. . . [I]f you imagine in me some special knowledge of a way to liberation other than the nembutsu or a familiarity with writings that teach it, you are greatly mistaken. If that is the case, you would do better to visit the many eminent scholars in Nara or on Mount Hiei and inquire fully of them about the essentials for liberation. I simply accept and entrust myself to what a good teacher told me, "Just say the Name, being liberated by Amida"; nothing else is involved.

—*Shinran*

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## Background: Pure Land Buddhism from India to the Modern Period

To understand the problems with the orientalist and occidentalist interpretations of Shin, some background knowledge of the history of Pure Land Buddhism is essential. [1]

Shin was a late product of the Pure Land mythos, an aspect of Buddhism which originated in ancient India as one of the early offshoots of the Mahāyāna movement. Unlike the early monastic tradition, which directed its mythic attention to the emulation of the renunciant life of Shakyamuni, Pure Land teaching directed its attention to the notion of karmic rebirth in another realm of consciousness called the Pure Land. The existence of such a karmic transit zone was described in Indian sūtras concerning Amitābha: the *Wu-liang-shou ching* (The Larger *Sukhāvatī-vyūha*) and the *A-mi-t'o ching* (Smaller

*Sukhāvatī-[amrta]vyūha)*, or *Amitābha-vyūha*). According to these sūtras, thanks to the presence of the Buddha Amitābha in that future temporary karmic zone, devotees "reborn" there would be able to make rapid progress and achieve eventual enlightenment. Although the issues were somewhat confused by early Western Buddhist studies, the visionary and devotional elements of Pure Land teaching were entirely in tune with normal Indian (and Tibetan) Buddhism and in general style were also eminently recognizable from the standpoint of the much larger tradition of Hindu bhakti. Indian Pure Land was probably mainly a monastic tradition; nevertheless, because the gist was that by relatively simple visionary and devotional practices any karmic beings could be reborn in the land of Amitābha, the structure of the Pure Land mythos was relatively public and egalitarian, supplying a way for people to affiliate themselves with Buddhism without necessarily taking a monastic path or even joining a specially initiated teaching lineage. Probably because of Indian social conditions, however—the need for social authority mediated through a monastic or a gurucentric religious authority structure, combined with the uncertain place Buddhism already held as a non-brahmanical school in India—Pure Land thought was never independently successful in India.

The primary development of Pure Land teachings occurred in China, where it was transferred with Indian monastic Buddhism in the early centuries of the Buddhist transmission from India. Pure Land became an important part of Chinese monastic practices after Lu-shan Hui-yüan (344–416), one of the most important of the early Chinese Buddhists. Chinese monastic practices were largely elaborated from an additional, non-Indian text called the *Kuan-ching* (Visualization Sūtra), which taught that while all might enjoy a vision of Amitābha on the deathbed, nine possible statuses of rebirth in the Pure Land existed ranging from very low to very high levels of understanding. Despite this elaborate monastic tradition, interpretive developments under the T'ang figures T'an-luan (476–542), Tao-ch'o (562–645), and his follower Shan-tao (613–81) created increased openings for popular practice by proposing that not only visualization of the Buddha and his Pure Land by religious specialists but even simple recitation of the Buddha's name by ordinary people (*nien-fo*) could result in rebirth (albeit at the lowest level) in the karmic transit zone. Such ideas about the possibility of simple practice became associated with theories (originally independent of Pure Land teaching) about the unavoidable decline of the monastic tradition (Latter Age of the Dharma, *mo-fa*) and, subsequently, although Pure Land leaders insisted on the primacy of continuing the kind of practice associated with monasticism, T'ang Pure Land teaching eventually denied the conventional legitimacy of monastic lineages. Gradually the idea of simple *nien-fo* opened up a widespread serious mass form of popular Buddhist practice which did not depend on either

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monastic lineage or practice to be sustained. Independent Pure Land teaching became one of the most widespread forms of Buddhist practice in northern China under the T'ang, was increasingly separate from monasteries in organization, and was reflected in a variety of popular forms of communication such as illustrations of Amitābha and the Western Paradise used in conjunction with preaching and entertainment. Like monastic practices, Pure Land was often syncretized with folk religion and ancestor religion; yet a more austere personal piety and the internalization of genuine Buddhist notions of nonself also entered into the lives of many followers, creating a significant divide between dedicated Pure Land practice and mainstream Chinese religion.

The wide dispersion of Pure Land practices beyond government control after the T'ang altered the political dialectics of Chinese Buddhism, and in the monastic tradition much effort was devoted to the attempt to synthesize Pure Land and Ch'an together under the rhetorical hegemony of Ch'an. The most eminent and typical of the monastic promoters of such "harmony" was Chu-hung (1535–1615), who argued that no significant differences existed among the various strains of Buddhist rhetoric because they were really all Ch'an. However, Chu-hung was also responsible for the promotion of an "orthodox" lay Buddhist movement tied to his monastery which focused on Pure Land practices of *nien-fo* and the observance of precepts in daily life. He realized that the most important audience for Buddhism in late imperial China was no longer in the monasteries because of widespread disillusionment and cynicism about the behavior of monks and because the sociopolitical situation of late imperial China ensured that the efforts of the most intelligent and competent members of society went into the examination system and the effort to achieve a post in government service. Yet below the highest elites and status levels existed a large number of people in mercantile, military, management, and other roles who, while not inclined to the monastery, were seriously interested in Buddhism.

Although official monks such as Chu-hung were reluctant to endorse independent lay Buddhist associations because of the political threat they presented, such Pure Land Buddhist groups became highly active anyway. Their institutional format in Sung, Yüan, and Ming periods was the voluntary lay society, later generically known under the rubric People of the Way or White Lotus Buddhism. Consisting of loose organizations of lay Buddhists reciting Amitābha's name, the social openness of the practice allowed such groups to combine class inclusiveness with individual religious self-determination. Despite the nonmonastic format, Pure Land commitment still entailed extensive devotional practice, occasional visionary experience (especially on the deathbed), the keeping of precepts, listening to preaching and lecturing, and copying sūtras. Lay groups also engaged in social work to acquire religious merit, such as supporting monasteries, building bridges

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or roads, and printing sūtras. Later records of the independent movements are preserved in a genre of literature called *pao-chüan* ("precious scrolls"). Actually, the political values of the independent groups were typically conservative: they declared their allegiance to the ruler and supported the "family values" of Confucianism, and indeed, since their goal of ultimate liberation involved this-worldly ethical devotion, manifested a dimension of cultural patriotism and even an acceptance of the emperor as a "living Buddha." Through the later imperial period the membership of independent groups continued to be drawn from middle to lower levels of Chinese society with corresponding prestige, wealth, and authority, and at the same time they often received high-level support from members of the government. Because of such networks, Pure Land was more important than monastic Buddhism even among the educated.

A later addition to the independent Pure Land phenomenon was voluntary societies—the Non-Action movements—basing themselves on the teaching of Lo-ching (Luo-qing) (1443–1527). Lo-ching, whose language was Ch'an-like but who was deeply influenced by Pure Land, sharply criticized the monastic Buddhist schools, including Ch'an; he simplified religious practice by eliminating all deliberate religious activities (vegetarianism, monasticism, invoking the name of the Buddha, meditation, good works, the maintenance of temples, belief in deities, belief in hell, moral repentance, any ritual, belief in good and evil, intellectual analysis, image worship, the monastic or lay precepts, and the belief in the superiority of the monastic order, as well as folk practices of sorcery, fortune-telling and exorcism), retaining only a kind of absolutely spontaneous pure introspection. Lo-ching seems to have been the only Chinese Buddhist teacher to totally reject conventional notions of mediated authority.

The hostility of Chinese imperial governments to independent Pure Land and Non-Action organizations meant that they were never able to attain an overtly high level of political or social influence, and later imperial government reporting became increasingly pejorative. However, despite such negative literati perceptions, occasional local government suppression, or loss of members from among the almost completely Confucianized later imperial governmental elites, the lay Buddhist movement seems to have reached its peak during the Ch'ing period (1644–1912), when laypeople formed large societies both independently and around Buddhist monasteries, and participated actively in the propagation of Buddhist teachings through writing and the patronage of printing and distribution of Buddhist literature.

Although eventually Shin in Japan would stand out far more clearly as a cultural phenomenon, the independent Pure Land movements in China approached Shin in their practical creation of a distinctive anti-establishment

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Buddhism. Direct parallels included a close connection with economic growth, a background of open political conditions which allowed for alternative religion, a membership concept of "neither monk nor lay," independent members' networks with methods of organization independent of traditional monasteries, a degree of unfriendliness to folk religion, a burden of suspicion from traditional elites and Buddhist monastic lineages, and conservative acceptance of the governing regimes by their members. Thus, even before Shin Buddhism emerged in Japan, independent Pure Land in China had already created a semantic field different from the one controlled by monastic Buddhism and its multifarious interests rooted in the classical ascetic model, such as magic, state control, and support of social hierarchy.

Buddhism was brought from China to Japan as part of a package of Buddhist monastic culture; as in China, the monastic program was supported in the early part of Japanese history by ruling aristocrats, who remained like the common folk primarily fascinated with the achievements of asceticism and its potential magical accomplishments. The central use of Buddhism among the ancient Japanese elites was to protect their private clan interests and thus the ruling regime as they understood it, and such a combination of political and thaumaturgical interest accounted for most of the Japanese interaction with Buddhism in the Nara and Heian periods, including the original sponsorship of Buddhism in the first Nara capital, Emperor Shōmu's construction of the Daibutsu, the *kokubunji* (regional prayer temple) system, and the imperial sponsorship of Kūkai's and Saichō's monastic centers at Mt. Kōya (Shingon) and Mt. Hiei (Tendai). The interlocking network of economic, administrative, personal, and political interests shared among the monastic institutions, the aristocratic elites, and the universe of merged *kami* (nature spirits) and Buddhas (together forming *honjisuijaku* religion) created a complex semantic field called *shinkoku* (Japan as land of the gods) which linked elements of national defense, monastic supernormal powers, and the aristocratic legal and political hegemony. Nevertheless, Japanese Buddhist institutions came to have a relatively free hand in comparison to China. Independent arrangements of religious power and patronage proliferated in the Heian and Kamakura capitals; Saichō strove at Mt. Hiei to create a lineage with maximum independence from the ruling regime. Eventually medieval Japanese religion became a highly dispersed system whose manifestations included the court, the cloistered emperor, the monastic systems at Hiei and Kōya, sites patronized by aristocratic families such as the Fujiwara, sites patronized by the military governments at Kamakura and Kyōto (which eventually sponsored their own kind of Buddhism in the form of Rinzai Zen), mountain ascetic Buddhism (*shugendō*), the new itinerant sects of the Kamakura period, and even independent entrepreneurial shrine and temple centers.

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As in China the specific Pure Land mythic forms and practices were initially embedded in the larger matrix of normal monastic practice, and it became common for monks in the Nara schools to study the Pure Land sūtras and to resort to Amitābha and the Pure Land as objects of meditation. Monastic Pure Land was introduced at Mt. Hiei by Saichō's successor Ennin (794–864), who had traveled to China; thereafter, *jōgyō zammai* (perpetual chanting meditation with a Pure Land reference) was an important Tendai custom, further promoted by Ryōgen (911–985), the reformist abbot of Tendai in the tenth century. In Japan as in China *mappō* (*mo-fa*) rhetoric and its skeptical assumptions about monasticism seem to have been pervasive from the late Heian period onwards. However, in Japan the sense of decadence and social chaos which fueled the Latter Dharma sensibility reflected the experiences of aristocratic elites and their patronage relationships with the *sangha* (the community of Buddhist monks) rather than the religious and social conditions of the majority of the population. Indeed, the loss of power felt by the Heian aristocrats was the consequence of positive economic growth and political energies building up in other parts of the country and the fragmentation and decentralization of all politics. The primary intellectual concerns of Japanese Buddhism came to involve not philosophical issues but questions about the institutionalization of authority. Tension about the authority over ordination to the monastic status had originated in the Heian period; it had grown as Japanese thinkers elaborated the Mahāyāna Buddhist discourse about spiritual egalitarianism, especially in the Tendai school. Mappō thought led to the conviction that if Buddhism were going to continue, a teaching somehow had to be found that was in accordance with the spiritual potential of the age. As in China the Pure Land mythos offered itself as one of the primary solutions.

Because the aristocratic elites had access to the more sophisticated resources of monastic Buddhism, they pioneered new possibilities in the popularization of Buddhism to lay people. The most important of these proselytizers to laymen was Genshin (942–1017), a student of Ryōgen's who left Mt. Hiei and established a small Amida temple near the base of the mountain where he began to instruct less well-connected aristocrats and commoners outside the usual patronage circles in quasi-monastic Pure Land teachings. Genshin capped this early phase of the monastic and lay Pure Land blending in his famous work *Ojōyōshū* ("Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land"), a work compiled specifically to serve the lay groups with which he was in contact. Yet the resources of Buddhism also gradually made their way into the larger inchoate world of the common people by way of a variety of entrepreneurial shamanic itinerants called *hijiri*. From the Kamakura period onwards economic development coupled with political decentralization helped such itinerants attract broad patronage to independent religious

centers linked in translocal networks. The Pure Land teachings which paved the way for Honganji had begun to be carried out widely into the general society by Kūya (903–72), but only very gradually did seriously internalized Buddhist ideas go into circulation for significant numbers of either aristocrats or nonaristocrats.

This normal East Asian Buddhist environment—in which a Pure Land teaching basically defined by monasticism was surrounded by a penumbra of lay, unofficial, less disciplined, and less conservative popular nonmonastic practices—suddenly began to change in Japan with the Heian innovators Hōnen and Shinran. Hōnen (1133–1212) was an orphan who entered the monastery at Mt. Hiei at the age of thirteen. There he came into contact with the new currents of Pure Land teaching. Hōnen's spiritual search is supposed to have involved multiple readings of the Buddhist canon until he settled on a passage from Shan-tao's commentary on the *Visualization Sūtra*. In 1175, at the age of forty-two, Hōnen came down from the mountain following the example of several of his predecessors and with the help of patrons established himself in the city of Kyoto, where his guidance in Pure Land teachings soon attracted attention from people of all social classes, including members of the warrior class and an aristocrat who was for a time the most powerful individual in the court. What Hōnen actually taught and at what stages of his life he taught it is an unresolved problem, but it is clear that Hōnen's circle gradually attracted the unfriendly attention of the large monastic establishments, especially Mt. Hiei, which submitted a petition to the emperor in 1204 which alleged dangerous antinomian and unconventional qualities in Hōnen's teaching. The court formally accepted monastic complaints; however, its members including the emperor were largely on Hōnen's side and did not act. Unfortunately two of Hōnen's popular teachers became involved in a scandal involving women in the emperor's palace in 1207, a personal breach of faith which broke the emperor's resistance against the ongoing pressure from the monastery leadership and caused him to take punitive action: four of Hōnen's disciples were executed, several disciples including Shinran were exiled, and Hōnen himself was exiled to remote Tosa on the island of Shikoku. The exile actually lasted only ten months before Hōnen's sympathizers at court obtained his pardon, but Hōnen died in 1212 shortly after he had been allowed to come back to the capital again to take up his residence. The anthology of scriptural quotations called the *Senjakushū*, which contained Hōnen's radical teachings, was blockprinted and distributed only after Hōnen's death.

Hōnen initiated radical change in East Asian Buddhism by rediscovering the possibility of independence from the monastic mythos, an independence which had been suggested earlier by Shan-tao. Unlike any earlier Asian Buddhist theoretician (with the exception of Lo-ching in later imperial China), Hōnen declared monastic practice completely illegitimate. For Hōnen, Shan-tao's practice

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of *senju nembutsu* (exclusive recitation of the Buddha's name) was the only possible remaining Buddhist practice: not only were the more complex monastic teachings strictly speaking unnecessary (at least to attain the lowest levels of the Pure Land), but indeed the more complex teachings were actually worthless because of the depth of Latter Dharma. Hōnen lopped off the whole quasi-monastic top of the tree of techniques which had been normative even in Pure Land teaching, leaving behind only the simplest and most minimal practice with the lowest expectations. At the same time, whereas previously Pure Land had been subsumed for practical purposes under monastic tradition despite doubts about the legitimacy of that tradition, Hōnen offered a polarizing challenge to the conventional monastic hegemony. The idea of the minimal practice pushed the necessity of monastic practice further to the side than it had ever been pushed before in Japan.

The success of these ideas was based partly on the charisma of the founder's personality, but the larger explanation lay in the background political circumstance: the existence of a sufficiently large audience which was eager to hear about a way which could allow it to escape the authority of the monasteries. Indeed, the stimulus of Latter Dharma led not to pessimism but rather to an era of strong new claims about the possibility of realizing enlightenment, which were combined with social demands for an open, egalitarian Buddhist teaching. The Lotus Sūtra teacher Nichiren asserted that the final Latter Dharma stage of Buddhist history was the ideal time to attain enlightenment, because the role the Lotus Sūtra and its superior authority would be allowed to come into play at that time. The Zen teacher Dōgen tried to bypass Latter Dharma by a redoubled emphasis on the direct enlightenment experience which could override the weaknesses of inherited authority and provide an independent base of authority through a revived independent monasticism. And in the two centuries after Hōnen's death Pure Land thinking also was in ferment, promulgated by a variety of small networks and independent wandering teachers claiming lineage authority from Hōnen and standing at every point on the spectrum between monastic-level traditional sophistication in orthodox Buddhism and crude magical popularization of the latest *nembutsu* practices.

Hōnen's follower Shinran (1173–1262) followed up Hōnen's radicalism with an even more creative version of Pure Land teaching. Shinran was born in 1173 into a marginal aristocratic family in Kyoto. At the age of eight Shinran was put in the Tendai monastery on Mt. Hiei, where he apparently began at the lowest level as an ordinary temple monk but spent a great deal of time studying. In the following twenty years, he developed an encyclopedic acquaintance with the primary sources used in Tendai tradition and independently began to turn to the Pure Land mythos as way of solving the Heian crisis of authority. At the age of

twenty-nine he sought visionary contact with a Buddhist deity (Shōtoku Taishi) and decided to leave Hiei and to become a follower of Hōnen. During the next several years he eventually received permission to copy texts, and at the age of thirty-one, while in Hōnen's community, had another visionary experience which suggested that he marry. Shinran subsequently became involved in the authority controversies surrounding the Hōnen group, and after the 1207 scandal, when the imperial court temporarily banned Jōdo teaching in the capital and exiled Hōnen, Shinran was obliged to travel to exile in the remote Echigo district. This exile removed him entirely from centers of traditional social and intellectual power in Japan, exposed him to the rising energies of the provinces, and turned his attention completely away from the social and political network of conventional Buddhism around the capital. Officially the exile was lifted after four years, but when Hōnen died in Kyoto shortly after his return, Shinran elected to stay in the provinces. In 1214 he migrated to the Kantō, the region north of modern Tokyo, where the inhabitants had probably already been exposed to Pure Land teaching by the activities of various itinerants. He probably made contact with aristocrats and small local elites. The basic outline or draft of his central doctrinal statement, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, was probably in place as early as 1224. In 1233, when he was sixty-one, Shinran moved from Kanto back to the capital, probably because the populist (and sometimes antinomian) implications of Pure Land teaching had begun to spread rapidly through some parts of provincial Kamakura society in the twenty years after Hōnen's death and had made themselves felt in resistance to the oppressions of the Kamakura agrarian legal system, resulting in local government suppressions of the teaching. Shinran stayed at his writing desk in Kyoto for the remaining twenty-nine or thirty years of his life, consolidating his own doctrinal and mythic views and completing a body of original written works. He also tried to control two main problems which emerged among his Kantō followers: the spread of teachings divergent from Shinran's own views but claiming his authority (claims about the special empowerment of individual teachers based on secret or hidden transmissions were typical of the rest of Japanese Buddhism, including other versions of Pure Land, but were rejected by Shinran) and the antinomian reputations of various followers. Shinran died in 1262 at the advanced age of ninety.

Shinran's thinking went considerably beyond Hōnen's. His ideas were based on a rediscovery not only of Shan-tao's independent recitation practice, but also of the traditional Buddhist understanding that in the final analysis enlightenment can only happen by itself. Out of this latter insight into the ineluctable spontaneity of the spiritual transformation, he created a minimalist doctrine whose goals were equivalent to the goals of monastic Buddhism philosophically, but which also completely eliminated conventionally authorized renunciation as

the focus of practice. The focus was located instead in a community of equal members, distant from monasticism, initiation, state support, and *kami* religion alike, which attended instead to a notion of authority called *tariki* (the "other power" of the Buddha).

Shinran's thinking contained three conceptual clusters: enlightenment as *ekō* ("turning of merit"), the idea of Buddhist practice as *akunin shōki* (the ignorant person is the object) awareness, and the institutional transcendence of the lay-monk polarity in the *hisō hizoku* (neither monk nor lay) principle. The *ekō* ("turning of merit") cluster was fundamental. Shinran's basic insight was that enlightenment had to happen by some process coming as it were from "outside" the ego. The term *ekō* contained two meanings: the spontaneous religious transformation he called absolute "yielding" or "entrusting" (*shinjin*) toward the reality of the Amida Buddha, and the redefinition and revalorization of the concepts "Amida" or "Pure Land" and "entrusting" so that they meant perfect enlightenment and basic partial enlightenment respectively. The linkage between these two aspects of *ekō* was in the uncontrollability of the fundamental relaxation of "normal" human ego effort. *Shinjin* was a reliance on "that power" (*tariki*), technically a reference to the power of the Eighteenth Vow of Amida laid out in the Larger Pure Land Sūtra as interpreted idiosyncratically by Shinran. In one sense the vow as understood by Shinran was the declaration of a logical tautology, asserting that the only condition for perfect enlightenment after death (i. e., "rebirth in the Pure Land with Amida") was a basic enlightenment experience in life; in another, more powerful sense, the power of the vow also lay in the suggestion that the Buddha quite independently of human institutions had a certain dynamic energy, an ability to transfer merit (*parināma*), a spontaneous working to effect enlightenment in human minds.[2] Thus *ekō* involved the notion of perfect enlightenment provisionally conceived of as a quality of active agency initially distinct from ordinary consciousness. Most importantly, in Shinran's thinking the working of the Amida Buddha did not involve monasticism, meditation, texts, other Buddhist deities, and any ritual practices understood as able to cause enlightenment intentionally; all of these miscellaneous practices were lumped together under the classification of self-power (*jiriki*), for Shinran's *ekō* involved giving up the idea that intentional practices in the final analysis had instrumental value. The ritual practice of *nembutsu* was redefined and revalorized by Shinran, becoming no more (but no less) than the expression of thanksgiving that the deity of Amida Buddha was constantly engaged in bringing about transformation toward enlightenment, even in the course of ordinary activities.

Despite a certain unconventionality in its formulation, Shinran's *ekō* concept was simply a restatement of the traditional Mahāyāna dialectic of the interrelationship and overlap between the realms of enlightenment and ignorance.

Shinran's thought, like all Mahāyāna thought, expressed the ultimate identity of opposites combined with the paradoxical transformation of those opposites into one another; the *shinjin* state was merely another term for the realization of this traditional Mahāyāna dual simultaneous *saṃsāra*-and-*nirvāṇa* position. In addition Shinran's idea of *ekō*, although it had no specific precedent in conventional Pure Land interpretation, was but a recapitulation in the Pure Land rhetorical context of one of the most ancient problems of Indian thought, that of the "leap" to enlightenment. The most important Indian traditions—including Nāgārjuna and bhakti schools—were all leap philosophies because their theories ultimately admitted of no formal causal relationship between the state of ignorance and the state of enlightenment. Indeed, the idea that the fruit of enlightenment at the end of the path of practice must be "instantaneously," that is, noncausally, realized, was a universal underlying assumption in Indian Buddhism. The "dualistic" approach to this situation which Shinran adopted worked more lucidly than the conventional monistic approaches because by (provisionally) situating "enlightenment" and "human ignorance" as separate spheres the logical problems of self-reference which monism entailed were eliminated.

Without the usual quasi-monastic renunciant and visionary practices, practice for Shinran consisted instead of the recognition of the bipolarity of the states of ignorance and enlightenment in everyday life, that is, the push and pull of human ignorance and "Amida's light." This was the *akunin shōki* cluster of ideas; the "evil person" (*akunin*), defined according to Shinran's dyadic pattern, was inherently the true object (*shōki*) of the activity of the Amida. Shinran's rhetoric of the power of the vow and the final "leap" to basic satori concealed a definite disciplinary regime, although it was distinctively nonmonastic and mundane. Rather than on precepts, visualization, or meditation, Shinran's approach relied on intense critical introspective study of the operations of the ego in ordinary daily life and eventually a recognition of the dyadic relationship between the suffering produced by these ego operations and the liberation produced by the intervention by the Amida, from "outside" as it were, into the ordinary ego frame. Since *akunin shōki* represented a particular kind of sophisticated mythic approach, the language of self-abnegation and monastic "inability" had a strongly rhetorical quality in Shinran, constituting a structural feature of Shinran's bipolar mythic conception.

However, Shinran's idea of *ekō* and practice as *akunin shōki* recognition meant the denial of the ultimate meaningfulness of the monk-lay categories in the obtaining of enlightenment; this was the idea of *hisō hizoku* (neither monk nor lay). Conventional Buddhism already implicitly agreed that enlightenment involved a "leap" whose exact karmic preconditions were not precisely knowable, but conventional Buddhism had generally accepted without question the mythic

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models of monasticism or the charismatic teacher in a legitimating lineage. Indeed, classical monastic Buddhism tended to presuppose a necessary homology between its experiential and institutional dichotomies, so that the experiential dichotomy between wisdom and ignorance must be correlated with the institutional distinction between monk and lay. Shinran's doctrine rejected the institutional dichotomy while preserving the experiential one. Nevertheless, although not defined by the mythic figure of the monk and by the monastic institution, Shinran's Buddhism was defined by adherence to a largely traditional sensibility about Buddhism which was still to be embodied in a community of followers and in a teaching leadership. Yet instead of monastic lineage the working social principle became equal followership (*dōbō*), which replaced the kinds of hierarchy presumed in traditional forms of Buddhist institutionalization (a principle not essentially compromised by the later existence of a hereditary caretaker clergy). The model for a Buddhist community which emerged from Shinran's thought was so different from the models of monastic Buddhism that it initiated an entirely different politics. First, putting enlightenment theoretically beyond the control of any specific teacher or any specific instrumental practices created a flexible inclusivity; to sustain the tradition, followers only had to agree on the *tariki* principle and on the authority claim of the Honganji leadership to maintain the proper teaching about that decentralization of power. Second, the *hisō hizoku* principle meant the denial or marginalization of the entire semantic field associated with either asceticism in the traditional Buddhist institutions or guru-disciple patterns in shamanic Buddhism, that is, conventional magic and thaumaturgy, including merit transfer from monks to ancestors. This denial included the uses of magic and thaumaturgy by states, aristocrats, or power structures for private purposes, and by further extension a denial of the use of Buddhism by the state as an instrument of political control over the people.

The three interlocking clusters of ideas in Shinran's thought were accompanied by a stylistic shift in the presentation of Buddhism, toward a simplification of ritual, text, and iconography. Nevertheless, Shinran's thinking shared the general features of Mahāyāna tradition with the monastic schools—philosophy, ritual, chanting and music, architecture, textual study, moral seriousness (even if the formal attitude toward the precepts was different), interest in education and karma theory—and what became striking was not how much the tradition deriving from Shinran would differ from other kinds of Buddhism but how much it would parallel them.

Even without a sophisticated understanding of Buddhist emptiness philosophy on the part of a hearer, Shinran's rhetoric inculcated strong emotional, ethical, and political ideas: the *ekō* concept yielded a mood of universal hope and, for lack of a better word, "piety"; the practice of *akuninshōki* awareness

taught humility and self-criticism; and *hisō hizoku* gestured toward an absolute idea of underlying human spiritual equality. These emotional, ethical, and political ideas together constituted a powerful new ethical and moral field, a field which transcended the old hierarchical concept of Buddhist ethics as a gradual progress to rebirth as monk after many karmic cycles. Unlike Hōnen or Nichiren, Shinran did not attack the traditional mythos of Buddhism so much as simply bypass and ignore it in favor of a new independent approach. Criticism of monasticism would be implicit whenever Shin preached the *tariki* principle, but Shin (like Nichiren) had such an independent, self-sustaining mythos of its own that its propositions did not depend on, and were ultimately not defined by, the contrasts with monasticism. Ultimately, although Shinran's thought still showed certain ties to the archaic semantic field of traditional Buddhism, the replacement of the renunciant principle with the *tariki* principle in Shinran's theory was a watershed, dividing Shinshū from every other form of premodern Asian Buddhism with the exception of Lo-ching's unstable tradition in China.

Like the other Kamakura reformers Shinran had little impact on the Japanese population as a whole in his lifetime. Popular Buddhism insofar as it existed in the thirteenth century consisted almost entirely of networks of contacts with cult sites created by itinerant figures, and the new Kamakura ideas spread slowly. When Shinran died in 1262, most of his several thousand followers were still in the Kantō region of eastern Japan where he had spent most of his life after his exile; during the following centuries the membership areas gradually tended to spread westward toward the capital. Shin membership was socially diverse from the beginning: the original followers included a mix of regional military government officials, local cultivator-warriors, and merchant-traders participating in an early phase of the money economy. Although ideologically the relationship between Shin and economics was indirect (Hōnen had little to say explicitly about economics, Shinran also very little), a main social point was addressed by the teaching of radical spiritual nondiscrimination. Thus emerged a strong elective affinity between Shin and the freer, more energetic elements of the population which had the most to gain from economic and political growth. Shin was destined to become the largest Japanese Buddhist tradition because of this fundamental relationship with both the entrepreneurial agrarian and the commercial sectors of the population.

Numerically, most Honganji members lived in progressive sectors of medieval agrarian society, which was the product of the decline of the private aristocratic estate as the central aristocratic establishments of Kyoto kept losing traditional rights and privileges to regional warriors and local cultivators. Linked with increased agricultural productivity based on intensified cultivation, collective social organization at the village level expanded because of the demands of the new

agriculture for improved organization, because the nominal central proprietors of the land in practice grew more and more remote, and because increasing expectations and energies led to conflicts with neighboring communities or government authorities which required collective solidarity. The Shin membership also drew from the nonagricultural sector comprising trade and handicraft traditions. Increases in both agricultural and handicraft productivity in medieval Japan allowed the opening of many provincial markets (often in conjunction with the temples or shrines which served as regional gathering places) and the involvement of villages early in trade because the more important local cultivators became engaged in shipment of products to the capital. Late medieval Japan became the period of commoner ascendancy. Commoners were free to move about (within the constraints of the system of taxes and work obligations), to possess weapons, and to own marketed and imported goods. In this way farmers, traders, and artisans created a new legal and political sphere of property and commercial transactions from the thirteenth century onwards.

For such medieval cultivators and traders Shinran's ideas about *tariki* provided a basis for independent moral communities of equal members. Indeed, the salient organizational feature of Shin Buddhism shortly after the death of Shinran was a fragmentation of his followers into a number of small local groups or lineages, illustrating the extent to which issues of local autonomy and authority were central to nonmonastic Kamakura Buddhism. The local *dōjō* (meeting hall) with its associated *kō* (voluntary religious confraternities) was the primary form of religious organization. The *dōjō* operated on the basis of a set of principles somewhat different from those of monasteries: besides nonmonasticism, its keynote was a high level of completely local, independent self-governance and self-organization among congregants who made decisions together and paid for the maintenance of the hall together. Members gradually evolved lists of congregational rules (*okite*) to govern their conduct. They often lived over wide geographical areas and were brought together by meetings at the *dōjō* and by the work of traveling priests; they came from nonsamurai, nonelite occupations; and the *dōjō* head was often married and the wife played an almost equally important role. Financial contributions were at first voluntary and then became a requirement for membership, but the practice of direct support by members meant that Shin stood on a quite different financial base than the monasteries, which depended on estates provided by various patronizing governmental regimes.

Few of the early members were properly educated in Buddhism, and the initial receptions of *tariki* doctrines in the thirteenth century diverged widely from Shinran's intent. The Honganji temple tradition led by Shinran's grandson Kakunyo turned out to be the most faithful to the original rigor of Shinran's ideas, and its eventual mainstream tradition of Shin Buddhism was based on a merger

between the specific leadership family of the Honganji and the preservation of Shinran's intellectual tradition; this merger became hegemonic after Rennyo in the fifteenth century, when it was agreed by the largest number of followers that Honganji best guarded Shinran's teaching, best certified the correct replication of Shinran's language among the followers, and best maintained a ritual program. The physical basis of the Honganji institution was the ownership and guardianship of the site (the Otani *honbyō*) where Shinran's remains were enshrined. Kakunyo's family secured a strong legal title to the site and turned it into a temple formally recognized by the Kyoto authorities. Even though the institution of Honganji happened to make use of father-son legal inheritance to convey headship, the idea of "blood succession" in the Honganji tradition was not primarily genetic but was a continuation of an ordinary monastic concept (a conventional metaphor in Chinese monastic Buddhism) referring to the transmission of traditions from teacher to a disciple.

Kakunyo (1270–1351) and his son Zonkaku (1290–1373) consolidated the Honganji organizational paradigm around small local groups of nonmonastic followers, local leadership and proselytization by trading and merchant classes, central hereditary leadership by the Honganji family, a religious teaching based on the works of Shinran, and emphasis on the equal enlightenment of women and men. A distinctive religious program was evolved featuring a simplified Pure Land symbology (especially aniconic Pure Land symbols) and a hagiographic literature featuring Shinran, who by the fourteenth century was already becoming a mythic character. Instead of meditation, preaching had an essential role in the Shin tradition because the basic operation of *tariki* was not based on meditation but on a spiritual openness to the working of Amida, which was metaphorized as "hearing" the Dharma (*monbō*) and was conveyed through speech about the existential circumstance of *akunin shōki*. Of great future political importance was the developing background understanding that the cultivator and trader community of Shin Buddhism (*buppō*) was distinct from from yet complementary to the civil military regime (*ōbō*). This theoretical posture toward the government was intrinsically unconventional because a traditional conception of *ōbō* (the king's secular government) and *buppō* (the Buddhist monasteries and their practices) was still current throughout the medieval period to refer to the different spheres of responsibility of the imperial government and the Buddhist monastic institutions; rhetorically they were still expected to support each other and, as in normative Indian Buddhist political theory, to define each other. Shinran's doctrine replaced the monastic versus lay dichotomy with a dichotomy based on *tariki shinjin* which was institutionally undivided in the same way: rather than separate physical institutions, ignorance and enlightenment were two complementary dimensions of experience within a unitary nonmonastic body.

In its totality, the Honganji tradition became a new "textual community," in which the teachings of Shinran and the literacy which was connected to those texts created a new informational system in medieval Japan. It was partly an oral culture, but the orality was governed by a special literacy linked to a special social mobility and associated with religious diversification, reform, and critical opposition to mainstream or conventional discourse. The Honganji reenvisioning of Buddhism was a synthetic, multidimensional transformation, creating new kinds of exchange and communication across several social, economic, and cultural fields, redrawing the old boundaries and clusters of interests presupposed in the Buddhist world.

However, Shinran's ideas were politically centuries ahead of their time, and because medieval Japanese religion was intensely entrepreneurial, Shinran's teaching and its institutionalization in the Honganji family lineage was not initially competitive with other kinds of popularized or populist Buddhist teachings. Shin appealed most to nonaristocratic, but also nonsamurai elites with a strong consciousness of political autonomy, and it took time for this dimension of Japanese society to expand. For several generations after Kakunyo the Honganji program was latent; unable to find a large audience, it underwent only halting expansion for two centuries after 1262. Eventually, however, Shin tradition began to flourish in tandem with the accelerated economic growth of the late fifteenth century and the relaxation of the early medieval legal regime which had loosened in the wake of fifteenth-century civil wars among the military regime's leading families. Ever-increasing local private control accelerated the social diversification which had already emerged under the primitive conditions of the early estate, and by the mid-fourteenth century village communities in advanced areas included a great variety of managers, landlords, and tenants, many with dual owner/cultivator status. Economic growth promoted stratification but also allowed social mobility and new freedom of entrepreneurial initiative for the more powerful cultivators. The consolidation of village (*sonraku*) organization accelerated; this shift, the most prominent transformation in the fifteenth and sixteenth century countryside, further reinforced the political independence of the diversified cultivator society. By the late fifteenth century the combined pressures of internal agrarian economic growth, rising expectations, the breakdown of policing and political allegiances in the old imperial-aristocratic-military government system, and increasingly aggressive local tax exploitation by independent regional warriors, all made the village level of social and political organization increasingly militant. Villagers were pushed into actively self-defensive positions to maintain or increase their privileges; in some areas, this resulted in armed autonomous villages (*sō*) by the sixteenth century, which were the extreme of the unstable but in many respects viable decentralized political order of late medieval Japan.

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Honganji was roused from its latency to take advantage of the new conditions under the leadership of Rennyo (1415–99), the eighth lineal head of the Honganji. When Rennyo was born in 1415, the various groups which had developed from Shinran were scattered across Japan in various regions north of Kyoto. Many were working with teachings influenced by *kami* religion; a handful were in the orthodox Honganji intellectual tradition which followed Shinran most closely; most were poorly linked by any center. After Rennyo became Honganji head in 1457, he immediately launched into recruitment for new Honganji members and affiliates in the province of Ōmi to the east of Kyoto, where his initial successes took place in the trading and merchant communities. Among these groups Rennyo practiced on a larger scale the kinds of communications that had been practiced by his predecessors, giving out scriptures and inscriptions, making personal preaching appearances, and composing new texts. Rennyo also during this period began to write preaching or pastoral letters (*ofumi*), a technique pioneered by Shinran. In just a few years the new affiliations had irritated the regnant monastic powers on Mt. Hiei so much that in early 1465 they descended from the mountain and smashed the old Honganji headquarters at Ōtani, causing Rennyo to flee for safety. While the destruction of Ōtani by Mt. Hiei's armed thugs was dramatic, from the larger sociopolitical perspective it was an indication of how strong the appeal of Shin teaching was becoming and how much the tides of change were beginning to run against the old order. For the next four years Rennyo moved from place to place under the constant threat of Mt. Hiei but making new friends and allies; in 1471 he decided to move to a site called Yoshizaki further to the north in Echizen province on the coastal road. From this base he began to make preaching tours to Shin-affiliated temples and his presence initiated a great upwelling of popular religious enthusiasm which resulted in the Yoshizaki site's becoming a major pilgrimage center. Afterwards none of the older Buddhist institutions could threaten his new plans, so Rennyo moved back to the Kyoto region safely in 1475, where a new complex of buildings was completed in 1483, manifesting the support of members who were prosperous, aggressive, and intensely committed to the Honganji organization. After Rennyo officially gave up the role of head priest to his son Jitsunyo in 1489, he moved some distance away to a small dwelling on a site which later became the Ishiyama temple headquarters and the foundation of the city of Ōsaka, where he died in 1499.

Rennyo's leadership was a turning point in the success of Shinran's ideas and of the Honganji institution in Japanese society. Rennyo flourished because he was able to deliver his sharply focused politicized teaching to a suddenly enlarged body of interested persons. The shift in Japanese society manifested in these late-fifteenth-century audiences was so fundamental and permanent that Rennyo's restatement of the orthodox Honganji program was effective throughout the whole

subsequent premodern period from the 1460s up until the 1870s. However, almost everything Rennyo did both methodologically and intellectually had a prior precedent, and Shin in the sixteenth century was essentially a major expansion of the early paradigmatic Honganji patterns. A primary element of Rennyo's religious program was the pastoral letters which Rennyo used to follow up his preaching visits; the letters reformulated Shinran's doctrines in as plain and understandable a way as possible, stylistically developing a teaching language which combined folksiness, story, and indoctrination in an appealing blend. Rennyo confirmed a ritual cycle that placed special emphasis on the *Hōonkō* (ritual meeting in memory of Shinran), which became the most important ritual of the Honganji. He encouraged the use of Shinran's vernacular Japanese verses as the most popular liturgical pieces for chanting and standardized the form of *nembutsu* inscription that was used as the main symbolic object in the *dōjō*. Rennyo also restated the earlier Shin position on women's equal potential for enlightenment, expanded and clarified Zonkaku's idea that economic occupation was irrelevant to the religion of the Honganji, and encouraged the formation of *kō* linked to Honganji leadership.

Rennyo's career ended in 1499 but marked only the beginning of Shin success: its continuing growth in the sixteenth century secured the place of the institution in Japanese culture. The membership of the Honganji continued to include a spectrum of medieval Japanese society ranging from the high but nonaristocratic and nonsamurai elites down to the lowest peasants; the majority of local leadership in Shin temples consisted of local samurai or farmers, often with nonordained status. The development of these membership interests coincided not only with the major growth in the Japanese economy that accompanied the wars of the sixteenth century which eventually led to the reunification of Japan under the Tokugawa military government, but also with major growth in the size of the Japanese population. In agarian areas the interests of various parts of Honganji society came together in the *ad hoc* organizations called *ikkō-ikki*, which united the interests of local peasants, warriors, traders, and regional magnates in provinces where other kinds of authority had become weak. Meanwhile the growing commercial life created a variety of new sixteenth-century urban and quasi-urban settlements. These included not only the castle towns of the warlords and ports, but also economically and politically dynamic networks in a number of sixteenth-century provinces, where the interests of all the sectors of Honganji society—village dwellers, traders, migrant laborers, *ikkō-ikki,* and religious leadership—came together in *jinaichō* (Honganji temple trade centers). *Jinaichō* were private, independent, fortified trade and commercial settlements possessing a true urban character; closely related to the emergence of markets in general, they formed around the nuclei of certain local temples and were administered under

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temple policing authority. In its heyday around 1570 the *jinaichō* around the Ishiyama Honganji, headquarters of the Shin organization and foundation of Ōsaka, was the most economically vigorous single location in Japan.

The leadership which directed this vigorous network of *kō, jinaichō,* and *ikkō-ikki* combined the large, miscellaneous body of local leaders at middle and lower levels with a small kin-based religious, educational, and administrative leadership at the top based on the lineage of Rennyo. Rennyo was able to create a more complex religious leadership network than before in the late fifteenth century because the growing membership looked to Honganji to provide ministerial personnel and because Rennyo succeeded in fathering twenty-seven children with five successive wives over an extended period of time. Rennyo placed his numerous children (both male and female) in regional temples in order to extend Honganji authority). The *ikkeshū* ("one lineage group," the important male descendants) were the educational and ritual backbone of the sixteenth-century institution: its members were specially charged with the teaching, ritual performance, and propagation of the tradition. In nonreligious matters they served as Honganji's regional representatives and diplomats to *daimyō,* aristocrats, and the court, were responsible for the encouragement of donations and membership fees to Honganji, and were called into council (sometimes from all corners of the temple network) on occasions requiring collective deliberation.

The aristocratic Shin leadership derived some of its prestige from associations with the court. Honganji gave financial assistance to the accessions of emperors in 1521 and 1536, and as Honganji status went up in the sixteenth century, the Honganji aristocratic leaders (specially recognized by the imperial court) assimilated status practices, especially clothing and titles, associated with the monastic traditions.

Nevertheless, although Honganji had a hereditary "kingship" at the top, the organization and the religious phenomenon were essentially driven by the general membership's interests, commitments, and, above all, willingness to pay. The leadership worked hard to address its public. Like the itinerant networks, Honganji supported a systematic proselytizing program which worked both to start new local organizations from scratch and to capture preexisting organizations into the membership. Preachers representing Honganji circulated in the countryside of Japan spreading the message wherever permitted. When interest was aroused, a Honganji meeting hall would be constructed or an older temple would be converted to the uses of the new group of followers. Provided with Honganji contacts and guided by local cultivator or warrior leaders, local *kō* and autonomous *sō* villages often converted *en masse* to Honganji. Honganji local leaders were usually the most literate and wealthiest members of their communities; many even worked full time as Honganji proselytizers, and Honganji affiliation helped

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the power of such local elites to flourish in both religious and economic ways. Contrasting sharply with the esoteric approaches of Shingon, Tendai, Zen, or *shugendō* traditions, Shin was anti-esoteric in its logic, its rituals, and its rhetoric and thus tried to make its material public and universally accessible (including by the use of printing), while simultaneously maintaining at the intellectual center a conventional Mahāyānist philosophy. Honganji offered a comprehensive religious program which tended to replace the Japanese *kami* religion with another effective popular culture, a new synthesis of elite Buddhist and folk interests. While some features of folk life were compatible with Shin, including a degree of ancestor religion, *kami* religion and acceptance of charismatic authority, Shin's political goals of *dōbō* and universal compassion also meant that it suppressed features of *kami* religion which alienated the social vision, such as pollution-purity beliefs, victimization by curses, and demonic possession. Over the centuries Shin had a significant effect on Japanese society in suppressing superstition, and the sophisticated personal Buddhist dimension also gradually became stronger.

Thus the Shin culture linked the richest sixteenth-century Japanese elites in an organization that supported strong moral values, spiritual egalitarianism, and independent cultural prestige. It also reflected other cultural interests. The sixteenth century was a period of a rapidly increasing public dispersion of classical ideals and aesthetic and religious modes which had a couple of centuries earlier been relatively confined to the aristocratic classes of Kyoto. Thus the Honganji leadership mediated high culture to their *nouveau riche,* recently "bourgeois" military and merchant membership who formed the new class of patrons. Honganji was most conspicuous in the sponsorship of *nō* theater and tea ceremony.

Because they represented such an important part of the sixteenth century Japanese population, the militarized regional membership groups called *ikkō-ikki* became major forces in the secular politics of the century. When the secular sphere of authority became weak—losing its legitimating persuasiveness or its policing power—the Honganji vision of Buddhist society (and its special religious commitments) easily had the capacity to overrun the boundaries of civil order and command substitutes for that authority. Such activity was not religiously edifying, but showed in the sharpest way how much the urge to autonomy and independent authority fueled the Shin movement. Involving even the Honganji headquarters, episodes of violent conflict driven by the feudal contests for power flared in 1506 and for a period beginning in 1531. In particular, the events of 1531 confirmed Honganji's unique governmental role in the province of Kaga, where it served as the legal administrator of civil law, collecting provincial taxes, defending conventional land law, and maintaining peace. Even outside of Kaga, by the later sixteenth century the influence of the Honganji was so powerful that the institution was treated as a *daimyō* or warlord.

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