

Immolations in Japan

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When Buddhism arrived in Japan in the 6th c., its influence on Japanese culture was far stronger than in China or Korea, which, paradoxically, had been its vehicles. This pervasiveness of Buddhism was however associated with a substantial cultural adaptation. Although some aspects of Chinese Buddhism were better preserved in Japan than in China and Korea, Japanese Buddhism took on a very distinct local flavour. The adoption of Buddhism by the elites and particularly by the sovereigns until the 19th c. ensured its stability and prosperity. Until 1868 Japanese Buddhism had in fact never been subject to persecution.

Although there had been cases of suicides committed by some monks and followers, they were not forms of protest for the vast majority of them but the extreme expression of their own reflection and ascetic practices. "Abandoning of the body" *shashin* 捨身 is considered one of the most beautiful forms of "gift" *fuse* 布施 of "offering" *kuyô* 供養 to the Buddhas. The Scriptures of the Great Vehicle abound with examples of this "abandoning of the body." The methods described vary: immolation, leaping into emptiness, drowning, fasting. However one has to notice that there is a great discrepancy between the examples given in the scriptures that take place in some remote area in a distant past, and their actual achievement here and now with one's own body.

In Japanese Buddhism, even though the texts explicitly referring to the "abandoning of the body" had been known relatively early, the practice itself started much later. It only spread when the control by the state on the Buddhist community became less severe. Quite logically, when the power of the state had been re-established from the 16th c. onwards, these practices diminished and became restricted to groups at the margins of the great Buddhist institutions. The relative decline of these Buddhist "abandonings" coincides with the promotion of suicide among warriors. More or less imbued with Buddhist beliefs like the rest of the population, warriors gradually established numerous categories of suicide: punishment-suicide, accompaniment-suicide and reproachful suicide.

Buddhist self-cremation *shôshin* 燒身

Among the different forms of the “abandoning of the body,” the most spectacular is undoubtedly self-immolation. One of its sources can be found in one of the most widely read *sūtras* in Japan, the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Myôhō renga kyô* 妙法蓮華經), in the book dedicated to the original behaviour of the bodhisattva King of Remedies (Yakuô bosatsu honji hon 藥王菩薩本事品):¹

In those times, the bodhisattva expounded the Lotus book for the benefit of the bodhisattva Vision of Joy for All Beings as well as a myriad of bodhisattvas (Issai shujô kiken bosatsu 一切衆生意見菩薩) and listeners... Once he had made his offerings he [the bodhisattva Vision of Joy for All Beings] awoke from his meditation and he thought: “Indeed I have made my offering to The Awakened One with my miraculous powers, but it cannot compare with the offering of my body (*kuyô* 供養).” He breathed in a variety of perfumes: sandalwood, frankincense, prickly juniper, benzoin, aloe, myrrh; he also drank the oil of scented flowers such as gardenia during one thousand two hundred full years; he rubbed his body with fragrant oils. In front of the Awakened Virtue of Pure Solar and Lunar Clarity (Nichigatsu jomyô toku butsu 日月淨明德佛), he wrapped his body in a precious divine garment, anointed himself with scented oils and, his resolution reinforced by his miraculous powers, he made his body burn on its own (*mizukara mi wo tomoshite* 而自燃身). Clarity illuminated as many worlds as there is sand in the eighty myriads of Ganges and the bodhisattvas that were there praised him at the same time: “It is good, it is very good, son of good! You have shown authentic zeal, this is what makes the authentic offering of the Law to an Awakened One (*kore wo shin no hô wo motte nyorai wo kuyôsuru to nazuku* 是真精進。是名眞法。供養如来). Even if you took flowers, incense, garlands, fumigations, powders, ointments, celestial silk, banners, dais, fragrant sandalwood from the Cis-marine bank and you gave this great variety of objects as offerings, it would not equal the Awakened One; even though it was the offering of a kingdom, a city, women and children, this as well would not be equal. Son of good, this constitutes the primordial gift, the most venerable, the most eminent gift, as this is an offering of the Law to the One Who Has Thus Gone (*kore wo daiichi no se to nazuku*,

¹ *Le Sūtra du Lotus*, translated from Chinese to French by Jean-Noël Robert. Paris: Fayard, 1997, pp. 344-348.

moromoro no se no naka ni oite saison saijô nari 是名第一之施。於諸施中。最尊最上)。

After saying that, everyone kept silent.

The combustion of his body lasted for one thousand two hundred years, and his body was completely consumed... What do you think? Could the bodhisattva Vision of Joy for All Beings be somebody else? It was him, the current bodhisattva King of Remedies [Bhaisajyarāja]. The offering he made by relinquishing his body (*sono mi wo sutete* 其所捨身), there were innumerable thousands of millions myriads, of billions of comparable ones. Royal Splendour of Constellations, if it happens that someone who, after developing his thought and being eager to reach the full and unsurpassable Enlightenment, is able to burn his finger or toe to make an offering to the pagoda (*yoku te no yubi naishi ashi no isshi wo tomoshite butsutô ni kuyôsuru* 能燃手指。乃至足一指。供養佛塔), he will surpass the one who had given objects as precious as a kingdom or a city, or women or children, even kingdoms, forests, rivers and lakes of the tricosmic world.

Maurice Pinguet wrote about this passage in *La mort volontaire au Japon*² [Voluntary Death in Japan]: “Prestigious examples: fire suicides are well-attested in Chinese Buddhism. In Japan, one of the Taihō laws, promulgated in 702, formally forbade monks to practice self-cremation.”³

Article 27 of the *Code for monks and nuns* specifies:⁴ “Monks and nuns cannot burn their bodies or throw their bodies. For those who did not respect these rules, as well as for those who caused it, the offense will be determined according to the penal code (凡僧尼。不得焚身捨身。若違及所由者。並依律科斷).”

² Maurice Pinguet, *La mort volontaire au Japon*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984, p. 125 and note 53 p. 324, relates to this passage, and re-explains this ban: “But from the 9th c. onwards in Japan, the *Ryô no gige* has formally warned the monks against the sacrifice of the body in fire, it is a serious violation of the laws. (...) However, the Japanese readers’ attention was not drawn to chapter 22 where Bhaisajyarāja’s self-immolation is described.” Firstly, the *Ryô no gige* 令義解 (early 9th c.) is not a legal text, but a commentary on the codes. It quotes the passage on the *Code for monks and nuns* and mostly comments on the last part of the article on sanctions (p. 89). Secondly, as we will see, self-immolation became fashionable at one point in Japanese history.

³ See James Benn’s article on the subject in this issue.

⁴ Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞, Seki Akira 関晃, Tsuchida Naoshige 土田直鎮, Aoki Kazuo 青木和夫, *Ritsuryô* 律令. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Nihon shisô taikai 3, 1976, p. 223.

The collection of commentaries of codes *Ryô no shûge* 令集解 (end of 9th c.) re-uses an old annotation *Koki* 古記, which glosses the *Codes* of Taihō: “to burn one’s body means to burn a finger, to consume the body means to do it entirely. To abandon one’s body means to graze it and copy a *sūtra* on one’s skin, these two acts being called the offering of the animals, thus savagery dries out by itself (焚身, 謂灯指燒身尽身也。捨身、謂剥身皮写經、并称畜生布施、而自尽山野也).”

The commentary makes a clear distinction between “to burn oneself” *fen/fun* 焚, the act described in the *Code*, and “to burn” or “consume” *shao/shô* 燒 the body that does not appear in the text but that was perfectly attested and known because of the reading of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

The contemporary editors of the Japanese *Code* mention a former version of this article in Chinese in the format of a decree from the 11th month of year 9 of the Zhen-guan Era 貞觀 (635) under the Tang Emperor Taizong 太宗:⁵ “It is forbidden to impress common people by cutting one’s skin or burning one’s fingers (鑽膚焚指驚俗).” It seems obvious that what is forbidden in China and Japan are above all mutilations, the ones that are mentioned in the second passage of the chapter on the King of Remedies in the *Lotus Sūtra*. It was confirmed in a decree in 717 that was aimed at the great monk named Gyôki 行基 (668-749), then called “Little monk,” and his fellows:⁶ they are blamed for burning themselves and ripping off their own fingers and arms (焚剥指臂).

There is another echo of the *Lotus Sūtra* in which the bodhisattva King of Remedies also pulls his arm out.⁷ These forbidden acts seem to show that although mutilations did exist, self-immolation was not practiced in Japan yet.

Japanese *Codes* written in the 8th c. not only repeated entire passages from the Sui and Tang *Codes*, but they also followed their mind-sets. For the Confucian men of letters, the mutilation of the body received from the parents was unconceivable. One had to preserve it as a precious inheritance. Furthermore, in the vision of a state that ex-

⁵ *Ritsuryô, op.cit.*, p. 548.

⁶ *Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀, 23th day of the 4th month of year 4 of Yôrô era 養老元年 四月壬辰. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Shin Nihon bungaku taikai, vol.2, 1990, pp. 26-27. A similar ban is reported in *Sandai kyaku* (三代格) on the 10th day of the 7th month of year 6 of Yôrô era: “or else in the villages, mutilating one’s bodies and burning one’s fingers 於坊邑、害身燒指.”

⁷ *Sûtra du Lotus, op. cit.*, p. 348.

pected to control the population, those mutilations, not to mention self-immolations, could be seen as a threat to its authority.

But the ideal of a state ruled by the *Codes* in the Chinese way had to deal with the growing influence of Buddhism from the beginning. Gyôki, who had been aimed at by the decree in 717, received the title of *daisôjô* 大僧正, i.e. great monastic chief-officer, in 745. He was also given the responsibility of raising fund for the building of the Great Buddha by Emperor Shômu. The articles of the *Code for monks and nuns* were de facto less and less observed.

From the middle of the Heian era (10th c.), several sources mention a relatively high number of self-immolations. It is the case in the *Hyakurenshô* (*The Mirror Polished a Hundred Times* 百練抄, second half of the 13th c.), which relates that in the 9th month of year 1 of the Chôtoku era (995): “the Venerable one standing on Amida peak burned his body. Hordes of great ones and humble ones assembled to watch, in recent years eleven people have burnt their bodies in different provinces (上人於阿弥陀峰燒身、上下雲集見之、近年 国焼身者十一).”

As is shown in the passage of Amida peak, self-immolation did not refer only to the prestigious example of the *Lotus Sûtra*, but also belonged to extreme devotional practices of Amida Buddha. The abandoning of the body is indeed also mentioned in another *sûtra* that has been known for a long time in Japan: *Konkô myôkyô* 金光明經 (*Suvarnaprabhâsottama sûtra*). A chapter of this *sûtra* is dedicated to the abandoning of the body *shashin hon* 捨身品. This *sûtra*, entitled *Konkômyô saishô kyô* 金光明最勝王經, was read in all provincial monasteries from the middle of the 8th c.

Collections of Buddhist anecdotes give detailed descriptions of those pious immolations. For instance, in the ninth story narrated in the *Dainihonkoku Hokekyô genki* 大日本国法華經験記 (*An Account of the Wonders of the Lotus Sûtra in Great Japan, 1040-1044*):

Ôshô, the master of the law from Nachi mountain.

Ôshô was a monk who lived in Nachi mountain in Kumano. He practised spontaneously, without respite. His practice included reading of the *Lotus* and his aim was to follow the Buddha's path. He stayed under the trees of the forest and the mountains. He did not like to mix with humans. When he read the *Lotus* aloud, every time he reached the chapter on the King of Remedies, it became engraved even more deeply into his memory and body and it ran through his veins.

He was infatuated with the passage in which the bodhisattva Vision of Joy burned his body, burned his arm for all beings. He was filled with joy. Finally he made a vow: "like the bodhisattva King of Remedies, I am going to burn this body as an offering to the Buddhas." He refrained from eating grains and salt; moreover he did not eat any more sweet food. He did the washing-up with pine needles and dressed with wind and water. He thus purified himself both from internal and external impurities. He resorted to the expedient of body cremation. In order to cremate his own body, he put on a robe of law made of new paper. He took a censer in his hand and sat in the meditation posture on bundles of wood. He firmly turned to the West and called forth the different Buddhas. He then made a vow: "I offer this body and this mind to the *Lotus Sūtra*. With my head I make offerings to the Buddhas of higher regions, I offer my feet to the Blessed ones of lower regions. May the Venerable ones of the East receive my back. May the One who possesses correct and universal knowledge take my face in pity. Moreover, I offer my chest to the Great Śākya master, my left and right sides, I give them to the revered Many-Jewels (Taho). I offer my throat to the One Who Has Thus Come, Amida. My five vessels I offer to the Five Knowledgeable Ones Who Have Thus Come. My six organs, I give to the beings of the six paths, etc." He then put his hands in the seal of meditation. In his mouth he recited the wonderful Law, in his heart he believed in the Three Jewels. Then, after his body had turned into ashes, the voice kept reciting the *sūtra* and did not stop. Everything looked impeccable. The smell of smoke was not bad, it smelled like precious incense.

A soft wind kept blowing, it sounded like the harmonious voices of music. After the fire burned out, a glow was still there. The ashes radiated in the sky, illuminating mountains and valleys. Hundreds of beautiful birds, whose names and appearances are unknown, gathered. They flew here and there singing softly and sounding bell-like. This was the first self-immolation in Japan. It cannot be said that the ones who saw it closely or who heard about it, did not feel any intense pleasure.

Since it is a text of religious propaganda, it should not be understood literally. However it shows in what mindset the first immolations occurred in Japan. After the medieval period, the examples are less and less abundant. One of the last examples took place in Edo in 1597. The ascetic jumped into the fire before a crowd of onlookers.⁸

⁸ Takizawa Bakin 滝沢馬琴, 兔園小説, quoted by Saitō Masatoshi, *Miira shinkō no kenkyū*. Tôkyô: Ôwa shoten, 1985, p. 182.

Those immolations were the ultimate expression of extreme practices that aimed at the purification of the body before offering it.⁹ The same approach is adopted in the other practices of “abandoning.” Moreover, one can notice the place of asceticism of the priest, Nachi in Kumano, which is famous for its waterfall and other kinds of “abandoning.”

The fasting period necessary for self-cremation was also preceded by self-mummification. This practice is based on the idea, widespread in Sino-Japanese Mahāyana, of the possibility of becoming a Buddha with this body *sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏 in Sino-Japanese. The idea was to make one's body eternal. Some waited for their final moments to prepare themselves for this transformation. That is what Kochi Ho.in 弘智法印 did. He died at the age of 82 in 1363. Before lying down he had told his disciples that they should not bury his body but leave it as it is, because he had made the vow to wait for the dawn of the coming of Maitreya (Miroku no geshō no akatsuki 弥勒の下生の暁).¹⁰ He therefore followed the example of Kūkai 空海 (774-835) who, according to the legend, said that he waited for the coming of Maitreya on Mount Kōya.¹¹ He also followed the example of Rinzen 琳賢 who died in 1150. It is said that he was the first person whose body was revered as a relic *shari* 舍利, although it is hard to know if he had actually planned his own mummification.¹²

The will to transform one's body into a relic is often accompanied with the practice of self-burial. One of the first occurrences of this form of suicide can be found in *Heiji monogatari*. This text talks about a suicide as part of a devotion for the sovereign without any planned mummification but in a context that is clearly Buddhist:¹³

⁹ For an almost complete census of self-immolations in Japan, see Saitō Masatoshi, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-41. He showed that this practice involves mainly monks of low rank whose names and exact dates of self-immolation are not known.

¹⁰ Matsumoto Akira 松本昭, *Nihon no miirabutsu* 日本のミイラ仏. Tōkyō: Rikkō bukku, 1985, p. 87.

¹¹ The legend seems to take shape at the beginning of the 9th c. It is mentioned in *Seijiyōryaku* (政治要略 *Compendium of the administration*), 1002.

¹² Matsumoto Akira, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-164.

¹³ *Le Dit de Heiji*, transl. René Siefert, in *Le Dit de Hōgen – Le Dit de Heiji*. Paris: P.O.F, 1976, pp. 13-14.

Heiji monogatari 平治物語, in *Hōgen monogatari Heiji monogatari* 保元物語. Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, *Koten bungaku taikai* 31, 1969, p. 200.

入道に此由申せば、さればこそ。信西がみたらん事はよも違はじ。忠臣君に替たてまつるとは信西なりしが、命を失て御前に替奉らんとおもふぞ。息のかよはむ程は佛の御名をもとなへ參候ばやと思へば、其用意せよ。との給ふ間、穴を深くほりて、四方に板を立並、入道を入たてまつり、四人の侍共もとどりをきり、最

When he told the monk about the news: "That's what it was! Shinsei's predictions have rarely been incorrect! Shinsei was the devout vassal who was to sacrifice for his Prince; he will then sacrifice for his Majesty! I want to call the blessed name of the Buddha until my last breath; help me prepare myself for it!" Thus he said, and following his instructions they dug a deep grave, put boards on each side, helped the monk to go down; then the four followers cut their quiffs and said: "Please grant us a final favour by giving us religious names!" The master gave the name of Saiko to the Officer of the Guard of the Left Doors Moromitsu, the name of Saikai to the Officer of the Guard of the Right Doors Narikage, the name of Saisei to Morokiyo of the Guard of the Secluded Emperor, and the name of Saijitsu to Kiyosane from the Department of Constructions. Then they put the tip of a bamboo tube in the mouth of the master and covered him with earth and their hair. The four disciples stayed for a moment and wept over the grave, but since it was useless, the four of them returned to the City.

The year of Heiji in 1159 was marked by violent unrest, a prelude to the war between the Geijis and the Heikes. The suicide of the monk called Shinsei occurred in an exceptional context. It has to be noticed moreover that he resorted to a very particular method that is self-burial. This method was also adopted later by ascetics *yamabushi* 山伏 of Mount Dewa. The only difference was that they intended to transform their bodies into mummies. After a period of fasting that was more and more severe, they were locked in a basement with only a small opening to let the air in. This is how Honmyôkai 本明海 (1623-1683) did: as a warrior of low rank, he rejected his condition as well as his wife and children, to perform ascetic practices in Yudono mountain in Dewa. In 1673 he refrained from eating five types of grain for a thousand days, then ten types of grain for another thousand days. Then for five months he fed on "alimentation dendrique,"¹⁴ i.e., eating only pine bark *mokujikigyô* 木食行. Finally he asked to be buried and died *dochû nyûjô* 土中入定.¹⁵ A lot of people followed his example.

Apart from individual concerns, Naitô Masatoshi noticed that many ascetics endured extreme fasting during the long years of fam-

後の御恩には法名を給らむ。と申せば、左衛門尉師光は西光、右衛門尉成景は西景、武者所師清は西清、修理進（清實は）西實とぞ付られける。其後大なる竹のよを通して入道の口にあて、もとどりを具してほりづむ。四人の侍墓の前にてあげきけれども、叶べきあらざれば、皆都へ歸る。

¹⁴ As translated by Paul Demiéville, « Momies d'Extrême-Orient », *Journal des Savants – Troisième centenaire 1665-1965*, janvier-mars 1965, p. 164.

ine of the second half of the Edo period (1600-1868). It was their way of asking for the end of the people's suffering.¹⁶

There have been other methods to leave this sullied world than self-immolation and self-burial. Drowning *jusui* 入水 became very popular particularly after Kumano. The most famous example can be found in *Heike monogatari* 平家物語. Like Shinsei's self-burial, Koremori 維盛 had also been defeated. He preferred suicide to the shame of being made prisoner. However, the method and the place that he chose clearly show that his act was not only motivated by the warrior's honour. In the *Heike* there is a long description of his hesitations and a monk encouraged him by showing him the right way and gave him some time to think it through:

“...and provided that you become a Buddha and are liberated, your heart opens to understanding, you will be able to come back to your human motherland and show the path to women and children. Once you are back to this sullied earth, you will offer salvation to men, there is no doubt about it!” he said. As he knocked the bell, he encouraged him to chant. The Commander thought it was time for the ultimate knowledge and as he suddenly became detached of his passions, he called the blessed name of the Buddha a hundred times with a strong voice and jumped into the sea. Monk Byôe and Ishidô-maru also called the Blessed Name and followed him into the sea.¹⁷

This “immersion in water in order to be reborn in a Pure Land” *jusui ôjô* 入水往生 was not only practiced in Kumano. There had been departures in groups from the South of Shikoku in Tosa province. However it is from Kumano that those departures were the most numerous. They were called “crossing the ocean towards Potalaka” *Fudaraku tokai* 補陀落渡海.¹⁸ The first mention of this “crossing” with no return dates from 686 and the last one from 1722. Most of the times we know the name of the leader and the number of people who followed him—between five and eighteen until the 16th c.¹⁹

As Potalaka was situated beyond the sea, monks left on boats with a cabin closed with nails for the final “crossing to the Pure Land.” Contrary to what Father Charlevoix said, based on missionary ac-

¹⁶ Naitô Masatoshi, *op.cit.*, pp. 233-249.

¹⁷ René Sieffert (transl.), *Le Dit des Heike*. Paris: P.O.F., 1978, p. 435. *Heike monogatari* 平家物語, vol. 2. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, Nihon koten bungaku taikei 33, 1969, p. 284.

¹⁸ Potalaka is Avalokiteśvara's heaven, Kannon bosatsu (観音菩薩).

¹⁹ Hori Ichirô 堀一郎, *Minkan shinkô* 民間信仰. Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, 1972, pp. 245-246.

counts from the 16th century, this practice has actually never been popular.²⁰

At the end of the Edo era, these different forms of Buddhist suicides started declining. There were numerous causes. One of the most obvious is the tougher control of the authorities—the central government and the fiefs—on the population as well as on groups considered deviant. This policy was to be continued and even strengthened during the Meiji era.

It is in this context that an ascetic practised *shashin* (the abandoning of his body) in 1884 by leaping from the top of Nachi waterfall.²¹ *Shugendô* 修験道, the way of the *Yamabushi*, includes practices such as the contemplation of the void while one is hanging from a chain above a precipice. Jumping from the top of a waterfall was only the achievement of an act that is normally symbolic. What makes Jitsukaga's suicide special was that it happened while the government of Meiji had forbidden *Shugendô* and the police were chasing the last unwilling ascetics. It is possible that one of the causes of this extreme act was a form of protest against the ban of the ascetic practices of the *Yamabushi*.

From 1868 there was a massive anti-Buddhist movement in Japan. This movement was known by the slogan *haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈 ("destruction of Buddhism, rejection of Śākyamuni"). This policy led to many destructions and victims, but to my knowledge, Jitsukaga's gesture remained isolated.²²

It is in another context that a parallel with the self-immolations of Tibetan monks can be found—the reproachful suicide committed by warriors. Instead of burning themselves, they ripped their stomachs open. *Seppuku* 切腹 (commonly called *harakiri*) enjoys an unsound reputation probably due to the fascination for horror, a reputation it shares with self-immolation. One can think of *sati* tradition in India for instance.²³

Among the many forms that *seppuku* took, the reproachful suicide *kanshi* 諫死 may seem the most unselfish and noble. In front of a superior whom one has to obey and be loyal to, it was the only means for a faithful vassal to show his disagreement without going back on his opinions. In China there are a great number of examples of honest

²⁰ *Histoire et description générale du Japon*, Paris, 1736, p. 224, quoted by Maurice Pinguet, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-131.

²¹ Annu mari Busshii アンヌ・マリ ブッシイ (Anne-Marie Bouchy), *Shashin gyôja Jitsukaga no shugendô* 捨身行者実利の修験道. Kyôto: Kadokawa shoten, 1977.

²² On the anti-Buddhist persecutions in Meiji era, see James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 77-86.

²³ See Marie Lecomte's article in this issue.

ministers who committed suicide to show their disagreement with the sovereign. From the Middle Ages in Japan, warriors used *seppuku* as a preferred form of suicide and made this act of double fidelity to the lord and to a higher standard of morality even more dramatic. One cannot say however that these acts have been more numerous. Maurice Pinguet only mentions two examples: one in the 16th c. and one in 1870 in the Meiji era.²⁴

The promotion of suicide among the warrior class in Japan is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained in a few words, let alone summed up in one or two ideas. It is true however that Buddhism and its vision of life and death may partly explain the phenomenon. The offering of one's life is considered the most beautiful offering in the *Lotus Sūtra* and this idea has an echo in the suicides of warriors who decided to follow their lords in death *junshi* 殉死, a practice which was forbidden in 1663. The theme of sacrifice as an offering had been used with the worst excesses by ultranationalists until the final disaster of 1945.²⁵ During these tragic years, many Zen monks did not hesitate to re-create the old bond between Zen and the warriors' way.

Iida Tōin wrote in 1934:²⁶

Death is not the end of everything. The non-dispersion of energy and the preservation of matter are a principle of the universe. The stronger ones will ensure the survival of the many. This is something that we must take to heart. Military Zen simply wants the individual to become a warrior. In the present like in the future and beyond, you have to be a warrior. You need a lion heart, move on and never turn back—such is the perfection of military Zen.

This cultural background that is often concealed is what makes Mishima's suicide in 1970 so ambiguous. He staged his *seppuku* as a reproachful suicide against the evolution of contemporary Japanese society as Yokoyama Yasukate had done a hundred years before for the same reasons.



²⁴ Maurice Pinguet, *op.cit.*, pp. 146, 219.

²⁵ On relationship between Buddhism and war, see Brian Victoria, *Zen at war*. New York: Weatherhill, 1997.

²⁶ *Sanzen manroku*, quoted by Brian Victoria, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168.

