

RESPONSES

The Reconstruction of Shinran's Image

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First let me express my gratitude to Professor Dobbins for his wonderful talk, which has superbly answered to our hopes for commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the Eastern Buddhist Society.

Professor Dobbins has examined the multifaceted development of the understanding of Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262) during the past seven-and-a-half centuries, and has provided us with a clear picture of that development by presenting works and authors central to the creation of these various understandings. I was very grateful for the clarity and accuracy with which Professor Dobbins presented the changing views of Shinran held by people both within and outside of the denomination in the medieval, early modern, and modern periods, all of which he approached from his perspective as a historian of religious history.

Reviewing the text of his lecture, we can observe the following images of Shinran:

(1) The traditional image of Shinran

Here Professor Dobbins shows how Shinran was mythologized as a saint through the works of doctrinal authorities, such as Kaku-nyo 覚如 (1271–1351) and Ryōkū 良空 (1669–1733).

(2) The making of a modern Shinran

Here he discusses the demythologization of Shinran into an individual human being by referring to authors such as Kurata Hyakuzō 倉田百三 (1891–1943) and Nakazawa Kenmyō 中沢見明 (1885–1946).

(3) Images from *The Eastern Buddhist*

Here he addresses the portrayal of Shinran as a philosopher of Mahayana Buddhism, an image particularly prominent in articles in this journal by Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) and Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875–1926).

(4) Suzuki Daisetsu's living Shinran

Here he considers Suzuki's description of a Shinran who is living and teaching right before us in the present.

An Understanding of Shinran that Responds to the Times

When we consider these various images, we come to understand that in each of the corresponding periods an image of Shinran was constructed that responded to the needs of the time. Looking at the matter from an angle slightly different from that of Professor Dobbins, we might say that every fifty years, when a memorial service for Shinran is held, a new image of Shinran is created. In recent years, scholars such as Ōkuwa Hitoshi have examined the history of these memorial services and found that such reinterpretations have in fact been occurring since the earliest of these ceremonies. The 400th memorial service in 1661 and those that followed during the Edo period (1603–1868) each served as an opportunity for the publication of new biographies of Shinran, works that tended to situate him in a context relevant to the concerns of the masses of that period and portrayed him as a sectarian founder who could respond to their spiritual needs.¹ In addition, soon after the 550th service, Gōsei 仰誓 (1721–1794) compiled the *Myōkōnin den* 妙好人伝, which presents the life stories of model Shin followers as ideals to be emulated by members of the congregation. Many of these wondrous people (which is what the term *myōkōnin* literally means) were docile stoics who found solace in the Shin teachings and were thereby able to accept their social positions and live within their assigned roles in the feudal hierarchy. In a sense, these model Shin followers were also model subjects of the Tokugawa government.

At the time of the 600th memorial service held in 1861, during the final years of the Tokugawa *bakufu* and just prior to the Meiji Restoration, the image of Shinran presented was in alignment with the direction in which the state was moving at the time. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in two works by Fukuda Gidō 福田義導 (1804–1881)—the *Goshōsoku dainishō kōshi roku* 御消息第二章甲子録² and *Ten'on hōtai roku* 天恩奉戴録³—both of which depict Shinran calling on Shin followers to respect the emperor and the laws of the state. At the 650th memorial service in 1911, when Taishō

¹ See *Kōō to shite no goenki shi* 呼応としての御遠忌史 by Ōkuwa Hitoshi 大桑齊 in volume 52 of *Shinshū kenkyū* 真宗研究 (2008) for a detailed treatment of this subject.

² *Shinshū taikai* 真宗大系, vol. 23 (Tokyo: Shinshū Tenseki Kankōkai, 1930), pp. 359–81.

³ *Zoku shinshū taikai* 続真宗体系, vol. 17 (Tokyo: Shinshū Tenseki Kankōkai, 1939), pp. 83–93.

democracy was on the horizon, an image of the human Shinran was being developed. This image appears in, among other works, the *Shinran shōnin den* 親鸞聖人伝 (Biography of Shinran Shōnin)⁴ by Sasaki Gesshō, “Shinran shōnin ron” 親鸞聖人論 (Discussion on Shinran Shōnin)⁵ by Naganuma Kenkai 長沼賢海 (1883–1980), and *Hōnen to Shinran* 法然と親鸞 (Hōnen and Shinran)⁶ by Kinoshita Naoe 木下尚江 (1869–1937). The 700th memorial service in 1961, held during a time when democratization was proceeding apace after the close of the Pacific War and the Dōbōkai Movement was taking shape in the Ōtani-ha, saw the presentation of images of Shinran situated among the common people. *Shinran to tōgoku nōmin* 親鸞と東国農民 (Shinran and the Farmers of Eastern Japan)⁷ by Kasahara Kazuo 笠原一男 (1916–2006) and *Shinran* 親鸞⁸ by Akamatsu Toshihide 赤松俊秀 (1907–1979) are representative of this trend.

Toward a Creative Return

It is, as Professor Dobbins suggests in his title, the complexity of Shinran—his many faces—that made this sort of change possible. In his lecture, Dobbins approaches the various pre-modern sources from the perspective of a specialist of medieval Japanese religious history and he addresses the role of *The Eastern Buddhist* from the standpoint of a scholar who operates first and foremost within the Western academic community. In his lecture, he has shown us in clear detail the image of Shinran as seen from that standpoint. Viewed from his position, we can see that Shinran is truly a Buddhist thinker, and a human being, whose multifaceted nature presents us with a plethora of possibilities.

Here at Otani University’s Comprehensive Shin Buddhist Research Institute, we have taken the current memorial service as an opportunity to conduct a research project organized around the issue of “The Reconstruction of the Image of Shinran.” I have been involved with this project since its inception several years ago. We have asked many scholars both from within and outside of the university to address the question “How should Shinran’s

⁴ Tokyo: Muga Sanbō, 1910.

⁵ This piece was serialized during 1910 in volume 21 of *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌 from numbers 3 to 12. It appears at *Shigaku zasshi*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 34–68; no. 4, pp. 54–79; no. 5, pp. 72–106; no. 6, pp. 24–43; no. 7, pp. 56–88; no. 8, pp. 43–69; no. 9, pp. 51–81; no. 11, pp. 62–96; no. 12, pp. 25–66.

⁶ Tokyo: Kaneo Bun’endō, 1911.

⁷ Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1957.

⁸ Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1961.

image be reconstructed in the present age?” The results of this project have recently been published in a two-volume set: one volume focuses on Shinran’s philosophical contributions as found in his *Kyōgyōshinshō* 教行信証,⁹ while the other volume attempts a reformulation of the image of Shinran from the perspectives of a number of scholars.¹⁰ Through listening to these lectures over the past few years, I too have come to give this matter much thought, and Professor Dobbins’s lecture has greatly enlightened me with regard to this topic.

At the end of his lecture, Dobbins introduces the moving speech that Suzuki made in New York at the American Buddhist Academy and discusses the latter’s assertion that we need to discover “a living Shinran.” As opposed to approaching Shinran as a historical figure who once existed but now survives merely as memories and words on the pages of manuscripts, in his speech Suzuki is exhorting us to hear the cry of Shinran as, to use a Buddhist term, the dharma-body (*hosshin* 法身), which lives and works here and now.

When we consider the reconstruction of Shinran’s image from this perspective, we realize that reconstruction cannot be achieved by reaching back into the past and selecting an image of Shinran that accurately reflects his thought and character, just as they were. Our limited sources about and understanding of his times do not permit such clarity. That being said, neither should such a reconstruction be an arbitrary rearrangement of Shinran’s image based solely on the needs and conditions of our own times. It seems that many of the earlier representations of Shinran—e.g., as loyal subject of the state, as democratic champion of the people—were informed by the needs and concerns of the times more than by a critical examination of the available sources. I feel that we need to do as Suzuki suggests and turn our ears to the voice of Shinran as living in the present, but I believe that the only way to realize this, to truly hear his voice, is through research that attempts a “creative return” to him as a person and as a thinker. Because we must see Shinran through our own eyes and via our own concerns based on the materials at our disposal, this return requires creativity on our part. Yet by laying weight on the words that Shinran left behind, rather than giving priority to our own concerns, this reconstruction can be considered a return to his ideas and his intent. Rather than creating a new Shinran suited to our own times, we must attempt a creative return to his original intent by listening to his preaching in his works.

⁹ *Kyōgyōshinshō no shisō* 『教行信証』の思想, ed. Ōtani Daigaku Shinshū Sōgō Kenkyūjo 大谷大学真宗総合研究所 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2011).

¹⁰ *Shinran zō no saikōchiku* 親鸞像の再構築, ed. Ōtani Daigaku Shinshū Sōgō Kenkyūjo 大谷大学真宗総合研究所 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2011).

Shinran's "Returning"

Looking over Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, we can see that he uses the term "return" (*ki* 帰) in three different contexts to explain three critical aspects of his religious thought. By introducing these three phrases, I would like to cast light on where Shinran calls us to return. This in turn will allow us a glimpse of what formed the foundation of his religious experience in the Kamakura period and what can form the foundation of ours today. First, in the *Shōshinge* 正信偈, verses that appear at the end of the chapter on practice in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran introduces the critical moment in the life of Tanluan 曇鸞 (476–542?) saying, "He burned his Daoist texts and returned to the land of bliss" (*ki raku hō* 帰樂邦).¹¹ In this context, "return" signifies the clarification of what one takes as one's foundation for living. Tanluan, who began his career as a Buddhist scholar, spent many years studying Daoist thought and medicine. He attained much skill in these practices, took the Daoist way to be the source of his wellbeing, and relied upon them to provide him longevity. However, upon encountering a teacher who preached about the Buddha of Immeasurable Life (Skt. Amitāyus; Ch. Wuliangshoufo 無量壽仏), he cast aside his faith in these teachings, burning the various texts containing Daoist secrets, and took refuge in the Pure Land created by this Buddha. Shinran's phrase, taken from Tanluan's biography, indicates a major shift in what Tanluan took as the foundation of his life using the word "return" to describe this change.

In a different use of the term "return," Shinran presents the Pure Land as the place to which the Buddhist follower should return. In the chapter on transformed buddha bodies and lands in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran quotes a passage from *Fashizan* 法事讚¹² by Shandao 善導 (613–681) that states: "Let us return home (*kikyōrai* 歸去來)! We must not stay in this foreign land, but following the Buddha, return to our original home!"¹³ Shandao adopts Tanluan's position that the Pure Land ought to serve as the foundation for our lives. Taking this a step further, Shandao describes it as "our original home" and states that this world is a foreign land to us that must be left behind. In this way, two of Shinran's predecessors regard the Pure Land as the centerpiece of their lives and the object of their religious seeking.

¹¹ *Teihon kyōgyōshinshō* 定本教行信証 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1989), p. 89.

¹² More fully, the *Zhuanjing xingdao yuanwangsheng jingtu fashizan* 轉經行道願往生淨土法事讚, no. 1979 in vol. 47 of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭 (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1928).

¹³ *Teihon kyōgyōshinshō*, p. 307.

Although Shinran himself also understood the Pure Land in this way, he shifted the focus from the Pure Land, as a religious goal, to the original vow, as the means that brings about the realization of that goal. At the end of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Shinran describes his encounter with his teacher Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) and his entry into the Pure Land faith, stating, “I cast aside the sundry practices and returned to the original vow (*ki hongan* 歸本願).”¹⁴ While Hōnen speaks of his own entry into faith as “casting aside the sundry practices and returning to the *nenbutsu* 念仏,” Shinran reaches back further to the source of the *nenbutsu* practice and says that he takes refuge in the vow. While Hōnen trades one practice for another, and Shandao exhorts us to leave this world behind and choose another, Shinran enjoins us to return to the source of both the *nenbutsu* and the Pure Land: the original vow of Dharmākara Bodhisattva. Shinran’s statement not only indicates the source of his religious experience, it also makes manifest the center of the entire doctrinal system laid out in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which is built around his interpretation of the vows expressed in the *Wuliangshoujing* 無量壽經 (Sutra on Immeasurable Life).

In a sense, rather than being simply a return to the historical figure of Shinran, a “creative return” to Shinran entails a return to that which he, himself, relied on—a return to that to which he calls us to return. In this way, such a return requires going beyond Shinran himself to those teachings that constitute the backdrop of his thought. More specifically, Shinran directs our attention to the teachings of the original vow presented in the *Wuliangshoujing*. A creative return to Shinran thus requires us to reach back past him to the foundational myth, a myth that provides us with a universal referent capable of transcending the 750-year gap that separates us from Shinran.

Although this is but a poor response to the fine lecture given by Professor Dobbins today, I shall end my comment with this suggestion for a creative return in future reconstructions of Shinran’s image.

¹⁴ *Teihon kyōgyōshinshō*, p. 381.