

Communications

December 18, 1970

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies*:

In his brief review of my *Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation* (November 1970, p. 244), Mr. Leon Hurvitz demonstrated a lack of knowledge concerning the topic of *honji-sui jaku setsu* that must be corrected. To state that Buddhists have given this subject or *shimbutsu shugo* the "silent treatment" or subjected it to a "conspiracy of silence" belies a vast ignorance of available source materials as well as the Buddhist attitude. Although it is my contention that to date *honji-sui jaku* scholars have neglected to fit the subject into the general framework of Buddhist philosophy and tend to treat it fragmentally, this certainly does not imply that the Buddhist attitude is that "one need not dignify the monster by studying it." Certainly it is apparent for even those who possess a rudimentary knowledge of Buddhist philosophy that the assimilation of indigenous beliefs has been an essential feature of the religion. Japanese Buddhist scholars have been aware of the subject although, unfortunately, Westerners tend to assign it to the limbo of syncretism. It is inconceivable that as a Buddhist scholar, Mr. Hurvitz could term these developments mere "folk-beliefs" or that a linguistic purist could apply the word "syncretism" to Buddhism without qualification. Did someone speak of lamentable superficiality?

One amazing point in his review is that Mr. Hurvitz criticized my work for spending chapters on the development of the philosophy of assimilation in India and China when according to Leon Hurvitz, *honji-sui jaku* "as a Mahayana [sic] idea, goes back to India itself, whence it made its way to China, thence to Japan." *JAOS*, Vol. 85:3 (Sept. 15, 1965) p. 395. Frankly, I had expected the author of a monograph on "Chih-i" to find criticism of my treatment of Chih-i's philosophy (one of the theoretical bases of the *honji-sui jaku* theory) rather than to list my outstanding "howler" as the failure to make the necessary adjustments in dates from the lunar to solar calendar.

Finally, it is a bit surprising that he could not find a single ounce of redeeming value in the book that received the 1970 NHK International Publications Cultural Award, but perhaps Mr. Hurvitz was piqued by my criticism of some of his own interpretations and lost his objectivity. He certainly is entitled to his own opinion but it is regrettable that in the space of such a brief review he could make so many unfactual statements about the subject in general. It is my opinion that Mr. Hurvitz should have done more homework before discussing Buddhist philosophy.

*University of California,
Los Angeles*

ALICIA MATSUNAGA

January 27, 1971

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies*:

Mrs. Matsunaga is certainly in the right when she says that I have not done my homework on *shimbutsu shūgō*. The Buddhist circles in Japan that I frequented were concerned with the history of Buddhism in China, and are thus not in the mainstream of the religion in their own country.

As to the terms "syncretism" and "folk-belief," I fail to see what is wrong with them. Neither is, to my knowledge, a pejorative term. The only person who objects to folk-beliefs is one who objects to folks.

Beyond this point, Mrs. Matsunaga and I seem to be talking past each other. I can only repeat that in a work as short as Mrs. Matsunaga's, the space taken up by India and China detracts from the space that might otherwise be devoted to the main topic. Besides, a person who does not know the languages involved should be very wary of dealing with foreign cultures. The germ of *honji suijaku* is Indian in the sense that, to borrow Mrs. Matsunaga's own words, "the assimilation of indigenous beliefs has been an essential feature of the (Buddhist) religion." The Mahāyāna was in this respect much more hospitable than the earlier schools. That, however, is one thing, while disproportionate use of space, and that on the part of a person who does not use the original (i.e., Chinese and/or Indian) materials, is quite another.

I have no recollection of any attack directed at my Chih-i study by Mrs. Matsunaga. If she has in fact attacked it, then I take this opportunity to welcome her into a growing company of the work's critics, a company that includes a fellow named Hurvitz.

My general impression of Mrs. Matsunaga's remarks is, as said above, that she and I are talking past each other. Quite apart from that, if I have given her personal offense, it was entirely unintended, and I herewith beg her pardon most humbly.

University of Washington

LEON HURVITZ

November 24, 1970

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies*:

Professor Calkins in his article, "The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700-1740," (August 1970, pp. 799-806) must have made some quite novel contribution for it to be published in *JAS*. Unfortunately, I have not been able to detect any new information or interpretation in this article.

One of the most serious omissions in the article is any reference to *History of Bengal, Vol II*, edited by Jadunath Sarkar (Dacca, 1948). Professor Calkins repeats the same evidence, states the same arguments and conclusions, as are in the Sarkar volume. In fact, the two narrations follow an almost identical order. If Professor Calkins had indeed read the Sarkar volume, I think he was under some obligation to tell us where he found the Sarkar account or interpretation inadequate.

The University of Rochester

BRIJEN K. GUPTA

Note from the Editor:

The Editor is happy to welcome back to the position of Review Editor for South and Southeast Asia, Professor Aram Yengoyan, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan. The editor is most grateful to Professor Richard Park, Department of Political Science, University of Michigan, who so ably undertook this editorial responsibility while Professor Yengoyan was in the Republic of the Philippines.