

Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko's Theo-Humanistic Comparative Theology: Analogies of Mysticism

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Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko was an early twentieth-century Japanese Catholic theologian. His main concern is how to align Christianity with modernity in Japan and with the Japanese spiritual heritage of his time. Yoshimitsu argues that Christian grace could embrace Japanese spiritual heritage, and the same grace could guide anthropocentrism within atheistic modernity in a theo-humanistic direction. He suggests that thinking of “mysticism” as “the élan of life” would bridge Christianity and Japanese spiritual heritage; beyond that, doing so would create an effective response to a modernity in which people are caught between the grandeur of scientific advancement and the poverty of metaphysical spiritual engagement based on this unique approach to “mysticism.” With this perspective in mind, Yoshimitsu explores interreligious studies including Christianity, the Advaita tradition in Hinduism, and Islam. His approach to “mysticism” is considered to be a theo-humanistic approach, rather than a theo-theistic approach, which has been common in the West. And while certainly we expect that the understanding of religion, in general and with regard to specific religions, has changed over time, there is still much of value in Yoshimitsu’s presentation of “analogies of mysticism” in various religions.

Keywords: comparative theology in Japan, Japanese Catholicism, analogies of mysticism, élan of life, theo-humanism

Introduction

In Europe and the U.S. at the turn of the twentieth century, several notable studies in comparative theology were completed by F. Max Müller, James F. Clark, and J.A. MacCulloch.¹ At about the same time, there was a similar sprout of comparative theology in the Far East, but from a different angle. This article traces scholarly works by the most prominent scholar of the latter moment, a Japanese Catholic theologian named Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko. Yoshimitsu did not primarily identify himself as a comparative theologian, nor did he focus mainly on interreligious ideas, but his theological arguments clearly engage with comparative theology covering Christianity, the Advaita tradition in Hinduism, and Islam. Yoshimitsu should not be regarded as an expert on Hinduism or Islam, but rather as a Japanese Christian of his time who is engaging with those religions in particularly intelligent and productive ways. His approach to comparative theology, which emphasizes practice and anthropocentrism, is different from those of today’s mainstream Western comparative theologians. Due to this distinct approach, as well as limited translation of his works into English, Western scholars have paid little attention to his works.²

¹ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 32–35.

² Only two of Yoshimitsu’s articles are translated into English: “Catholicism and Contemporary Man,” included in *Xavier’s Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture*, ed. Kevin Doak (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011) 80–90; and “The Theological Grounds of Overcoming Modernity: How Can Modern Man Find God?” included in *Overcoming*

However, his unique endeavor offers valuable insights to broaden our knowledge of contemporary comparative theology.

Yoshimitsu was born in 1904 on the southern Japanese island of Tokunoshima, where traditional ancestor worship was commonly practiced together with Buddhism.³ He was initially baptized into the Protestant community in 1921, and then converted to Catholicism in 1927. He graduated from the Imperial University of Tokyo in March 1928. Soon after graduation, he studied for two years in France with Jacques Maritain and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP. Yoshimitsu wrote many articles about Christian theology, but also showed a keen interest in non-Christian religions, including Hinduism and Islam. Since Yoshimitsu had been raised in a non-Christian environment where non-Christian religions were taken for granted on their own terms, he had no hesitation in engaging with non-Christian religions throughout his scholarly life.

Yoshimitsu's approach to comparative theology is unique compared with contemporary comparative theologies in the West. Yoshimitsu is an advocate of a theocentric humanism where the dichotomy of nature and the supernatural is eminent; the relationship between doctrine and practice is also important. This comparative theology based on theocentric humanism is distinct from Western approaches, which are based on theocentric theism.

To that end, this article begins by comparing Yoshimitsu's approach to comparative theology with that of the West in the late twentieth century, focusing on the key aspect of theism vs. humanism. It then explores Yoshimitsu's comparative theological framework based on nature, the supernatural, and mysticism. After reviewing Yoshimitsu's theological framework, this article explores the background of Yoshimitsu's focus on mysticism in the moment of Japan's Western-influenced modernization. Through this analysis, the article suggests that mysticism as theocentric humanistic approach provided an entry point for Yoshimitsu to bridge his own practice of Christianity with other religions, while also offering hope that Christianity would be accepted during his home country's modernization. Finally, the article engages Yoshimitsu's analysis of mysticism within the Hindu Advaita and Islamic traditions. It brings us significant insights about the way mysticism can function as the "élan of life," which analogically exists in various religions and has the potential to connect various religious traditions in a unique and insightful manner.

Yoshimitsu's Approach of Theocentric Humanism

Yoshimitsu's comparative theology is distinct from the Western approach common among mainstream scholars of the late twentieth century, such as S. Mark Heim, Jacques Dupuis, and Keith Ward. One of the main differences between Yoshimitsu's approach and the Western approach lies in different interpretations of "theocentricity." Both Yoshimitsu's and the Western approach are based on theocentric ideas, but Yoshimitsu's is based on theocentric humanism, while Western scholars emphasize theocentric theism. Comparative theology based on theocentric theism (which I term CTT) explores a clear-cut, non-dualistic structure of God or the Absolute. The concepts or elements of the Being are central to the scholarly work of those who emphasize

Modernity: Cultural Identity in Wartime Japan, ed. Richard Calichman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 77–91.

³ Eisuke Wakamatsu, *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko: Shi to tenshi no keijijōgaku* (Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu: A Metaphysics of Poetry and Angels) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2014), 3.

theocentric theism. On the other hand, comparative theology based on theocentric humanism (which I term CTH) has a multi-layered, dualistic structure. In CTH, the main concerns are the understanding of the relationship between nature and the supernatural in each religion and the way each religion fills the gap between nature and the supernatural through mysticism or practice. CTT tends to seek the analogy of super-naturalness among religions in its discourse, while for CTH, the matter of concern is, first, the identification of the religious domain of each religion (whether it is in the domain of nature, or in the domain of the supernatural, or both) and, second, the relationship between these domains of nature and the supernatural, or the relationship of two different states within the single domain of nature. There exist theologies and religions in which the relationship between “nature” and the “supernatural” is paramount, such as Christianity, but also those in which the relationship between “nature” and other “nature” in the same natural domain is more important, such as Buddhism.

Yoshimitsu’s comparative theology is rooted in his Catholic faith, which emphasizes the desirable relationship between Man and God, together with the adherence to Thomist ideas of freedom and grace. Based on this, he extends his viewpoint of Man (nature) and God (the supernatural) to other non-Christian religions. For Yoshimitsu’s CTH, human religious aspiration, either within the realm of nature and the supernatural or just within the realm of nature, are inclusively important. In other words, mysticism is a form of religious aspiration that lies between the realm of nature and the supernatural on the one hand and between the realm of nature and nature*⁴ on the other.

For Yoshimitsu, mysticism has no nominal definition; rather he defines it as “the *élan* of life” (“the dynamism of life”).⁵ Yoshimitsu’s notion of “the *élan* of life” shares a common ground with Bergson’s “*élan vital*” in terms of mysticism and experiential metaphysics; however, the two notions are distinct. Yoshimitsu’s “*élan* of life” seeks to balance intellectual recollection towards transcendence (divinity) with experiential practice. On the other hand, Bergson’s notion of “*élan vital*” emphasizes the intuitive evolution towards transcendence (divinity) as an experiential practice.⁶ Yoshimitsu suggests that “*élan* of life” is a dynamic practice between Man, as a creature of reason, and God (“*Motus creaturae rationalis ad Deum*”).⁷ To express this “*élan* of life,” he uses the phrases associated with “restlessness towards God,” “humility,” and “perseverance (even foolishness sometimes).”⁸ These progressive and virtuous elements seem to be the basis for Yoshimitsu’s mysticism. Bernard McGinn suggests one typology of mysticism is process. Yoshimitsu’s mysticism belongs to this category. McGinn writes:

⁴ Here, “nature*” denotes “true self” or “the ultimate experience” within nature.

⁵ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Shinpihugi to nijūseiki shisō* (Mysticism and Twentieth Century Thought),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1938] 1984), 4.

⁶ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Tetsugakusha no kami: Bergson and Pascal* (Philosopher’s God: Bergson and Pascal),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1941] 1984), 169–170.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Gendaini okeru shinpihugi no mondai* (Current problems of Mysticism),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1942] 1984), 44; Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Tetsugakusha no kami: Descartes and Pascal* (Philosopher’s God: Descartes and Pascal),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1941] 1984), 390–392.

[M]ysticism—or, better, the mystical life—is essentially a process, an itinerary or journey to God, not just a moment or brief state of what is often called mystical union, important as such moments may be. A proper grasp of mysticism requires an investigation of the ways by which mystics have prepared for God’s intervention in their lives and the effect that divine action has had upon the mystic and those to whom he or she has communicated the message.⁹

In this context, if non-Christian mysticism engages “the *élan* of life” processually, it is analogous to Christian mysticism even though there may be no shared doctrine or the understanding of transcendence. This common (and expanded) mysticism is a base of Yoshimitsu’s CTH.

Scholars of CTT such as Keith Ward, S. Mark Heim, and Jacques Dupuis have offered general concepts of the sublime value such as the “supersensory realm” and “limitless better possibility” as ways of representing the divine within different religions. Ward defines religion as “the ultimate nature of things in relation to a supersensory realm.”¹⁰ Ward’s phrase “supersensory realm” may sound like “other worldliness.” Heim too offers his own term to encapsulate religious commonality, using the notion of achieving “a limitless better possibility” to illustrate a religious common goal.¹¹ Dupuis perceives salvific Ultimate Reality within various religions.¹² These three terms—“supersensory realm,” “pursuit of limitless better possibility,” and “Ultimate Reality”—demonstrate different theologians’ expressions of how major world religions pursue or imagine the ultimate Truth. Despite these theologians’ departure from the word “God,” however, the basic concept of these three approaches is still theistic inasmuch as all three rely on the elements of omnipotence and infinity associated with the Absolute.

Yoshimitsu accepts the individual legitimacy of global religions in the same way as the pluralists in the West, but he does not attempt to integrate religions through “analogies of supernatural” based on a single paradigm such as the supersensory realm. Rather, he uses generic dimensions, such as nature and the supernatural, to map global religions and find “analogies of mysticism” between nature and the supernatural or between two different natures. For Yoshimitsu, mysticism as process is the indispensable hinge between religious seekers and their goal, or further, a process that could be a goal itself in some cases. Yoshimitsu never downplays mysticism as process in favor of doctrine in his comparative theology.

Nature, the Supernatural, and Mysticism

For Yoshimitsu, nature and the supernatural are two distinctively different domains that must not be comingled. Hence, in religions, the identification of the precise relationship between nature and the supernatural is essential. The Absolute in nature, like Brahman and God in the supernatural, are distinct. Yoshimitsu does not attempt to wrap the Absolute and God into one basket of theism. He contends that both the relationship of nature and the supernatural, and of nature and true-nature, must be the core of religious paradigm. Hence, when identifying the essence of religions, Yoshimitsu avoids a single abstraction such as “the supersensory realm,” “a

⁹ Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), xiv–xv.

¹⁰ Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 318.

¹¹ S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 213.

¹² Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 254.

limitless better possibility,” or “the Ultimate Reality.” Each global religion presents a different discourse on the relationship between nature and the supernatural or nature and nature*. Some religions are open to revelation, while others are not.

Yoshimitsu’s main concern is each religion’s understanding of the relationship between nature and the supernatural, or nature and nature*, and eventually, mysticism as “the *élan* of life.” He looks into how each religion explores the possibility of nature coming closer to the supernatural or nature*. On the other hand, his view towards nature* (the Absolute) is inclusive. Yoshimitsu contends that doctrine needs to be experienced in some form. He presents this idea of mysticism as follows:

The workings of religions and philosophy should always be where there are humans as spiritual beings, and mysticism or *mystik* is its central life, its lively *élan*, and its ultimate deployment of life. Philosophy and religions, in particular, must be understood as *die Sache des Lebens* (the matter of life). *Mystik* is the ultimate substance of religious and philosophical life, and *mystik* is a fact of life preceding explanation and definition. It exists in the living awareness of life.¹³

Here, Yoshimitsu seems to favor Alois Mager’s phrase, “Mysticism is experienced dogma.”¹⁴ This highlights the religious and philosophical tendencies that pursue mysticism in life. To grasp doctrine fully, doctrine-based mysticism must be lived or experienced by humans. There are different combinations of doctrine and mysticism, but they all pursue a living awareness of life such as restlessness, humility, and perseverance. In the meantime, Yoshimitsu is critical about ecstatic mysticism, which is distant from life experience.

In Yoshimitsu’s approach to Christianity, there is a clear distinction between mysticism as human endeavor or “the *élan* of life” on the one hand and God’s will or grace on the other. That said, both mysticism and grace are necessary. In this context, Yoshimitsu suggests that his view of Catholicism requires both Augustinian mysticism that values faith as well as a Thomist understanding of grace under the supernatural order of salvation. In other words, “nature” must thrive with its own form of mysticism side by side with a theological understanding of Thomist grace. As long as Man is in nature, for Yoshimitsu, Man cannot bypass mysticism as a process to cultivate his own finite, yet virtuous, quality. This experience is necessary if Man wants to encounter God’s gifts, even though prevenient grace may already exist within nature. On the other hand, Yoshimitsu acknowledges different forms of mysticism embedded in non-Christian religions. Each of these is a form of the “*élan* for life” towards the Absolute or nature*, but they are not all directed towards the supernatural. They are also experiential and existential. Yoshimitsu terms this mysticism “natural mysticism” following his mentor Jacques Maritain.

¹³ The original text is included in Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu’s 1938 article “*Shinpishugi to nijusseiki shisō* (Mysticism and the Twentieth Century).” The English translation of this quotation is included in Akira Takahashi’s article “Understanding Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko’s Mysticism,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, 39, no. 4 (2002): 277.

¹⁴ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Shinpishugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 4 (Tokyo: ,Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 50.

Mysticism: A Way Forward

Yoshimitsu's special interest in mysticism is related to his struggle as a Japanese Catholic theologian faced with the advent of "modernity" in the early twentieth century. During his lifetime, Japan was in the process of undergoing a robust westernization after two centuries of national seclusion, while in the West a strong current of atheism and nihilism were ascendant. Based on this distinct vantage point, Yoshimitsu observes a certain stagnation of Western thought after the sixteenth century:

Since the sixteenth century, modern spirituality has exposed a tragic dialectic process in history. It started as the separation from the church; it confronted rational deism and the separation from Christ in the seventeenth to eighteenth century; it went through naturalism and materialism in the nineteenth century; then, eventually it ended up with the hopeless selfish heroism symbolized by "God is dead."¹⁵

Yoshimitsu sees the Western intellect as being caught between the grandeur of scientific technology and the misery of a poverty of metaphysical spiritual contemplation.¹⁶ To cope with this stagnation, Yoshimitsu seeks a return to the authentic Catholicism of Thomist grace and Augustinian faith. Yoshimitsu's adherence to Augustine's soul-oriented metaphysics comes from his basic commitment to faith or the "open spiritual attitude (*hirakareta seishintaido*)."¹⁷ Yoshimitsu thinks that spirituality, which is especially based on mysticism or mystical theology, can help one regain true humanism in the midst of modernity. Rebalancing "intellectual ethics" and mysticism is thus the core of his approach to modernity. Yoshimitsu illustrates this idea by drawing Descartes and Pascal in conversation:

Descartes's "intellectual ethics" must unite with Pascal's "logic of religious faith." Until then, there can be no salvation for the modern world. The tragic situation of conflict, where there is no reconciliation between Descartes and Pascal but rather a false choice between the two, exemplifies the powerlessness of modern metaphysics and exposes the cause of the problems facing the modern spiritual world.¹⁸

Yoshimitsu upholds Pascal's mysticism, or his "*élan* of life," which owns restlessness, humility, and perseverance, as follows:

Pascal illustrates the continuous demand for salvation from the human soul until one is salvaged by the order of grace, which is the third of his three orders: the order of body, the order of spirit, and the order of grace. Pascal's significance resides in

¹⁵ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Chūsei seishinshi no rinen* (Ideas in the Spiritual History of the Middle Ages)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 12.

¹⁶ Kevin Doak, "Time, Culture and Faith: Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko's Critique of Modernity." *University of Tokyo Center of Philosophy Bulletin* I (2003): 113.

¹⁷ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*St. Augustine ni okeru risei to shinkō: Seishinshūteki shūkyō tetsugaku jyoron no issō* (St. Augustine's Reason and Faith: A Chapter for the Introduction of Spiritual Religious Philosophy)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 83.

¹⁸ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Descartes yori Thomas heno michi* (The Road from Descartes to Thomas)," reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1943] 1984), 409.

the fact that he is the deepest Christian confessional thinker, as exemplified by his saying that “I will not sleep with Christ until the end of the world.”¹⁹

Pascal’s enthusiastic mysticism or even love, which is shown here, is necessary to counterbalance Descartes’ *cogito*. In the early twentieth century, Yoshimitsu tries to find a new modernity by rebalancing “intellectual ethics” with “mysticism.”

During this period of Yoshimitsu’s life, Christianity in Japan was still in its infancy after a two centuries-long national prohibition of Christianity. Despite this adversity, Yoshimitsu was optimistic due to the legacy of “natural mysticism” in Japan. “Natural mysticism,” as noted above, is mysticism directed towards nature* rather than towards God. Yoshimitsu believes “natural mysticism” will seamlessly lead Japan into Christian mysticism. He writes of this possible transition as follows:

If the impact of one thousand years’ history of Buddhism on Japanese spiritual culture is considered, including the contribution by Shotoku-Taishi, Kobo-Daishi, and other Kamakura era religious thinkers, this new bloom of spirituality will compare with the previous years. The new bloom of Christian souls in Japan embracing the perspective of “the supernatural” is hopeful, and God’s future providence in world history will not be less in coming years than in the past two thousand year glory.²⁰

Yoshimitsu’s struggle with modernity as a Catholic theologian gave him a special awareness of mysticism. At the same time, Yoshimitsu thinks that mysticism will be a continuous religious anchor into the future if the religious paradigm does shift in favor of Christianity. For Yoshimitsu, legitimate mysticism has the potential to be a seamless guiding force between religions. Due to this privileging of mysticism, Yoshimitsu is skeptical of religious approaches that minimize or eliminate mysticism. His study of Hinduism and Islam is firmly rooted in this hopeful, inclusive approach to mysticism.

Yoshimitsu’s View on the Advaita Tradition in Hinduism

Yoshimitsu lays out his approach to the Advaita tradition in Hinduism in his article “The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence” (“*Shinpihugi to keijiyougaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no hige*”). Hinduism represents a diversified set of religious thoughts and practices. As a constellation of religions, Hinduism also has been influenced by Islam and British colonialism.²¹ In the case of Yoshimitsu, his thought on Hinduism seems to concentrate on the specific tradition of Advaita (non-dualism). He mainly focuses on two elements: the Upanishads and Patanjali’s Yoga, both through the lens of Advaita. He also follows Shankara’s discourse on

¹⁹ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Pascal wo kataru* (Interview: Thoughts on Pascal),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1942] 1984), 419.

²⁰ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Maritain sensei heno tegami* (Letter to Professor Maritain),” reprinted in *Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko zenshū* Vol. 5 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, [1938] 1985), 145.

²¹ The expression “a constellation of religions” to refer to Hinduism is used in Ariel Glucklich, *The Strides of Vishnu: Hindu Culture in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

Advaita Vedanta. Although Yoshimitsu's approach towards Hinduism is limited to those threads that relate to the Advaita tradition, and does not include any other aspects or foreign influences, his focus on Advaita still gives us key insights into Hindu mysticism. Yoshimitsu tries to show the seeds of mysticism within the Advaita tradition in order to demonstrate how they explore the homology between nature and nature*. He suggests that the Upanishads in their invitation to speculation, and Patanjali Yoga in its commitment to practice, offer a similar mystical thesis that could be called "natural mysticism."

Yoshimitsu argues that the Upanishads offer both a contemplative tradition as well as a philosophical and religious one. According to Yoshimitsu, this contemplative tradition relates more to a practical necessity for emancipation (*moksha*) from life and death rather than a pure intellectual speculation. Thus, this spiritual search for the inner-absolute has the element of religious mysticism.²² Yoshimitsu asserts that the search for the Absolute as the cosmic true existence is made through spiritual, empirical, and existential comprehension. In other words, since *moksha* is considered to be a homological union between the human and the cosmic Absolute, it is a part of mysticism. Yoshimitsu describes the core concept of Brahman in the Upanishads as follows:

Brahman is the true existence behind phenomena. It is the permanent true nature under all creation and change; it is certainty over uncertainty; it is the eternal principle for all; it creates all; it is the force to maintain and include all; there is no other thing in existence except Brahman. Brahman is the Atman: the Soul; it means oneself, it means "thou," and it means him. It is the universal soul which exists as deep trans-individualistic existence.²³

According to Yoshimitsu, the Upanishad's core concept of *Tat tvam asi* ("That thou art") indicates that Brahman is the universal self-ness for all people, including "thou" and I. Brahman is the individualistic Atman and the universal Atman at the same time (hence the term *advaita*, "not-two").

Yoshimitsu finds similar thoughts within Patanjali's Yoga, which was compiled after the Upanishadic period. Yoshimitsu identifies the key point of Patanjali Yoga as the quest to abide the seer's (or the soul's) true nature by stilling the changing states of the mind.²⁴ Since Patanjali Yoga claims that the soul's true nature must be obtained through the cessation of truth-bearing discrimination and meditative absorption without form, Yoshimitsu suggests that Patanjali Yoga provides a mystical path much like the union of Brahman and Atman (hence the term yoga, "union").²⁵ Yoshimitsu writes about this similarity as follows:

Positive unity between Brahman and Atman through metaphysical speculative explanation and Patanjali Yoga's negative meditative absorption without form do not differ in substance. In both cases, the mystical contemplator's psychological experience needs to go through two stages. First, the direct perception of existence (*ishvara*) or soul (*purusha*) is attained through conscious spiritual concentration

²² Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpushugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higai* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 65–66.

²³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁴ Yoshimitsu refers to the Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (I, 2-3).

²⁵ Yoshimitsu refers to the Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (I, 51).

(*samprajnata-yoga*). Second, thinking subjectivity, thinking objectivity, and thinking acts must be united as one by the absorption of all thinking functions into the cause (*prakriti*) within the unconscious process (*asamprajnata-yoga*).²⁶

For Yoshimitsu, the unity of Man’s soul with Brahman, which is the understanding that the current consciousness of Brahman in Man’s inner soul and the ascetic experience of the Absolute in Man’s soul which creates total cessation and the state of “void” share a similar “*élan* of life.”

For Yoshimitsu, these forms of Hindu mysticism in speculation and in practice could be termed “natural mysticism” (*shizenteki mystic*). He explains his definition of “natural mysticism” as follows:

“Natural” means the opposition to “supernatural” in Christian theology. In the original sense, mysticism exists only in relation to the experience of God as supernatural grace, but it could be possible to use mysticism in relation to nature if humans can achieve an analogous inner direct experience with the Absolute within their spiritual possibility. In this context, this experience of the Absolute, as its possibility and its potentiality, must be the inner consciousness of the creator and the divine providence which aligns with the supernatural Christian God.²⁷

Here, Yoshimitsu does not comingle nature with the supernatural and the Absolute with grace, but instead contends that the mystical trajectory of Hinduism in the Advaita tradition may harmonize with Christian mysticism. Yoshimitsu does not see a contradiction between the essence of Advaita’s natural mysticism and the possibility of supernatural grace in Christian mysticism. He contends that Hinduism’s “natural mysticism” in the Advaita tradition offers a solemn path to both graceful and supernatural possibilities. This is possible because Advaita’s natural mysticism is interpreted as a restless state before meeting with God, a state that values “one’s internal human nature” (*naiteki ningensei*) by which one pursues direct contact with the origin of one’s existence through one’s absolutely emptied soul.²⁸

Yoshimitsu cannot dismiss “natural mysticism” as an entrance point to Christian mysticism, because the intellectual and ascetic tradition of Christian mysticism seeks the progress of oneself towards inner-self and spirituality. Furthermore, he argues that natural mysticism may involve the sense of limitedness within existential experience, which leads into the quest for supernatural mysticism beyond idealistic monistic thoughts. In this sense, Yoshimitsu believes that Hinduism’s natural mysticism in the Advaita tradition can be interpreted as a humble principle of existence or the state of Advent. This is Yoshimitsu’s inclusive view of Hindu Advaita. For Yoshimitsu, Hindu Advaita is in natural light; thus, it is able to access supernatural light at any moment.

Yoshimitsu’s thesis that Hinduism in the Advaita tradition is a form of natural mysticism and of Adventism is different from the Western approach undertaken by scholars such as Keith

²⁶ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Shinpushugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence),” 64.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

Ward. For Yoshimitsu, mysticism within the Advaita tradition would be analogous to Christian mysticism. However, Ward suggests that Shankara's Advaita and the Divine of Thomas Aquinas are deeply united through their manifestation of un-real Real. Ward writes:

He [Thomas Aquinas] argues that God is utterly simple and without parts; is timeless and changeless; stands in no real relation to the finite universe; and is wholly ineffable, except by the use of terms which, though appropriate, do not signify what we think they do. Wherein does this differ from Shankara's allegedly pantheistic and impersonal philosophy? For both, the Divine manifests to us for the sake of our eternal bliss in the forms of time and space. For both, the apparent can truly express or signify the Real, even though it is illusion to take it for the Real in itself. The deep unity of these views should be clear.²⁹

From Yoshimitsu's perspective, the Real in Hindu Advaita must be attained through both the intellectual and ascetic traditions, but this Real stays within nature and may include the potential to meet the Christian Real. Yoshimitsu's approach does not suggest the absorption of the Hindu Real by the Christian Real nor a sameness between the Hindu Real and the Christian Real; rather, it suggests that they exist in the different domains of nature and the supernatural while retaining a similar "élan of life." This is possible precisely because, for Yoshimitsu, natural mysticism allows the practitioner to move from the natural realm to the supernatural realm without disruption.

Yoshimitsu's View on Islam

Unlike Hinduism, in which Yoshimitsu identifies a "natural mysticism" that could be compatible with grace and the supernatural, orthodox Islam causes him some difficulty. While Yoshimitsu's religious approach is based on the dimensions of nature and the supernatural, orthodox Islam has an extremely clear structure reliant solely on the supernatural. In other words, Islam deals with the supernatural so vividly in the Qur'an that it minimizes the role of nature and the Order of Creation with which Yoshimitsu is so concerned. Due to this, Keith Ward characterizes Islamic thought as solely Qur'anic. He writes, "There is consequently little interest in God's self-revelation in history in Islam, since God gives a perfect revelation in the Koran."³⁰ Hence, there is no apathetic aspect or supernatural truth-searching asceticism to be found within "nature" in orthodox Islam, since religious seekers have the Word of God in front of them. From Yoshimitsu's perspective, then, it would be simply a matter of "take it or leave it" in relation to the Word of God. Unfortunately, there is no article in which Yoshimitsu directly deals with orthodox Islamic thought.

Though orthodox Qur'anic Islam provides him no clear entrepôt, Yoshimitsu engages strongly with Sufism and its theistic mysticism. Sufism promotes the ascetic annihilation of oneself and one's unification with God. Ward summarizes the core of Sufi religious tradition as follows:

Such movements [Sufi movements] espouse a life of devotion to God, with stages of spiritual ascent, leading from repentance and renunciation to a final stage of "annihilation" (*fana*), in which the individual self seems to fade away and nothing

²⁹ Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 147.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

remains but the face of God. . . . Thus when they are most truly themselves, they become transparent to the only basis of their reality, which is God.³¹

Yoshimitsu’s analysis of Sufism relies heavily on the thinking of one of his mentors in France, Louis Massignon, a French Catholic scholar of Islam. Massignon observes that most Sufis will reach their revelation as soon as they get to the entrance of spirituality (the point of liberation from the flesh) through chanting and contemplating the Qur’an. Hence, one can either achieve religious ignition through spirituality quickly and successfully, or go for broke unsuccessfully trying.³² According to Yoshimitsu, Sufi mysticism is different from Hindu mysticism in the Advaita tradition due to this closeness to revelation. However, Yoshimitsu specifically recognizes an exception within Sufism in the “God’s hands” alluded to by Al Ghazali (1058–1111) and Al Hallaj (858–922). He terms this group of Sufis as “super-Qur’anic.”³³ Yoshimitsu engages most completely with these two distinctive Sufis from the “super-Qur’anic” group. Ghazali is the dominant Islamic theologian of the eleventh to twelfth centuries, while Hallaj is more of an extremist who was executed for his thoughts in the tenth century. Therefore, while they are both super-Qur’anic inasmuch as they seek a “soul-illuminating” encounter with the supernatural, there are significant differences between the two in the Islamic tradition.

Ghazali’s work emphasizes the importance of the spiritual encounter with God alongside one’s intellectual pursuits within the Qur’an. Paul Heck articulates this as follows:

The only way to have one’s character informed by divine and not simply human wisdom is to integrate the Qur’an into one’s limbs, one’s feelings and sentiments, one’s gut. . . . This is Ghazali at his best—limbs in unison with the heart, action conforming to knowledge of God, which for Muslims is above all the soul-illuminating knowledge of the Qur’an.³⁴

As Heck points out, Ghazali’s approach is a mystical technique that tries to conform to the knowledge of God with the heart.

Hallaj, on the other hand, is an extremist and a controversial figure from the Islamic perspective. Despite this, Yoshimitsu pays more scholarly attention to Hallaj than to Ghazali. The reason for his interest in Hallaj may come from the proximity of Hallaj’s religious thought process to Christianity, as is the case for his mentor Massignon. Heck explains the abnormality of Hallaj within Islam as follows:

³¹ Ibid., 189.

³² Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Shinpihugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence),” 72–73. Paul Heck explores some limits of the practice of recitation of the Qur’an as follows: “The transformation that such practices [recitation of the Qur’an] offer is blocked by impurities of the heart and body as well as intellectual doubts and excessive scruples with the external practices of the religion—its ritual and moral norms. . . . Those preoccupied with worldly concerns are unable to identify emotionally—physically and spiritually—with the verses of the Qur’an.” Paul L. Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 27–28.

³³ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Shinpihugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence),” 73.

³⁴ Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism*, 28.

Hallaj, a controversial figure of the ninth century who claimed to embody divine truth and was subsequently crucified, in his view to expiate the sins of Muslims, was not accepted as a liturgical model—that is, a focal point of communal prayer—in Islam. His life and death did not reflect the part of the prophetic heritage that Islam emphasizes, prayerful worship of the unique Creator and Lord. In Islam, there are prophets but not priests.³⁵

Despite the heretical nature of Hallaj's thought from the point of view of Islamic orthodoxy, Yoshimitsu builds on Massignon's appraisal of Hallaj as noble and pure in his mysticism.³⁶ Following Massignon, he recognizes the unique position of Hallaj within the Islamic tradition of mysticism that began with Hasan Basri (643–728) and gradually developed by integrating the Islamic creed and monastic mystic theology.³⁷ Hallaj explores a form of mysticism that implements a non-traditional Islamic idea of unity with Allah. Yoshimitsu confirms the main thesis of Hallaj, quoting his remarks on his pilgrimage to Mecca: "We are two spirits fused in a (single) body. Thus, to see me, is to see Him. And to see Him is to see us."³⁸ He evaluates Hallaj's remarks on this embodiment of the divine. He writes:

Here, as we know and remember together with the name of Hallaj, the phrase of "Ana al Haqq (I am the truth)," which also signifies him as a blasphemer in Islam, is a difficult proposition which I do not have the qualifications to solve. But, we must admit that Hallaj expressed through this phrase the joy of the interface between God and soul, or the joy of discovery of God within the emptiness without one's ego, as the confession of "mystical unification of God," assuming Hallaj unmistakably stayed in the Islamic faith.³⁹

Keith Ward notes that Hallaj's "Ana al Haqq" is paradoxical considering the absolute transcendence and power of God in orthodox Islamic discourse. He contends that Ghazali's eleventh-century revision of Hallaj was necessary in this context. Ward writes:

Although al-Hallaj was put to death for this claim, it is a recurrent theme in some forms of Sufism that great saints or imams can achieve a sort of identity with Allah. The eleventh-century sage al-Ghazzali, who achieved a synthesis of Sufism and orthodoxy and is generally accepted as the greatest philosopher of Islam, is at pains to state that there is never an actual identity of the soul and God. "That [the experience of *fana*] had not been actual identity, but only something resembling identity," he says. Orthodox Islam naturally draws back from a doctrine of *hulul*, of Divine indwelling or incarnation. Yet such a notion is a constantly recurring feature of Muslim spirituality.⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

³⁶ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, "*Shinpushugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence)," 73.

³⁷ Ibid., 73.

³⁸ Ibid., 74.

³⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁰ Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, 190 (bracketed words in original).

Since Yoshimitsu’s discourse concerns process or mysticism, he shows his strong scholarly interest in two distinctively different practices within Islam: the citation of the Qur’an and Hallaj’s endeavor for the embodiment of Divine reality.

In the case of Hindu Advaita, Yoshimitsu characterizes its “invitation to speculation” and “practice” as “natural mysticism,” which might also be incorporated into his Christian inclusivity as an Adventist practice. Yoshimitsu identifies Hallaj’s mysticism as very close to the mysticism of grace in Christianity. He writes:

The inner religious quality, which Hallaj persistently seeks, shares common ground with the inner aspect of “Grace which fulfills law,” which has been explored within St. Paul’s Letters in the Bible. This idea will surpass the Qur’anic notion of religiousness, and it will merge into the point where God’s supernatural mysticism is represented solely as “God is Love.”⁴¹

Yoshimitsu is clearly aware that there is neither the Incarnation nor the Trinity in Islam, but he contends that Hallaj is considered to be a martyr for putting Jesus (as a saint) ahead of Mohammed and also putting one’s inner sanctity ahead of Islamic laws.⁴² Yoshimitsu perceives that Islam embeds antinomy between individual spirituality and external law due to its strict reliance on revelation by word. This might create a fatalistic limit. Further, this antinomy might not be objectively and universally solvable. Hence, Yoshimitsu suggests that the mysticism of Hallaj can be interpreted as analogous to the expectation of graceful love in St. Paul’s Letters in the Bible that completes the Torah, or the one that represents mysticism of anxiety towards the sacramental mundane reality of the supernatural.⁴³ From the viewpoint of mysticism, Yoshimitsu foresees uncertainty in the Qur’anic approach and anxiety in the super-Qur’anic approach.

If we adopt Yoshimitsu’s terminology of “natural mysticism” for Hindu Advaita, the super-Qur’anic approach of Sufis such as Hallaj could be said to be a “non-Christian mysticism.” Yoshimitsu further suggests that this “non-Christian mysticism” would be completed, both as Christian mysticism and theology, by the Thomist God.⁴⁴ For Yoshimitsu, grace is not to be pre-owned by word, nor is it the object of unification. He contends that grace resides within mysticism as the *élan* of life that is assured by the two Thomist pillars of the order of creation and the supernatural order of salvation. He contends as follows:

It would be a surprise that a truly Thomist understanding of God completes Islamic religiousness both in theology and in mysticism; the Thomist understanding of God is the revelation of Grace through the Incarnation within the realm of “Analogia entis creati et increate (The analogy between God and creation)” in nature and it is the living experiential truth within Christian mysticism.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Yoshihiko Yoshimitsu, “*Shinpushugi no keijijōgaku: Shūkyōteki jitsuzon no higi* (The Metaphysics of Mysticism: The Mystery of Religious Existence),” 75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 75–76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

For Yoshimitsu, Islam experiences both theological and mystical anxiety by looking at God only through the lens of omniscience and omnipotence, not through a form of living experiential truth like grace. Just as in his view on Hindu Advaita, Yoshimitsu does not deny Islam nor Sufi mysticism; he only sees a limitation within them from his Catholic perspective. For Yoshimitsu, some combination of mysticism and doctrine that bridges nature and the supernatural is necessary to unite oneself with the supernatural life through grace and the Incarnation.

A Concluding Note

For Yoshimitsu, religious mysticism is not an additional, indifferent branch, nor an appendix to religious doctrine. It is a necessary process and “the *élan* of life,” one that shares a similar aspiration of restlessness, humility, and perseverance despite being based on different religious doctrines with or without a supernatural element. Christian mysticism is the soul-oriented act, making oneself open to receive grace under the supernatural order of salvation. In the Hindu tradition of Advaita, natural mysticism associated both within a speculation of Brahmanism and a practice of Patanjali Yoga would also be a mysticism that bridges two different stages or consciousness of nature. The super-Qur’anic approach in Islam shows some anxiety towards mystical union. Each of these religions has different doctrines and domains regarding nature and the supernatural; however, all three religions have a clear sense, or some distance in case of Islam, towards “the *élan* of life.”

Yoshimitsu does not present his work as constituting a separate scholarly field such as comparative theology, nor does his work try to offer complete coverage of all major religions or texts. Furthermore, this article does not make a general statement through him about the nature of those religions. Yoshimitsu’s view on religions is specific and it is influenced by his struggle against modernity and the westernization of Japan in the early twentieth century. However, his approach to religions through theocentric humanism or mysticism offers valuable insights and new dimensions for the standard theistic approach and comparative theology in general. Yoshimitsu’s practical and anthropocentric approach, which is intellectually substantive, culturally neutral, and authentically balanced between doctrine and practice, offers us many rich insights into the human condition today. And while certainly we expect that the understanding of religion, in general and with regard to specific religions, has changed over time, there is still much of value in listening to Yoshimitsu and the theology of his day.

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