

THE NON-MODERN CONFRONTS THE MODERN: DATING THE BUDDHA IN JAPAN

JAMES E. KETELAAR

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the emergence of a distinctly “modern” style of history and some of its uses as applied to Buddhism by Buddhist scholars within the early Meiji Period (late nineteenth century) in Japan. After a discussion of the importance of “area studies” in the formation of conceptions germane to history as practiced in Japan, the paper proposes a new category of the “non-modern” as a means to counter the historiographical dominance of modern categories in the formation of the historical discipline, especially as formulated in Japanese studies.

As a case study, the emergence of the discourse dealing with the quest for the historical Buddha is examined. By showing the methods and accomplishments of modernist historians, and the concomitant slippage of non-modern categories in their work, this paper sketches a method of analysis particularly applicable to the intersection of religion and history.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Area studies” in general, and Japan studies in particular, is wedded, if not chained, to the quest for the meaning of Japanese modernity. This quest itself emerged during the last years of the great colonial expansions of the nineteenth century. Modern historical meanings were, in other words, intimately linked to the contemporary political and strategic boundaries that were being guarded, fought over and, when possible, extended. Area studies was inaugurated in the United States with the clear goal, borrowing the title of a Frank Capra film created for the War Department, to “Know Your Enemy.”¹ The primary aims of developing systems of knowing in order to enhance information useful to strategic, and later business, concerns had as unintended consequences the creation of language and cultural studies centers that have become the basis of academic departments throughout the United States. This is nowhere more true than in the field of Japanese studies, which essentially began in 1946 with the publication of Ruth Benedict’s master work of anthropological assessment, *The*

1. Directed by Frank Capra for the US War Department, this film was written by Capra and Carl Foreman, narrated by John Huston, and released in 1945. See also Capra’s *Our Job In Japan*, which uses much of the same stock film with different narrations to create a very distinct vision of who the “Japanese really are.”

Chrysanthemum and the Sword.² This impressive work, still in print (as well as translated into Japanese), is also noteworthy because Benedict never went to Japan in order to complete the work, which was originally commissioned by the War Department.

Strictly speaking, the study of “Japan” by Euro-Americans began much earlier with the publication in 1727 of Englebert Keampfer’s monumental *The History of Japan: Together with a Description of Siam*.³ It became the standard reference work dealing with the archipelago for over one hundred years. Of course, Chinese studies of Japan predate this work by over a millennium and studies of “Japan” by the “Japanese” are also legion, beginning with the earliest extant work on the archipelago, the *Kojiki* (or Record of Ancient Matters) that was compiled by imperial order in the early eighth century. But the modern study of Japan, using standards of history developed using “scientific” assumptions regarding truth, meaning, and interpretation, is very much a twentieth-century concern; and the wars of mid-century, both hot and cold, stimulated and shaped interest and research.

Two driving questions have informed much of the modern study of the history of Japan. First: how was it possible for Japan to “modernize” so quickly? This line of inquiry applies as much to the Tokugawa and Meiji eras of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as it does to the period after the destructions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Second: What went wrong? That is, after such positive developments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, how was it that “Japan” eschewed liberal-democratic, capitalist idealism and swung toward colonial imperialism? Why was the Pacific War necessary?

While early area studies efforts related to Japan focused on institutional, political, and economic history to answer these and related questions, intriguingly, and sadly in my opinion, subsequent generations have only continued this quest, although often from different perspectives. Examinations of theater, poetry, painting, literature, philosophy, and religion have all also taken up these questions to explain “Japan’s modern origins” as embedded in the wide range of human cultural historical experiences.

To be sure, much of our understanding of this period and its consequences have been modified in recent years by an expansion of post-structural concerns and the emergence of subaltern, neocolonial, transnational, and global studies. Be this as it may, while the politics have certainly shifted, and sometimes quite dramatically, the concern for the modern remains dominant. It is within this context that I have started to use the term “non-modern” to expand my understanding of Japanese history and to raise questions about contemporary historical methodology per se.

II. PROPOSING THE NON-MODERN

What might the “non-modern” be? While it might be many things, clearly it cannot simply be a re-invocation of the oppositional “traditional,” which practitioners

2. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946).

3. First published in German, this was later translated into English and widely circulated.

of the “modern” have often used as a contrapuntal rhythm to their progressive changes rung with a precise teleological calculus. The “non-modern” is not some always already existent, yet always already on the verge of extinction, time-space, some set of cultural markers forever playing out set-pieces in now intriguing, now quaint, now inspirational, now misguided attempts to perfect the human spirit, to clumsily clarify law and the hierarchy of state power, to, finally, make room for the rational. The “non-modern” does not precede nor presage; it does not wait for nor tremble before the “modern.” The non-modern, in contrast to, certainly, the “premodern” or the “early modern” and even to the “medieval” or the “ancient,” eschews historical teleology, developmental hierarchies, and ideals of “progress” with trans-global meaning.

This is thus an attempt to read a historical moment as a rigorously discrete phenomenon that rejects its future as the dominant frame of interpretive reference. Much of history is an exercise in pre-posturing: a taking of the present and using it to frame that which came before it. While convenient, often telling, and certainly evocative, such preposterous history has its own limits as well: the limits of order, progression, and clarity.

This is not to say that the non-modern is antihistorical, much less nonhistorical. Far from it. The non-modern is deeply historical. Indeed, it can even be asserted that the non-modern is primarily, even purely, historical. It is perhaps the only fully historical category open to analysis for those of us who dwell inevitably, exclusively, inescapably in the “modern.”

The “postmodern” helped the non-modern emerge, of course. Without the structural analysis of language, the queering of the ways of knowing, communicating, and creating narratives, without the post-structural and deconstructive efforts to show the limits of the figurations of knowledge in the “modern,” we could not conceive the non-modern. In this historiographical sense, which must be recognized as temporally and politically bounded, the non-modern can be said to be a product, a manufacture, a forgery, an unintended consequence of the “modern.” Simply, if there were no “modern” the non-modern would not need to be named, much less constructed.

This prolegomenon to the non-modern is also not meant to be a neopositivist appeal for the recreation of the “past” as a “world unto itself.” Some writers in eighteenth-century Tokugawa Japan, for example, claimed that through a carefully maintained hermeneutic reconstruction of the primary sounds of words, poetry, songs, divine utterances and communications, a re-invocation of the primal past that produced these sounds could be accomplished; that, in other words, through a resuscitation of the primal human emotional language a full participation in the primal past was possible and the spiritual ontology of that time/place could be lived anew. The non-modern, as I see it, makes no such claims. A hermeneutic praxis of ontological participation in another time-space is a utopian fantasy. As pleasant or beguiling as this fantasy may be, it is not history. It is not a means to the non-modern.

The historiographical categories of “premodern,” “early-modern,” and so on are, without question, useful. They do precisely what they are designed to do. That is, they bring order to the chaos of human life, memory, and interpreta-

tion. F. Max Müller, the nineteenth-century scholar who edited the pathbreaking *Sacred Books of the East* series,⁴ and who coined the phrase “history of religions” (*Religionswissenschaft*), liked to point out that all religion begins with anthropology. What he meant by this was that at any given moment every human being is consistently and continually confronted with the infinite and the limits upon the human. There are always things to see beyond what we can see, there are always things to hear beyond what we can hear. If, and this is an important yet immediately recognizable “if,” we take notice of “that which we cannot apprehend,” if we are sensitive to the absence that is always present, we are irrevocably confronted with the infinite. What, precisely, can we not see, hear, understand? This may simply be read as the always-already present “other,” but it is also an immediate and potentially dramatic manifestation of the infinite other. Here, Müller claimed, in the sensory limitations of the body in interaction with its world, is the location of the emergence of that which we call “religion.” The unmitigated or unfiltered confrontation of the body with these many infinities is one definition of “chaos”: too many possibilities in a too limited frame of reference in too short a period of time. This image I also find useful as a means to describe a form of knowing that strikes me as distinctly non-modern in range, reference, and character.

Language is in some sense a buffer here. In using language we often must think in linear, grammatical, regulated fashion. Poetry, song, and other similar uses of language attempt, and indeed often succeed, in bending these frames to the breaking point. Yet the problem remains. Beyond knowing is always more. Is it possible to live in a world of always more, or more precisely, can a human mind dwell within the infinite?

Within the discipline of history, the chaos of the infinite is always present. At the most mundane level there is always more to read. The days of reading an entire library, as was often claimed by non-modern writers or their biographers, are over. (One endearing iconic formula in the *Kōsōden* [Records of Illustrious Priests] genre is the aside that the great master had read the thousands of volumes of the Buddhist canon before he was six years of age [or perhaps eight for some lesser figures].) Claims of exhaustive scholarliness generally refer to an exhausted scholar and not to a somehow “complete” bibliography. Yet there is more at stake here. The historiographical categories noted above (the “premodern” and so on) come into prominence at the same moment that they provide their essential service. They determine frames within which our inquiries, of whatever inclination, can be carried out. And importantly, they do so in a seemingly transparent manner that provides clarity for disparate possibilities. Moreover, they have also claimed and, to a certain extent, assumed a primacy of meaning even over the historical material they were created to order, to frame. Indeed, often it seems the frame takes over for the framed.

It is precisely here, of course, that we must acknowledge our greatest debt to post-structuralist and postmodernist writers. The lie of claims to historical clarity should now be obvious. The “premodern” as a historical reality, no matter the nomenclature, never existed. Period. It exists now, of course, and will continue

4. These were published from 1879–1910 and finally totaled fifty volumes of translations from across south and east Asia.

to do so, but only ever as an artifact of our attachment to the “modern” as the touchstone of meaning. The hegemony of the “modern” is so powerful, so pervasive, that claims to other forms of knowing history are quite easily dismissed. The very question “what does it mean?” and the very ability to ask it, have themselves become intimately linked to the goals of the modern. This is not to say that the quest for “meaning” is solely a quest of “modern” writers, but the claims of what *constitutes* “meaning” has indeed been overrun by what can be called modernist concerns: application, relevance, verifiability, precision, categorization, political importance, worth, and control.

The challenge of the non-modern is thus the challenge of chaos. How is it possible to think that which is contingent, teleologically undetermined, implicated in a vast field of meanings, and necessarily subject to multiple interpretations? Patterns are real; trajectories, influences, and interconnections occur. Yet, we must continually ask, “how do we find them”? The assumption of the non-modern is that once we eschew the dramatic rush of the clarifying light of “modernity,” many original and unsuspected aspects of history will appear. History in this sense is thus not the declaration of willful contemporary wisdom as much as it is the willingness of the historian to linger in shadows speaking into light.

Every text has its shadows: the parts that remain unfulfilled, fragmented, unclear. These may be the results of interpretive ignorance or prejudice on either the readers’ or the authors’ parts, perhaps both. There could be material damage, scarcity of or a complete lack of “original” versions; faulty scribes, transcription and translations errors, deceptive, lazy, or simply mistaken transmissions might also be involved. Records, be they personal, shrine, temple, village, domainal, shōgunal, or imperial, all have their distinctive shadows. These technical details need to be attended to, learned and used in the reading of shadows. This is not a mere juxtaposition of what one can “really know” and what one might “infer”; this is not a suggestion that there is “true truth” and “constructed truths.” That is a modernist claim. No, I am suggesting that in the non-modern there is *only* truth: true lies, true stories, true mistakes, true truths, and true fakes. Can we narrativize this? Some might claim that this is not “history.” On the contrary, I would suggest that this is all that history has ever been. Modernist claims of the scientific nature of the historical discipline to the contrary, history has always already been an exercise in forgery. By this I mean it has been both imagined and tempered in the furnaces of our collective knowing.

III. TO STUDY SHADOWS

As I have argued extensively elsewhere, “religion” in Japan becomes a problem and a problematized concept in the late nineteenth century.⁵ The aggressive persecution of Buddhism and the near elimination of several aspects of this once-dominant institution were met by Buddhists in numerous ways. One of the more intriguing responses was the construction of a New Buddhist history. Works ranging from biographies of the Buddha to studies of the geography of ancient

5. James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

India to reviews of the early Buddhist conferences filled monograph after monograph and journal after journal as the New Buddhists sought to inscribe (again, some would say recover) the origins of their faith within a specific and verifiable time, place, and intellectual milieu. Under the threat of eradication in the early Meiji era, Buddhist theologians returned to basic questions: What is Buddhism? Who founded Buddhism? What will the Buddhism of the future be? To bridge the vast expanse of time and place that separated the “origin” of Buddhism from the contemporary world, and thus provide a means to answer these questions, they found it necessary, in the words of Murakami Senshō,⁶ one of the first “modern” Buddhist historians, to discard the “imaginary age” (*kūsō jidai*) and ascertain the “actual age” (*jijitsu jidai*) of Buddha’s life and Buddhism’s past. Such an epistemological shift would be possible only through rigorous “logical research” and “historical excavation,” which must be presented to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike in a “sober-minded,” “trustworthy,” and “commonsensical” fashion.⁷ While this New History in fact embodied the features of the modern age, which so characterized the persecution itself, it was also perceived as a means to free Buddhist institutions from their critics.

Classically, these so-called New Buddhists sought “to use the weapons of their enemies to confound their enemies,” not realizing that they could not simply put down those weapons again after they were finished. They themselves were indeed changed in the rewriting of their own history and the tensions between the modern and non-modern here emerge.

It is tempting to write of a time/place that is so divorced from that which we call the modern that a non-modern perspective would seem natural or inevitable. Yet even if we look at the emergence of kingship, say, or the uses of Buddhism soon after its arrival on the archipelago in the sixth century AD, we would still need to refer continually to the modern and contemporary discourse on these subjects. No, I think there is no field that by definition might escape the modern. Moreover, the challenge for the non-modern as a concept may be its ability to co-exist analytically beside the modern.

6. Murakami (1851–1929), in many ways exemplifies the career of the Meiji-era scholar priest (*gakusō*). After beginning his life as a young priest in present-day Aichi prefecture and becoming the head priest of the Nyukaku-ji (1876), he went on to study with Nanjō Shinkō and Higuchi Ryūon at the Shin Sect Takakura Academy in Kyoto. Eventually becoming a lecturer at the Academy, he then began his peripatetic life as a Buddhist philosopher teaching variously at the Sōtō Sect’s academy in Tokyo, Inoue Enryō’s academy the Tetsugakkan, the Asakusa branch of the Otani academy, and as a lecturer at his own institute, the Buddhist Lecture Group (*Bukkyō kowa kai*) at Kanda. (Under the auspices of this latter group he also published a monthly collection of Buddhist lectures and research papers.) In 1889 he became a lecturer in Indian philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University; after numerous publications, awards, the creation of a woman’s high school, and extensive academic appointments (including the directorship of several private academies), he received his Doctor of Letters in 1899 and became a full professor at the Imperial University in 1917. His extensive writings include major works on Shin Sect history, trans-sectarian unity, modern Buddhist ethics, Indian philosophy, Buddhist historiography, women’s education, and so forth. It is also important to note that although he renounced his priestly rank in 1901 (coinciding with the publication of his work on trans-sectarian unity) he subsequently served as the President of Otani University and, just before his death, was made a High Priest (*sōjō*), and received the court rank of the upper fourth level.

7. Murakami Senshō, “Bukkyōshi kenkyū no hitsuyo o nobete hakkān no yūrai to nashi awasete honshi no shugū mokuteki o hyōhaku,” in the inaugural issue of *Bukkyō shirin* 1:1 (4/1894), 1–11.

Thus it is that the examples that I have arranged here are not a case study for how precisely one might “do” a non-modern history. Indeed, I think that such a history has yet to be written. Rather the goal is to try to cope with the fact of the non-modern amidst the modern. The examples following serve to demonstrate a particular historical moment when the pervasive nature of modern ideals are deployed even by those who have the most to gain from eschewing such categories. Further, at this intersection, the non-modern does emerge, as suggested below, in the dogged resistance of the categories examined to smooth analytical encapsulation; it is, again, to the shadows that we must look for the traces of the non-modern.

IV. MAKING (A CASE FOR) BUDDHIST HISTORY

The writing of Buddhist history in Japan begins in the nineteenth century. This is not to suggest, of course, that records, genealogies, textual compilations, biographies, and so forth, associated with Buddhists and Buddhism were not produced (and in great bulk) prior to this period. Indeed they were. Yet “history,” as perceived by Meiji-era Buddhist writers, while drawing upon these sorts of textual materials, claimed for itself an entirely different *raison d’être*. As Maeda Eun⁸ notes in his preface to Sakaino Kōyō’s history of Buddhism in India and China: “For those who would study Buddhism they must first know the essentials of its history [*rekishi*]. Yet throughout the past [until, that is, the publication of Sakaino’s work] there have been no historical works of quality written on Buddhism.”⁹ Sakaino himself notes in this same work that his goal as a historian of Buddhism is to create a pure and unmediated history “completely devoid of dogmatism” (*mattaku dokudan no ken kuwaezu*) that, coupled with his earlier work on the history of Japanese Buddhism, would serve as a textbook suitable for general education. (His efforts appear to have enjoyed some success given the numerous reprintings the work enjoyed.)

Fujii Senshō¹⁰ expresses a similar sentiment in his history of Indian Buddhism: “No matter how precisely one might record the succession of monarchies, and

8. Maeda Eun (1855–1930), after studying for three decades within the Hongan-ji institutions, and holding appointments as lecturer at Tokyo Imperial University, Inoue Enryō’s academy the Tetsugakkan, and Bukkyō University, received his Doctor of Letters in 1903. In 1906 he was appointed President of Tōyō University (previously Inoue’s Tetsugakkan) and in 1922 he was made President of Ryūkoku University; he held the latter position until retirement in 1929. He was posthumously awarded the Upper Fifth court rank. The majority of his writings are sectarian in nature, and the greatest percentage of these deal with the history and thought of the Pure Land sect.

9. Sakaino Kōyō, *Indo, Shina Bukkyō shi yō* (Tokyo: Kōmeisha, 1906), 1. The contrast between this edict—to study Buddhism is to study its history—contrasts sharply, of course, with Dōgen’s admonition that “to study Buddhism is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self.”

Sakaino Kōyō (1871–1933), a student of Inoue Enryō and Murakami Senshō at the Tetsugakkan, is best known for his work on Chinese Buddhism; it was for a work on pre-T’ang Buddhism, moreover, that he received his Doctor of Letters. After graduating from the Tetsugakkan in 1892, he went on to become a lecturer at Tōyō University, where he, like Maeda Eun, eventually served as President. He retired while he was serving as a Professor at Komazawa University.

10. Fujii Senshō (1859–1903) became a priest at the age of eight and after studying at the Nagaoka Middle School, under Shimaji Mokurai (the great Shin political activist of the early Meiji), and at Fukuzawa Yukichi’s Keio Academy, he entered the philosophy department at Tokyo Imperial

no matter how carefully one might describe the victories and losses of military conflicts, when the antecedents, consequences, and related contemporary factors are left unclear we have created but annals [*nempyō*] and records [*kiden*]. This is not history.” For Fujii and the New Buddhist historians of the Meiji era, history was not a static chronicle of events and persons aligned as antecedents to a particular tradition (as previous versions of the Buddhist past were perceived to be). Rather history, Buddhist or otherwise, was understood as a vital developmental process (*hattatsu*) intimately linked to the global advancement of civilization (*bunmei*) and culture (*bunka*). Thus, if Buddhism was to be understood at all, the Meiji Buddhists claimed, its history must be read to reveal its interaction with the global trajectory of civilization. Or, as Fujii notes, there are two types of history, the universal or general (*futsū*) and the particular (*tokushu*). The former is employed in histories of whole societies, nations, or even of the world itself; the latter is used in histories of particular religious, political, or artistic traditions. Yet *Buddhist* history cannot, as one might expect, be confined to the particularistic style of history. Inasmuch as any history of Buddhism would include an analysis of the three jewels—the Buddha, the teaching (*dharma*), the community (*sangha*)—such a history would necessarily be immediately implicated within a specific social, racial, cultural, political, literary, geographical, and philosophical milieu (this is Fujii’s list).¹¹ Thus, the history of Buddhism becomes the history of a significant part of humanity itself, if not of the whole world.

Indeed, the historical exercise as practiced by Meiji-era Buddhists was seldom limited to purely domestic concerns. Even works with such unassuming titles as *An Outline of Japanese Buddhism* or *The Essentials of Meiji [Buddhist] Sects* were basing their interpretations of “Japanese” Buddhism upon the global trajectory of a Buddhism created in India and inexorably transmitted eastward (*tōzen*, literally, penetrating the east).¹² For example, Yoshitani Kakuju,¹³ author of the latter work, begins his analysis of Meiji religions in Japan with a discussion of the world’s “Ten Great Religions,” of which, of course, Buddhism is one. He notes, sensing the tension that emerges as he tries to enclose the non-modern,

University, from which he graduated in 1891. A teacher (later director) at the Academy of Letters (Bungakuryō) of the Hongan-ji, his major works were the histories cited below. He died unexpectedly in Marseilles while on a journey sponsored by the Shin sect to Buddhist sites in India and Ceylon and to centers of learning throughout Europe.

11. For the difference between history and annals or records, see Fujii Senshō’s *Bukkyō shoshi: Indobu*, 2 vols. (Kyoto: Otani Shintai dō, 1896), 1:1-2. For Fujii’s discussion of the interaction of human society and Buddhist history see *ibid.*, 5-7. An almost identical division among annals, records, and histories can be found in Hayden White’s essay “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1-25.

12. The first work noted here is Murakami Senshō, *Nihon bukkyō shi kō*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Kinkōdō, 1899); the second work, by Yoshitani Kakuju, is perhaps the earliest sustained attempt at a Buddhist history in the Meiji era, *Meiji shoshū kōyō* (Tokyo: Zeshinkai, 1890).

13. Yoshitani Kakuju (1843–1914) spent most of his scholarly career within the Takakura Academy both as a student and as an active and respected lecturer. He also held lecture posts at the Tokyo Imperial University and the Tokyo Kyōkō academy (where he also served as President). He was also appointed to a Professorship at Otani University in 1911, which he retained until his death. In addition to extensive lectures on Shin Sect theology, he wrote two monographs on trans-sectarian Buddhism (one cited above) and another work on the main sutras of the Shin Sect.

that the current trend of comparative studies of world religions, beguiled by “coincidental relationships,” attempts to interpret Buddhist thought by means of Western analytical categories. Witness, Yoshitani asserts, contemporary attempts to reduce Kusha (the *Abhidharma-kosha* of Vasubandhu) thought to materialism, Tendai (the T’ien-t’ai teachings brought to Japan by Saichō) theory to an Asian version of the problem of the one versus the many, and the operation of karma to biological evolution. Yoshitani asserted that contemporary comparative histories of Buddhism failed fully to account for the truly distinctive aspects of Buddhism itself; therefore, he set out to provide a doctrinal history of Meiji Buddhism upon which subsequent comparative efforts would be based.¹⁴ This is, in other words, a clear example of the pre-posturing of historical categories deployed in the rush to the modern. Not all ideas have had their historical meanings clarified or adequately summarized by modern categories.

It is more than coincidental that Yoshitani’s strongest arguments focus on the theoretical apparatus of trans-sectarian unity to be found in Tendai thought and, intriguingly, in the transnational method of *dharma* transmission found in the Pure Land tradition. For Yoshitani and others in the Meiji era, it was not merely that the history of Buddhism would be written against a global or international backdrop, but that the distinctive historical character of Buddhism was such that it would profoundly affect both world history as well as its written records.

“Religion,” Katō Genchi, an editor of the Meiji magazine *New Buddhism* (*Shimbukkyō*) notes, “is a cultural phenomenon.”¹⁵ As such, religion, like societies throughout the world, will also evolve (*shinka*). An examination of the principles of the “developmental evolution” (*hattatsuteki shinka*) of religion, in terms of its social organization as well as its doctrine, is, in fact, the examination of its history. One explicit goal of the historian, particularly the modern religious historian, is thus to illustrate the future possibilities of a given tradition by drawing a developmental sketch based upon the gradual, yet inevitable, dissolution of antiquated ideas and practices and the emergence of increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive philosophies, institutions, and practices. (It is not coincidental, for example, that the early issues of *New Buddhism* devoted extensive coverage to the issue of “delusion” or “false beliefs” [*meishin*]). This sketch is to be used not to refute the past as entirely devoid of meaning but rather to illustrate how religious education, like Buddha’s teaching of enlightenment itself—in true non-modern fashion—relies upon various means relative to the listeners’ understanding to represent Buddhist essentials. Might we then see this sort of history as a gesture of *upāya*, the skillful means of preaching employed by Buddha?¹⁶ This works quite well as a model of non-modern interpretation.

Just how “universal” are these truths? Fujii, quoting T. W. Rhys Davids, notes that while there are 100 million Protestants, 200 million Catholics, and 150 million Muslims in the world, there are 500 million Buddhists (approximately ten percent of whom are in Japan). From one man, Shakyamuni, and his ten dis-

14. Yoshitani, *Meiji shoshū*, 1-3.

15. Katō Genchi, “Iwayuru shūkyō no rekishiteki hattatsu to wa nani zo ya,” *Shimbukkyō* 1:4 (April 1900), 178.

16. *Ibid.*, 181.

principles, came 500 million believers, more than all other major religions combined. Surely, Fujii asserts, such a preponderance of numbers necessitates the creation of a precise, concise, and comprehensive history of Buddhism. One way that Fujii attempts to illustrate how a “comprehensive” history of Buddhism would work is to, throughout his text, draw upon chronologically parallel moments in world history to “situate” his otherwise Buddhist narrative. After his discussion of the death date of the Buddha (more on this below) he concludes, for example, that at the same time the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar was occupying Jerusalem, the Phoenicians were rounding Africa and, closer to home, Confucius was mediating between states engulfed in conflict during the Spring and Autumn periods.¹⁷

By the turn of the twentieth century, Buddhist historiography had reached a scholastic and political sophistication that was to guide it through the next several decades. Canonical studies were ongoing to determine the exact chronological order of the production of the various sutras and their commentaries; the content of the sutras themselves were examined for later additions, amendments, or alterations either within specific sutras or to determine fraudulent creations; the histories of the differing sects, their doctrinal particularities, and areas of dispersal were being written; the genealogical continuities between nations and through the ages had been subjected to critical scrutiny and adjustment; and the projected future of Buddhism had been writ large based upon a vision of the universal evolution of the human race.¹⁸

V. MAKING BUDDHIST HISTORY: DATING THE BUDDHA

One issue that emerges again and again in Meiji Buddhists’ attempts to marshal the tools of modern historiography is that of chronology. Across a broad spectrum of historical narratives, chronology serves as a device providing absolute order as a transcendent approximation of, finally, truth itself. There is a modernist assumption, in other words, that truth in history can be obtained through an objective analysis of the historical object and, further, that chronology provides one potential point of objectivity from which to begin the analysis. Chronology here thus refers both to the specific, verifiable, date of a certain actual, physical event as well as to the trajectory of the history under construction as a whole. As such, chronology also suggests the disappearance of non-modern difference and superfluity. Though, as we shall see, nothing is quite so totalizing as to allow for complete erasure.

Within specifically national or Nativist (*Kokugaku*) histories, the dominant chronological form in Japan is derived from the imperial lineage; the emperors, their reign names, and era titles are used metonymically to describe the age itself. Much like the ideal unification of the named object and the name that signifies the object found in the Confucian conception of the “rectification of names,” there is an assumed consubstantiality of the imperial charisma and the events

17. Fujii, *Bukkyō shoshi*, 1:202.

18. Some of the above conclusions can be found in (part four of) an article typical of the period by one Futarō Manbitō (?), “Butsumetsu nendai ron,” *Shimbukkyō* 5:12 (December 1904), 974.

to be described that surround this charisma.¹⁹ Even specifically Buddhist-based historical narratives during the Meiji period frequently follow a similar imperial chronology when describing the history of Buddhism within Japan, pre-Buddhist Japanese history, or even pre-Japanese Buddhist history. Thus the date of the official entry of Buddhism into Japan is, for example, most frequently noted by Meiji Buddhists as the thirteenth year of the reign of Emperor Kimmei, or 1,212 years After Jimmu (*Jimmu kigen go*: AD 552).²⁰ Jimmu is the ostensible first emperor of the Yamato clan, and thus the ancestor of all subsequent emperors of the Divine Land of “Japan.” For Meiji Buddhists, that is, even as they wrestled with the *techné* of modern chronological history, they also relied heavily upon non-modern constructs of time and meaning.

The methods of calculation used to determine aspects of Buddhist history external to Japan, and especially the chronology of the Buddha’s life, are somewhat more diverse and the resulting dates are more flexible than the consistently cited “Kimmei 13.” Focusing here on particular events in the life, including, importantly, the death of the Buddha, I would like to highlight some Meiji-era scholarship directed toward the recovery of the “historical Buddha.” Along the way I will illustrate aspects of New Buddhist uses of chronology as a modernist historical tool, and, by extension, illustrate some Buddhist historical practices that emerge from the interstices between modernist methods and non-modern characteristics.

There is a cluster of troublesome dates for biographers of the Buddha. We can begin, of course, with the relative dates of Buddha’s life, “relative” meaning here a dating determined in relation to Indian, Chinese, Japanese, or Western calendrical calculations. Embedded within this larger issue are several more precise concerns: how old was Buddha when he died? When did certain key events in his life take place? Or even, on which day of which month did these events take place? The amount of scholarly energy expended in the pursuit of verifiable answers to these and related questions may appear excessive. Yet it is precisely this apparent excess that signals the profundity of concern that moved nineteenth-century Buddhist historians to search for the truth of the Buddha’s existence and to verify his historicity.²¹

19. A prime example of this can be seen in the major publication of the Historical Compilation Bureau at Tokyo Imperial University, the *Kokushigan*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Teikokudaigaku zohan, 1890). Edited by Shigeno Yasutsugu *et al.*, the narrative of Japanese history contained therein follows a chronological division devised from the imperial lineage, rather than centuries; this is especially clear in the tables arranged at the front of volume one.

20. For examples of the Buddhist reliance upon an imperial dating system, see Shimaji Mokurai’s 1896 essay “Bukkyō kakushū kōyō,” in *Shimaji Mokurai zenshū*, ed. Futaba Kenko and Mineshima Hideo, 5 vols. (Kyoto: Hōgan-ji Shuppan, 1973), 3:154-155; and Sakaino, *Bukkyō shiyō*, 5; Murakami, *Bukkyō shikō*, 1:1, in reference to the entrance of Buddhism into Japan, merely says that it occurred “over 1,300 years ago.”

21. These concerns are not limited to nineteenth-century Japan. See, for example, the impressive conference collection coordinated by Heinz Bechart in the 1990s: *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, The Dating of the Historical Buddha / Die Datierung des historischen Buddha*, ed. H. Bechart, ser. 3, nos. 189, 194, 222 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991, 1992, 1997).

Nanjō Bunyū,²² a doyen of Buddhology in Japan, presented the Meiji scholarly community with a compilation of thirty-two theories of the death date of Buddha derived from Nanjō's comprehensive search through Tibetan, Mongolian, Indian, Burmese, Ceylonese, Chinese, Japanese, German, and British sources.²³ A historian concerned with producing a logical and factual narrative clearly needed to marshal the full array of historical analytical strategies to determine which, if any, of these theories provided the "real" death date of the Buddha. These thirty-two theories were subsequently expanded to forty-eight by Fujii Senshō in 1896.²⁴ The earliest dating in these compilations, derived from a Tibetan record, placed the Buddha's death 1,752 years Before Jimmu (*Jimmu kigen zen*), or 2412 BCE. The latest date found by Fujii, credited to Westergaard and Weber, placed the death of the Buddha between 291 and 293 years After Jimmu, or 370–368 BCE. Calculating from these forty-eight theories, in other words, the death of the Buddha was located at some point in slightly more than a two-thousand-year period.²⁵ This would be roughly equivalent to nineteenth-century Christian theologians attempting to locate the historical Jesus, to which this exercise has extensive parallels, and being confronted with ostensibly reliable dates extending from, say, the time of Socrates until the age of Descartes. Failing to identify the precise chronology of the Buddha's life would have profound consequences. Fujii, Sakaino, and others noted that Western scholars, commenting on the seemingly irreconcilable differences in the numerous chronologies, had gone so far as to wonder whether Shakyamuni Buddha was more likely a figment of the collective oriental imagination than an actual historical person.²⁶ What *if* Buddha

22. Nanjō (1848–1927), who in many ways set the pattern followed by scholar monks such as Murakami, was the first Buddhist scholar to receive substantial training abroad. Born in Echizen, he made his way to the Takakura Academy and the tutelage of Nanjō Shinkō (1868). After his ordination in 1872 and an early career as Buddhist lecturer, he traveled to England in 1876 (with another young priest, Kasahara Kenjō), where he studied Sanskrit and the history of religions at Oxford under F. Max Müller. Receiving his M.A. from Oxford in 1884, he returned to a professorship at Otani University (where, in 1914, he became President) and a lectureship in Sanskrit at Tokyo Imperial University. He, like Murakami after him, held numerous academic positions, obtained the Doctor of Letters (1888), and ultimately received the position of High Priest and the Upper Fourth court rank. In addition to his international study, he was also well traveled throughout the Buddhist world; this contributed directly to his voluminous publications on Buddhist history, hermeneutics, and philosophy, as well as to his blatantly cosmopolitan interpretation of the Buddhist teachings.

23. Nanjō's charting of death dates originally appeared in volume 14 of the *Reichikai zasshi*; the version used here, with certain additions, can be found in Fujii's *Bukkyō shoshi*, 1:182–186.

24. For Fujii's discussion of the death of the Buddha, see *Bukkyō shoshi*, 1:150–172; for his discussion of the problem of dating itself, see 173–202; and for the dates listed in chart form, see 182–186.

Inoue Tetsujirō, in his *Shaka shuzoku ron* (Tokyo: Tetsugaku shoin, 1897), 24–26, notes that he has found fifty-two different dates for the death of the Buddha; he gives neither the dates nor his source(s). He does mention, however, that there is a difference of "2,054 years" between the earliest and the most recent date, which is roughly congruent to Fujii's and Nanjō's calculations.

25. Fujii has the earliest Western calendar date as "2422"; yet calculating from 660 BCE, the assumed date of the ascension of Jimmu to the throne (*Jimmu kigen*), 1,752 years Before Jimmu would be 2412 BCE. This calculation is compounded yet again by Fujii's selection as a Chinese equivalent the twenty-second year of the reign of Kao-hsin, or Emperor K'u: 2415 BCE. Intriguingly, more recent research has in fact expanded this chronological range. Bechart points out that there are theories that range from 2420 BCE to 290 BCE, adding almost one hundred years to the span! See Bechart, "Introductory Essay," in *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, no. 189, 1.

26. Fujii, *Bukkyō shoshi*, 180–181; Sakaino, *Indo, Shina Bukkyō shi*, 81–82; and see also Tokiwa Daijō, Chikazumi Jōkan, and Yoshida Kenryū, *Shaka shiden* (Tokyo: Morie Shoten, 1908), 3–7.

had never even existed? What *if* the sutras were indeed all manufactured by disparate individuals with questionable motives? What *if* the institutional, artistic, and philosophical traces of this imaginary “Buddhism” were cut loose from the origin of Buddha’s enlightenment? For Meiji Buddhist theologians, such questions as these, demanding the assumption of a Buddha-less Buddhism, were finally untenable, impossible, and unthinkable. The actuality of the Buddha’s enlightenment was the primary ground, the necessary antecedent, to the very possibility of something called Buddhism. Or, as Inoue Tetsujirō noted, the origin of Buddhism and the story of the Buddha are finally inseparable.²⁷ The enlightenment of Buddha (whose name, of course, means the “enlightened” or “awakened” one) was the transcendent guarantee of Buddhist claims to speak the truth. The *logical* answer to problems of chronology was thus to be sought in the fallibility of those who recorded the ancient events and not in the events themselves. Fujii, for example, after a critical review of most of the earliest dates included in his and Nanjō’s compilation of death dates, settled on the late second century After Jimmu, that is the early fifth century BCE. His reason for this choice is simple: of the forty-eight theories he has identified, seven of them fall between the years 176–184 After Jimmu, or 485–477 BCE. (It also bears noting that three of these seven theories came from Western scholars: Bühler, Cunningham, and Müller.) Because of this concentration of like-minded conclusions, and “based upon probabilism” (*gaizenron ni yoru to*), Fujii determines this dating to be the most useful.²⁸ What I find most intriguing here are not the seemingly arbitrary conclusions that Fujii (and many others like him) draws for certain dates over others, but the irreducible modernist certainty that “correct dates” can, or more accurately, will eventually be found. Although in true non-modern fashion, Meiji writers always postpone absolute certainty of the precise dates of the Buddha’s life and freely acknowledge the provisional nature of their conclusions, there is a concomitant certainty that eventually, “in the future,” such a deferral will no longer be necessary.²⁹

One sub-theme that scholars pursued was the number of years in the Buddha’s life and, not unrelated, the years in which certain events were purported to have occurred. It should be noted, however, that neither Nanjō, nor Sakaino, nor for that matter most other historians concerned with the problem of Buddha’s historical existence provide direct evidence to substantiate the *birth* date of the Buddha. The usual method of argumentation in this regard was to assume the age of the Buddha at death and simply subtract. Clearly, source material is a serious issue here. Yet it is also easy to see that the history of “Buddhism” begins only *after*

27. Inoue Tetsujirō, *Shakamuni den* (Tokyo: Bummeidō, 1906), 2-3.

28. Fujii’s conclusions are in *Bukkyō shoshi*, 201-202. “Probabilism,” not to be confused with “probability theory,” is a central concept to Fujii and is derived from the Pragmatism of thinkers such as Salisbury and from Mill’s Utilitarianism. For a Meiji-era definition of this term, and a brief discussion of its Western philosophical antecedents, see the *Tetsugaku dai jisho*, 7 vol. (Tokyo: Dōbunkan, 1911), 1:263.

29. Perhaps the most precise recent attempt to determine the death date of the Buddha has been Richard Gombrich’s work. He claims the Buddha died “*between 411 and 399 B.C., probably towards the middle of that period*” (italics in original.) See his “Dating the Buddha: A Red Herring Revealed,” in Bechart, ed., *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, no. 194, 246. Many other contemporary scholars, however, still adhere to a mid-sixth or mid-fifth century BCE date.

the founder is dead. Many Meiji writers actually use the death of Buddha as the “zero” year for their own chronological systems.³⁰

Though consensus over the centuries has settled on “eighty years” as Buddha’s age at death, this is not a settled point for Meiji scholars. Other options for Buddha’s age at death cited by Meiji historians, all derived from canonical sources, are seventy-eight, seventy-nine, eighty-two, and eighty-five years.³¹ There are equally divergent dates for the key moments in Buddha’s life as well, such as his renouncing the world or the enlightenment itself. A choice for any particular date produces a domino effect of chronological consequences. If Buddha was enlightened at age thirty-five, for example, and then preached for forty-five years, he would have been eighty at death; if he preached for fifty years however, as some sources suggest, he would have been eighty-five. Or is it necessary to recalculate the date of his enlightenment? I do not want to dwell overly long on such picayune calculations, other than to say that the seemingly endless contradictions that emerged from ostensibly “reliable” canonical sources caused more than one scholar to walk away in frustration.³² It should also be stressed that for those who did choose specific dates, their problems had really only just begun. If the Buddha preached for fifty years when (and where) were certain sutras preached? What happens to this chronology, a crucial one for doctrinal studies, if Buddha’s life is shortened by five years?

There is a substantial history to anti-Buddhist thought based upon the careful juxtaposition of contradictory Buddhist doctrinal sources. The *locus classicus* of this form of argumentation is Tominaga Nakamoto’s Tokugawa-period, eighteenth-century *Shutsujō kōgo*, wherein we find a brilliant and devastating critique of Buddhist thought, history, and belief based exclusively upon Buddhist materials.³³ Tominaga taught the Buddhists to fear their own history. His method was deceptively simple and direct. Extensive quotations from a wide range of Buddhist writings, each in contradiction to the others, were marshaled for issue after issue to show, finally, that with so many internal contradictions it would be impossible to isolate some identifiable entity called “Buddhism.” By the time Tominaga was finished with his review of the canon, the Buddhist textual past could no longer be seen simply as a repository of enlightened utterances. Rather it came to be understood as a morass of intellectual and cultural contradictions that needed to be decoded and subjected to extensive critical review. One of the great ironies surrounding Tominaga is that Meiji Buddhists eventually acknowl-

30. Two examples of this postmortem chronology can be found in Shimaji Mokurai, *Bukkyō kakushū kōyō*, 156-160, *passim*; and in Fujii’s *Bukkyō shoshi*, whose entire second volume is divided into centuries counting from the Buddha’s death (*Butsumetsu dai isseki*, and so on).

31. See, for example, Sakaino, *Indo, Shina Bukkyō shiyō*, 69; *Bukkyō kakushū kōyō*, ed. Bukkyō kakushū kyōkai (Kyoto: Kaiba Shoin, 1896), 1; and Fujii, *Bukkyō shoshi*, 1:174 for representative comments on the Buddha’s longevity and the canonical sources.

32. Inoue Tetsujiro, for example, prefaces his 1906 biography of Shakyamuni with the disclaimer that the complexity of the issue prevents chronological certainty greater than to say that Buddha lived sometime during the 5th century BCE: *Shakamuni den*, 8-9.

33. For Tominaga’s work, see *Shutsujō kōgo*, ed. Yoshikawa Entarō (Osaka: Kyōgaku Shobō, 1944) and *Emerging from Meditation*, transl. Michael Pye (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press; 1990); for a discussion of Tominaga’s anti-Buddhist position and its consequences for Meiji Buddhists see Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs*, 19-30.

edged his work as the major impetus to the advancement of Buddhist historical scholarship. What I would like to stress here is that the internal chronological contradictions identified by Meiji Buddhist historians could not simply be left unattended. Because of the substantial collection of modernist post-Tominaga, anti-Buddhist rhetoric, such contradictions were in and of themselves sufficient proof of the fallibility of the Buddhist message, if not the spurious nature of its entire history.

In addition to confusion and reliance upon “probabilism” to determine the most useful dating system, there were also culturally astute analytical attempts to deal with the pervasive resistance of historical data to seamless chronologies. For a particularly sensitive, though inexorably partial, untying of this Gordian knot of Buddhism’s past, I would like to conclude this essay with a brief examination of Murakami Senshō’s contribution to the construction of the historical Buddha. Uniquely, Murakami focuses his discussion on the day and month (not the year) of Buddha’s birth and death.³⁴

Convention in Japan had settled on the eighth day of the fourth month for Buddha’s birth and the fifteenth of the second month for his death. Yet as Murakami notes, since even the sutras contain numerous alternatives, these dates cannot be accepted without caution. Perhaps the most convenient, if you will, chronological biography of the Buddha is found in the fourth chapter of the Longer Agon Sutra, where we read that Buddha was born, renounced the world, was enlightened, and died all on the eighth day of the second month. (These are, of course, the same days in different years.) Yet in spite of the obvious appeal of this form of record-keeping, there are numerous other contenders. Particularly popular dates for Buddha’s birth are the eighth and the fifteenth days of the third month and the eighth day of the fourth month; while the fifteenth day of the second, third, and eighth months, along with the eighth day of the fourth, eighth, and ninth months are variously recorded as Buddha’s death day.³⁵ For Murakami, the *years* that these events took place were already settled in his mind: Buddha was born in 367 Before Jimmu (1027 BCE) and after having lived for 78 years (or, according to the Japanese way of counting age, 79 years), died in 289 Before Jimmu (949 BCE).³⁶

Murakami, carefully citing chapter and verse of canonical and secular literature, carries out what he calls the “scholar’s mission” (*gakusha no nimmu*) to

34. The following discussion is drawn from an article in two parts by Murakami, “Shakamuni butsu shuttan nyūmetsu no gappi kō,” in *Bukkyō shirin*, part one (6/1894), 12-19, and part two (8/1894), 9-23.

There are a number of works that equal Murakami’s concern for detail and accuracy, though few that do so with such a novel interpretation of the data. An excellent example of the hermeneutic apologetic as applied to the canon can be found in the four-part article by Futarō Banjin, “Butsumetsu nendai ron,” *Shimbukkyō* 5:9-12 (September–December, 1904). Futarō concludes that Buddha died much later than the earlier Meiji scholars had suggested; his date for the event is 384 BCE: 5:11, 908. (He is one of the few scholars of this issue to use the Western calendrical system exclusively to order his chronological studies.)

35. Murakami, “Shakamuni butsu shuttan nyūmetsu no gappi kō,” part 1:13-18.

36. This particular choice, also included among those compiled by Nanjō and Fujii, was perhaps the most common one made by Meiji Buddhist historians. Fujii’s move toward a later date, as noted earlier, should thus be seen as somewhat iconoclastic.

analyze and clarify the chronologically contradictory theories of an event that physically disallows such slippage. For Murakami, Buddha was indeed a historical person and as such his birth and death must necessarily accord with conventional conceptions of historical time. The problem, then, logically should be located in the method of chronological calculation and not in the epistemological or philosophical issues surrounding the event itself. The argument, detailed and precisely reasoned, is admittedly also engaging.

Times noted in the canonical sources differ for three reasons, Murakami concludes. The first of these is that the calendrical years of India and China begin at different times of the year. The “new year,” in other words, occurs at different times in the two areas. Though the Indian New Year remains constant throughout the era in question (which extends across the possible range of years of Buddha’s life and the texts written to substantiate these datings), the Chinese New Year is calculated in four distinct fashions in different dynasties. Using the Chinese “zodiac” system of monthly organization³⁷ as a base to align the various New Year dates, Murakami points out that while the Hsia dynasty (c. 2200–c.1700 BCE) began its year with the month of the Tiger (the “third” month), the Shang or Yin dynasty (c.1700–c. 1100 BCE) began in the month of the Cow (the “second” month), the Chou dynasty (c. 1100–c. 250 BCE) began in the “first” month, the month of the Rat, and the Ch’in dynasty (255–206 BCE) began its year in the “last” month, the month of the Hog. Further, while the Han dynasty (206 BCE–AD 221) initially continued the calendrical system established in the Ch’in, this was, in the time of Kuang Wu Ti (AD 25–58) changed back to the calculations used during the Hsia dynasty two millennia previously.

The second reason for different calculations of the Buddha’s death is that the months themselves also begin at different times within these Indian and Chinese calendars. In the Indian calendar the full moon appeared on the first of the month, in the Chinese on the fifteenth. (It appears that there were significant regional variations here of which Murakami himself was not aware.) The months in the two areas were thus a half a month apart in their calculations. Further, while the Indian notations of days of the month were based upon a division of the month into a “bright” second half and a “dark” first half, the Chinese had no comparable system. Thus, problems in calculation emerge, Murakami argued, when we recognize that during the Hsia, for example, if the Indian date was the “fifteenth day of the second month,” according to the appropriate Chinese calendar this could be either the thirtieth day of the second month (if this is the fifteenth day of the “dark” part of the month), or the fifteenth day of the third month (if this is the “bright” second half of the month). Depending upon the care taken by a translator, or even the level of assumed common knowledge of the differences in calculation, dates normally “off” by fifteen days could thus vary by as much as an entire month.

37. This is the so-called Chinese zodiac based upon twelve months, each named for a different animal. They are, listed in the traditional Chinese order from the initial to number twelve (with their Japanese pronunciations): *ne*, rat; *ushi*, cow; *tora*, tiger; *u*, rabbit; *tatsu*, dragon; *mi*, serpent; *uma*, horse; *hitsuji*, sheep; *saru*, monkey; *tori*, rooster; *inu*, dog; *inoshishi*, hog.

The third source of difference noted by Murakami is simply one of interpretive mistakes or errors in calculation (failing, for example, to note *which* calendrical system was used for a given date).

These problems of calculation are manifest not merely in the transference of knowledge of Buddhism from India to China but also, owing to the differing Chinese calendars, throughout Chinese, and thus Japanese, history as well. (For example, the “second month,” according to the calendar used in the Later Han, would mean the fourth month in a work of the Chou period.) The potential mistakes that emerge from such a fluid conception of time are, of course, manifold. Murakami gives many examples of errors, the most prevalent being that dates would be translated “as is” without a calculation into the calendar used by the translator and his colleagues, the readers. These issues are further compounded in any region where Buddhism would leave a written trace; indeed, the first holy days celebrated within a Buddhist community are the birth, enlightenment, and death days of Buddha, and based upon such faulty calculations almost every community necessarily produces a distinct chronology relative to its own conceptions of time. When all is said and done, Murakami himself concludes that the correct dates for Buddha’s birth and death are the eighth and fifteenth of the third month respectively. (Since this article was written in the twenty-seventh year of Meiji, well after the official shift to the solar calendar had taken place in Japan, I can only assume he was not referring to the lunar calendar still occasionally used for religious calculations.)

VI. CONCLUSION

Through an appeal to logical reasoning, close textual analysis, and by assuming a transnational and multicultural perspective, Murakami is able to conclude that the diversity of datings associated with events in Buddha’s life is due not to some perverse “oriental imagination” but rather to an entirely understandable series of difficulties of cultural translation. In fact, the diversity that this excess of dates suggests points more to the universal applicability and global reach of Buddhism than to reasons for its limitation. Murakami succeeds, in other words, in addressing the perhaps overly detailed “problem of chronology” in such a manner that not only are the inherent contradictions given an entirely logical *raison d’être*, they are also used to justify the essentially cosmopolitan nature of the Buddhist teachings. Such were the goals and the accomplishments of the Buddhist New Historians.

While these goals are driven by and act most directly in concert with modernist truth claims, we can also see in them certain unwilling traces of non-modern possibilities. The quest for the historical, physical Buddha, and the attempt to “pin down” his time and place, was driven by the need to produce a logical and verifiable version of “Buddhism” *per se*. Yet at every turn, the superabundant nature of the teachings, which were designed to match time, place, and audience in a continually shifting performance of meaning, and the practices of the numerous “Buddhisms” found in the world, created other Buddhas, other versions, other Histories. While the modern discipline of “Buddhology” (still) strives to forge the

religion of Buddhism, are there not non-modern histories that continually elude even the most comprehensive of cosmopolitan teleologies?

Finally, let me use Murakami for another example, here arguing against himself. In an article for the inaugural issue of the same journal in which appeared the essays on chronology discussed above, Murakami relied upon the traditional dating in Japan of the eighth day of the fourth month for Buddha's birthday (rather than of the third month as he painstakingly argued for above). Not coincidentally the eighth day of the fourth month was also the date chosen for the publication of the first (auspicious) issue of the journal itself. Murakami, in fact, goes on to read *all* of Buddhist history as distilled into this one date, or, in his own words: "The eighth day of the fourth month is none other than Buddhist history! Buddhist history is none other than the eighth day of the fourth month."³⁸

Murakami makes a clear distinction between the religious conception of certain holy moments and the rational quest for unqualified certainty regarding those moments. These are distinct, equally essential, and mutually non-contradictory understandings. This tension is, of course, not an uncommon one and perhaps within a non-modern history it can be seen not as aberration but as possibility.

University of Chicago

38. See his "Bukkyōshi kenkyū no hitsuyo o nobete hakan no yūrai to nashi awasete honshi no shugi mokuteki o hyōhaku," *Bukkyō shirin* 1:1 (4/1894), 1-11, esp. 1-3.