

Introduction

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Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism explores a field of inquiry that might be called the “theological” or “dharmological” construal of the Buddhist path: the articulation of a reflective self-understanding of a living Buddhist tradition that is intelligible within, and illuminating of, our contemporary life. In this volume, three Buddhists present proposals for creatively reinterpreting a Buddhist tradition in order to elucidate its enduring transformative power and to overcome critical inadequacies in the established formulations—failures to interpret traditional narratives and concepts in a manner now cogent and healing, or to treat significant issues arising from our present understanding of the world and human existence within it. These proposals, developed with recognition of the plurality of religious traditions and worldviews in interaction today, also inherently seek to provide frameworks for comparative considerations.

This book focuses on the Pure Land tradition, which radically developed the Mahayana Buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva, the being of wisdom-compassion who aspires to ferry all living things floundering in painful existence to the other shore of awakening before departing from the ocean of birth-and-death him or herself. According to the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, the bodhisattva Dharmakara (Dharmākara)

vowed to bring all beings to liberation by enabling them to be born in a realm pervaded by the virtues of his own enlightenment.¹ To fulfill those Vows, he performed practices for countless aeons, finally attaining enlightenment as Amida Buddha and establishing a Buddha realm known as the Pure Land or the Land of Bliss. Although Pure Land Buddhism grew out of contemplative practices focusing on the features of the Buddha and the Buddha land, among the primal or originary Vows of Amida is one to bring to birth in the Pure Land all beings who say Amida Buddha's Name, "Namu-amida-butsu," with sincere trust. This Vow gradually came to be viewed as the core of the Pure Land path, and Buddhist schools advocating single practice of nembutsu, or verbal utterance of the Name of Amida Buddha, reached full and independent development in Japan.

This volume treats in particular the Shin Buddhist tradition established by the medieval Japanese religious leader Shinran (1173–1263). Shin Buddhism (*Jōdo Shinshū*) is the preeminent model of a Buddhist path that, while grounding itself in basic Mahayana conceptions of wisdom, does not uphold a monastic ideal, but instead teaches a fully reasoned and articulated way to awakening that is accomplished while carrying on life in society. It has elaborated its position in a long scholastic tradition and evolved into a formidable ecclesiastical organization. Since the fifteenth century Shin has been one of the most influential Buddhist schools in Japan. At present its two major branches, the Nishi (West) and Higashi (East) Honganji temple systems, together constitute the largest Buddhist congregation in Japan and, in size and wealth, one of the foremost Buddhist movements in the world.

Despite its significant doctrinal and institutional evolution, Shin Buddhism has attracted disproportionately little interest in the West, but the reasons for this neglect may be precisely those that might animate our present "theological" concern. From a Western perspective, a number of elements of the Shin path—the focus on a single, universal Buddha, the centrality of a conception of "faith," the deep self-reflection and self-awareness of evil—have often seemed closer to strains of Western religious thought than to monastic Buddhism. Thus, the Shin Buddhist tradition has commonly been perceived in the West as a kind of debased religious practice, branching off from Mahayana Buddhist teachings of rigorous psychological cultivation but evolving an incongruously monotheistic or salvation-oriented outlook. Its institutional strength has been viewed as the result of a "popularization"

as a “lay Buddhism” that has severed it from its Buddhist roots. By the same token, its doctrinal elaboration has seemed to researchers an “elitist” enterprise, far removed from the actuality of the simple piety of the ordinary lay faithful. Perhaps it is chiefly for such reasons that treatments of Shin thought by Western scholars have been scarce, and have tended to regard it, whether negatively or positively, as a marginal form of Buddhism.

Viewed without the preconceptions of Buddhism as essentially monastic and meditative, however, Shin may be seen as a remarkable achievement in the history of Buddhist tradition: the transformative path of Mahayana Buddhism transposed, on the basis of fundamental Mahayana insights, from a monastic setting into the context of ordinary life in society. Here, similarities in conceptual structure offer an opportunity for the close comparison of Mahayana Buddhist tradition with other world religions, and for highlighting the potential resources for contemporary religious thought offered by Japanese Pure Land Buddhism.

Regarding the specific aims of this book, however, it may be asked why there should be need to develop a new branch of Buddhist study under the non-traditional term *Buddhist theology* or *dharmology*. Further, why should Shin Buddhism be in need of such development—particularly in the partially comparative form taken in this book—when it already possesses a highly sophisticated tradition of scholastic study that has been maintained for nearly eight centuries, and that is itself based on lineages of texts and commentaries extending back to India at the beginning of the common era. The authors of this volume amplify their own individual views on these questions. Here, I will offer some general observations by way of introduction.

The Need for a Buddhist “Theology”

The call for theological approaches in the study of Buddhism may be viewed both as an issue of Buddhist studies as an academic discipline and as a problem within particular traditions such as Shin. The general problem has been tersely stated over twenty years ago in an address to Japanese scholars by Yoshifumi Ueda, at the time one of the world’s leading Buddhologists:

Buddhist tradition is taken as an object of study in a number of academic fields, including history, anthropology, psychology, philosophy,

art, sociology, religion, and literature, but surely these cannot all be viewed as disciplines directed to probing its essential nature. If there is indeed a discipline that may be called Buddhist studies in this sense—not merely because it takes Buddhist tradition as an object—then there must be a methodology that distinguishes it from other fields treating Buddhism.²

Ueda was particularly concerned that rationalist philological research would overstep its methodological limitations and impose inappropriate standards of logic in establishing and interpreting texts. He called, therefore, for approaches that would treat the often paradoxical statements regarding practice and realization in Mahayana texts.

Notable differences exist in the conditions and histories of Buddhist studies in Japan and the West, and significant developments have been achieved since the time of Ueda's address. His apprehension about the dominance of philological study now seems less urgent, and his own textually based philosophical research has also come to appear partial. In addition, the presupposition of a Buddhist "essence" invites questions. Nevertheless, the central issue Ueda raises remains pertinent. If, in addition to existing disciplines that also treat Buddhist tradition, it is useful and appropriate to have a branch of learning termed "Buddhist studies," what are the questions it must ask and the methods by which it illuminates them? One approach that, drawing on textual and historical research in Buddhist studies, may provide means for formulating and treating issues of the kind indicated by Ueda is the "theological." It is the attempt to articulate the intellectual self-understanding of persons as Buddhist, and while standing within Buddhist tradition, seeks the development of the tradition through efforts to respond to contemporary concerns and to critically utilize contemporary thought.

Further, viewing various forms of sectarian Buddhism in Japan at present, it may be said that despite long and continuous scholastic traditions of scriptural and doctrinal study, formulations of religious life in the contemporary context have not been adequately developed. There are diverse reasons—historical, doctrinal, and institutional—for the general failure of the traditional temples to respond effectively to issues of modern life, but for the most part expressions of the teachings remain couched in terms and phrases codified in the Tokugawa period. Although needs and life patterns have changed, it is the exception rather than the rule to find religious engagement conceived of as

personal and individual rather than familial and communal, as elucidating concerns of the present rather than promises of the future, and as providing orientation in practical life rather than in mortuary rituals for the repose of ancestors. While social custom may sustain ritual or communal forms of participation in temple functions, there is a widely felt and little answered demand for a fuller, intellectual understanding of one's daily existence as possessing a religious dimension.

Another pressing issue is the role of Buddhism in society and the moral conduct of persons as Buddhists. Since almost all forms of Buddhist tradition have been centered in monastic life, with the practicing monk as the religious ideal, rules governing the communal life of monks and nuns have been elaborated as a cardinal component of the teaching, but life in society as itself an arena of Buddhist cultivation has in general not been developed. Partly for this reason, Buddhism has been highly accommodating of native traditions of cultures into which it was introduced, such as Confucianism and Shinto, which provided ritual cohesiveness in social life and fulfilled popular needs in ways deemed supportive of the Buddhist path.

To provide some historical context for the discussions in this volume, and to indicate perceptions of significant concerns within the tradition, I will touch on the handling of these two basic issues—the character of religious existence and the relation of religion to social life—in premodern and modern Shin scholastics. As preliminary background, I will first mention two basic questions that have traditionally arisen for practitioners within the Shin Buddhist path.

Basic Questions of the Shin Buddhist Path

There are two broad, fundamental questions that emerge in Buddhist practice and that Buddhists have traditionally brought to the teachings in the process of their engagement: What is the nature of the goal in the Buddhist path, whether it be termed “enlightenment,” “nirvana,” “Buddha,” or “true reality”? How is the goal to be attained? Buddhist commentators have in general taken these questions as the motive force of their writings. Underlying them, of course, is the analysis of the ordinary, unenlightened human condition as painful, impermanent, afflicted by delusional self-attachment, and in need of transformation.

In the Pure Land path prior to Shinran, the answers were, in general, that the eventual and inexpressibly sublime goal was enlightenment and Buddhahood, but that it was attained through an intermediary goal of birth into the Pure Land of Amida Buddha, an ideal environment immeasurably more conducive to successful practice as a bodhisattva than our corrupt world of blind passions. Descriptions of the bliss and beauty of the Pure Land and its residents were found in various sutras. The means for attaining birth in the Pure Land after death in this world were variously understood, but they centered on reciting Amida's Name, *Namu-amida-butsu*, also known as the *nembutsu*, with trust that one would thereby be in accord with Amida Buddha's Vow and gain birth into the Pure Land. With Shinran's teacher Honen (Hōnen, 1133–1212), also, these answers in general hold.

When the questions regarding the nature of and the means to attainment are transposed into the Shin Buddhist tradition, however, matters grow complex. This is because of fundamental changes in thinking brought about by Shinran. Briefly stated, these may be understood as a telescoping of the linear parameters of the path, so that the intermediary terms lose their traditional status and significance. Regarding attainment, Shinran asserts that birth in the Pure Land itself signifies immediate realization of Buddhahood. Hence, the Pure Land, which had represented a medial stage leading to eventual Buddhahood and provided concrete imagery of an afterlife of bliss in the popular imagination, dissolved into the inconceivability of wisdom or enlightenment.

Moreover, regarding means, it had been taught that the practice of reciting the *nembutsu* was devised by Amida Buddha in order to bring to emancipation even those beings incapable of the normal Buddhist practices of precepts, good works, and meditation. It had been common, therefore, for Pure Land Buddhists to devote themselves to recitation, uttering the Name as often as possible. Shinran, however, delved into the question of why saying the *nembutsu* should hold the power to bring about birth in the Pure Land, especially for beings who did not bring to it any special concentration of mind and who fulfilled no other practice. His answer was that although the Name might seem merely one kind of practice among the others taught in various Buddhist texts, it was effective because it was not essentially an act of an unenlightened and delusional human being seeking

Buddhahood, but rather the act of Amida Buddha. The nembutsu spoken by a person is practice given by the Buddha, and therefore holds the virtues of the Buddha's enlightenment. For this reason, a person's own endeavor to utter the nembutsu repeatedly as a way of accumulating merit is meaningless.

The vehicle by which practice is given is *shinjin* or true entrusting. Shinran states that *shinjin* is itself Amida's wisdom-compassion, so that the Pure Land practitioner acquires or realizes the Buddha-mind in the form of *shinjin* or the entrusting of oneself to Amida's Vow. Saying the nembutsu is a concretization of this mind, and thus embodies the Buddha's virtues. While persons who realize *shinjin* remain beings of ignorance and delusional attachments, because they have attained the Buddha's mind—their existence been transformed—they will realize Buddhahood when their present lives end. At that time, *shinjin* is said to unfold into the full realization of wisdom-compassion, so that they immediately return to this world with the capacity to guide beings in painful existence to emancipation. In Shinran's path, persons say the nembutsu out of the realization of *shinjin*, and since this is Amida Buddha's practice and mind given to them, they attain perfect enlightenment without any self-generated effort or calculation when the karmic bonds working their consequences in this life are severed upon death.

While Shinran's teaching is clear, it raises difficult questions for practitioners, questions for which no concrete answers are given in his writings. As we have seen, he collapses the conception of the path as framed by the goal of birth into the Pure Land and by the means as recitation of the nembutsu. While in other forms of Buddhism clear prescriptions and guidance are given regarding the manner and content of what must be done to advance along the path, in Shinran's teaching, practice is accomplished and given by the Buddha, and the practitioner is free of instrumental thinking. The fundamental questions of the path come to focus on the concept of *shinjin*. The practical questions become: If the immediate goal is attainment of *shinjin*, what is it to realize *shinjin*? How does it manifest itself in ordinary life, and how is it to be attained?

These questions, however, receive no answer in Shinran's writings, for Amida's Vow works precisely where one is free of contrivance and calculation. Nevertheless, problems in the understanding of the nature of religious life have been recurrent in the history of Shin

tradition, beginning with serious antinomian trends that erupted during Shinran's own lifetime.³ Below, I will sketch ways in which the concrete issues of shinjin have arisen and been dealt with in traditional Shin thought.

Honganji Orthodoxy and the Character of Realization

During the premodern period, the Tokugawa shogunate developed a variety of policies to turn Buddhist temples into active forces for stability and conservatism in the society. The populace was assigned membership by family in local temples, and the temples came to serve the authorities by keeping records of changes in the membership, including registers of births and deaths, and issuing certificates of affiliation that were necessary for travel, changes of residence, and marriage. The association of local temples in a hierarchical national temple system of branch and headquarter temples was also fixed, and these temple systems were designated as specific denominations.

Doctrinally, the temple systems were charged with codifying their teachings and ensuring the orthodoxy of the teaching as disseminated in the branch temples. Within the temple systems, learned scholar-monks devoted great creative energies to scholastic debate, scriptural study, and expanding the commentarial tradition. Within the sectarian universities today, the influence of this system remains. Study of Buddhism in Japan for most of this century has been divided into "academic" and "sectarian" fields, the former influenced by Western philological and historical scholarship and methods and focusing on Indian and Tibetan studies, the latter rooted in the tradition of Tokugawa-period scholarship circumscribed by the issues and solutions set forth in voluminous commentaries and polemical writings of the period. The dominant treatment of concrete issues in religious life developed amid the conservative pressures generated by the premodern systematization of doctrine.

Perhaps the decisive event in setting the tone and orientation of Shin scholastics over the past two centuries, particularly within the Nishi Honganji, was the incident known as the "turmoil over three kinds of religious acts" (*sangō wakuran*). This term refers to a period of "confusion and controversy" surrounding the notion that entrusting oneself to Amida Buddha necessarily involves the expression of aspiration for the Pure Land in all of a person's "three modes of action"—physical, verbal, and mental.

In the atmosphere of concern on the part of state and temple authorities for social order and orthodoxy in doctrine and practices during the Tokugawa period, religious teachings tended to crystallize around traditional formulations of belief and formal aspects of proper ritual conduct. Shin parishioners paid close attention to meeting the precise conditions or requirements of entrusting oneself to Amida Buddha's Vows and thereby gaining birth in the Pure Land. The underlying issue was the nature of religious life, focusing on the realization of shinjin, and as mentioned before, this has been a difficult and recurring theme in Shin tradition. Two fundamentally opposing attitudes developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries regarding the nature of shinjin as it is attained by Shin Buddhists.

One stream of thought was based on Shinran's sweeping rejection of all forms of self-power, or religious endeavor ultimately rooted in self-attachment. This was interpreted to mean that faith arose in a posture of complete passivity on the part of the practitioner. Thus, the relationship between the person and the teaching came to be understood in terms of simple assent to beliefs about Amida Buddha and the Vows. In particular, it was taught that embracing a fervent aspiration for the Pure Land was not necessary, and even misguided; hence, this position came to be described as teaching "the settled mind [of shinjin] with no taking of refuge" (*mu-kimyō no anjin*). According to this view, the cause of beings' birth in the Pure Land was fulfilled by Amida Buddha aeons ago, so it makes little sense for persons to entreat the Buddha for salvation. Since one's birth in the Pure Land has already been determined, actively expressing aspiration is nothing other than a manifestation of doubting the Buddha and of self-power, as though one in fact brought about birth oneself through one's convictions or actions. It is sufficient simply to realize without doubt that Amida's Primal Vow has already saved us. This highly conceptualized notion of shinjin as belief in doctrinal assertions probably reflected the influence of other branches of Pure Land tradition.⁴

According to the opposing view of the period, the realization of shinjin was a decisive and transformative experience, and not mere acquiescence; hence, a fervent religious aspiration was the mark of authentic entrusting to Amida's Vow. This position, known as "the settled mind [manifested in] taking refuge through the three modes of action" (*sangō kimyō no anjin*), asserted that clearly and consciously relying on Amida, aspiring for birth in the Pure Land, and asking the Buddha for salvation were major components of shinjin. It was through

the working of Amida and Shakyamuni (Śākyamuni) that aspiration arose in one's heart, but this thought of aspiration naturally manifested itself physically, as one faced the Buddha in worship, and also verbally, in the utterance of the nembutsu. Thus, this ardent aspiration for birth was enacted in all three modes of action: mental, bodily, and verbal.

In this view, aspiration for birth took on a pivotal significance not seen in Shinran's concept of *shinjin*, which, as the mind of Amida Buddha given to beings, was largely expounded in symbolic and abstract terms divorced from the practical life of the practitioner. In other words, this position evolved out of an intensely felt need for a definition of concrete action on the part of the practitioner, without which utterance of the nembutsu seemed little more than a mechanical mouthing unrelated to a person's actual experience. This understanding of active aspiration was gradually developed from the mid-seventeenth century in the official academy of scholars (Gakurin) in the Honganji and came to be propagated by the head (*nōke shoku*) of the Gakurin, who held responsibility in doctrinal and educational matters and served as advisor to the abbot (*shūshu*) of the Nishi Honganji.

The "turmoil over religious acts" grew out of a confrontation between these two positions. During the mid-eighteenth century, the notion of *shinjin* as simple acceptance with no requirements of affirmatively "taking refuge" spread among Shin practitioners in Echizen province (present Fukui prefecture). The Honganji judged this teaching to be heterodox and ordered the head of the Gakurin academy, Kozon (Kōzon, 1720–1796), to correct the mistaken views. In 1762, Kozon journeyed to Echizen, where he was successful in clarifying the matter for leaders of the heterodoxy. He then gave a series of sermons in the province in which he strongly asserted the importance of "taking refuge" in Amida's Vows through acts of one's whole existence: mental (aspiration), bodily (worship), and verbal (nembutsu).

These sermons were recorded and published, and gradually became a target of criticism by scholar-priests outside of the official academy and active in various parts of the country. These critics did not argue from the position that *shinjin* was simple assent that one's birth was already settled, but nevertheless took issue with the opposing position that Kozon's had developed. They argued that in overemphasizing concrete acts of religious fervor, Kozon had diverged from Shinran's teaching of Other Power, or the working of Amida's com-

passionate Vow. The controversy reached its peak during a period of nearly ten years, beginning with the accession of Kozon's successor Chido (Chidō, 1736–1805), who became head of the Gakurin in 1797. Amid published scholastic criticisms of the teaching of "aspiration in the three modes of action," Chido strongly asserted this position from his office, including on formal occasions in which he spoke in place of the Honganji abbot. The debate flared, and although some priests called for academic discussion and the development of a compromise stance, factions solidified. Amid pressure to determine clearly the correct understanding, the Honganji administration, traditionally run by the lay Shimotsuna family, supported Chido's position as the authentic teaching and in 1801 began actively suppressing criticism. Accusations of obstructing the temple were brought against more than twenty critics who had journeyed to Kyoto from various areas in the country, and some of them were arrested and taken into custody or jailed. The Honganji also had local authorities forbid the sale of publications critical of Chido.

As a result of these repressive actions, incidents of public disorder involving several thousand people broke out in Mino province, and the local authorities were forced to step in. In response to stern warnings from the government to quell the turmoil, the Honganji administration shifted its standpoint to that of Chido's critics, only to find itself invaded by several hundred spear-bearing supporters of the Gakurin. Finally, the shogunate intervened, and during a four-month period in 1803, an investigation was conducted in Kyoto. It was determined that Chido and his followers had incited lay people to protest against the Honganji, and more than forty people were taken into custody. In 1804, representatives of both sides in the controversy were summoned to Edo; Chido was transported caged and under guard as a criminal. In a process lasting more than a year, detailed doctrinal arguments were heard from various representatives, and finally opposing written expositions were presented to the Honganji with a demand for adjudication. In 1805, the teaching of "aspiration in the three modes of action" was declared heterodox and punishments were meted out to participants on both sides of the controversy. Chido issued a formal statement of recantation, and died of sickness while in custody, before final sentencing of banishment could be carried out. The Honganji temple itself was put under quarantine for one hundred days during which its gates remained closed. When the quarantine

was lifted, the abbot prohibited the publication of any doctrinal writings without his approval. Thereafter, the academic bureau within the temple was reformed, so that a group of scholars rather than a single person possessed final responsibility.

The significance of the "turmoil over religious acts" for our concerns here is twofold. First, while it reveals the high level of Shin scholarship and serious religious debate conducted in various parts of the country, not solely at the Kyoto headquarters, it also shows the overriding concern with social stability and orthodoxy exercised by both the state and temple authorities during the Tokugawa period and the willingness of the temple to employ its bureaucratic apparatus to determine and suppress dissent. Moreover, particularly because the temple's own academic arm was found to be in error, a cautious, backward-looking scholasticism became embedded in the succeeding Shin scholarship. The issues surrounding the understanding of shinjin that took shape during the controversy were defined and the authoritative resolutions codified on the basis of evidence chiefly from the writings of Shinran and Rennyo (1415–1499), the eighth-generation Honganji abbot. These became the one hundred "topics regarding the settled mind" (*anjin rondai*) that were long the mainstay of Shin theological studies and that continue to be used today as the standard of Shin scholarship within the Nishi Honganji.

More importantly, we see that the standard of orthodoxy masked the genuine underlying issue of the interpretation of religious life. The debate over the status of aspiration revolved around the problem of understanding, amid Shinran's assertion of shinjin given by Other Power, what it is concretely to realize shinjin. It may be said that both positions, though they take opposing tacks, share a common root: the need felt by Shin practitioners to have a specific image of how they should conduct their lives, and how the religious dimension of their existence might be apprehended. The question of whether they should cultivate active aspiration or whether they should simply accept the teaching is, on a more abstract level, the question of whether there is something a person should do, or whether any prescription of action would invariably involve self-power.

As a result of the social and political turmoil growing out of the doctrinal debate, subsequent Shin study, particularly with regard to questions surrounding attempts to explore concretely the subjectivity or awareness of the Shin practitioner, came to be characterized by a re-

luctance to move beyond earlier formulations and expressions supported by traditional scriptures.

The Shin Buddhist in Society

A second major issue in the attempt to treat the life of the Shin Buddhist in concrete terms is the relationship between religion and society; or, how a person, as a Shin Buddhist, should consider conduct of daily life with its moral dilemmas and ethical problems. Once again, the fundamental difficulty for Shin Buddhists has its roots in Shinran's thought, and in particular his penetrating analysis of the residue of self-power in ostensibly religious life. The focal point of Shinran's concern in his teaching is the obdurate adherence to one's own goodness, even while embracing the Pure Land path of Other Power. This attachment leads to efforts to accomplish good deeds for the sake of achieving salvation, instead of trusting in the working of Amida Buddha.

Moreover, Honen and Shinran further taught that no evil deed excludes one from Amida's compassion. This teaching led to some confusion in the community, for there were those who utilized it abusively, asserting even that to seek to curb one's nature as a "foolish being possessed of blind passions" was to exhibit distrust of Amida's Vow. Shinran denounces such understanding as self-serving, pointing out that self-awareness of wrongdoing leads not to indulgence or complacency, but to a natural eschewing of evil and of the three poisons of greed, anger, and egocentric attachments. Nevertheless, the difficulty is clear. While the value of general moral principles is assumed, Shinran's teaching asserts no specific moral or ethical precepts as means to salvation, and declares instead that no good act one can perform will move one closer to birth in the Pure Land, no evil act will obstruct one's attainment. How, then, should one conduct one's life? What standards of moral life have religious force?

The Shin temple institution has traditionally availed itself of a conceptual cleavage between the religious and secular spheres of life. By relinquishing questions of conduct in society to regulation by customary social norms and the political authorities, this device allowed for a treatment of the relationship of the temple and the congregation to society and the state that avoided conflict, whether from an affirmation of the early antinomian misunderstanding or from an affirmation of religious values that might clash with those of the state.

Two parallel pairs of terms have been used in Shin tradition, particularly from the fifteenth century through World War II, to express the distinction, and also suggest the ideal of mutual support, between the religious and secular spheres. Both sets of terms occur widely in Buddhist texts, but came to hold special meaning in Japan. The central terms are the “two truths”—the “supramundane truth” (*shintai*, literally, “genuine” or “supreme truth”) and the “mundane” or “conventional truth” (*zokutai*, literally, “secular truth”). In Buddhist thought stemming from Nagarjuna (Nāgārjuna, c. 150–250), these terms normally apply to ineffable reality or wisdom, on the one hand, and the expression of this reality in the world, particularly by verbal means, for the transmission of religious awakening. In Shin tradition, however, based on usage adopted in Japan during the Heian period, the “two truths” came to signify Buddhist institutions, on the one hand, and the secular authorities, on the other. The former was also termed the “Buddhist law” or dharma (*buppō*) and the latter, the “Sovereign’s law” (*ōbō*).

While the terms *Buddhist law* and *Sovereign’s law* occur in Chinese Buddhist texts, their use as a complementary and inseparable pair of concepts evolved in Japan from about the eleventh century. It was emphasized that the “supramundane truth” and the “mundane truth,” or the “Buddhist law” and the “sovereign’s law,” were like two wheels of a cart, or two horns of an ox. Behind this usage lay the desire of the Buddhist temples to solidify their status in the social system ideologically. Under the Ritsuryō (*ritsuryō*) legal system in Japan, which developed during the seventh century, temples were constructed and monks and nuns trained and supported in order that rites for the protection of the state be performed. The economic foundation for the temples was provided by the contribution of arable estates. It became increasingly necessary, however, for the temples to protect their holdings from incursion by secular powers. Thus, to justify their administration of estates and assert temple ownership and control, Buddhists propounded the ideal of the mutual support and protection of the two authorities, Buddhist and secular.

Lamp for the Last Dharma-Age, a work traditionally attributed to Saicho (Saichō, 767–822), the founder of the Tendai school in Japan, and quoted at length by Shinran in his major work, *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*, is prefaced with the statement: “The benevolent king and the dharma-king, in mutual corre-

spondence, give guidance to beings. The supramundane truth and the mundane truth, depending on each other, cause the teaching to spread."⁵ We see here the idea that the Buddhist teachings and the secular rule work together for the good of the people. The sovereign and his administrators are responsible for the well-being of his subjects and, by ensuring the peace and stability of benevolent rule, make possible the spread of the dharma. The Buddhist temples function to elicit divine protection for the state and cultivate the people in the true teaching.

We must note, however, that Shinran does not himself directly advocate this understanding of the "two truths" and that he employs the extended quotation to assert not the mutual support of temple and state, but rather the integrity and autonomy of the religious sphere. This is in fact the central point of *Lamp for the Last Dharma-Age* as a whole. In 798, many monks and nuns who broke precepts were banished under enforcement of Ritsuryo codes governing temple life and personnel. *Lamp for the Last Dharma-Age* argues that, while the precepts were meant to be followed during the period of Shakyamuni's lifetime and some centuries thereafter, in the present, with the devolution of conditions in the world and growing temporal distance from the historical Buddha, the precepts could no longer be considered applicable. Thus, the punishment of monks and nuns by the state for breaking precepts was a transgression against the authority of the Buddha's teaching.

Shinran accepts this argument, but probably foremost in his mind was the persecution of the nembutsu by the imperial authorities, at the behest of established temples, leading in 1207 to the exile of Honen and a number of his followers, including Shinran himself. The cause of the persecution was the menace the older schools perceived in the nembutsu movement that was growing in the capital, but the formal charges included the failure of ordained monks to uphold their precepts. In *Teaching, Practice, and Realization*, Shinran strongly condemns the injustice of the persecution, and throughout his life we see an insistence that Buddhists are not to be mere instruments of political authority, but possess an independent foundation. Hence, even though they keep no precepts, monks "in name only" manifest dharma in the world just as did Shakyamuni's direct disciples.

Shinran did revere Prince Shotoku (Shōtoku, 573–621), who vigorously adopted Buddhism into Japan, as an incarnation of Kannon

Bodhisattva. Hence, he did not deny that compassionate bodhisattvas might manifest themselves in history as ideal rulers to spread dharma. He also states that people who have realized shinjin should say the nembutsu with the wish for peace in the world and the spread of Buddhism in their hearts.⁶ Nevertheless, at a time when Buddhist monks, including Zen monks from China and even the wandering holy man Ippen, journeyed to Kamakura in hope of support from the shogun, Shinran admonished his followers not to seek the involvement even of local secular authorities in the spread of the nembutsu. His eyes were on dharma, and because of the oppression he experienced against Honen's movement and his own, he shunned political involvements.

For Shin Buddhists today seeking a fuller interpretation of the social implications of religious life, the problem is twofold. On the one hand, as outlined above, Shinran's own writings, by challenging the religious significance of our ordinary moral judgments, provide little concrete guidance for reflection on life in a pluralistic society and world, either on a personal or an institutional level. On the other hand, the treatment of these issues in Shin scholastic tradition, employing the notion of "two truths," evolved in a context of strong authoritarian and bureaucratic rule, and though this framework of the mutual support of the two spheres of life was formally abandoned after World War II, a new perspective has yet to be developed. Let us turn briefly to this latter problem.

The last major attempt by the Nishi Honganji temple to define its own role and that of its members in society occurred in the late nineteenth century, during the transition from the feudalistic state of the Tokugawa shogunate to the emperor system under Emperor Meiji. During this period, Buddhist institutions came under severe public attack as the new regime sought to drastically reduce the power and prestige of Buddhist temples, and to supplant Buddhism as a state religion with forms of Shinto that focused on the divinity of the emperor.

The Nishi and Higashi Honganji temples spearheaded efforts to mitigate the initial harsh policies enacted by the new authorities. It was in this climate that the conceptual scheme of the two truths came to be espoused as the framework for defining the relationship between Shin Buddhism and society. In the fourth year of Meiji, 1871, a formal pastoral letter by Konyo (Kōnyo, 1789–1871), the twentieth abbot of the Nishi Honganji, was posthumously issued.⁷ In it, the cardinal te-

nets of the concept of the two truths are promulgated. That is, the Buddhist law and the sovereign's law function in conjunction, so that the spread of the dharma is dependent on the emperor's benevolent rule. Further, loyal Shin Buddhists should conduct their lives according to the two truths, obedient to the emperor in this life and mindful of their birth in the Pure Land in the next.

In 1886, in accordance with new edicts regarding temple bodies, the Nishi Honganji adopted rules and regulations that became the basis for the administration of the temple system until after World War II. Article 2 of these regulations defines the purport of the Shin teaching as the two truths: the supramundane truth as hearing and entrusting oneself to Amida Buddha's Name, which embodies great compassion, and the mundane truth as ethical conduct in accordance with human norms and reverence for imperial rule. The Buddha's dharma and the sovereign rule of the state are mutually supportive, and one should respond with gratitude for the former and act to protect the latter. The implications of this attitude in a nationalist military state were quickly drawn as the country went to war from the final decade of the nineteenth century. Repaying one's indebtedness to the emperor and the country would take the form of self-sacrifice, and one would face death on the battlefield with equanimity, in the knowledge of one's certain birth in the Pure Land. In 1940, on the eve of World War II, the Higashi Honganji issued a formal pastoral letter that addressed the continuing "sacred war" in Asia to which soldiers were embarking and reminded Shin Buddhists of the mutual dependence of the two truths. In this context, the Buddhist principle of "no-self" was interpreted as the annihilation of oneself for the sake of the country. Inwardly, one embraced shinjin that assured one of salvation, and outwardly, one gratefully acknowledged the benefit one had received from society, serving the emperor and the nation without attachment to body or life.⁸

Even this usage of the concept of the two truths came under the critical scrutiny of the military censors, however, and the following year, Shin Buddhists were admonished not to refer to the sacred imperial constitution as the "mundane" truth.⁹ Finally, immediately following World War II, a new constitution and regulations were drafted by the Nishi Honganji. These remain in use today, and in them the two truths that had previously functioned as the overall framework of the teaching receive no mention.

Since the Meiji period, many Japanese social thinkers and intellectuals, including a number of Marxists, have found in Shinran's thought and life the native resources for building an egalitarian society. As we have seen, however, Shinran's teaching harbors at its roots the persistent issue of the relationship between moral life in society and religious engagement with the Shin path. On the one hand, no religious significance is recognized in moral conduct per se, and the observance of precepts or performance of good acts *as a form of religious practice* is rejected as tainted with self-attachment. On the other hand, Shinran emphasizes that no evil act in itself need obstruct the realization of shinjin and attainment of birth in the Pure Land. It is difficult, therefore, to delineate concretely the nature of life in society of the Shin Buddhist or the person who has realized shinjin.

Needless to say, the long usage of the two truths as a means of accommodation by which shinjin is regarded as belonging to the inner life, while in social and political life one accords with the prevailing ethic, has been detrimental to the tradition. Nevertheless, merely discrediting the wartime usage of the two truths has only driven deeper the wedge between religious and social life. The Western notion of the separation of church and state was utilized by the government during the Meiji period to reduce the power of Buddhist temples, even while promoting state Shinto as transcending the category of religion. In Japan at present, the widespread conviction that church and state must be separate derives its strength in large part from memories both of the use of Shinto in wartime indoctrination and of the complicity of Buddhist institutions in the war effort of the imperial state. Hence, religion tends to be relegated strictly to private life, and religious enthusiasm that seeks to exert public influence is viewed askance.

There have been efforts to interpret the concept of the two truths on a personal level. It has been asserted that endeavor in ethical life is a preliminary stage in religious engagement, that the two are correlative, and that the realization of shinjin, with its dimension of deep self-reflection, naturally manifests moral characteristics. It is clear, however, that in a world of shifting values, complex moral questions, and global perspectives, the simple dichotomy of religion and society is no longer tenable. As yet, however, no new conceptual framework for considering the concrete social or ethical implications of engagement with the Shin Buddhist path has gained currency. This remains a crucial topic for reflection.

Temple System as Guild

Above, I have sketched traditional treatments of two broad areas of concern regarding life as a Shin Buddhist and have indicated sources of difficulty in considering them within the traditional scholastic frameworks. A third source of difficulty regarding such reflection is found in the indirect influence of the Shin institutional structure. There are two interrelated and exceedingly distinctive facets of the Shin Buddhist temple system that contribute to its institutional cohesion and also to an inherent conservatism in doctrine and practice. Remarkably, despite their distinctiveness, Western researchers have little noted the significance of these institutional characteristics, and they are little studied in Japan. One is the practice of hereditary succession to the office of head abbot. The present abbots of both the Nishi Honganji and Higashi Honganji temple systems stand in unbroken lineages of blood descent, spanning more than twenty generations, from the founder Shinran. This hereditary succession reflects social practices deeply ingrained in Japanese culture, and analogies may be seen, in both the mechanism of succession and the sentiments of allegiance felt among the membership, in the emperor system and, to a lesser extent, the *iemoto* or head master system in schools of traditional arts.

It is not that the abbots are necessarily personally conservative in outlook. Today, their roles are largely ceremonial, although they possess significant charisma through their offices. The *office* of abbot, however, functions to undergird and legitimize the hierarchical and hereditary dimensions of the temple structure. This is the second and more consequential conservative force inherent in the temple system. The Nishi and Higashi Honganji temple organizations each consist of approximately ten thousand local temples that serve members in their neighborhoods. The office of resident minister in these temples is, like the office of Honganji abbot, commonly passed on by hereditary succession from father to son. Since ministers marry and raise their families in the temples, the temples become ancestral homes, frequently occupied by three generations of a family that has been associated with the temple for hundreds of years and many generations.

The hereditary succession to temple priesthood is not only startling to non-Japanese Buddhists, but highly unusual from the perspective of practices among the world religions. It is not simply a matter of sons of ministers often themselves following in their fathers' footsteps, for it

involves in essence family ownership of temples and proprietary control of local religious life. Thus, it is not unheard of for bitter family disputes to arise over matters of succession, for many temples provide not only residences, social status in the local community, lucrative incomes, and lifetime security, but may also be maintained while holding other regular employment, including academic positions.

The adoption of the general social practice of hereditary succession into the Shin temple institution was made possible by Shinran's assumption, revolutionary at the time, of married life. By abandoning his priestly precepts, including those of celibacy, and formally marrying, he drew the natural conclusion of Honen's nembutsu teaching that persons were saved solely through the practice of the nembutsu and not any other practice, including observance of monk's precepts. This was a step that Honen himself did not take, and a radical departure from the monastic ideal officially upheld throughout the entire preceding history of Buddhism. Although at present it is common for monks of almost all schools of Buddhism in Japan to marry, apart from the Shin tradition, this practice of public recognition of the marriage of priests goes back only to the Meiji period.

It must be noted, however, that hereditary succession of the leadership of the Shin movement was not instituted by Shinran himself, but developed by his descendents after his death. In fact, the Honganji temple was not established by Shinran, but grew out of a mausoleum built for him by his daughter. Shinran spent most of his years of active propagation in the Kanto area in eastern Japan, but left the followings that had gathered in the different areas in the hands of close disciples and returned to Kyoto in his early sixties. He devoted the remaining three decades of his long life to his writings, and the domination of his movement by his blood descendents and the Honganji temple developed slowly over several generations.

At present, in addition to hereditary succession, the temple system is sustained by practices of intermarriage among temple families within the system. Thus, not only are relationships with parishioners maintained over generations, sustained by the need for funeral services, memorial services for past generations of ancestors, and care of the ancestral graves that are sometimes located in temple graveyards, but relationships within the temple system are also close-knit, supported by intermarriage and other associations within the temple administrative, educational, and propagational infrastructures. Our