianity, diversity of the Jews, of the Mohammedans, and of the 'heathens'. Thus, it gradually developed a universal *genus* of religion, a "taxonomic system of equivalence" (Mandair 2016, 186) modeled after Protestant Christianity.

In this way the various discourses and practices around the concept of 'religion' (and its opposite twin, 'secularity') actively contributed to the construction of orientalist imaginaries of non-Euro-American regions. They provided in fact a model that, being based on Christianity, but employed towards other 'religions', has been instrumental in establishing the superiority of Euro-American civilizations. In other words, we have seen how the study of religion\s has been instrumental also in the orientalistic enterprise, because it posited the 'others' in an evolutive line between 'modern' and 'primitive', empathizing their ab-normal aspects, generalizing such ab-normal aspects as their constitutive norms, and denying any historical evolution of these aspects. This, argued Said (1978), justified colonial and imperial exploitation.

However, Said's thesis has been subject to various reflections and developments. Among them, there is the idea that the phenomenon of Orientalism was not uni-directional in the sense of being engendered by Euro-American agency alone. Instead, in order to become effectively hegemonic, Orientalist discourse needs two intertwined processes.

The first one is Occidentalism. The notion of Occidentalism can be employed in two ways. The first basically refers to the "dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies" (Buruma, Margalit 2004, 3). The second one is upheld by scholars such as Coronil (1996), and refers instead to Occidentalism not as the 'reverse' of Said's Orientalism, but "its condition of possibility, its dark side" (Coronil 1996, 56), in the sense that the possibility of discourses concerning an homogeneous and completely opposite 'East' (i.e. Orientalism) has to be grounded by discourses *from and about the West*, starting from the very idea that there exists a 'West' which is a 'bounded unit'. That is, a view of a 'West' whose relational histories with external elements as well as inner variability have been silenced (cf. Coronil 1996, 57 ff.).

In this sense, the orientalist discourses are no more a simple justification for exploitation. Euro-American regions possess, in their availability of colonized or even simply influenced cultures, a sort of reverse-mirror in which projecting all

> what is or should be other to the 'West', including the unconscious removal or nostalgic desire for native Euro-American traditions and its own non-modern past. (Miyake 2015, 98)

In other words, Orientalism, as the 'offshoot' of Occidentalism, works through erasing inner differences and inflating external differences in order to confirm

> a Self-centered standpoint from which difference is turned into Otherness either through Self-confirming objectification or Self-questioning exoticization. (Coronil 1996, 73)

This works in tandem with self-Orientalism, i.e. the processes in which all the various orientalist discourses that establish 'East' as the 'Other' came to be *actively*, not *passively*, accepted, interiorized and even tactically implemented and re-elaborated by the people who were the object of these discourses. These people constructed thus their new subjectivities as the 'Others' in contrast, or at least in reference to the 'West'. In this way it engendered, and still is engendering,

> a sort of mirror game in which specular identity and alterity representation enforce one another, reproducing the 'West' as the ultimate and universal point of reference. (Miyake 2015, 101).

It must be noted, however, that all these phenomena are "embedded in a historical process whereby negotiation and disjunctions are always at stake" (102) and the universal, and often implicit or unmarked notion of the 'West', actually varies. It does so in accord with the way in which it depicts its 'Other': as something to be

> (re)discovered and explained (academic Orientalism), to be educated and reformed (paternalistic Orientalism), to be despised and hated (racist Orientalism), to be fantasized and desired (exoticistic Orientalism). (98)

With these theoretical reflections as our background, we proceed now to an historical review of the dynamics and the outcomes of the historical-cultural encounters, debate and negotiations, between modern Euro-American and Asian socio-cultural realities, on the issue of what Asian religious traditions are, or should be. We must start from the effects of the introduction of the modern concept of religion. The interiorization of this concept has been the first instance of self-Orientalism, as it entailed the acceptance, by Asian people, of their status of an inferior people who need to get rid of their superstitions *tout court*, or at least they need to wipe away these superstitions from the 'authentic' core of their religions (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.1). This latter case is a clear instance of what has been called the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm 1983). Indeed, the Asian people's "responses to novel situations" (2), such as colonialism or the threat of colonial rule, has often taken the form of fictitious, or at least largely selective re-construction of native religious traditions, in which a set of practices and rules of ritual or symbolic nature were highlighted and posited in historical continuity with an allegedly 'mythical' past.

These processes originated out of three needs: firstly, religious institutions, in order to keep their political positions, felt compelled to contribute to the production of an identity base for the formation of a modern nation, understood as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983); secondly, a renewal of these religious traditions into

certain forms was deemed necessary in order to make them 'fit' for the modern configuration of these imagined community; and thirdly, there was the need to promote on religious ground these imagined communities in front of Euro-American powers which had previously despised them especially for their religious backwardness.

However, these operations have to be read in tandem with the historical development of the imagery of 'oriental religions' produced in Europe and America, which was actually inextricably entangled with various native concerns such as critiques to Christianity, critiques to scientific rationality, the need for universal truths, and so on. At any rate, all these concerns revolved around the 'big' question of the place of the 'West', with its 'religion', in an increasingly larger and connected world (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.2). Asian actors, consciously or not, took with due consideration these Euro-American imagery and interpretations, and accordingly produced their self-orientalist versions of the concept of 'religion' in the sense of universal phenomenon, and of their own religious traditions.

These exchanges engendered a series of mutually confirming representations that nonetheless varied through history, following changes in contexts and relative tactical and hermeneutical operations (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.3). The newer representations did not necessarily erase the older ones, thus creating a stratification of representations which may also have contradictory aspects, e.g. Buddhism as rational philosophy but also as the irrational practice followed by nonconformists.

As preliminary argued in ch. 1, and as it will be shown shortly, these processes of orientalistic self- and hetero-representations involved a series of similar patterns throughout Asia, as well as the construction of an imaginary landscape, which included India, China Japan, and other Asian religions, both as a unitary whole, and in a hierarchical manner in which certain countries, depending on the circumstances, appeared to be more or less representative of the 'Orient'. Therefore, to understand the modern construction of Japanese religions, especially in consideration of a general RE discussion, we need to see a larger picture, because all representations must be taken into serious account when dealing with the issue of teaching any example of East-Asian religious traditions.

3.3.1 The Introduction of The Concept of 'Religion' in East-Asian Contexts. Three Examples

We have already touched the issue of Hinduism as a modern discursive construct in the field of religion. However, it would be highly reductive to state that it was a complete invention of the colonizers subsequently imposed upon a passive colonized population. As I have hinted above (§ 2.1.8), the Indian sub-continent offers a case

for examining the dynamics of 'inner colonization', in the sense that

> Hinduism was the result of a dialectical collaborative enterprise, with the colonials and Indians mutually contributing to the construction of this edifice. (Keppens, Bloch 2010, 5)

Furthermore, Hinduism could not have been constructed out of thin air. Scholars such as Lorenzen (2010) argue that prior to the emergence of British colonialism there existed a certain consciousness of a collective identity as 'Hindu', such as in the verses of the poet Kabir (fifteenth century), who distinguished it from 'Turks' or 'Muslim' (*hindu*, *turka* and *musalaman*).

However, it was during the colonial period (1757-1947) that this initial identity awareness was exploited by various actors and framed into a construct named 'Hindooism'. Roughly speaking, three colonial actors looked for the 'foundations' of what seemed to be the religions of the colonized: the first orientalists, guided by both exotic curiosity and romantic expectations; missionaries (who often were themselves orientalists), in order to be better prepared in native religion which abled them to proselytize more effectively; last but not least, East India Company (later British Empire's) officials, who were in need of clues for taking census and distinguishing the local population from Muslims and other traditions (Jews, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh), and were in need of finding indigenous laws and ideological systems in order to standardize and better control the socio-cultural fabric. Due to the uncontested protestant paradigm of religion, all these actors sought the interlocutors who better fit their ideas of standard religion. Therefore, they addressed the brahmans (and to a lesser extent, Muslim law-doctors), i.e. those who mostly resembled a specialized, priestly class devoted to the exegesis of ancient sacred texts. Out of these choices developed a process that Torri (2000, 361-4) calls the "brahmanization" and Sugirtharajah (2010, 72) calls the "textualization" of the Indian traditions. That is, the translation and domestication of certain texts, such as the religious-legal tractates of the *Manusmṛti* (firstly translated in 1794) or the *Bhagavadgītā* (firstly translated in 1785) and their election as the foundations of the Indian legal and religious system. The ancient legal tractates, in particular, become swiftly incorporated and applied (perhaps for the very first time) through the British legal codes,

> to nearly the 80% of the population of colonial India in matters of marriage and divorce, legitimacy, guardianship, adoption, inheritance, and religious endowments. (Doninger 2009, 596)

All this came at the expense of other texts such as the *Purāṇa* or other religious expressions such as rituals, art or dance. This 'sanita-

tion' towards undesired elements applied notably to Tantrism. The renowned sanskritist, Monier-Williams (1819-1899), who was the first to employ the term 'Tantrism' as indicating a distinct entity, disparaged it as the most degenerate form of Indian religion. By representing Tantrism as a tradition characterized basically by orgies with wine and women, where sanguinary sacrifices are enacted and meaningless formulae are uttered with the aim of acquiring magical power and destroying one's enemies, Monier-Williams considered it no more than mere 'witchcraft' (Urban 2003, 67).

Together with this incorporation and purification of long held Brahmanical views in the gradually developing idea of 'Hinduism', also foreign elements, such as universalistic tendencies, rationalizations or standardization of doctrines and practices, and the emphasis of creedal beliefs, gradually start spreading. In this way, ideas of 'Religion' and of a unitary religion called 'Hindooism' entered in the public debate and were readily negotiated and adopted by Indians. This fostered discussion and debates in which there was an increasing awareness of belonging to a unitary tradition, or at least to traditions in need of being unified. One of the most famous examples is the foundation of the Brāhmo Samāj (Society of *Brahman*) by Rāmmohun Rāy (1772-1833), a Bengali intellectual. He came from a brahmanic caste and was well-versed in his own tradition and equally proficient in English, European culture and Christianity. He was the first to publicly using the word 'hindooism' in 1816, seen by him as morally decadent, due to the peculiar practice of Hindoo idolatry which was nonetheless considered alien to the 'real', 'ancient' 'hindooism'. In his interpretation 'real hindooism' is a universalistic monotheism, whose God is fundamentally non-dual (*advaita*) to human beings, and whose truth was to be found in all scriptures of the world, if properly interpreted through reason and morality. His writings and Brāhmo Samāj initiatives were especially aimed at reforming India society. For example, they strongly endorsed the 1829 ban on the practice of *satī*, the immolation of the widow on the funeral pyre of the husband (Killingley 2019). Similarly, Rāmmohun despised *tantras* as a pernicious departure from the authentic Hindu tradition and endorsed only a highly purified version of Tantric doctrines or practices. These latter expounded an impersonal image of the Absolute, or an image of Kali as a loving mother, and mentioned sexual practices to be permitted only with one's own wife (Urban 2003, 80-3).

The Queen's proclamation of the British Raj in 1858, including the enshrining of the idea of religious practice as a 'right' of subjecthood in colonial India, had an intensifying role in the proliferation of modern organizations focused on one or the other aspect of the issue of religion (Zavos 2010, 63-4). European emphasis on the idea of 'creed' as being the main components of a religion, highly influenced indigenous terminology. In fact, by the end of the nineteenth centu-

ry, a term like '*dharma*' had come to have almost the same meaning as 'religion' or 'religious creed'. As a matter of fact, another society, called Ārya Samāj (Society of Arians, founded in 1875) sought to unite all Hindus, beyond any sectarian and caste boundaries, under a reformed religion. This was based on *Veda*, rejected idolatry and, most notably, actually required its adherents to subscribe to the Ten Principles (Oddie 2010, 46-7).

These reformist attempts engendered also opposite reactions, such as those published in the Calcutta newspaper, *Samchar Chandrika* (first issued in 1822). The ostensible conservatorism of these reactions, silent in matter of doctrine and deities but focused on "patterning a general structure for Hindu action, social and ritual", was in reality driven by

> an urgency to shape a modern, popular Hinduism through emergent discourses promoting a centralization of authority and a common, socially cohesive Hindu identity. (Pennington 2005, 140)

Other similar self-proclaimed defenders of orthodoxy focused on other issues of symbolic value such as cow protection and the traditional ritual roles of images (*mūrti*).

Shifting our discussion toward the Chinese case, discourses about religion in the modern sense of the term began to develop in the historical context of the Qing empire at turn of the century. The government was in a crumbling state, bankrupt, militarily humiliated by Western powers by the two Opium Wars and by Japan through the war over Korea. From the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the intellectual exchange between westerners, especially missionaries, new ideas started to circulate. At the same time, there was a pressing fear that if advanced foreign technical knowledge was the only necessary means to survive, it would be useless without a more profound ideological reform (cf. Cheng 2000, 656-60), which of course would also include the newly imported concept of religion.

We have already seen (§ 3.2.1) how the concept of a well-defined corpus of teaching and practices that requires exclusive belonging is quite different from a traditional understanding of the ways of doing religion. The emic distinction concerning what we now label religion in the Qing China was, especially from a political point of view, between 'orthodoxy' (*zhengjiao*) and 'heterodoxy' (*xiejiao*) or 'illicit cults' (*yinci*). The former included a wide range of institutional traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, plus an even wider range of all the various worships, practices and doctrines on a local level, especially those closely adhering to a patriarchal order of society (territorial communities, lineages, guilds), and those that were not deemed as threats to the imperial authority and social cohesion by local governors (Gossaer 2005, 3). This traditional con-

ception of the state-religions relationship, as well as the traditional way of relating to religions came to be strongly questioned and seen in need of a reform. A reform clearly inspired by the modern protestant idea of religion.

In 1898 Kang Youwei memorialized the throne for the establishment of a sort of 'state-religion' (*guojao*) which was a

> wild hybridization of Confucian fundamentalism and Christianity under the influence of, notably, the Scottish Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (1845-1919). (Gossaert, Palmer 2011, 46)

Youwei proposed the creation of a network of state-managed 'Confucian churches', in which all Chinese should be compelled to attend weekly Confucian masses where Confucian classics would be read by a Confucian pastor. His intended plan was meant to rectify the lax morality of a population that for two millennia has built temples to all sorts of immoral deities, which had caused them to be despised as barbarian by foreigners.

Shortly after 1898, new words began to appear in the discourse on religion, usually introduced in newspaper articles. The most important ones were *zongjiao* for 'religion', and *mixin* for 'superstition', popularized especially by Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a disciple of Kang Youwei. These two pivotal terms are generally considered by current scholarship to be adaptations of the Japanese neologisms, *shūkyō* and *meishin*, which had been invented a few years earlier. However, recent research (Barret, Tarocco 2012) shed light on the indigenous developments and combination of the terms *zong* ('main ancestral line', 'origin', 'principle') and *jiao* ('teaching'). The renowned Buddhist exegete Zongmi (780-841) used *ad hoc* combinations of the terms to indicate, with *jiao-zong*, "a doctrinally distinct strand of Buddhism" (Barret, Tarocco 2012, 312), and with *zong-jiao*, "something more inclusive, the teaching of the entire lineage of Zen masters stretching back through Bodhidharma to the Buddha himself" (Barret, Tarocco 2012, 312). This usage by Zongmi, still as *ad hoc* combinations and not as a common regular words, seem to have been passed down to the nineteenth century and appear in the writings of the lay geographer Wei Yuan (1794-1856), where "*zong* and *jiao* seem to be used by Wei to cover those activities that were proper to the Buddhist clergy" (Barret, Tarocco 2012, 314). Such connection between *zong* and *jiao* and matters related to Buddhist clergy resurface in the 1838 writings of missionary Karl Gützlaff (1803-1851), who indeed chose the term *jiaozong* to indicate the unusual status of the Papal state in Italy, described as a *jiaozong* state and clerics as *jiaozong* persons (Barret, Tarocco 2012, 315). In this sense, *zong* and *jiao* came to be furhter associated with "beliefs and practices of the relatively few religious professionals" (Tarocco 2008, 45).

In such context, it is not surprising that the first use of *zongjiao* referred to Christianity. "Religion was understood in the Western post-Reformation sense of a system of doctrine organized as a church separated from society" and "was considered a strong, moralizing, and unifying force behind the Western nation-states" (Gossaert, Palmer 2011, 50). In fact, in his essays from the early 1900s, Liang Qichao described *zongjiao* as "the root of Western civilization" and, accordingly, he sought for a native equivalent as an alternative to Christianity. He thus decided on Buddhism, since it showed traits more akin to 'rational belief' (*zhe xin*) than 'superstition' (*mixin*) (Tarocco 2008, 50).

Although the religion-superstition formulation may recall imperial-era categories such as 'orthodoxy' *versus* 'heterodoxy', its very premise was rapidly changing. Instead of Confucian righteousness and moral emperorship, the new dichotomy was based on claims of universal scientific truth (Nedostup 2008, 90), which became the measure in dividing between 'religion' (compatible with science) and 'superstition' (unscientific). This latter term indicated all that was not "grounded in and strictly limited to the spiritual and moral self-perfection" (Gossaert, Palmer 2011, 51). In this sense, it is not difficult to understand slogans such as "Destroy temples to build schools" (*huimiao banxue*), because the religious discourse and the educational one were entangled in terms of both moral and knowledge improvement (Gossaert, Palmer 2011, 49-50).

Eventually, the modernist rhetoric overwhelmed even those who wanted a strongly reformed tradition as a new ideological base of China, such as Kang and Liang. The newly established Republic of China clearly set itself in rupture with the traditional past, and exchanged its previous theological authority in matters of religion with authority over scientific discourse. In fact, from 1912 to the present days, legislators and administrators, when faced with the task of differentiating religion from superstition, have constantly called in academic experts to assist in this work (Gossaert 2005, 11). These measures in religious policy were clearly targeted against all those practices deemed superstitious, such as funeral rites, temple festivals, the worship of statues of any kind, and geomancy. For instance, by abolishing the traditional lunar-solar calendar in 1912, Republicans tried to replace (or at least 'rationalize') all those recurrences, especially the deities' birthdays, characterized as 'unproductive', 'hot and noisy' sociality (Nedostup 2008), with a new set of civic rituals. At the same time, 'freedom of religious belief' (*xinjiao ziyou*) was stipulated, but still within the strict frame of religion/superstitions, that is, freedom was permitted only to those traditions that fit the *zongjiao* paradigm. For such religions this meant adopting and indigenizing "Christian models of clerical training, community organization, confessional identification, and social engagement" (Gossaert, Palmer 2011, 74).

For the first time, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Islam attempted to organize themselves in the form of central, hierarchical, and nationwide organizations. A difficult task, since most activities were carried out by relatively independent specialists in service to local temples, mosques and schools. Due to its strong relation with imperial past Confucianism did not manage to be recognized. Eventually, five official religions were established, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism and (later) Daoism (Gossaert, Palmer 2011, 79-89). They shared such common traits as the

> bureaucratic control of religion, assimilation of political ideology into the religious discourse, anti-ritual rhetoric, and attempts at the national unification of each religion, contributing to the unification of China itself. (76)

These groups, however, represented only the tip of the iceberg. Many other religious groups or individuals actively engaged in the challenge of modernity, such as the so-called redemptive societies, which proposed new communal forms of universal salvation, or those movements which tried to modernize various body cultivation and healing traditions involving meditation, martial arts, and traditional medicine (91; cf. also 91-121).

Similar to China, the pressure by Euro-American powers in East-Asian left a clear impression on the Japanese. Already near the end of Edo period, they strongly felt the urgency to take both the technical and cultural resources of the Euro-Americans into serious consideration[35] and to implement strong reforms accordingly to avoid the same fate as China (cf. Kitaoka 2017, 11-24). The issue of unequal treatises also signaled the need of being recognized among 'civilized people', and, consequently, of adopting certain cultural forms and values. Among these new cultural forms, Christianity and the modern idea of religion were pivotal components (Isomae 2012, 228-9).

The first cultural engagement by the Japanese with the modern concept of religion was primarily a matter of diplomacy and translations of diplomatic treatises with Euro-American powers which were compelling Japan not only to open its borders to commerce, but also to establish freedom of religion. This latter issue, however, was primarily focused on lifting the ban on Christianity, an aim that Japanese noticed. The first attempts to translate religions, in fact, signal the "influence of the Christian prototype on the process of choosing

35 We can see these tendencies, for example, in the institution of the Office for the Investigation of Barbarian Books (*Bansho Shirabesho*) in 1856, in the use of the slogan *tōyō dōtoku*, *seiyō geijustu* ('eastern ethics and Western science') coined by Sakuma Shōzan (1811-1864) and in the various travels abroad to study Euro-American knowledge which had already been conducted by the 1860s (Gordon 2003, 73-4).

what to include in the category of religion" (Josephson 2012, 93). The words chosen for the first translation of 'religion', in the 1858 Treaty of Amity and Commerce concluded with the US, were *shūhō* ('lineage' or 'school's law') and *shūshi* ('lineage' or 'school's principle'). The former originally indicated those practices and regulations that are specific to a given Buddhist school, and was here used for 'religion'; the latter originally indicated the doctrine specific to a given Buddhist school, and was here used for 'religiously'. In this treaty 'religion' as a concept still does not seem to be applied also to the Japanese religious situation, and thus seems not to have a universal scope. In fact, what in English is rendered as 'Japanese religious ceremonies' and 'objects of their worship' corresponds in reality to *shinbutsu no raihai* (rituals for *kami* and *buddhas*) and *shintai butsuzō* (embodiment of *kami* and Buddhist statues) (105-7).

In following tractates there is still no fixed terms concerning 'religion', and the chosen terms vary consistently. Isomae (2012, 231-2) individuates two trends. The first focused on religion as ritual action and the terms used pertained originally to the institutional Buddhist parishioner system of the Edo period, as reflected in terms like *shūmon* ('gate of the lineage'). The other focused more on the doctrinal side and drew from the cultural area of intellectual debate between Buddhism and Confucianism, with terms like *seihō* ('sacred law') or *seidō* ('sacred way').

One of the intellectual workshops in which the nature and role of religion was debated was the influential but short-lived *Meiroku zasshi* (1874-1875), which popularized various Euro-American concepts. Here intellectuals who had been studying abroad proposed various views about religion, as well as additional proposals for translation, like *kyōmon* ('gate of the teaching'), *hōkyō* ('law and teaching'), and *shūkyō* ('teaching of the lineage'). Positions varied. For example, Nishi Amane (1829-1897) saw religion only in terms of private, emotional beliefs concerning the unknowable, beliefs that should be both protected by the state but excluded from public space, while Tsuda Mamichi (1829-1903) regarded religion as essential for public morality and the promotion of civilization, and maintained that Christianity could be a feasible choice in this regard. Kashiwabara Takaaki (1835-1910) argued for guidance by the state towards the right religion and away from 'heresy' or savage religion, a way similar to what the 'West' had already done. In fact, several thinkers distinguished between 'religion' and 'superstitions', especially those concerned with warding off supernational influence, which were defined as *meishin* ('delusionary beliefs') (cf. Josephson 2012, 228-42).

Concerning these latter, it must be noted that already from 1870 the new Meiji government had issued various regulations aimed at suppressing all those 'old evil customs' in order to avoid being considered uncivilized and thus being in the position of asking for modifica-

tions to unequal international treatises. These suppressing measures addressed both everyday-life customs, for example bans on public nudity, as well as on popular customs linked to religious practices such as dancing *nembutsu*, dancing and lighting fires for the Bon festival, certain forms of divination, phallic statue worship, and so on. More incisively, what became outlawed were practices such as divination and ritual healing, beliefs in fox and *kami* possession, or persons such as *itako* shamans and magicians. Initial motivation, however, was not based on scientific refutation, but on the necessity of not having imperial subjects bewitched and under the control of other form of (supernatural) authority (Josephson 2012, 185-202).

In summary, religion was not seen anymore as a ‘Western’ peculiarity to be permitted, but as an essential aspect of Euro-American civilization, especially for morality aspects. Such an aspect of civilization pertains to the inner sphere, and should be safeguarded, but also regulated and guided by the state in order to unify the morality of the nation and to avoid letting it go astray. Given this idea of religion as a marker of, and path to, civilization, it engendered a field of competition between Buddhism, Christianity and the newly created Shintō (cf. above, § 3.2.2.3). This situation further contributed to the configuration of the meaning of the idea of ‘religion’ which become eventually translated with *shūkyō* in the 1881 reference book called *Tetsugaku jii* (Philosophy Glossary) (Isomae 2012, 231-3).

While intellectuals where debating on religion, in 1870 the Meiji government launched the Great Teaching Campaign, aimed at contrasting Christianity and at unifying the newly envisioned state under a common doctrine to be preached in both Shintō and Buddhist institutions. This doctrine revolved around the three loose principles of: 1) respect for the gods, love of country; 2) making clear the principles of Heaven and the Way of Man; 3) reverence for the emperor and obedience to the will of the court. However, it basically combined ideas concerning the need of modernizing reforms with very general theological and eschatological matters (Isomae 2012, 234; Hardacre 2017, 376). Given this ambiguity, debates among shrine priests during the Campaign showed how there was no agreement in terms of pantheon and doctrines. Buddhists, on the other side, protested against the very campaign. This situation gave a chance for the Buddhist intellectual Shimaji Mokurai (1838-1911) to make a petition in 1872 against the Great Teaching Campaign, arguing that *shūkyō* should be a complementary, yet separated dimension from governmental policies. Shintō, being primarily rituals and practices, pertains to this latter, while a

> depoliticized Buddhism could then enter into free competition with Christianity for alternate religious 'space' in the heart of the Japanese people. (Josephson 2012, 243)

Accordingly, by 1884 the Campaign ended, and the 1889 Constitution enshrined the freedom of religion, however using the term *shinkyō* (lit. 'belief into teaching'), thus further emphasizing the private, inner nature of religion. This permitted the establishment of compulsory shrine-related rituals, pertaining to the public dimension of *dōtoku*, 'morality' (Isomae 2012, 237, 239-40). In the 1880s, moreover, further notions concerning religion came to Japan, such as the idea of the clash between science and Christianity, and the theory of a universal evolution from the 'religion of nature' to the 'religion of civilization', and then finally from religion to ethics (cf. above the first paragraphs of § 3.2.3). These ideas made the previous fascination with Christianity fade as marker of civilization, and introduced the notion of a common, *sui generis* category of religion subsuming all individual religions, which were now not only in competition as 'tools of civilization', but in competition for being the most 'advanced' or science-compatible religion.

In this context, Shintō was institutionally elevated (and confined) to the status of morality. Confucianism, initially repressed by Meiji state because of its strong connection with the past Tokugakawa regime, was then reduced to the status of philosophy by influential thinker Inoue Tetsujirō (1855-1944), also because of the that, as we have seen (§ 3.2.1.2), Confucianism fits with great difficulty into the taxonomic frame of the modern idea of religion/*shūkyō* (Paramore 2016a, 141-53). What remained were just Christianity and Buddhism. In such a situation Buddhists felt a strong need to self-reform in order to compete and to attest that they were fit for a modernizing nation. Both laymen and affiliates to monastic institutions created associations and journals upholding a new Buddhism (*Shinbukkyō*), sharing ideas such as critiques to doctrinal rigidity, interest in self-cultivation and Western thought, and the goal to present Buddhism as the religion best suited to modern times. For example, Shin Buddhist Kiyozawa Manshi (1863-1903) proposed a Buddhist reform based on spiritualism (*seishinshugi*) – in the sense of self-cultivation based on introspection and ascetism – and a return to the original writings of the founder Shinran, but open to any other school. He also emphasized the need for fulfilling social responsibilities and assuring one's own self-well-being, in order not to lay burden on organized Buddhism or on the state. Another common claim among *Shinbukkyō* proponents was the compatibility between science and Buddhism, often through the interpretation of the doctrine of *karma* as a rational mechanistic, cause-and-effect worldview (Deal, Ruppert 2015, 209-31).

Academic development such as the teaching course called 'Comparative Religion and Eastern Philosophy' (*Hikaku shūkyō oyobi toyō tetsugaku*) held by Inoue Tetsujirō at Tokyo Imperial Academy in 1891, or the foundation in 1898 of the religious studies (*shūkyōgaku*) by Anesaki Masaharu (1873-1949) at the same university, further consolidated the idea of a common, universal, *sui generis* essence of religion. These scholars viewed religion as fundamentally grounded in the inner, subjective experience of the individual – a "psychological towardness to unlimited beings", as Anesaki would put it (Isomae 2005, 236). Divine beings were seen as a projection of human feelings, desires, or of life forces. At any rate, religion remained basically a depoliticized dimension of existence (Fujiwara 2008, 197-8).

Through these academic developments Japan kept pace with the growth of religious studies in Euro-American context for some time. By the 1890s, papers written by Japanese intellectuals on Japanese religions were circulating in Euro-American academic and popular journals, while scholars and religionists alike were well prepared in showcasing Japanese religions, especially Buddhism, in important international arenas such as the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago (cf. *infra*, § 3.3.3). On the other hand, public and institutional discourses were further justified in regulating a normative idea of *shūkyō*, contrasted not only with *meishin* ('superstition') but also with *ruiji shūkyō* ('pseudoreligion'). This denigratory term was used often to refer to that host of so-called new religions (Astley 2006), founded by charismatic figures, that grew rapidly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, and for this reason were perceived as threatening by the government. Due to the large use of magical healing in their system of practices, they became one of the main targets of campaigns upholding the value of education, science and morality for molding national character, which banned the practice of these new religions as fraudulent and irrational (Josephson 2012, 260-9).

With this I conclude our short survey of the historical introductions of the concept of religion in three case-studies of India, China and Japan. It should be added that the history of the modern idea of religion in these countries does not end here but further develops in contemporary times. For example, the 1995 terrorist attack by the Aum Shinrikyō group in Tōkyō caused a strong disaffection by Japanese to anything *shūkyō*-related, while it did not affect the growing interest in the field of 'spirituality' (*supirichuariti*) or 'spiritual world' (*seishin sekai*) (Prohl, Nelson 2012b, 12; cf. also Shimazono, Graf 2012). In China the economic growth of the last decades has led to a relaxation of the control over religions and a new urban class is enjoying more religious freedom (Yang 2011). I have not provided further examples such as South-Asian countries as it would have taken up much further space, but these will be considered when examining the issue of the modern development of Buddhism in the next section.

What I wanted to stress in the first place is the depth of the influence of the modern concept of religion. Ironically, while such a concept is supposed to refer to something pertaining to a separate, inner and/or *sui generis* dimension of human existence (cf. above, §§ 2.1.5 and 2.1.8), it has instead been implemented, debated and negotiated as a standard of civilization. Faced with powerful and threatening interlocutors, Asian cultures tactically absorbed, elaborated and applied to themselves, along with other aspects, also the Euro-American religious framework, especially in relation to issues of national identity, morality and governance – an observation that further reinforces the thesis of the functional dialectic of 'secular' and 'religion' presented above (§ 2.1.8). I employ the adverb 'tactically' to indicate how this process did not consist of a simple imposition by active Euro-American powers over passive East-Asian subjects, but it entailed a careful selection of themes and perspectives on the issue of religions in order to exploit these external paradigms for their owns ends, for example, to present themselves in international contexts as modern interlocutors in religious (and political) matters. Similarly, in domestic contexts, to justify the social restrictions necessary for modernization on a new, much more compelling Euro-American religious ground. Moreover, as we will see, this tactical use of Euro-American conceptions of religion has also been pivotal when these newborn Asian nations presented themselves as actually superior 'Eastern' civilizations, because they embodied those 'eternal and universal spiritual values' that the 'material West' had lost. It will be in these processes that the interplay of Occidentalism, Orientalism, and self-Orientalism cited above (§ 3.3) comes starkly to the fore.

3.3.2 The Orientalist Representations of East-Asian Cultures in Modern Euro-American Contexts

We can trace a peculiar European fascination concerning cultures and religions of Asia already in the Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment period. This was fueled especially by Jesuit reports from China, characterized by a high regard and admiration for Chinese civilization, in particular for Confucianism. To a large extent this was due to the Jesuit agenda, which in their interpretations of Confucianism wanted to demonstrate that the Chinese were sufficiently enlightened to be receptive to the Christian message. Consequently, a conspicuous number of Enlightenment thinkers developed a keen interest for Confucianism, seeing it as a model for moral and political reform based on established basic philosophical principles concerning morality, society and the universality of human reason. For them, Confucianism was a

> mirror in which to examine the philosophical and institutional inadequacies of Europe […] and strip Christianity of its pretensions to uniqueness. (Clarke 1997, 42)

These first encounters also represented the first steps in a quest towards a *philosophia perennis*, a term probably coined by Leibniz (1646-1716), who sought to combine and synthetize Chinese concepts such as *li* and *qi* with European philosophical concepts (Clarke 1997, 48). However, if 'enlightened' Confucianism was the proof that the Chinese were ripe for conversion, the competitive presence of Buddhism and Daoism was presented by Jesuits to justify the urgence of the conversion, and accordingly they were thus branded as the most idolatrous superstitions. This Jesuit perspective, especially on Daoism, would be the authoritative one for almost two centuries (Clarke 2000, 39-42).

By the end of eighteenth century this intellectual enthusiasm for China, together with other cultural trends such as the cult of *chinoiserie*, faded, probably due to the expulsion of the Christian missionaries from China in 1770 and for it being too inflated. However, another 'exotic' land began to stir up European imaginations and reflections about civilizations of the 'others': India. William Jones (1746-1794) is usually credited for having been the first to suggest the hypothesis of Indo-European roots of Greek and Latin, thus relating them to Sanskrit and not Hebrew. He and his colleagues thus advocated the importance of studying Eastern languages and texts in India, and for this reason were labeled 'Orientalists'. These latter were opposed by those whom Inden (1986, 417-18) calls 'Utilitarians', or 'Anglicists', because they argued that 'Western' knowledge in English should displace the 'Eastern' one. The most prominent of these was James Mill (1773-1836), whose influential *History of British India* (1817) refuted many of Jones's ideas. For Mill and other 'Anglistics', there are incommensurable differences between Europeans and Asian people. The former are temperate peoples of wide-ranging skills and organized into small or medium nations, characterized by constitutional monarchies or republics. Asian peoples, instead, are characterized by an extreme temperament and are organized into large empires whose normal and distinctive political institutions are the despotic rule of fear of all-powerful autocrats over a docile and servile populace.

However, if the view of India as the opposite of Europe was meant to justify the policies of the East India Company, the romantics saw this same opposition as something valuable. What was worthless for the utilitarian-minded was considered instead as the primordial source of universal civilization, still not stained by soulless rationalism, individualism, industrialization and urbanization. "Where China had been taken to heart as a political utopia, India came to be seen as the realm of Spirit" (Clarke 1997, 57). The first translation of the *Upaniṣad* from a Persian translation by Anquetil Duperron

(1723-1805) had a considerable impact, as Anquetil himself drew connections between Indian philosophy and Kant's transcendental idealism, on the grounds of the deep-belief in Enlightenment of the unity of the human mind. The *Upaniṣad* attracted the attention of the Romantics under many aspects. Among the most fascinating ideas was the monistic notion of *Brahman* behind the plurality of earlier *Veda* and its connection with *atman*. Equally attractive was the idea of the realization of the self through the identification with the absolute in order to go beyond an illusionary view of the world (*māyā*). All this seemed to harmonize well with some central and characteristic features of German idealist philosophy focused on the concept of *Geist*. The fact that many ancient Sanskrit texts, even on astronomy, were written in verse, further confirmed a Romantic theory of the origin of human speech in poetical form and thus reinforced the idea of Sanskrit literature as possessing a primitive, fundamental wisdom (Clarke 1997, 57-61). Critiques and domestication of ideas also occurred. Herder (1744-1803), for example, disliked the practice of *satī*, the caste system and interpreted the idea of *saṃsāra* as a false but albeit positive source for the idea of a fundamental unity of all living beings (Clarke 1997, 61-2). Similarly, the allegorizing of Vedic ritual in the *Upaniṣad* was read through anti-clerical and anti-ritualistic sentiment (King 1999, 122).

With the decline of Romantic trends, the rise of positivist and materialist philosophies, the growing appeal of the idea of progress, and the influence of the above cited Mill's *History of British India*, the enthusiasm for India as the spiritual fountainhead necessary to Europe waned. However, even if with condescending and racist attitudes, the rise of Europe as a global actor fostered an increased interest in 'Eastern' civilizations, also beyond the limited circle of a few intellectuals or scholars. The writings of these latter, in fact, were designed now for "a newly emerging class of readership which was eager to learn about the religion, culture, and history of the East" (Clarke 1997, 73). As anticipated above (§§ 2.1.5 and 2.1.8), one of the prominent 'discoveries' (or better say constructions) in this regard was Buddhism, sparked by the unearthing in Nepal of nearly 400 Sanskrit and Tibetan manuscripts, previously unknown.

It was the French scholar Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852) who mostly handled their translation. His work in this field held an immense impact, especially with his book *Introduction a l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* (1844), originally devised as a preface to the translated texts. Notwithstanding his judgment of a certain *naïveté*, Bornouf presented the Buddha as a human philosopher who offered his teachings of freedom through suffering to all members of society through the textual medium of Sanskrit. His original doctrine was purely moral and the extravagant metaphysics of the later *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, not to mention the *tantra*, are inventions of a later age. Burnouf was in fact

the first to establish the influential distinction between the northern and southern branches of Buddhism, and to give emphasis to the latter as being the more ancient and 'pure' version of the Buddha's teaching (Lopez 2008, 170-6). Bornouf's seminal construction of the Buddha as a thinker similar to the Enlightenment philosophers provided the tracks for other pioneering scholars to follow. Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922), who founded in 1881 the Pāli Text Society, translated with 'enlightenment' the central term *bodhi*, which literally means 'awakening', a translation that has now become standard. This choice was not without reason; in his view it was possible to detect in Buddha's teaching Enlightenment ideas and values such as reason, empirical observation, suspicion of authority, freedom of thought, and notably the absence of reliance on a divine plane.

> *Nibbana* is purely and solely an *ethical* state to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight. It is therefore not transcendental. (Rhys Davids, Stede 1921, 427b, cit. in Snodgrass 2003, 106; cf. also McMahan 2008, 18)

Similarly, for Max Müller, Mahāyāna traditions such as Japanese Buddhism were "a corruption of the pure doctrine of the Royal Prince", because they relied on the "degraded and degrading Mahāyāna tracts […] the silly and mischievous stories of Amitabha and his Paradise" (Müller 1900, 236, cit. in Snodgrass 2003, 110). This paradigm of the superiority of the older texts was also further reinforced in regard to Hinduism, and the romantic admiration for the speculation of the *Upaniṣad*, or the mythological imagery of the *Veda* as mitigated by the assumption that the present messy and chaotic situation was a subsequent degeneration from this ancient common textual root (cf. King 1999, 128 ff.).

The dissemination of knowledge about Buddhism in Europe was not a mere matter of exoticism, but also represented an input for contemporary debates linked to the ideological fissures, in the Victorian age, between Christianity, Biblical Higher Criticism, Positivism and Darwinism. Many saw Buddhism as inherently in tune with the scientific outlook, thus providing a mirror that allowed Christians to see themselves more clearly, and to cast off aspects no longer acceptable to the scientific worldview, such as the mythological and the miraculous. Other enthusiasts, upholding the superiority of Buddhism over Christianity on the grounds of the possibility of a morality without God, conjecture that the latter may be a decadent derivation of the former (Clarke 1997, 77-83).

Meanwhile, the expansion of European political and military power in Asia also gave new impetus to Chinese studies, with the appointment in 1815 of Abel Rémusat (1788-1832) to the first European Chair of Chinese Language and Literature at the Collège de

France. His work introduced and gave a certain philosophical value to the *Daodejing*. However, he nonetheless followed the old Jesuits' judgment, and interpreted the religious Daoism as degradation of this tradition of thought in the form of superstition (Clarke 2000, 43-4). Hegel (1770-1831), who read Rémusat (Wong 2011, 56-7), established this view almost as a dogma by designating the Chinese thought as the dawn of philosophy, but still stuck to its most elementary and infantile stage. Other influential sinologists such as James Legge (1815-1897), translator of the *Zhuangzi*, followed suit in dismissing contemporary Daoism as 'superstitious' and 'unreasonable' in comparison with the philosophical depth of the earlier Daoist texts (Clarke 2000, 44).

Another intellectual trend that actively shaped the reception of East-Asian religions was Transcendentalism. Being a sort of American outgrowth of English Romanticism, exponents of this current believed in an essential unity of the cosmos, which ultimately is of spiritual nature, together with a positive view of the human individual and its possibility to harmonize the intuitive dimension with the rational one. Similar to European Romantics, Transcendentalists found inspiration in the ideas of Advaita Vedānta, whose non-duality between *ātman* and *brahman* is clearly present in Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803-1882) idea of an omni-embracing 'Oversoul'. Other Asian religions were involved, albeit in lesser forms. In fact, the universalist outlook was developed further by Samuel Johnson (1822-1882), a transcendentalist who published a popular three-volume work entitled *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion* (1873-77), in which he argued that Christianity will ultimately lay the foundations of this 'Universal Religion', but not before it is radically transformed by its encounter with the East. Daoism is also considered, and Laozi is sympathetically represented as a 'Chinese non-conformist' whose spiritual simplicity and spontaneity are a welcomed correction to ascetism or pessimistic worldviews. However, also Johnson ultimately laments that such enlightened teachings were transformed into superstitions such as astrology or alchemy (Clarke 1997, 83-7; Clarke 2000, 45-6).

As anticipated above (§§ 2.1.8 and 3.2.2.1), one of the most active movements that contributed to various cultural encounters, on many levels, between Euro-American worlds and East-Asian religions was arguably the Theosophical Society. It was founded in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky (1831-1931) and Colonel Olcott (1832-1907). The foundational writings of the former, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) revive the idea of a *philosophia perennis*, conceiving it as being secretly transmitted in esoteric fashion. Indeed, in those day occultism was a fashionable pursuit for many people interested in probing that grey area between science and religions, such as mesmerism or spiritualism. Blavasky conjoined Neoplato-

nism, Renaissance magic, Kabbalah, Freemasonry, ancient Egyptian and Greco-Roman mythology with Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta to present the idea of a secret wisdom handed down from prehistoric times by a chain of initiates. A wisdom that in Asia has still not been tainted by modernity (Gooddrik-Clarke 2008, 203-18). This contributed to the extensive dissemination in vernacular parlance of terms such as *māyā*, *karma*, 'reincarnation', and 'meditation'. Interestingly enough, notwithstanding their interest in esotericism, when dealing with Tibetan Buddhism Blavatsky did not identify this latter as 'Tantra'; on the contrary, following current orientalist conventions, "she went to some pains to distinguish it from the disreputable tradition of black magic and hedonism known as Tantra" (Urban 2003, 226). Beyond merely popularizing Asian religious and philosophical ideas in Euro-American countries, Theosophists were active in encouraging their view of the 'East-West' dialogue. They got in touch with Arya Samāj and Brāhmo Samāj in India, and with Buddhists in Ceylon and in Japan. Of the total number of 400 branches in India, Europe and America, more than 100 branches existed in India alone in 1884. The Theosophical Society in Asia was quite active, among other things, in the revival of Hindu and Buddhism self-awareness and self-respect. They held a contrasting attitude toward missionaries and colonialists, and have been greatly supportive of the independence of India. We may say that, in general, this Society endorsed a rejection of Euro-American cultural hegemony, an attitude which greatly encouraged and informed the ways in which East-Asian representatives portrayed themselves and their religious traditions in international venues, the most famous of these being the 1983 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago (Clarke 1997, 89-92).

3.3.3 Self-Orientalistic Representations of East-Asian Religions in International Venues

The World Parliament of Religions was an initiative held in 1893 in conjunction with the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. As many studies have observed (Katelaar 1990; Seager 1995; Snodgrass 2003), this event was organized in a context of growing positivistic and anti-Christian sentiments. Therefore, the basic assumptions and aims behind this gathering of representatives from the various religions of the world was to exploit the influential ideological framework of social Darwinism and to show that Christianity, once put in comparison with other traditions, would emerge as the most evolved religions into which all other traditions would eventually transform.

Many invited Asian representatives were aware or at least had strong suspects concerning this kind of agenda. Nonetheless, they were positive in their interpretation of their own native traditions

through the lenses of modern concepts and values already assimilated (cf. above, § 3.3.1). Therefore, they each felt confident in promoting their own religion not only as advanced and fit for a modern, globalized world but, most notably, also as a solution addressing the illness of Euro-American civilization, namely materialism, secularism and the increasing gap between science and religion. An idea that, following our theoretical scheme of interplay between Orientalism and Occidentalism (§ 3.3), basically echoed with Euro-American deep-seated convictions concerning East-Asian religions.

One of the most successful propagators – or better to say, confirmers – of the 'spiritual East *versus* material West' was Narendranath Dutta, better known as Swami Vivekānanda (1863-1902). He received an English Education at the Scottish Presbyterian College in Calcutta. In his youth he was involved in the Brahmo Samaj and was a disciple of the guru Ramakrishna (1836-1886). At the Parliament he embraced the orientalist myth of the East-West difference, adding the notion of complementarity:

> You of the West are practical in business, practical in great inventions but we of the East are practical in religion. You make commerce with your business; we make religion our business. (cit. in Burke 1986, 160-1)

In his presentation of Indian religious traditions Vivekānanda intended to introduce the doctrine of his master Ramakrishna, portrayed as a man who saw the inner unity of all religions in the encompassing vision of Advaita Vedānta, and as a man who was also comfortable in worshiping Jesus or Muhammad. However, it has been argued that Ramakrishna's teachings were less about the abstract and intellectual system of Vedānta than about an engagement with tantric and ecstatic practices, focused on sexual and violent images of the goddess Kālī. Consequently, it also has been argued that Vivekānanda was active in downplaying these aspects of his master, dismissing tantrism as a corrupted form of the pristine vision of the *Veda* and *Upaniṣad*, for which the influence of licentious rites of the Buddhists of Tibet must be blamed (Urban 2003, 173-6). Indeed, Vivekānanda's Vedānta was universal, both in the sense that all humans possess the same divine nature which fundamentally transcend all religions, and in the sense that such a divine nature can be expressed not only in ascetic practice, but also in this-worldly activities, and therefore Vedānta is applicable to all doctrines or rituals. These latter, at any rate, are but secondary details, while the most important thing is the application of some kind of individual, mental and/or physical discipline focused towards the manifestation of such divinity. This idea of the divine in each person resonated furthermore to the increasingly appealing values of self-realization and religious individualism (cf. Jackson 1994, 16-48).

Similar affinities with modern views of the individual and with the value of self-reliance were explained also by Buddhists delegates. Zen abbot Shaku Sōen (1860-1919) exploited the pre-existent high regard for Buddhist ethics by further connecting the karmic doctrine of cause and effect to the virtue of self-reliance, explaining in rational terms that, since future retributions depends on present actions, Buddhism relies on self-discipline and not on an external or divine authority. Ashitsu Jitsuzen (1850-1921), a Tendai scholar, emphasized the theme of altruism by explaining the Mahāyāna concept of the bodhisattva who, aware of the non-duality between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, remains in the latter to help others (Snodgrass 2003, 212-13, 217-18).

In general, if Vivekānanda capitalized more on late-Romantic and Transcendentalist longing for a universal, mystical brotherhood among faiths, Buddhists focused more on the idea of compatibility with science which included, in those positivistic times, also the science of race and the science of religions.

Among these latter we must cite Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933), born as Don David Hewavitharane in the English-speaking middle class of Colombo. His family was Buddhist, but he was educated in Catholic and Anglican schools. This figure and the consequent rise of Sinhalese 'Protestant Buddhism' is linked to the following factors: the birth of a new Sinhalese urban middle-class, educated and receptive to modern individualism; the presence of Christian schools and missionaries which disseminated Euro-American ideas and values but, with their criticism to Buddhism, also fueled, anti-Christian sentiments; and the arrival in Ceylon of the Theosophists Blavatsky and Olcott. In 1890 they formally embraced Buddhism by taking the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts. This was seen by Buddhist as a remarkable victory in the competition with Christian missionaries, as Olcott was a colonel and a judge (Gombrich 2006, 172-84). Similar to what they did in India, Theosophists founded various schools, modeled after missionary ones, but that were mostly led by lay personnel and endorsed a strongly protestantized version of Buddhism (cf. also above, § 3.2.2.1).

Dharmapāla met them in 1880 and was initiated into the Theosophical Society four years later. He accepted the modern Protestant view of religion as a personal, inner-worldly enterprise of the free individual. In fact, he was

> the first Buddhist to learn meditation from a book without recourse to a master. Moreover, he initiated the fashion for lay meditation, which has become so popular among the bourgeoisie of Colombo and Rangoon. (Gombrich 2006, 189)

In his mind Buddhism had to become a major force of Sinhalese society, uniting strong ethical and ascetic commitments without renouncing worldly activities, notably the political ones aimed at inde-

pendence (190). In order to do so and to compete with Euro-American Christianity-based civilizations, Buddhism should be retooled with an up-to-date scientific outlook. He presented his tradition as a scientific religion, characterized by individualistic yet altruistic ethics, philosophically grounded in a "psychological mysticism and a cosmogony which is in harmony with geology, astronomy, radioactivity and relativity" (Dharmapāla 1965, 27, cit. in Lopez 2008, 15). He also exploited the growing theories about Aryan origin of 'Western' civilization by referring sometimes to Buddhism as 'Aryan psychology' and by asserting that ancient Greeks thought like the ancient Aryans of India, that Greek gods were not semitic, and that the draped figures of Greek poets and philosophers are identical to of the statues of the ancient 'Aryan Bhikkhus' (Lopez 2008, 98).

Similar grapplings with science, including the dawning 'science' of Buddhism, characterized the Japanese Buddhist delegation to the Parliament. Japanese Buddhists had been formally invited as representative of what early scholars identified as the Northern Branch. While the newly formed Council of all Buddhist schools still held sectarian views in Japan, the delegates accepted this identification of Japanese Buddhism with a larger individualized unit called Mahāyāna. Therefore, they endeavoured to identify a set of basic Buddhist doctrines common to all schools and, to further appeal to the popular Euro-American perception, they chose a vegetarian lifestyle, thus avoiding to mention their practice of having eaten meat since 1872, when the government allowed it (Zheng 2019). They were in fact aware of the predilection, among scholars, of the Southern Branch as it was considered the closest to the original, rational Buddhism of the 'human philosopher' Gautama (Snodgrass 2003, 110). They thus tailored their presentations accordingly, with Sōen explaining that the law of cause and effect, as the Buddha taught it, was a complex system of interdependence where all the necessary causes are in an endless process of growth and decay, and that therefore it was consistent with science. The argumentation was that it is a view of the universe as a continual, but ultimately conservative, change of state of matter that does not need any external force, be it a first mover or Creator, as it points to an innate law within things themselves. A law that the Buddha, as a sort of early scientist, discovered. Therefore, he elaborated his other doctrines accordingly (Snodgrass 2003, 212-13). Ashitsu, and other delegates, on the other hand, took pains to demonstrate that – as Tendai orthodoxy would put it – Shakyamuni actually taught first Mahāyāna doctrines, and only afterwards adapted it in the form found in Pāli texts. This was meant to demonstrate that, in reality, Mahāyāna is the original teaching, whose progression from Hinayāna was planned by the Buddha himself (Snodgrass 2003, 207-9).

Another Buddhist reformer, who did not participate at the Parliament but in many ways sought to convince the Euro-American inter-

locutors of the compatibility between Buddhism and science was Taixu (1890-1947), one of the most famous figures of the Chinese Buddhist reformism at the start of twentieth century. Among his essays and lectures there also is an attempt to harmonize Buddhist and European cosmologies. He argued that Buddhist cosmology, traditionally construed with the Mount Meru as the *axis mundi*, was in reality a metaphor for the solar system (Lopez 2008, 57). Presentations of other Chinese traditions at the Parliament basically reproduced the rhetoric of contemporary Chinese religions as harmful superstitions. Delegate Peng Guangyu, first secretary of the Chinese legation in Washington, presented the Confucian perspective as being very unsympathetic to religious proselytism or to theological quarrels repeating the reforming instances of fellow Confucians against all those illicit 'cults' (*yinci*) or 'superstitious' (*mixin*), which held back the modernization of the decadent Qing empire (cf. McRae 1991, 28-9; Seager 1995, 104-5; cf. above, § 3.3.1). An anonymous paper on Daoism, on the other hand, reproduced the coeval scholarly stereotypes by lamenting the corruption of the virtues expounded by the philosopher Laozi occurred in the later transformation into a religion of magic and alchemy, and expressed the need of a restoration from these errors through a clarification of its real, original message (Seager 1995, 102).

Another focus of the discourses employed by Asian religious representatives was Christianity. Vivekānanda indirectly addressed this issue through the Hindu relationship to Buddhism. He explained that India, which gave birth to the oldest and most successful of the greatest missionary religions of all time, i.e. Buddhism, had eventually reabsorbed it, in the sense that Buddhism is presently just a 'sect' in India. Exploiting the linguistic theory of common Indo-European origin, he explicitly affirmed that the basic doctrines of Christianity and its missionary impetus originally derive from Buddhism, which is older. In this way Vivekānanda was implicitly aiming for an inclusivistic neutralization of Christianity. We can also see this strategy in the fact that, while he was preaching universal tolerance, openness, harmony and the synthesis of all the religions of the 'East and West', he also preached that this very program is the essence of Vedānta, which had come thus to be configured, not just as a particular religion, but rather as the fountainhead of all religions (Halbfass 1988, 236-8).

At any rate, we have seen how it was Buddhism which was to be perceived as the real 'contender' of Christianity, and Buddhist representatives acted accordingly. Dharmapāla, on the grounds of his presentation of Buddhism as inherently scientific, repeatedly contrasted the Buddha's rational spirit of inquiry and his rejection of priestcraft, with the opposite images of Christianity persecuting Galileo Galilei or Giordano Bruno. On the same line of reasoning as Sōen, Dharmapāla contended that the Buddhist view of an eternal and ever-changing cosmos not only is congruent with science, but also ex-

cludes any creator god, which proves the superiority of Buddhism over Semitic religions that "have neither psychology nor a scientific background" (Dharmapāla 1965, 26, cit. in Lopez 2008, 15). Japanese delegates, notably the layman Hirai Kinzō, further attacked Christianity on different aspects. He critiqued the equation of Christianity with civilization, and the relative labels of non-civilized heathens or idolaters which were attributed to all other religious people. He argued about the failure of the monotheist perspective to understand the tolerant syncretism of Japanese religion. He employed the Buddhist idea of *zenkō hōben* ('skillful means') to argue that what mistakenly appeared as idolatry, was only a manifestation of the one encompassing truth which adapted itself to the varying needs of the people. Therefore, the Japanese are not idolaters, but instead people who have a long-held attitude of non-sectarianism and progressive tolerance. On the other hand, he critically observed that the so-called Christians, i.e. Euro-Americans that came to Japan with a contemptuous attitude and that forced the Japanese to sign unequal treaties, were ironically lacking the supposed Christian spirit of charity, of brotherhood and compassion for the weak. Another issue that Hirai addressed was the frequent charge of nihilism in Buddhism, made by Christians and scholars alike. He tried to counter it by explaining that *nirvāṇa* is not

> annihilation, not even annihilation of the passions, which implied a detachment from the concerns of the material world, but a clear-minded and active realization of the nature of truth, an insight to the principles of law that could be used for the benefit of society at large. Japanese Buddhism, he explained, is neither world-denying nor archaic. (Snodgrass 2003, 189; cf. also 181-9)

On the base of these observations, both Dharmapāla and, more vehemently, Japanese Buddhists argued that Buddhism was the best candidate for being the final pinnacle of religious evolution.

Engagement with the themes of science and Christianity indicates how, for Parliament delegates as well as other religious reformers from Asia, issues such as nationalism and international policy were also at stake. Dharmapāla and Vivekānanda were struggling for the independence of their land, Taixu sought to prove the relevance of Buddhism to the new Republic of China, Shaku Sōen and the other Japanese argued, internally, that Buddhism can play an essential role in the expanding empire of Japan and, externally, that the Japanese were not heathen idolaters and therefore not deserving the unequal treatises.

The World Parliament of Religion of 1893, and with it the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, can be seen as a sort of watermark from a textual-based, highly intellectual and scholarly orientalism, towards a more diffused dissemination not only of East-

Asian ideas but also practices, with the direct role of Asian disseminators through face-to-face interactions with interlocutors. For example, right after the Parliament, Vivekānanda spent two years in the United States, where the first Vedanta Society was founded in New York in 1895. He also traveled to France and England where he made other disciples (Jackson 1994, 48 ff.). However, at this point, we can see a shift in the motifs and modalities of both dissemination and reception of East-Asian religions and thought. As Clarke argues, this is consistent with the fact that this period saw an increased feeling of disenchantment towards not only traditional Christianity, but also towards the rationalist ideals of the Enlightenment and the faith in progress. Such feelings were accompanied by a sense of uncertainty and anxiety, if not degeneration and decadence, which pushed towards an unprecedented fragmentation of ways of thinking about the world, about values, and about matters of ultimate concern. These new trends were quite variegated and included positivism, psychoanalysis, social Darwinism and eugenics, artistic and literary theories associated with symbolism and expressionism, even a "variety of cults ranging from Tolstoyism and Wagnerism to neo-paganism, and occultism" (Clarke 1997, 96; cf. also 95-7).

3.3.4 New Interpretations of East-Asian Religions in Changing Contexts

Concerning Buddhism, in the short term the Parliament resulted in a failure for the Japanese effort in improving the reputation of Mahāyāna. In fact, the authority on Buddhism remained in the hands of Pāli philologists, who were still unconvinced and rather contemptuous towards the arguments of the Japanese delegation (Snodgrass 2003, 222-4). However, the situation would be rapidly evolving between and after the two world wars. Paul Carus (1852-1919) was a publisher and a philosopher upholding a rational monism, according to which all religions and the sciences were actually expressions of a same reality. Impressed by the speech of Shaku Sōen, Carus got in touch with him and Sōen in turn sent his disciple Suzuki Daisetsu (born Suzuki Teitarō, 1870-1966) to Carus as help in translation and dissemination of knowledge about Mahāyāna in American and Europe. Suzuki's first publications in English followed the themes of Japanese *shinbukkyō*, i.e portraying 'Eastern Buddhism' as a deinstitutionalized, deritualized, scientific and philosophical religion. However, we can see a remarkable shift starting with the article "The Zen Sect of Buddhism" (1906), provocatively published in the *Journal of the Pāli Text Society*. Suzuki flipped over the textual-based paradigms employed by the Euro-American Buddhologists by presenting a tradition whose system of legitimation was the heart-to-heart

transmission from master to disciple, in an unbroken lineage originating with Śākyamuni himself. Therefore, Zen is the quintessential teaching of the Buddha and, most notably, given its rhetoric of 'non relying on scripture' (cf. above, § 3.2.3.1), it goes beyond the blind acceptance of an outside authority, or the submission to conventionality. On the contrary, it further resonates with the themes of individuality and activity, and undermines the Euro-American charges of nihilism or passivity (Snodgrass 2003, 264-5). As an important corollary of the reversal of the textual paradigm, Suzuki increasingly emphasized the notion of the 'zen experience' in his writing, an experience which was linked to Zen technical terms such as *satori*, 'awakening, comprehension' or *kenshō*, 'seeing one's own (buddha) nature'. The development of this notion, Sharf argues (1993, 20-6; 1998, 96-103) is connected with the idea of pure experience as expounded by a Suzuki's friend, the renowned philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), who in turn was inspired by the ideas of philosophers such as Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and William James on the role of unmediated consciousness and experience. As a result, Zen, thanks to its (often rhetorical) emphasis of direct experience through meditation and *kōan*, and (supposed) reject of textual study, came to be considered the most refined expression of an a-rational, experiential ground that is actually shared by all religions and philosophies in both 'East' and 'West'. In this way, we can see how Suzuki also flips over the rational paradigm held by Buddhologists. In fact, he put what was previously deemed as superior, i.e. the rational and systematic outlook of the original Buddhism, as something actually hindering a more profound comprehension, because the 'truth' of Zen is beyond the limits of rationality. This is also connected with the long history of discourses on Japanese exceptionalism (cf. e.g. the *kokugaku* phenomenon cited above, § 3.2.2.3), which now characterizes Japan as being the best representative of the 'East' thanks to its spiritual and synthetical nature, in antithesis toward the material and rational-analytical 'West'.

Suzuki's ideas started spreading from the 1920s onwards through his writings and numerous trips and conferences. Arguably, his ideas were greatly favored by the changed intellectual and cultural *milieu*. For example, as we have seen above (§§ 2.1.1, 2.1.5 and 3.2.3), in those years the burgeoning field of phenomenology was aiming at countering the discourses of disenchantment in regard to religious matters through the creation of the universal, sui *generis* category of 'the Sacred' and confining the religious matters in the realm of the inner psychological sphere and of the 'mystical' experience. This move permitted, on one side, the positing of a transcultural common ground to all religious traditions and, on the other, an epistemological shield from rational enquiry. For Suzuki, in fact, "to study Zen means to have Zen experience, for without the experience there is no Zen one can study" (Suzuki 1967, 123, cit. in Sharf 1993, 25).

Just as Confucianism or primitive Buddhism had been deployed before as means of critiquing the hegemony of Christianity or its lack of rationalism, now East-Asian 'spirituality', epitomized by Zen Buddhism, was meant to critique the pretentions and the failures of rational progress, such as the two World Wars, and the relative alienation of mankind. Buddhism, for its long history of deep psychological introspection, seemed well suited for this role. The popularizer of Buddhism, Alan Watts (1915-1973), for example, emphasized the transformational and liberating potential of 'Eastern religions' in influential works such as *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961). Other cultural influences such as Jack Kerouac's (1922-1969) *Dharma Bums* (1959), on the other hand, further established the idea that Zen, as well as other 'oriental wisdom', may represent an alternative to scientific rationalism, to religious traditionalism and to a materialistic lifestyle in the counter-culture movement, in the New Age movements, and beyond (Clarke 1997, 103-5).

In tandem to the general tendency of dismissal and disillusion for traditional modes of thought, there was a renewed interest for those East-Asian traditions which until that moment had been scarcely engaged or straightforwardly despised. Staring with Daoism, a host of thinkers such as Martin Buber (1878-1965), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) were drawn in various ways to Daoist ideas. Each of them saw important confirmation of their own particular visions which, remarkably, were themselves more or less an attempt to overcome the previous, problematic perspectives inherent in the 'West'. Heidegger, who attested his interest for the concept of *dao* in his *On the Way to Language* (1959), is well known for his philosophical project of going beyond the 'Western' metaphysical thinking and its negative outcomes, such as the dominion of *techne* over the world. He endeavored to translate the *Daodejing* with scarce success, while Buber managed a translation, with commentary, of some chapters of the *Zhungzi*. Jung, on the other hand, was drawn to translations of the *Yijing* and a Daoist inner alchemy text translated as *The Secret of the Golden Flower* in the late 1920s.[36] His commentaries greatly helped the dissemination of these texts. In the first work Jung saw the confirmation of his popular idea of 'synchronicity', i.e. an alternative understanding of nature and human nature in terms of meaningful patterns of events, while in the latter he exploited the visualization techniques of *yin-yang* binarism as a way of explicating his theory of the psyche as a process in which opposite forces seek mutual accommodation and balance. For Jung these works were not about divination or other supersti-

36 The original title is *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*, "The Ultimate Purport of the Golden Flower of the Great One" (Esposito 2008).

tions, instead he understood them as therapeutic tools useful to explore the unconscious of his patients in analysis and, ultimately, to cope with what he saw as a spiritual crisis at the heart of European culture. It is worth mentioning that also Alan Watts held an enduring interest in Daoism (Clake 2000, 61-126, 143-75).

More remarkably, the tantric tradition now starts to be seen in a positive light, probably because, as Urban suggests, in the midst of the horrors of war, the Tantra was seen as the "most transgressive and violent path to the sacred – beyond good and evil, in violation of conventional law", so it came to be considered "the most appropriate – perhaps unavoidable – religion for this darkest, most violent of epochs" (Urban 2003, 185-6; cf. 185-205 for this whole paragraph). For example, the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer (1890-1943) considered Tantra as providing a much-needed antidote for the hyper-intellectualized world of the Judeo-Christian West, thanks to its affirmation of this material world, of sensuality and passions. From Zimmer's perspective, also influenced by the works of Jung, Tantrism reflected the archaic stratum of human civilization, an ancient matriarchal culture of goddess worship, in contrast with the patriarchal, life-denying Christian tradition. A similar predilection for Tantrism was entertained by Eliade, whose studies, we have seen above (§§ 2.1.1 and 2.1.5), were also meant to help modern man to re-discover a relation with 'the Sacred', which is expressed in various symbols from all religions, called hierophanies. What most intrigued Eliade were those symbols representing the *coincidentia oppositorum*, such as the androgyne, the golem, or the philosopher's stone of the alchemists. Therefore, for Eliade, the tantric tradition is one of the few ones still accessible to fallen modern man, thanks to its imagery of sexual intercourse as the most explicitly 'biological' and physical expression of *coincidentia oppositorum*, and thanks to its being ultimately a path that identifies the 'sacred' with the 'profane'. Finally, Tantrism was also interpreted by right-wind intellectuals such as Julius Evola as the solution to modern malaise, such as democracy being guided by weaklings and repressing unhealthy Christian morals. Tantrism offers the path of the "virile hero who dares to transgress the laws that bind other human beings" (Urban 2003, 196) and forces man to embrace both its sexual and violent aspects as a means of first liberation from the decadent times in which superiors are subjected to the rule of the many, and then towards the construction of a society of aristocratic and hierarchical rule.

Apart from the reception and re-elaboration on the intellectual and textual level, we can see a shift towards the 'technologization' of East-Asian traditions, especially after World War II, that is, as a sort of focalization of practice as a distinct element, or at least as the first step towards a secondary, non-compulsory doctrinal engagement. In the Euro-American reception of Buddhism, the grow-

ing appeal of the inner, psychological sphere combined itself with the common sense of 'technological neutrality' brought about by the advancement in applied science and consumerism. What resulted was the paradox that "while meditation is often considered the heart of Buddhism, it is also deemed the element most detachable from the tradition itself" (McMahan 2008, 185; cf. also Payne 2018, 10-14). A pivotal role in this sense has also been played by a peculiar development in Theravāda Buddhism, called the Vipassanā Movement. It emerged from the Buddhist traditions of Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Sri Lanka, and capitalized on the previous Buddhist reformist movements with their emphasis on meditation, their diffusion amongst the laity, and their insistence on the idea of experience as universal and nonsectarian. It became a kind of modern meditation tradition of its own. By focusing on a few precise texts such as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (Sutra on the Foundations of Mindfulness) and the treatise *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), reformers like the Burmese monk Mahāsī Sayādaw (1904-1982) offered a simplified version of the older forms of meditation. They cast off all those extensive traditional rituals, merit-making and initiatory elements integral to the Theravāda Buddhism as a whole, thus enabling the adoption of meditation by large numbers of lay and urban practitioners with little or no formal Buddhist training. This movement began to gain popularity throughout the Theravāda world before its broader global spread and it was connected, as in the case of other Asian religious reformers, to political independence movements (cf. Sharf 1995, 252-9; Crosby 2013, 157-69). Mahāsī's disciple, the German monk Nyanaponika Thera (born Siegmund Feniger, 1901-1994) coined the term 'bare attention' to highlight his master's focus on *sati* ('mindfulness' but also 'remembrance'), understood as non-judgmental awareness to whatever appears to consciousness *hic et nunc*. These kinds of interpretations contributed to meditation being seen more as a psychological method – a 'science of mind', as Thera called it – and which also lead to straightforwardly de-contextualized and 'technologized' outcomes such as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR). This was developed in the 1970s by professor of medicine, and Buddhism practitioner, Jon Kabat-Zinn (b. 1944) to reduce distress and to increase well-being. Other similar developments were also linked to the neurology- and cognitive sciences-based research on meditation that started appearing in the 1960s (Macmahan 2008, 204-7; Sharf 2015).

This modality in the reception of Asian traditions as being mainly practice applies well also to the case of the popularization of Daoism. From the 1960s onward, changes in the immigration laws brought more Chinese to North America, some of whom, while not being Daoist in terms of any formal institutional affiliation, were experienced in various forms of Chinese meditation and bodily techniques. One

of the most famous (and successful) of these practitioners is Mantak Chia (b. 1944), a Chinese born in Thailand who had a background in both Chinese and Euro-American medicine and also underwent training in traditional Daoist practices. In 1979 he opened a healing and acupuncture center in New York called Taoist Esoteric Yoga Center. Presently with the name of Healing Tao Center, it is one of the "most widespread institutional forms of popular Western Daoism" (Palmer, Siegler 2017, 119). Open to any kind of student, it teaches a simplified system of breathing, visualization, meditation, and postures based on the Daoist practice of Inner Alchemy. According to Palmer and Siegler, this popularized Daoism seems to be fitting rather well into the American alternative spirituality cultures, which are deluded by traditional religions, lament social atomization, but retain nonetheless a strong individualist component. Indeed, Daoist traditions do contain a rich repository of methods which have several practical aspects concerning issues of personal wellness, such as gymnastic, dietary provisions, meditation, even techniques to enhance sexual activity, all of which are presented in this popularized Daoism as requiring no belief or adhesion to a specific dogma nor membership. On the other side, they reflect a worldview which, once stripped of its rituals or mythological imaginary, offers an exotic holistic view of the interconnectedness of the body, mind and breath with the whole cosmos. An interconnectedness that must be cultivated in the right way to reach 'spiritual' transcendence, thus combining modern self-centeredness with a sense of 'cosmic' brotherhood with both human and non-human actors. All of this is further combined with the charismatic and liberating morals embodied by the figure of the extravagant or nonconformist Daoist sage from texts such as *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi*, which safeguard the freedom and uniqueness of the individual (Palmer, Siegler 2017, 141-64).

A similar discussion applies also to the Tantric tradition, which burst into popular culture starting around 1960. The ground was prepared by previous scandals such as the foundation of the Tantrik Order already in the 1900s in America by Pierre Arnold Bernard (1875?-1955), or by the deeds of the (in)famous magician Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). The first, trained by a putative, immigrate tantric yogin, is remembered for having set up a chain of 'tantric clinics' in which he introduced the doctrine and practice of Tantrism to the American upper middle class. The emphasis on sexual topics, coupled with the charisma and popularity of Bernard among women, stirred up a series of scandals. The second is well known for his 'sex magic', in which themes of Euro-American occultism and Tantrism were woven into magical practices that involved sexual intercourse. Both men were key figures in the sensationalization of Tantrism as something countering the mainstream culture and social conventions. In this way, Tantrism was reinterpreted from a tradition that was concerned

with secrecy and power to one focused on valorization and optimization of sexual activity. As a matter of fact, Tantrism spread widely through successful publications such as *Tantra: The Yoga of Sex* (1964) by Omar Garrison (1913-1997), which depicted Tantrism both as a sort of a 'cult of ecstasy' and as a technique for enhancement of sexual pleasure, often in connection with other non-tantric texts such as the *Kāma Sūtra*. This reading fit well within the discourses related to the so-called Sexual Revolution, and the more general American counterculture. For this latter, the disturbing tantric image of a terrifying yet erotic Mother Kālī was a powerful metaphor to address the lack of the liberating role of sex and femininity in the repressive 'West'. These developments, in turn, triggered a wave of gurus who arrived in America in the 1970s, an example of such was the famous Osho-Rajneesh (1931-1990) who accepted the identification of Tantra with sex and taught a largely 'sexo-centric' brand of Tantra marketed as "the most exciting path to enlightenment" (Urban 2003, 249). At any rate, related scandals induced him and his 'spiritual business model' to embrace a more generic New Age host of ideas (on the issues of this whole paragraph cf. Urban 2003, 222-83).

As a way of concluding, not only this section but the whole discussion started at § 3.3, we may see a sort of 'evolution' in the interplay of hetero-Orientalism and self-Orientalism, which are both centered, we have argued, around the construction of an implicit notion of 'West' as the universal point of reference. We have in fact seen how, in resonance with the components of this 'West' presently under the spotlight, be it 'reason', 'Christianity', 'science', 'poetics', 'crisis', 'Aryan race', 'individualism', 'sexuality', and so on, corresponding other- and self-representations of the 'East' promptly emerged.

Consistent with the baseline thesis that representations of the 'Other' speak more about the 'Self', it should not come as a surprise that the last evolution of contemporary representations of Asian religions are characterized by the following elements: general holistic visions, individualism, self-realization, psychologism, aversion to ritualism, quest for body-mind harmony to be realized through a host of various techniques, and mainstream-countering tendencies, often condensable into the three 'E': exoticism, eroticism and esotericism. In other words, a series of characteristics that fit well within the contemporary discourses on spirituality (§ 3.2.4). These observations notwithstanding, we must not forget that orientalist other- and self-representations do not evolve in the sense of erasing the old with the new, but concur to create a series of stratified images which nowadays form a sort of common cultural asset, and therefore are highly impactful for the present-day conception, dissemination and also consumption of East-Asian religions. This observation highlights the relevance of these historical developments for our discussion of the didactic and educative issues in teaching Asian religions.

3.4 Conclusion

From a certain point of view, we may say that the consequences of the analysis of the two challenges explored so far point somehow in two opposite directions.

On one hand, by observing the epistemological difficulties that a certain paradigm of religion would encounter when dealing with Japanese and other Asian religious traditions, we implicitly affirm that there are certain phenomena, the characteristics of which tend to be overlooked by, or even 'resist' to, an epistemological domestication. Therefore, they should be studied and represented through different lenses. We saw in fact that an emphasis on what we have called the 'inner dimension', the intellectual/experiential/existential/psychological/moral aspects of religions, overshadow various key elements of the ways in which East-Asian religions are conceived and practiced, such as the importance of practical and this-worldly benefits, the importance of ritual and the role of the body (§ 3.2.3). Concerning the supposed key role of doctrine and beliefs, especially in relation to the taxonomical intent of distinguishing between religions as clear-cut socio-cultural phenomena, we saw the difficulties in defining the specific traits of a certain religion by looking for a well-defined, distinguishing set of beliefs. Many traditions, such as in the case of the Indian subcontinent, may partake, with different interpretations, in certain common tenets, while diverging in many others (§ 3.2.2.4). We have seen how many practitioners may actually engage simultaneously with different religious traditions. We have also examined the ways in which different beliefs and practices have interacted with each other, a process which, in the case of *kami*-related beliefs and Buddhism, resulted in a new self-conscious identification of a well-defined tradition, called Shintō. Again, we have also seen the difficulty, such as in the case of Confucianism, of delineating the borders between 'religion', 'political ethos', 'ethics' or 'philosophy' (§ 3.2.1.2). Furthermore, the historical sketch of the dynamic interplay of self- and hetero-representations of East-Asian religion (§ 3.3) has shown how the ideas and conceptual knots around which these partial representations were construed basically correspond to those concepts which were implied in the construction of the modern Euro-American paradigm of religion itself. Indeed, a paradigm, especially if it comes from a powerful context, has always a certain normative power, judging what should and should not be considered relevant – in this case, as a religion or not. When applied, it is logical to think that positive appreciation goes along with what fulfills the expectation of that paradigm, and deprecation goes with what eschews it. We saw for example the general positive reception of the 'original' Buddhism as an inner-world oriented, highly ethical religious tradition preached by a well defined founder who established

clear principles, such as the Four Noble Truths (§§ 2.1.8 and 3.3.2). There was, of course, other pivotal issues engaged by the nascent field of the study of religion\s, born in the cultural context of the Victorian Age, such as questions of universalism and particularism in a context of evolutionism, and the distinctions between religion, science and superstitions (§§ 2.1.5, 2.1.8, 3.2.3 and 3.3.2).

On the other hand, we should not forget that certain aspects of that paradigm, albeit stereotypical, may 'evolve' and switch to different configurations. For example, a positive appreciation of a religion as a clear system of beliefs that must be engaged in an inner-worldly, ethical modality by a rational individual, may shift, often with polemical intentions, towards a higher appreciation of a bodily component, and a less emphasis or outright refusal to rigid doctrine, while maintaining or even reinforcing the stress on individualism. We have seen, for example, the appeal of Daoist or Tantric bodily practices as a way of holistic self-realization in the context of contemporary spirituality (§§ 3.2.4 and 3.3.4). Even more importantly, we should also be wary of falling into an 'antiquarian trap' and denying or despising any kind of historical change in religions. We would not be dissimilar to those first orientalists who were deluded to see how their cherished, highly philosophical or mystical texts, ones such as the *Upaniṣad* or the *Daodejing*, gave birth to religions full of ritual trappings and superstitions (§ 3.3.2). In other words, we need to acknowledge that, in the contemporary, increasingly connected global context, the effect of nearly two centuries of mutual influences between Euro-American cultural spheres and East-Asian cultural spheres – albeit with a major role played by the former – has led to profound adaptation and modifications in the landscape of East-Asian religions, developments that actually fit within a modern paradigm of religion. To give a concrete, yet ideal example,[37] it may not be too difficult to find, especially in a urban area of Japan, China or Sri Lanka, a Buddhist monk, well inserted in his institutional organization, who would consider his religion to be a system of sophisticated philosophical, psychological, and ethical ideas that, differently from monotheistic traditions, are compatible with basic scientific principles, such as experimental verification, rigorous reasoning and principle of causality. He would value complex Buddhist rituals as a way to maintain community bonds and reaffirm commitments, however he would strive to simplify them in order to draw more lay people. He would be uncomfortable with those practices, often involving spirit worship or manipulation, aimed at seeking mainly prosperity and profit.

37 I cite here one of the ideal portraits drawn by McMahan (2008, 34-6, 41-2) as possible examples of contemporary Buddhist practitioners, that he "assembled rather unsystematically from interviewees, public figures, Buddhist authors, and scholarly ethnographies" (McMahan 2008, 27).

Therefore, he would try to disentangle popular spirit worship from the Buddhist *dharma* and *saṃgha*. For him, Buddhism should focus on practices, such as meditation, which is meant to cultivate higher states of awareness and universal compassion. He would also think of Buddhism as a social force that can foster peace, justice, egalitarianism and democracy. While belonging, in qualitative terms, to a minority in respect to other East-Asian Buddhists, he would be in a highly influential position, together with other renowned Buddhist leaders such as the fourteenth Dalai Lama or the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

In summary, trying to deal simultaneously with the 'epistemological' and 'historical challenges' represents an additional hurdle, which can be summarized in the following, somehow paradoxical consideration: what we are trying to do is to avoid the imposition of certain paradigms onto East-Asian religion, while admitting that these very paradigms have deeply entered in the development of these traditions, which are nowadays no more confined to their traditional regions, but are increasingly gaining a global and diffused character, not only through expansions carried by historical institutions, but also through the eclecticism of contemporary spirituality. In the next chapter, we will see if and how these challenges are engaged or at least acknowledged in some examples taken from English RE.