

*The Bridges of Meaning and Friendship:  
"A New Humanism" from Mircea Eliade to Michio Araki*

A Lecture by Prof. David Carrasco, Harvard University  
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I wish to thank the Niwano Peace Foundation for this fine opportunity to speak with you about the powerful concept of "a new humanism." I also wish to thank Professors Richard Gardner and Tatsuo Murakami for their generous assistance. I also thank Professor Tomoko Taniguchi and all the others who have made my family's visit to Japan so enjoyable.

Let me say a few words about my life and work before talking about the concept of "a new humanism." I am a Mexican American descended on my father's side from several generations of schoolteachers. My grandfather Miguel Carrasco built a school for Mexicans living along the US Mexico border in 1925. This school was called the Smelter Vocational School. My father later founded the El Paso Job Corps Center to help educate low income, at risk students in vocational education. He and my grandmother helped raise me when my father, also a schoolteacher, and my mother, an artist, went to find work just after the Second World War.

When I was ten-years old I noticed my grandmother had dark, beautiful skin and I asked her how she kept her skin so pretty. She leaned close to me and whispered: "I have some secret ingredients. If you are a good boy, I will tell them to you." I said: "I am a good boy. Please tell me." She whispered in my ear: "My secret ingredient is prayer, prayer, prayer and ...good cosmetics."

She taught me two important lessons in those secret ingredients. She taught me the importance of meditation, prayer, and belief in the Other, a transcendent reality. And her comment about cosmetics told me to pay attention to the technology of the human face, masks, and the importance of looking good for others.

You will be interested to know that my Mexican grandparents lived in Yokohama for five years; they were very interested in the Japanese Christian pacifist Toyohiko Kagawa and joined his community. All this contributed in some important ways to my becoming an historian of religions.

I understand the new humanism as a bridge-building concept in the history of religions created by Mircea Eliade and developed by Joseph Kitagawa, Charles H. Long, and Michio Araki, among many others. This lecture pays tribute to my dear colleague and friend Michio Araki who exemplified the meaning of a new humanism by linking ideas, students, meanings, and friendships *between* Japan, Mexico, and the United States. I would like to recognize his widow, Mrs. Araki, who is here with us this afternoon.

My talk is built upon three bridges of alliances and friendships. The first bridge is that between Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa. This bridge grew when Eliade and Kitagawa came to Japan in 1958. I believe this journey helped produce Eliade's foundational essay "A New Humanism" and Joseph Kitagawa's book, *Religions of the East*, a book that I see as an important example of the early stage of the new humanism.

The second bridge, an extension of the first, joined Joseph Kitagawa and his student Michio Araki at the University of Chicago and resulted in Araki's 1982 Ph.D. dissertation *Konkô Daijin and Konkôkyô: A Case-Study of Religious Mediation*. As we shall see, this dissertation became the foundation for Araki's later teachings, writings, and community-building related to the study of religion and especially folk religions.

The third bridge joined Michio Araki and myself while we were students and worked under the tutelage of both Joseph Kitagawa and Charles H. Long. Our friendship resulted in each of us forming groups of scholars, teachers, and students who worked together to understand the religious experiences and expressions of human kind. Members of our groups met in Mexico, the US, and Japan. It was Araki who brought the African American teacher Charles H. Long (along with students of Long, myself, and others in the Chicago tradition of the history of religions) to Japan. I will later show images of three projects in Mexico in which Araki and his students participated: 1) a study of the Great Aztec Temple, 2) a study of the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and 3) the writing of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*.

One impressive result of these meaningful bridges and friendships is the book *Between Religion and the Study of Religion: Visions of New Forms of Human Community*, the fruits of a research project funded and supported by the Niwano Peace Foundation. This project grew initially out of Michio Araki's efforts to build a dialogue between religious leaders and scholars. Its completion depended on Richard Gardner's painstaking, creative editorial leadership.

## Bridge Number One: Mircea Eliade, Joseph Kitagawa, and the Rocks of Matsushima

Let me tell you the story of what happened when the great historian of religions Mircea Eliade came to Japan sixty years ago in March of 1958, along with his Japanese colleague Joseph Kitagawa. Eliade's deep appreciation for what he learned here is recorded in his book *No Souvenirs* in a chapter called "The Rocks of Matsushima." I believe his encounter with what he called "the soul of Japan" contributed in no small way to the essay he wrote three years later entitled "History of Religions and A New Humanism."

Eliade begins his chapter on Japan by recording a Japanese creation story about the closeness of heaven and earth.

One day a stranger who walked bent over, almost doubled over, arrived in a certain village. When asked why he walked that way, he answered that in his country the sky was so low that if he had stood up, his head would have touched the vault of heaven.

Eliade interprets this as a "paradise myth" about how "heaven was so close to earth that men, could, at any moment meet the gods." But this closeness of the primordial era was broken through human stupidity or evil actions and the gods and humans were pushed away from each other. Eliade felt he saw reflections of the Japanese yearnings to reconnect with the gods in "the simple authentic grandeur of Shinto shrines;" the ecstatic dance of the goddess *Ame No Uzume*; and a visit to a blind shamanness, a *miko* who drummed, played with sacred dolls, and divined a secret in Eliade's family history. This leads him to suggest that: "The Japanese soul yearns for a concrete epiphany of the divine." He also suggests that this Japanese soul is always "longing for the *primordial bridge* which once connected heaven and earth."

These words of Eliade's about his time in Japan contain the seeds of the four central ideas of his concept of "a new humanism."<sup>1</sup> Writing in the 1960's during the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, he argues that:

1) Our historical moment (the historical moment for Euro-Americans) is punctuated by confrontations with the cosmologies, rituals, and peoples of Asia and indigenous cultures. These peoples were previously "objects" of our studies. Now they will become "subjects," **people able to comment on and object to how they have been described and misunderstood.**

2) Our task is to understand that these cultures "are nourished by a rich, religious

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Eliade edited the 1961 essay "History of Religions and a New Humanism" for the 1969 publication of his book of essays entitled *The Quest*. It is that version of the essay that has the title "A New Humanism."

soil”

3) Westerners are ignoring the problems and creative solutions of Asian and archaic thought; they offer creative solutions that can help us have a deeper understanding of human life.

4) We need multi-disciplinary cooperation and dialogues that include economists, psychologists, literary critics, historians, historians of religions; we need teams and new communities. In my work, I call this the “ensemble approach.” As in musical groups, we need to incorporate many instruments in our *conjunto*, and not just play the music on one instrument. We need many disciplines to understand the religious dimensions of human culture and history.

One outstanding illustration of these four points for me was Joseph Kitagawa’s book entitled *Religions of the East* published in 1968 during the time when the notion of a “new humanism” was being developed by Kitagawa, Eliade, and Long. Here is a statement about the book from one of the leading academic review journals. I have placed in bold type the words that strike me as almost a translation of the four key points I just mentioned.

Departing from the usual established premise of religious historians that Christianity alone can claim the uniqueness of its Church, the author seeks **to find counterparts of the “holy community” in Eastern religions**, and to discover their ethos and structure. Mr. Kitagawa is determined to maintain a balance between historical facts and their structuring and interpretation. He realizes that **religions imply individuals gathered into communities** each of which has its own pace and law of growth, quite apart from the life cycles of its individual adherents. **The author is an Easterner, now in the West and in the book he aims to identify himself with the West without losing his Eastern identity.** The book is designed to give college students and laymen an unbiased origination for the study of comparative religion. In the present kaleidoscopic world scene this book is a mine of interpretative material for those who seek to understand their brothers’ beliefs.

I note that Kitagawa has added a fifth element to the notion of “a new humanism:” the strong emphasis on “community.” He learned from Joachim Wach the importance of not only studying religious communities but also forming communities of scholars to understand religious communities.

Charles Long also emphasized the importance of community in the notion of a new humanism and said to me, about my thoughts on this lecture concerning the bridges of Japanese-US-Mexico relations, the following:

When Joseph Kitagawa came to Chicago to study and teach, he set up a tradition where Japanese students came to Chicago. Kitagawa was the bridge. He also trained students

like William Lafleur, Richard Gardner, Gary Ebersole, and others who went in the other direction. They went to the East and a few stayed there to live and work. Later, Araki became a new kind of bridge in helping to build an intellectual community linking scholars from Japan, the US, and Mexico.

### Bridge Number Two: Joseph Kitagawa and Michio Araki

Let me tell you the story of Michio Araki's journey from Japan to Chicago and back again. Unlike Eliade's journey as a European going to America and then Japan and back to America, this is the story of a Japanese person who goes to the "West," to the University of Chicago, and learns **about the profound meanings of religion and history in Japan while he is away from home, in Chicago.**

After graduating with a B.A. and M.A. in Religion from Kyoto University Graduate School, Araki studied at Williams College until 1967 when he entered the University of Chicago Divinity School. We met and became friends in 1970 and studied with Eliade, Long, and Kitagawa. Both Long and Kitagawa were students of the German scholar Joachim Wach. So we also learned much of his approach to the study of religion.

Remember what I said earlier about Eliade's insistence on how the former "objects" of the study of religion were becoming new "subjects," new voices telling stories of human lives and religious experiences? Araki learned from Kitagawa and Long that there was value in studying the autobiographies of Japanese people and especially the founders of new religious movements in Japan. Where Eliade encouraged us to know the creation myths of a culture, Araki was thus also told to pay great attention to another kind of beginning, the beginning of new religions as witnessed in the life stories of their founders. This insured a more historical approach to human lives, religious experiences, and communities. We see this crucial element in the new humanism approach in Richard Gardner's essay on Takami Toshihiro in the book *Between Religion and the Study of Religion*.

I want to make clear to you why this emphasis on knowing the life stories of Japanese people, and for me Mexicans, meant so much to Araki and me. You see, we knew from our lived experiences in the United States that we were viewed and treated as marginal and even degraded social and cultural beings. I had grown in a country that claimed, over and over again, that it was exceptional because there was freedom and equality for all. But as a Mexican American, living among black people, brown people, and white people, we Mexicans had been *objected to* many, many times. Our neighbors told us, for instance, that because my father was Mexican and I was a mixed-race child, we were a threat to the value of homes in our neighborhood, that other people would not want to buy homes near us, and that the prices of

the homes were going down because we lived there. We were denied entry to some restaurants and told many times to “go back to where you came from. You don’t belong here.”

In those years, Mexicans, black, and Japanese people were constantly made fun of, demeaned, and insulted in social settings, on television, in the movies, and in schools. Richard Garner writes about this problem in the introduction to *Between Religion and the Study of Religion* as the “demonic side” of the American experience. So when Araki and I heard Kitagawa and Long lecturing about the new humanism, about how wisdom resided in the religions of Asia, Latin America, and Native American peoples, we felt liberated and motivated to “object,” to stand up to these prejudices in intellectual and educational ways. Araki and I spoke about this many times while studying together in the Divinity School and in Regenstein Library. We pledged that when we became professors we would train our students to confront this problem through our hermeneutical and educational work.

Let me return to Araki and his dissertation and bring him back to us with his own words in 1982 when he submitted his dissertation “Konkô Daijin and Konkô-Kyô: A Case Study of Religious Mediation. I appreciate especially his combination of vision and humility in the face of the study of Japanese religions.

By submitting this piece of work I am to end one important epoch of my life. Compared to the richness and depth of Japanese folk religion, however, I feel that my knowledge and understanding of folk religion is extremely limited. I would like to make this dissertation not the completion of my study of folk religion but the very beginning of my further study.

Araki need not have been so humble for his dissertation shows support of the study not only of Japanese culture *but also of elements of Japanese religion and history that had been ignored or reduced even in Japan*. I have read Araki’s dissertation twice in the last month; it is a sophisticated, balanced, insightful piece of scholarship in five well-written chapters.

I won’t summarize all of the dissertaion but let me list, as I did above with Eliade’s four points, the four key points in Araki’s vision of a new humanism.

- 1) The deep religious soil of Japan includes **folk religions** as well as the elite religions, which historically have a dialectical, dynamic relationship. We must study the folk religions.
- 2) One way to get access to the folk religions and the new religions of Japan was through the autobiographies of the founders, as in the case of the founder of Konkôkyô. This pathway led to understanding the religious experiences of the other devotees.

- 3) One key challenge in some folk religions is understanding how people experienced the ambivalence of the sacred—the Benign and the Threatening sides of the divine.
- 4) Many folk religions have at their center a search for healing for the “people troubled in the world.” Writing of Konkô’s religious experience Araki saw that Konkôkyô’s goal “was a new integration, purification of the theoretical, practical, and sociological aspects of Japanese folk religion.”
- 5) Students should study comparisons with messianic folk cults from other parts of the world so we can de-provincialize ourselves as students and strive for a wider understanding of Japan and other religions.

Michio Araki was very concerned with point number four, the healing aspect of folk religions in Japan and elsewhere.

Here is what Charles Long said to me last week about what he learned from Araki about folk religion.

The first time I went to Japan, Michio took me to about fifteen of these new religious groups. A few had a more Western orientation, some tried to recapitulate the old Japanese myths, and one involved a ritual of swallowing the sun. Several had women founders. He introduced me to the whole gamut. But at the heart of all of them was something very profound. All of them, whether doing an archaism or getting access to the modern world, were all about healing. I learned from Michio that for these Japanese folk people, healing and modernity went together.

### Bridge Number Three: Linking Japanese Students and US Students to Japan, Mexico, and Charles Long

Let me tell you the story of how Michio and I worked to practice the new humanism approach, with the help of Charles Long, in our teaching and writing. I went on to write my dissertation about Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent God who had helped create culture and cities in ancient Mexico. Michio went on to complete his dissertation on Konkôkyô.

Remembering our pledge to each other that we would carry the new humanism approach to the next generation of students, we kept in touch and often talked on the phone. In our last year together at Chicago an incredible discovery in Mexico took place. In February of 1968 archaeologists discovered, right behind the National Cathedral of Mexico, a sacred monolith with the image of the Aztec moon goddess carved on it.



The image shows the dismembered body of the moon goddess who has been sacrificed by the sun god, Southern Hummingbird, at the Serpent Mountain. This sacred stone marked the location of the Great Aztec Temple that had been destroyed by the Spaniards but was now soon to be excavated by the Mexicans. Many discoveries followed including these amazing objects.



I reached out to Michio Araki in Japan and invited him and some of his students to come to Mexico to participate in conferences dedicated to deciphering the religious significance of the Great Aztec Temple and the religious offerings. Here are some photographs of conferences in Mexico and at the University of Colorado showing the participation of Araki and his students in this work. I should add that the Mexicans really enjoyed Araki sensei's intelligence, sense of humor, and comments comparing Mexican religion to Japanese religion.





As Araki was deeply interested in folk religions and their connections with sacred hills, he became fascinated with the story of the apparitions of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, a female saint dedicated to love and mercy. This led him to make comparisons with the Kannon and other mercy figures in Japanese religions. Again, he traveled with students to Mexico visiting the site of *Tepeyac* where Guadalupe appeared and other sites of folk religion. We had meetings about this and he was enthusiastic in linking Japanese folk religion to Mexican folk religion.

In the 1990's I was invited to be the editor in chief of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Religions* and I invited some of his students to write articles to be published in English about the religions of Mexico and Mesoamerica. This publication won many awards and included articles by Araki-sensei's students: Takeshi Iwasaki wrote on Man-Gods, Michiyo Sasao on the New Fire Ceremony, and Tomoko Taniguchi on Oracles.

We were all fortunate that Araki sensei brought Charles Long to Japan a number of times where he visited religious sites and gave classes and public lectures. Many of the Chicago students wanted to be together with Long and Araki and here is a terrific photograph of one of our conference groups together at the Meiji Shrine.



I asked several of these people to send me their memories of Araki-sensei. I received many comments and responses. There is not time or space to include all their comments here. Allow me to report the following reminiscences. His student Reiko Sono said simply: "We Japanese students worked hard for him. He was not an easy professor because he demanded a lot. But we really loved him." His colleague Jacob Olupona, reminded me that "Michio Araki was a friend. He was generous with us. He had a lively mind and a good sense of humor. He was very engaged with the thought of our Teacher, Charles Long."

Phil Arnold who now teaches at Syracuse and traveled here a number of times to be with Araki wrote:

Once at Sophia we had a conference and Araki was giving a talk on the history of the History of Religions in Japan. He was impassioned. At that moment the floor began to move and the building to sway. I was terrified and my life flashed before my eyes. I thought of calling my wife Sandy back in the US. It was my first earthquake experience and while it passed quickly it seemed to me to have gone on for a very long time. When I looked up to see how others were doing, I noticed that Araki had never stopped talking; he had not even paused. I would like to hear the tape of that moment someday. I owe Araki a huge debt of gratitude and I don't know how to repay him.

There was a common theme in all the responses I received. All said their understanding of religion, as well as their understanding of themselves and being human, was changed by having met Araki-sensei.

## Conclusion

I am so honoured to have been able to spend this afternoon with you and this week, with members of my family here in Japan. In closing let me tell you one final story of Araki and Carrasco. Once when I came to Japan he arranged for me to see a Kabuki play called *Meiboku Sendai Hagi*. In the play, a woman named Masaoka risks her own life to protect a young boy of about seven-years old who is the next in line to the head of his clan; she protects him from assassins. She retreats with the young boy and her own son to the women's quarters where she hides them. The children are hungry but there is no food and they must remain hidden. One lengthy scene really had an impact on me because it showed how far a loyal adult would go to protect and nurture someone they were responsible for.

We see Masaoka painstakingly prepare food using the only implements available to her, tea ceremony utensils. She assures the children that some nourishment is coming even though all she will be able to provide is her emotional caring for them and some tea at the end of the ritual cooking. The waiting seems interminable to the two hungry boys who try to behave like young warriors but sneak over and look over Masaoka's shoulders to see if the food is soon to come. Masaoka is able to nurture them with her skillful caring and save their lives.

This scene and play stuck with me so much that I enjoyed simply saying the name "Masaoka." Later when I returned to the United States, Araki and I would talk on the phone. And we developed code words between us to signal the strength of our friendship. So when I called Japan and he answered "moshi, moshi," I would simply say "Masaoka." And he would say "Quetzalcoatl." And we would laugh. And then we would talk and reminisce and make plans for future meetings with our students and colleagues. Then, to say goodbye I would say "Masaoka" two or three times. It was not that I was calling him "Masaoka," rather it was my way of saying to him "you are my good friend." And he would answer and say good-bye with "Quetzalcoatl."

So I close this lecture with a greeting to all of you, and especially to his wife, and most of all to Araki-sensei, by saying "Masaoka." I know that later tonight under the moon when I am walking near the outer wall of the Imperial Moat with my wife and step-son, Maria Luisa and Marc, that I will hear his faint voice in the air whispering "Quetzacoatl."

Arigato and Gracias