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Michael Pye, Translating Drunk – and *Stark Naked*: Problems in Presenting Eighteenth Century Japanese Thought

ABSTRACT: In 1990 Michael Pye published a full translation of the writings of the Japanese scholar Tominaga Nakamoto (1715-1746), to which I responded in a 1993 review illustrating a possible alternative approach by retranslating one chapter. In 1997 Michael Pye defended his original work. Here I show that this defence misunderstands at least some of the rationale for suggesting an alternative translation method, and provide a short passage of translation with commentary from Hattori Somon (1724-1769), a very similar but much less well-known scholar, in order both to introduce his thought and to illustrate further the translation method I prefer. Finally some broader questions about the interpretation of Japanese eighteenth century thought are briefly indicated.

KEYWORDS: Tominaga Nakamoto; Hattori Somon; Japan; translation

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Introduction: A Difference of Opinion

Brian Bocking has in his career made important contributions to many aspects of the study of religion, but for his doctoral study he elected to carry out one of the most basic tasks of scholarship, namely the translation of an important source from a scriptural language, written in the often tricky Chinese of the first millennium CE that forms the basis of the Buddhist Canon in East Asia. In the doctoral translation as subsequently published he gave full acknowledgment to the support offered to him in this venture by Michael Pye, who again can number translation of East Asian materials among his many signal contributions to the field (Bocking 1995, [iii]). Michael Pye's own most significant translation is not, however, from a canonical source but from the writing of an eighteenth century Japanese critic of the Buddhist tradition, Tominaga Nakamoto (1715-1746), a scholar whose work displays some remarkably modern insights into the development of its doctrines over the centuries (Pye 1990). In welcoming the first English presentation of Tominaga, however, I ventured to suggest that the principles of translation observed in this volume did not for me produce a clear picture of some aspects of Tominaga's erudition, and strove to illustrate my point by offering an alternative rendering into English of part of the work, following somewhat different procedures (Barrett 1993). In response Michael Pye has devoted more than a couple of pages in a subsequent book chapter on rationality in the study of religion in Japan to defending his earlier approach to translation (Pye 1997).

The following remarks return initially to a further consideration of this divergence of approach. In the 1997 response, however, it is averred with reference to the massive early twentieth century series on Japanese religious polemics in which Tominaga's work was republished that 'it would be very helpful for those of us specialising in religion if sinologists such as Barrett would himself get on and translate the rest of these ten volumes for us instead of just picking over the bits that have already been done by others'. The explanation for this is that 'The valuable time of specialists in religion, who have perhaps some idea of the wider significance of the contents, should rather be spent on analysing those contents, and perhaps on checking up on one or two minor points of translation on their own account' (Pye 1997, 73). I have therefore felt – as a sinologist who has indeed perhaps perversely frittered away the bulk of his career on the study of China rather than Japan – under some obligation to provide a translation of at least a few more pages, in order to atone for trespassing on the valuable time of specialists in religion. I have consequently selected a passage from another eighteenth century Japanese scholar who plainly approved of Tominaga's work and wrote in a similar vein a pamphlet that the author entitles *Sekirara*, or in English *Stark Naked*. My hope is that the selection, though brief, will provide something of an additional sidelight on Tominaga's ideas.

Translating Drunk

It must be said that my 1993 publication seems to have been misconstrued as an article, described as 'a somewhat curious reaction to the presentation of Tominaga's writings in English' (Pye 1997, 71), whereas it was written simply as a review of the 1990 translation. Though it is stated that the

'introductory observations are somewhat patronising' (Pye 1997, 72) my intention in offering an alternative translation was entirely deferential towards a scholar with an amply deserved reputation for promoting the study of Japanese thought concerning Buddhism in English. I had hoped simply to review a work not free from misunderstandings of Tominaga's text without the invidious necessity of having to draw explicit attention to its errors, and providing a sample of alternative translation seemed the most tactful way to do this. Regrettably this tactic seems to have backfired, making it necessary to clear up misunderstandings of my review as well. First of these is the assertion that 'Barrett wants to turn Tominaga into a sinologist who uses the Wade-Giles transcription system' for matters of transcription are 'apparently superficial but in fact profoundly important' (Pye 1997, 73). And after explaining the difference between the Wade-Giles transcription and the pinyin transcription originally devised in the People's Republic of China and now the internationally accepted standard, the message is driven home again: 'This might seem to be an insignificant excursus, but it is not' (Pye 1997, 74).

In 1993 pinyin had not entirely won international acceptance, so at that time for the sake of convenience rather than in order to make any particular point I tried as far as possible when reviewing to use the transcription used in the work under review. Michael Pye's 1990 book uses Wade-Giles for Chinese, and the Hepburn system for Japanese. The latter is an 'Orientalist' system, devised by a missionary, which is still used by most scholars in preference to the *kunrei-shiki* Romanisation, devised in Japan before 1945, that is in fact the officially backed system in Japan and the international standard. In this case too for the sake of convenience in 1993 I followed Michael Pye in observing Orientalist precedents, and do so here. For Chinese in this present essay pinyin is used, though political considerations aside, the view of experts is that transcriptions of Chinese 'differ very little in their basic character and, judging by present-day linguistic theory, they are all almost equally good (or, if this viewpoint is preferred, equally bad)' (Kratochvíl 1968, 54).

For the most part the 1990 translation of Tominaga's main work in fact uses the Japanese pronunciation of Chinese names and terms as the basis for transcription, though occasional glosses in Wade-Giles are provided. Though I could and still can see some arguments in favour of this policy, to my mind it did and does result in an encounter with Tominaga as it were 'at the end of a long evening in the pub, still discoursing as brilliantly as ever, but speech slurred beyond all recognition' (Barrett 1993, 245), which draws the retort that if Tominaga were to read Barrett's translation 'he would think that it was Barrett who had been in the pub!' (Pye 1997, 74). But Barrett was striving to make a point about the intelligibility of translation while stone cold sober – though he will admit that such is not invariably his state. It may seem misleading to represent ancient Chinese names in modern Mandarin rather than the eighteenth century Japanese pronunciations used by Tominaga himself, but there is at least to Barrett's way of thinking a practical reason for this. In general phonetic change in both China and Japan has obliterated distinctions that originally made the pronunciation of Chinese names much more diverse. In some cases the Japanese pronunciation preserves distinctions now lost in Mandarin, but for the most part the phonetic diversity of the Japanese readings is much narrower. Though Classical Chinese, the language in which Tominaga wrote, was the Latin of eighteenth century East Asia, the distortion involved in adapting its proper nouns to the local vernacular was far

greater than the minor distortion imposed by us on Latin authors like Livy and Pliny – and even we do not talk of 'Tully' any more. The single Japanese syllable '*kō*', for instance, is used for a variety of syllables in Chinese pronounced in modern Mandarin *kou*, *gong*, *gou*, *kong*, *guang*, *huang*, *qiao*, *jia*, *jiao*, *hou*, *xiang*, *hao*, *jiang*, *kao*, *hang*, *keng*, *xiao*, *hong*, *gang*, *geng*, *xing*, *ken*, *heng*, and *gao* (Katsumata 1954, 2125). This explains the reference to slurring. Under such circumstances it is simply much easier to identify a Chinese name from any Chinese transcription than from any Japanese transcription of the same Chinese character.

Of course the objection offered to this solution appears to be one of principle rather than practicality – meeting the latter desideratum, after all, is now greatly assisted by the increased readiness of publishers to include Chinese characters wherever necessary. 'This discussion about choice of transcription systems is intended to illustrate how deeply ingrained are the assumptions with which people frequently go to work, and how far some orientalists are from really letting cultures speak autonomously' (Pye 1997, 75). A problem arises, however, from cultures speaking autonomously of others, and thereby hindering those others in their own speaking to us. Suppose we are translating into English a Japanese account of Europe. Do we render in accord with the principle of unfettered cultural autonomy the name of one of its capital cities as 'Parii'? This Japanese pronunciation actually better reflects the indigenous pronunciation of its name, but is surely as distracting to the English reader as faithfully reproducing in translations from Japanese into English such Japanese forms as '*Shiiatoru*' or '*Ros Anzerus*', for those are, one imagines, the ways in which the scrupulously non-orientalist should refer to Seattle and Los Angeles (Katsumata 1954, 2087). This might not amount to translating drunk, but it does surely verge on the somewhat curious.

But the problem is perhaps compounded for Chinese names by the indubitable existence in Japan during the first half of the twentieth century of a form of Orientalism that did indeed not allow China to speak autonomously (Tanaka 1993). While the policy of reproducing Chinese names in Japanese guise has plainly been advocated with the best of intentions, one fears that its implementation could give succour to such ways of thinking. This is especially so when an entirely different policy is accorded Indian names: these are occasionally glossed with their Japanese pronunciations also but are in any case invariably represented by their Sanskrit forms (Pye 1990, 150-151). Tominaga did not know Sanskrit any more than he knew Chinese! So why draw this invidious distinction? It is particularly unfortunate in this context moreover that of the more than thirty names occurring in the chapter by Tominaga selected for sample retranslation in 1993, the original 1990 translation identifies only one – and that is the name of a seventeenth-eighteenth century Japanese (Pye 1990, 167, n. 161), the sole non-Chinese mentioned. All the rest are passed over in silence. Some, translators forced to choose whether to misrepresent one Japanese or thirty Chinese, might regard the latter as less important, but at any rate the one commentator to have considered both the 1990 and 1993 translations of the same material from Tominaga deems the 1993 approach 'more sensible' (Durt 1994, 6, n. 4). Of course one understands the pressure from publishers to minimise footnotes for fear of scaring off potential readers, so the number allotted to this chapter was clearly strictly rationed to but nine in all, of which three are cross-references to other passages in Tominaga's writings – and of the remaining six footnotes, three are unfortunately either misleading or mistaken, something that

obviously in itself does not allow the Chinese to speak autonomously, and rather subverts any stand taken on principles in any case. Even so, one appreciates that certain ideal principles such as the provision of full annotation may legitimately be compromised in seeking as wide a readership as possible for important ideas. Far be it from a mere sinologist to query the judgment of an expert on expedient means, especially when this sinologist – as he has repeatedly stated – considers Tominaga's importance as a thinker notable enough that every effort should be made to bring his writings to the attention of an English-speaking audience.

But after Michael Pye makes the case on principle, a Parthian shot would seem to bring us back to practicalities. 'If such a "sinological" approach is taken seriously, almost all Japanese writings up until recent times would end up by having to be rendered, in part, in transcribed Chinese ("mandarin" dialect, Wade-Giles system)!' (Pye 1997, 76). While it has not been possible for me to determine exactly how widely this policy is observed with regard to 'almost all Japanese writings', this is at least precisely how experts on Japanese history have treated the one Japanese thinker who was more or less a contemporary of Tominaga and who has attracted multiple translations into English. It is true that Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) is a very different sort of thinker, much more interested in social and economic matters than in the evolution of Buddhism, but by reason of his education and intellectual environment he writes in a style that is broadly similar to Tominaga's type of prose, and that of course means that he makes reference to things and persons Chinese. Both the translations made before 1990 by McEwan (McEwan 1962) and Lidin (Lidin 1973) and those made after 1990 by Yamashita (Yamashita 1994) and Najita (Najita 1998), whatever their other merits or demerits, adhere consistently to this approach. Wade-Giles transcription in works on Japanese literature would seem to have persisted even later than this (Addiss 2000), but eventually the use of pinyin in such contexts appears to have become the norm (Qiu 2005), so if the use of Wade-Giles is an indication of Orientalism, then that problem at least seems to have been solved.

Tominaga Nakamoto and Hattori Somon

Understanding Tominaga is another matter. I have pointed out elsewhere that the assertion that he anticipated the modern usage of the Japanese term for religion rests upon a mistranslation (Barrett and Tarocco 2012, 309-310). Rather more judicious is the formulation 'one of the basic motors of modern reflection about religion is the perception that religions (or analogous sets of teachings with competing religious claims) are more than one in number' (Pye 1997, 76), even if (as will be explained below) I have my own doubts that this alone is what gave the impetus to Tominaga to carry out his work. For this 'analogous sets of teachings' formulation, too, may unduly highlight our own concerns with the very European construct of religion. One way to test this is to look at the wider intellectual environment to which Tominaga contributed so as not to see him in isolation. It is asserted that to assign any relevance to the broader context of Japanese polemical writing of Tominaga's times represents 'a dubious judgment, for the main responses were pious religious defences against Tominaga's critique. The main positive take-up of Tominaga's ideas was by the important Shinto writer Motoori Norinaga' (Pye 1997, 73). This, however, overlooks not only such prominent allies of Motoori as

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Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) but also the much more independent Hattori Somon, also known as Hattori Ten'yū (1724-1769), who as we shall see concurred enthusiastically in some of Tominaga's arguments – while remaining perfectly capable of provoking pious religious defences on his own account (Yamada 1964).

Scholarship on Hattori even in Japanese appears as yet to be somewhat thin, though a short introductory work on the *Lotus Sutra* recently translated into English does at least quote several of his remarks, both positive and negative, on that text, citing a joint publication of his little tract and the main work of Tominaga that appeared in 1902, when interest in the eighteenth century rise of critical thinking in Japan was just beginning to be explored (Tamura 2014, 20, 59, 61, 63 and 165, n. 95). Like Tominaga he came from a background in manufacturing, in this case in textiles, but to have been physically lacking in the rude good health required for the rumbustious Japanese business world of the day, with the result that he sought refuge in scholarship instead. He comes across as having been very widely read in Japanese and Chinese literature, and the name Somon that he chose for himself signifies 'follower of Su Shi' (1037-1101), the great Chinese writer who professed a strong interest in Buddhism (Grant 1994). Hattori shows in particular a familiarity with the doctrines of the Tendai School. His best-known polemical work, *Stark Naked*, published posthumously in 1785, explains in its preface that it is intended metaphorically to strip away the robes that had within Buddhism, and especially Zen Buddhism, come to symbolise the transmission of authority (Adamek 2007, 152-158). Inspired apparently by a remark of Wang Shizhen (1526-1590), he doubted that all the scriptures of Buddhism claiming the authority of the historical Buddha were actually authentic, though he found it more likely that scriptures antedating the rise of Mahayana Buddhism had a better chance of reflecting the Buddha's actual words (Hattori 1931, 348). In this regard he explicitly commends the chronology of Buddhist sources proposed by Tominaga, though his own analysis seems to be independent (Hattori 1931, 368).

It may be that Hattori has attracted much less attention than Tominaga not simply because his work is less extended but also because some of his speculations on Buddhist writings have not been confirmed by later Buddhist studies. He notes for example the allegation of the famous Chinese Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) that all Buddhist ideas were plagiarised from classic Daoist materials (Zhu 1986, 3010); he also reports the arguments against this of Lin Xiyi (ca. 1200-1273), a commentator whose writings were well known in Japan (Qiu 2005, 34, 43). Hattori, however, suspects that monks educated in the traditions of the Chinese literati modified at least one Buddhist text in the course of translation to include phrases and incidents similar in inspiration to these Daoist works (Hattori 1931, 369). Comparison with these passages as independently translated into Tibetan does not bear out this suspicion, and in general only rather less radical rewriting by Chinese translators has been detected elsewhere.

Even so there is at least one section in his writing that even if only in passing goes well beyond Tominaga in intellectual curiosity about the apparent universality of some forms of belief, though the context in which this occurs needs to be taken into account (Hattori 1931, 365-366). It is this that is presented here with some basic commentary on the references and allusions involved, which would seem to me necessary to an informed understanding of his meaning. Since I do not feel at home translating from

pre-modern Japanese – or indeed from any language – I trust that the shortcomings in what follows may provoke others to provide a more accurate and indeed more extended presentation of Hattori's ideas. The discussion concerns the conceptions of heavens in Buddhism and elsewhere, and one notes that while it does echo Tominaga's opening to his main work (Pye 1990, 73-74), and even uses his key term *kajō* found therein (Hattori 1931, 366), the initial context of broad cross-cultural comparison is somewhat different. Before turning to this context, it is perhaps worth noting that finding a good translation for Tominaga's term is something of a challenge, though 'superseding' certainly gets close (Pye 1997, 70). But since the literal meaning of the two characters is 'adding on top', an idea of layering and accumulation also seems to be intrinsically quite strongly present. At the same time both Tominaga and Hattori describe a situation in which competition between rivals is intense and acts as a driver towards innovation, so there would also seem to be an element of what might be called 'upping the ante' involved as well. But this is to anticipate matters somewhat, and so we begin at the beginning of the section that is devoted to the overall topic.

Stark Naked – A Sampling

> In general whether a society is civilised or not, wherever humans are there is the transmission of knowledge. But in establishing the transmission of knowledge they are not the same, going along as they do with their several climates and customs.

The problem here is with the Japanese word *oshie* or Chinese *jìao*, which at its simplest refers to teaching. It is very easy therefore to assume that under some circumstances it will tend to mean something like religious doctrine, but there is nothing given to indicate the content that is taught – hence the clumsy circumlocution 'transmission of knowledge'.

> In assigning cardinal importance to heaven however they all emerge as being on the same track. Obviously heaven exists above all things, supremely great and high, mysterious and unfathomable – there is nothing more worthy of awed respect than this, so all transmissions of knowledge do respect and make it important.

Again, the word translated 'heaven' can be as neutral as 'sky', but despite the diversity of usages laid before us by Hattori, he clearly wants us to understand more than that.

> Confucians speak for a start of the Mandate of Heaven, of the Way of Heaven, of fearing Heaven and of corresponding to Heaven. As for the Six Classics, the *Analects* and *Mencius*, not one of these books does not respect Heaven.

The first two concepts are well known elements in the Confucian tradition that may be traced back to the Confucian Classics (Yao 2003, 607-611). The last two pick up phrases from the *Mencius* and the *Analects* of Confucius respectively (Legge 1960, 155; 214).

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> The Way of Laozi may transcend the limits of the ordinary, but even so he says it is the Way of Heaven to diminish excess and supplement deficiency and Heaven's net is vast but its mesh lets through nothing.

'Transcend the limits of the ordinary' renders a phrase, *hōgai* in Japanese or *fāngwài* in Chinese, that comes originally from the *Zhuangzi* but was pressed into service in the China of the fourth century CE to convey the notion that the obligations of the Buddhist clergy could not be understood within the limits of conventional social thought (Zürcher 1959, 256; 414 n.11). By early modern times it had been extended to Daoist clergy and some others. The 'even so' suggests that the Daoists had some conception, like the Buddhists, of realities beyond what is termed below the Triple World, but Hattori does not linger over a question that he was not well placed to comment on, given the paucity of materials on Daoism available in Japan. The allusions are to the *Daode jing*, chapters 77 and 73 respectively.

> The Way of the Kami in our country too attributes our origin to kami from heaven, and points to their dwelling place *Takama-ga-hara*, the Plain of High Heaven.

This sentence briefly refers to the origins of Japan in the Shinto tradition as recorded in the foundational Japanese chronicles of the early eighth century (Mori 2003, 13; 30). Again Hattori does not linger on a consideration of Japanese matters either.

> The non-Buddhist transmitters of knowledge in India all take rebirth in heaven as their desired goal.

This should refer narrowly to the six heterodox teachers said to have preceded the historical Buddha who looked beyond the authority of the Vedas, but as refracted through East Asian tradition tended, as we shall see, to encompass all those outside the Buddhist tradition in India.

> The likes of the sect of Jesus in the West are strictly forbidden in our country, but though what they transmit is not easy to learn at present, since they have been described as the teachings of the Lord of Heaven theirs too would seem to be a transmission of knowledge that respects heaven.

Since any curiosity about Christianity would have involved Hattori in deep trouble, this is about as much as he could safely say in the wake of the seventeenth century suppression of Christianity (Élison 1973). Even so he does seem to be attempting a broader, 'global' approach to the phenomena he describes than Tominaga, who does mention Korea and Inner Asia but primarily confines his remarks to India, China and Japan. In the background here we may well imagine the eighteenth century Japanese cartography that now depicted Europe along with those parts of Asia that had long been represented in Japan (Unno 1994, 405-409).

> Only in the Law of the Buddha is heaven not respected – thus we have the saying "In heaven above and in earth below only I am to be respected".

The reference is to the reported first words of the historical Buddha, well known in East Asia but actually not at all easy to find in translated sources (Kadokawa 1967). The rapid survey of what would today be termed Confucianism, Daoism, Shinto, Hinduism and Christianity thus emerges not as a dispassionate exercise in comparative religion *avant la lettre* but as a simple rhetorical ploy introducing his main point.

> Moreover starting from the "heavens of desire" right the way up to the non-material heavens it puts them down as realms of the unenlightened who are bound to rebirth.

From here onward the resemblance to the opening of Tominaga's main work is striking (Pye 1990, 73-74). Since Hattori was only twenty-one when it was published, one supposes that here at least he takes his inspiration from his older contemporary.

> Obviously there are particular circumstances as to why the Law of the Buddha alone spews forth such braggadocio, as against all other transmissions of knowledge that show such reverential respect. The reason is that the main aim of Buddhism is to suppress non-believers.

Hattori's account is less detailed in terms of naming the non-Buddhists than Tominaga's text, even if the broader comparative emphasis whereby he leads up to his analysis seems to be all his own.

> In general though there may have been ninety-six varieties of non-believers in India and their followers may truly have been legion, they all made rebirth in the heavens their goal. But there were all sorts of distinctions between high and low, respected and less well regarded heavens.

Here the mention of ninety-six competing groups would seem to suggest even more clearly that Hattori is following Tominaga, who uses exactly the same terminology in discussing cosmology, as well as in other places in his treatise, though the figure 'ninety-six' to cover non-Buddhist India had long been used in East Asian sources by the eighteenth century (Keenan 1994, 147).

> For the first non-believers to set up their transmitted knowledge merely established but one or two heavens in proximity to the earth. Later as more groups of non-believers gradually appeared they competed to outdo these old teachings.

The heavens in proximity to the earth are those on the summit and upper slopes of the world mountain of Sumeru, as described in handbooks of Buddhist cosmology (McGovern 1923, 60). The mention of competition suggests that both Tominaga and Hattori, who were brought up with a keen awareness of commercial life, subscribe to what would today be termed a 'market model of religion'.

> Successively more heavens were cumulated (*kajō*) in layers, just like piling up firewood, so that finally one arrived at the heavens of non-thought and non-non-thought, making twenty-eight heavens in all.

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While Hattori's use of Tominaga's expression represents no more than an early gloss on its meaning, the firewood metaphor he employs points very clearly to an understanding of the term in which accumulation was a significant element. The rather refined divine existence at the very highest levels has been described as ineffable, but an alternative translation of this state could be one of 'neither perception nor non-perception' (Keown 2007, 250).

> But when we get to Śākyamuni setting up his transmission of knowledge, he did not rely on the old device of piling up firewood, but rather came up with a whole new contraption, and produced the notion of going beyond our Triple World.

'Contraption' may be a bit pejorative for a term that indicates a key mechanism – literally trigger and pivot – and hence a key point. But the need to go beyond the world of the heavens, the earth, and the subterranean levels of existence is indeed a dominant theme in Buddhist polemic (Barrett 2009).

> As a result this Triple World is compared to a burning house or to a prison, in an extreme putting down of his opponents.

Comparing this world to a prison is reminiscent of Pure Land Buddhism, but the famous parable of the burning house from which the Buddha calls us forth by expedient means points directly at the third section of the *Lotus Sutra* (Hurvitz 1976, 58-62; 67-72).

> Moreover when we come to those of his followers who created scriptures after his decease, we get the notion of gods coming down from heaven to hear his Law – the first section of the *Lotus Sutra* says the sun, moon and stars came down to line up in his audience.

In fact this scripture does not exactly enunciate this in so many words, but Hattori is right that celestial powers are amongst the vast audience of supernatural beings listed at the beginning of the text (Hurvitz 1976, 2). Perhaps Hattori is thinking of artistic depictions of the scene.

> Thus in order to suppress all the non-believers they built castles in the air and fabricated these fantastical ideas.

Here we conclude with a succinct *quod erat demonstrandum*. Hattori's little polemic is not divided into clear chapters like Tominaga's main work, but this is plainly the end of the section: the contents do not follow on from his earlier remarks, nor are they taken up in what follows. Over all he does not attempt like Tominaga to run through the main doctrines of Buddhism and their development offering systematic criticism, though given his detailed knowledge of the literature of the Tendai School, its main scripture, the *Lotus Sutra*, does receive particular attention. My impression is that he does not seem to be as widely read in general Buddhist sources as Tominaga, but he does cite Chinese literati and those Chinese Buddhists who interacted with them with a rather greater frequency.

No doubt the accuracy of my presentation of Hattori could be improved. Whatever approach one may wish to take to translation, I do hope that the fragment presented above will pique the interest of those

curious to know about the ways in which eighteenth century Japanese reconsidered the received traditions of their day. 'Japan's shift to modernity' is far too brief a way of referring to a complex process, one perhaps too complex for a misleadingly simple and dubious concept such as modernity in the sense in which it is generally used. But surely it is necessary to go beyond the intellectual stars of the age to consider also the less prominent, and also the frankly reactionary, those opposed to new ideas. What arguments carried weight? What evidence was adduced? Michael Pye has been in the vanguard of drawing attention to the intellectual riches that may be found outside the European intellectual tradition, and in inspiring Brian Bocking's work on East Asia he has certainly helped build up an important field of study.

Some Final Thoughts

In closing this essay, however, I feel obliged to give voice to some of the reservations I feel about situating Tominaga and Hattori in a discourse concerning religious pluralism at all. I can appreciate that to do so performs an important function in bringing the ideas of these thinkers into the arena of Western academic debate. I can equally appreciate that to exclude eighteenth century Japanese from consideration under the terms of Western academic debate runs the risk of rendering them purely exotic and thus unworthy of any consideration at all, trapped in an irrational or at any rate deeply alien universe that it is pointless and unprofitable to attempt to penetrate. But any such suggestion of irrationality, so far as I have been able to discover, stems only from baseless speculation rather than evidential scholarship (Barrett 2011, 216-218). I doubt in any case that we are confronted only with these two possibilities, without a middle way that pays due attention to the categories used by Tominaga and Hattori themselves, yet seeks to articulate their insights in our own language, though to be sure excluding as far as possible the imposition of contemporary agendas of our own is never easy. While I cannot speak of the purposes of specialists in religion, I would have thought that the humbler role of the Japanologist or Sinologist lies simply in trying to achieve just that.

And after reading repeatedly the stated aims of Tominaga and Hattori set out in the prefaces to their writings, I must confess that I find no indication there or anywhere else that either man was 'writing about an intellectual problem arising out of the fact that religions are plural in number' (Pye 1997, 76). Rather, the whole tenor of their arguments points for me to pressing contemporary concerns in Japan over issues of culture and identity in a rapidly changing society. The Ways of the Buddha and of Confucius seem as much to refer to cultural traditions as to systems of belief – and indeed the notion that the latter should be treated over all as a religion has been very strongly contested (Boot 2007). By providing references to the scholarship on controversy between Buddhism and Chinese traditions in the chapter of Tominaga translated in 1993 I had hoped to illumine – or perhaps complicate – the dimension of his thought that engages with cultural critique, for the notion that in practice the Buddhist or Confucian traditions anywhere presented themselves as mutually substitutable entities like alternative religious choices has always seemed odd to me.

Perhaps in some sense Tominaga 'was not even trying to be a "sinologist"' (Pye 1997, 76); this would however be the same sense in

which he was not trying to be a Buddhologist or Indologist or indeed a specialist in religion either. But as an eighteenth century Japanese the distant societies of India and China were surely in their way important to him. Unfortunately though some literature on Indian culture and Japan exists, it would seem to be primarily preoccupied with cultural influences rather than any probing of the shifting significance of India for the Japanese world view (Thakur 1992). All the same the continued power of what one might call 'Indocentrism' for the Japanese is cartographically quite evident in the eighteenth century maps that continued to depict a world centred on India with Japan at its edge that had been inherited from medieval times, even as other cosmographic conceptions were beginning to alter outlooks there in the ways already noted above (Unno 1994, 429). The imaginative allure of China in Japan from early times into the eighteenth century has, however, been explored in English language writing (Pollack 1986), and it is against this backdrop that I would prefer to read Tominaga. Nor does it seem to me in any way obscurantist or 'Orientalist' to do so. On this matter, though, I stand to be corrected, especially since I am all too conscious that the questions raised here are too wide ranging for satisfactory resolution in a brief occasional piece. Indeed the best that any participant in a minor disagreement such as that exhibited here may hope for is that some reader might at least feel intrigued enough to take up the broader issues touched upon in more extended research.

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