

JAPAN SEMINAR

# Exploration, Religion and Asia

大谷光瑞: アジアと日本の発見

Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2010

16.10-17.40, N313 (North building)

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( 使用言語 : 英語 / 事前登録不要 )

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## Abstract

Otani Kozui, the head of the Nishi Honganji who sent three expeditions: 1902-04, 1908-09, and 1910-14 to explore Central Asia, using London as his base, to trace the route that Buddhism took on its journey to Japan from India. European orientalists, such as Aurel Stein, were already uncovering the treasures of places like Dunhuang, but Otani felt that as Buddhists they had a better claim and expertise to carry out this undertaking. In this competitive spirit he financed and even personally participated in these expeditions.

These expeditions represent, for Tokutomi Soho, an alternative to the Alexandrian invasion of Asia, they were undertaken by an Asian power as cultural campaigns to uncover Buddhist culture and its artistic and historical artefacts and drew on Japan's exploratory spirit and enterprise, a spirit exemplified in Nobunaga and Hideyoshi. Tokutomi speculates that if the Tokugawa had not ruled Japan it is possible that Japan would have been colonized but it is, he argues, that the Tokugawa restricted the Japanese spirit which otherwise would have led the Japanese to spread outwards to southwest Asia, the Pacific Islands and even to Southern America.

Tokutomi's is one way of thinking about these, now largely forgotten lives, but I would suggest that these explorations also show the new links that were being forged within Asia, building on, but not confined to a Buddhist world view. These explorations provide an entry point to re-think the role of religion in shaping the complexion of modern Japan.

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